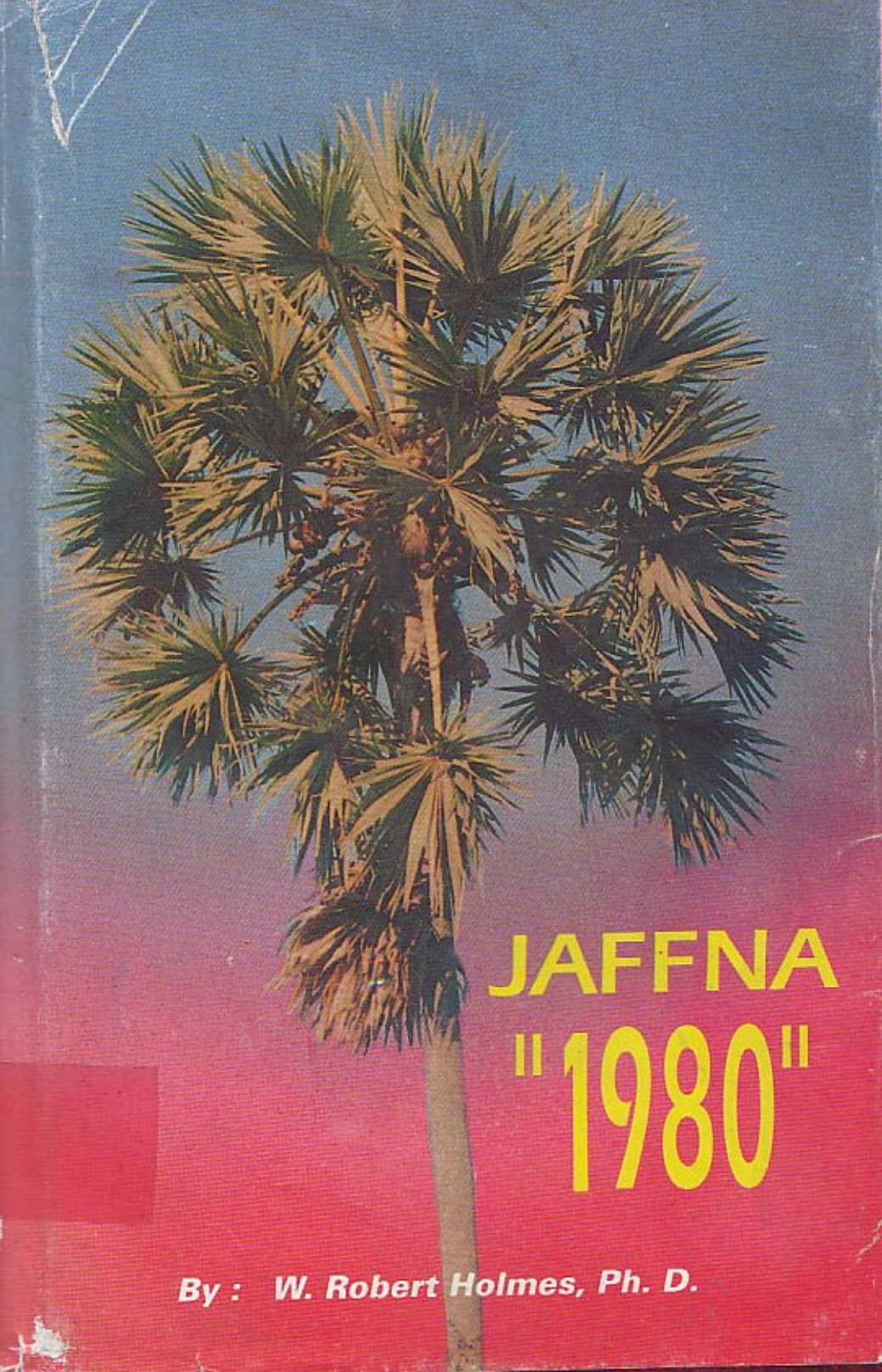


JAFFNA "1980"

By : W. Robert Holmes, Ph. D.

JAFFNA (SRI LANKA) 1980

The Jaffna That Was

W. Robert Holmes, Ph. D.

Instructor in history, Jaffna College, 1947-1960

Fellow of the Study Institute, Jaffna College

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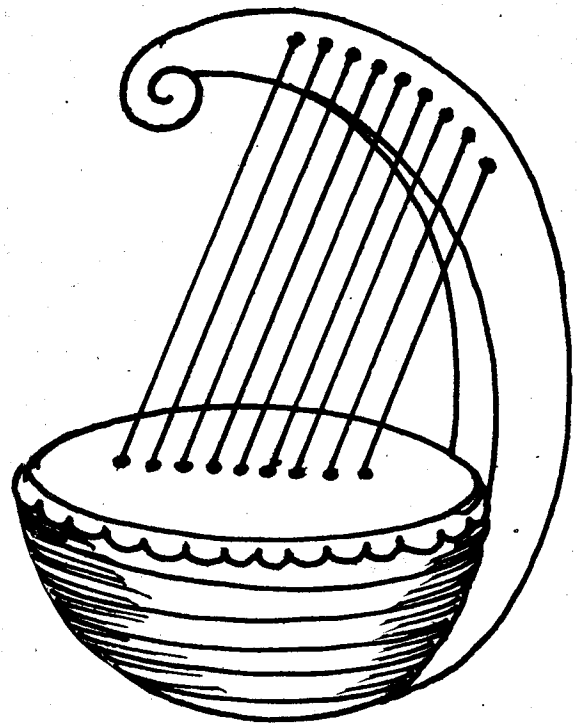
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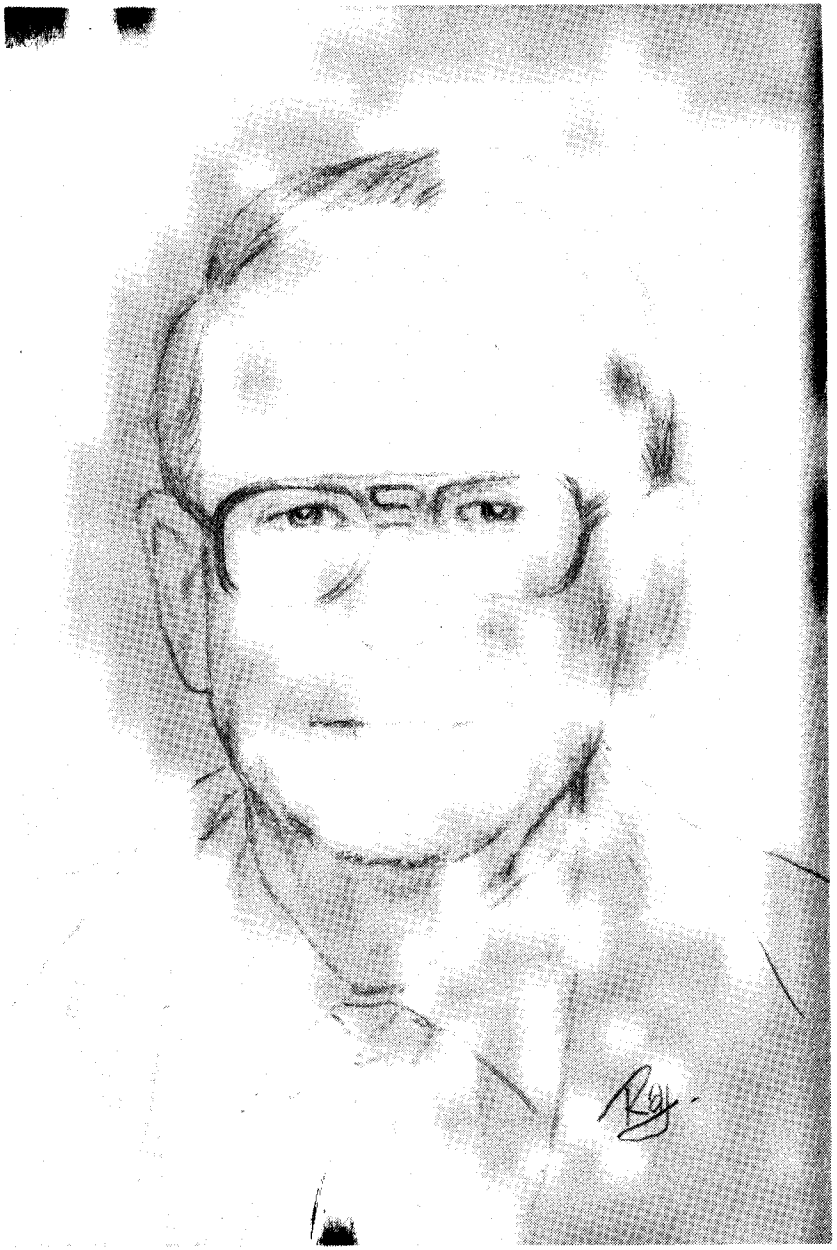
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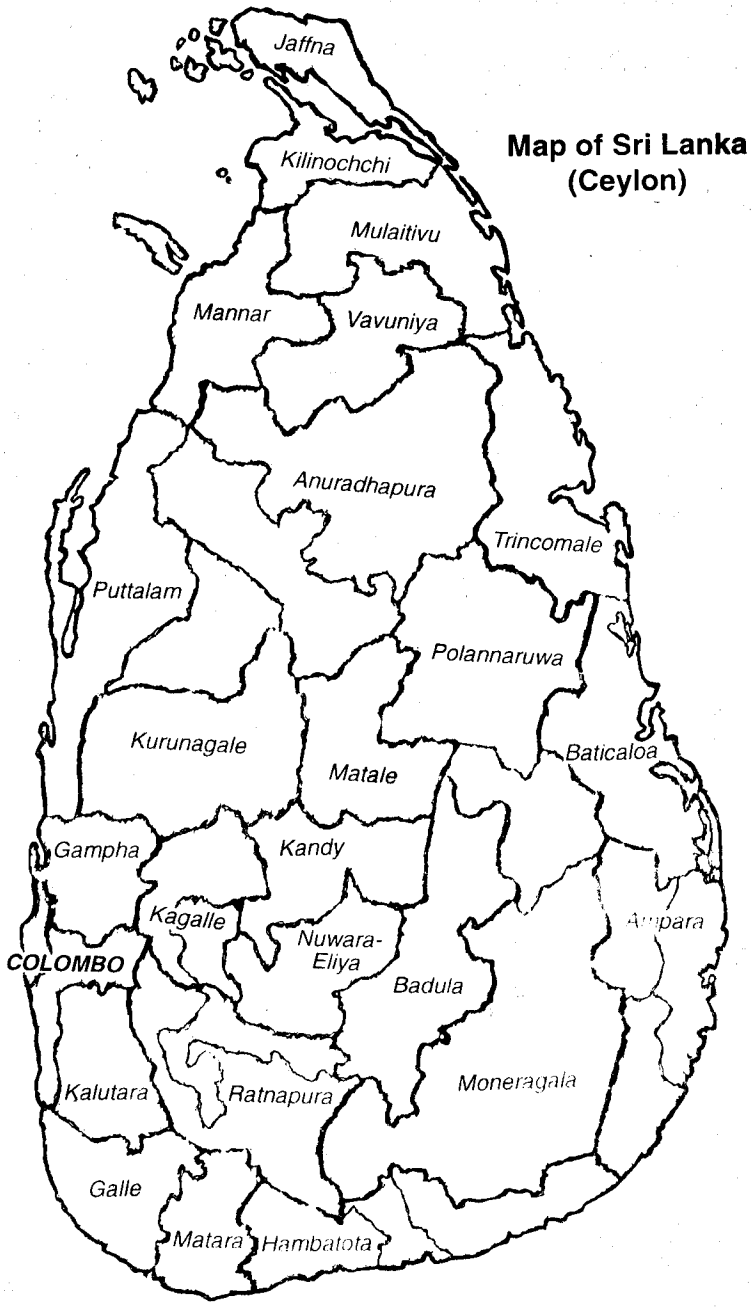


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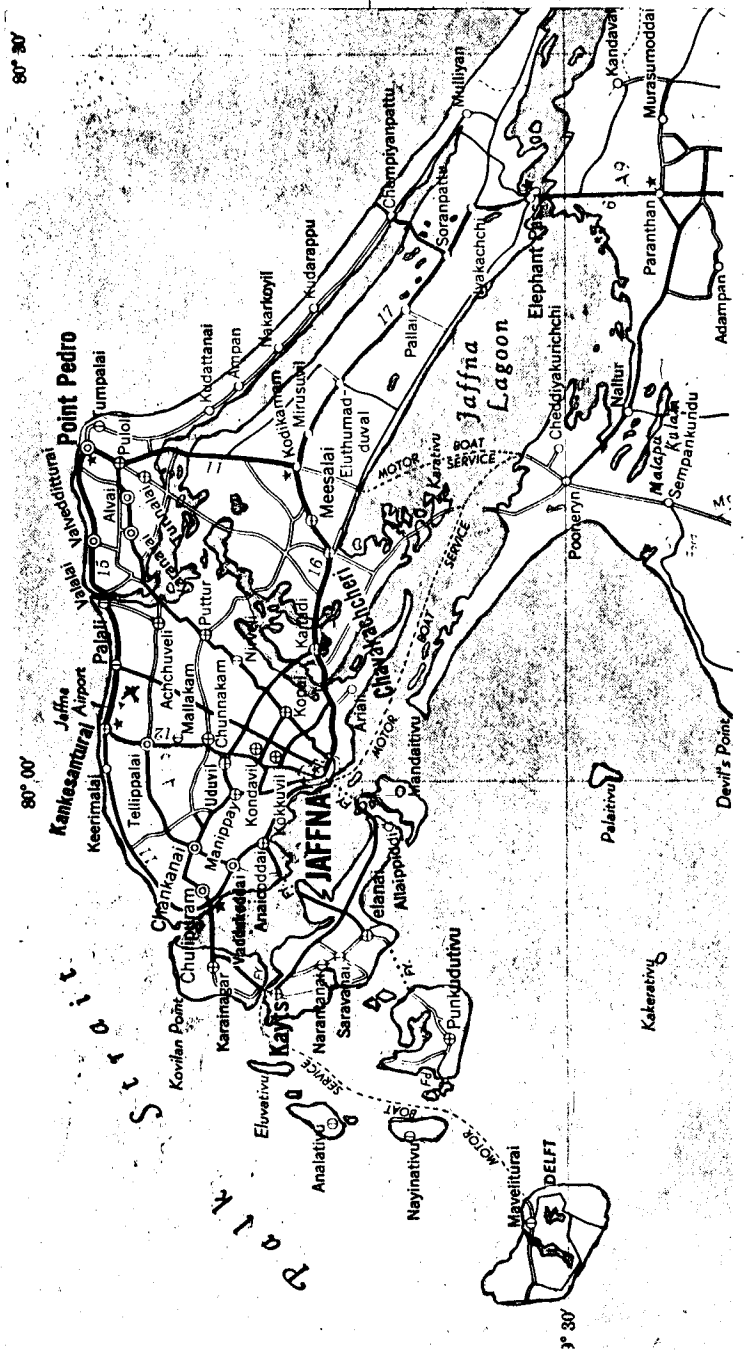
JAFFNA DERIVED ITS TAMIL NAME "YARLPAANAM FROM BOTH. THIS YARL AND THE EXPERT MUSICIAN CALLED PAANAN WHO PLAYED THIS INSTRUMENT WELL



Dr. W. R. Holmes



Map of Sri Lanka (Ceylon)



Map of the Jaffna Penisula

DEDICATION

Not only in Jaffna but in all of Ceylon and India and probably pretty much throughout the entire Third World, one who accomplishes anything must be given extra credit, for it is much harder to get things done in developing nations than in places where the electricity scarcely flickers once a year; where the telephone always works and where dialing is direct; where public transportation stops only if there is a strike and there are not many strikes; where the bus does not break down and where the mail and the newspaper are rarely late. In Sri Lanka, on the other hand, because of the high probability that the task will not be accomplished on the first try, one acquires a veneer of equal parts of fatalism, cynicism and patience with which to dress the soul when the try has indeed failed. While prudence keeps expectations low, experience encourages one to persist politely but firmly, to question and to wait, for sometimes patience is rewarded.

Whether rewarded or not, yet looking back over the day, one frequently realizes that quite a bit was accomplished on that day in Jaffna—and here is a salute to those who did it, in spite of everything!

And so, to those in Jaffna, and in all Sri Lanka,
who work and get things done
this book is dedicated.

You deserve the encomium and your fellow men and women and Sri Lanka will be enriched by the fruit of your labour.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Because of my need to examine the many books, journals and pamphlets in the Jaffna University Library, Mr. Sebaratnam Thambiah, the Librarian there, has given me more of his time than has anyone else in the writing of this book. I have greatly appreciated having the privileges of a visiting scholar at the University and of being able to talk with any member of the University instructional staff or administration. The Vice Chancellor, Dean of the Arts Faculty and Registrar have given me of their time as have particularly Professors K. Kailasapathy, K. Indrapala, K. Sivathamby, Kailasa Natha Kurukkal, and N. Balakrishnan, as well as Moulavi Kalideen, Silan Kadirgamar and Fr. J. E. Jeyaseelan. I am especially indebted to Dr. Luther Jeyasingham with whom I have shared an interest in describing Jaffna for the inquirer for a good twenty years. He has given me generously of his time and also, with the aid of his colleagues in the Department of Geography, particularly Mr. E. V. Christian, has supplied the two maps which are in this book, for which I am very grateful. Another member of that department, Dr. S. Selvanayagam, had rendered me valuable assistance before his tragic death in May, 1979.

At Jaffna College, the Principal, Mr. Rajan Kadirgamar, had a great deal to do with my coming back to Jaffna to take up this work in the first place. He not only welcomed my wife and me back to our former living quarters but has been helpful in many other ways, especially on the chapters dealing with education and with the fine arts. As chairman of the Board of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, he was also helpful. My being a fellow of that Institute was the result of the invitation of Bishop and Mrs. D. J. Ambalavanar, delivered in person in America as well as through official channels, to return to Jaffna. Unfortunately for me, Bishop Ambalavanar was on sabbatical leave during most of my stay in Jaffna this time. The usual cooperation between the Directors and the Trustees of Jaffna College and Dr. Telfer Mook in New York made it possible for my wife and me to return.

For his encouragement and cooperation, I am grateful to Canon V. S. D. Sathianathan, Director of the Christian Institute (which is located at the Ashram, Maruthanamadam, Chunnakam in the heart of Jaffna Peninsula). I have had full access to the Institute's library although my interests in Jaffna on this project could not usually be supported by the materials of that library which are historical and theological in nature.

Even before I arrived at Jaffna, Mr. H. A. I. Goonetilleke, at that time Librarian at the University of Sri Lanka at Peradeniya, had done me a great service, as he has all students of Ceylon, by compiling the three volumes of the bibliography of Ceylon. Using these volumes saved me a great deal of time and brought me into contact with materials I should not have discovered on my own. He increased my personal debt to him immensely by allowing me to use his fourth volume while it was still in manuscript at his residence in Peradeniya which again guided me to further useful materials.

The same cooperation was extended to me by persons from numerous government offices, schools, industries, shops and other business establishments. In other words, the hospitality for which Jaffna is famous was given to me in overflowing measure and perhaps most of all when I visited anyone at his home or office in quest of further information.

The thirty persons who did me the great favour of reading one or more chapters of this book in manuscript form I shall not name in this paragraph although the names of them appear in this section. Once more I thank them. They must not be held accountable for the views expressed here, however. For these, I am alone responsible.

In and around Jaffna College were friends from as long ago as 1947 such as the Rt. Rev. S. Kulandran, retired Bishop in Jaffna, the retired principal and vice principal of Jaffna College (Mr. K. A. Selliah and Mr. L. S. Kulathungam) and various members of the teaching faculty of the College such as R. Balasubramaniam, P. Anandaratnam, S. Jebanesan, T. Visvanathan, A. M. Brodie and V. Selvaratnam, all of whom helped me. Special thanks are due to the art master, Mr. P. A. Amirthanathan, for his India ink sketches of

saris and fences. I made frequent use of the Jaffna College Library whose staff was always most cooperative.

Mr. Luther Selvarajah not only held me to a good standard of tennis but spent more time than most in talking with me and taking me to various industries of Jaffna where the proprietors were invariably most helpful. Neighbours like Miss Chelvi and Mrs. Sumi Selliah and Miss Mary Elias were consulted on appropriate matters. Messrs. Harry Hermanson and S. J. Stanislaus of Cey-Nor, Professor K. Nesiah, Thomas Daniel, the managers of several banks, superintendents of four hospitals and the Superintendent of Health Services were all of assistance to me, often in supplying statistics and answering questions in their fields of interest.

This was also true of the Government Agents, a few Assistant Government Agents and Agricultural Extension officers at the Kachcheri as well as Messrs. J. Lewis and S. Selvaratnam at Thirunelveli. A generous portion of gratitude is due my former student, Mr. Richards Karunairajan, for his responsible work in seeing this book through its final stages at the Press.

And finally, my thanks are due in double measure to my wife for all those things for which wives are generally thanked in prefaces, particularly for putting up with the heat which she found more trying than I did.

Vaddukoddai W. Robert Holmes

GLOSSARY

Acre: 43,560 square feet. A football field 100 yards long and 50 yards wide is 45,000 square feet, slightly over an acre.

Agamas: Traditions of knowledge or practice elaborating Hindu scriptures.

Alathi: A Hindu wedding custom in which a blessing is given to the bride and groom by waving three times in a circular motion a tray on which are (usually) saffron and lime mixed with water and three pieces of banana on each of which is a burning wick.

Aluminium: Spelling of Aluminum in much of the world outside North America.

Atchi: Pet name for grandmother or any old lady.

Ayurveda or Ayurvedic Medicine: System of traditional medicine based on diet, herbs, other native remedies, traditional nostrums and secret formulae passed down carefully from father to son.

Betel: The favourite chew of many Ceylonese, composed of arecanut shavings, lime, betel leaf, tobacco, cloves and sometimes other things.

Bogey: A goods waggon or railway freight car.

Boutique: Common name, however fancy, for a small shop generally neither stylish or beautiful. Occasionally there is a neat and attractive exception.

Bund: Earthen ridge used in irrigation. Bunds separate fields.

Cadjan: A panel of fibre made by braiding the fronds of half a coconut leaf which has been split down the middle. Substitute for plywood in many instances.

Chank: Large, beautiful sea shell used in commerce, mostly for curios, and in Hindu temples.

Chutney: Made by cooking mangoes, limes or tamarind with spices to produce a sweet or hot relish. Fresh chutney is made of sliced onions, tomatoes, lime, plantains, chillies and coconut.

Cycle: Bicycle.

Emergency '58: Uprising in Colombo in June, 1958 in which groups of Sinhalese fell on Tamils, burned their homes and possessions and in many cases murdered the owners. The lawlessness burst out in many places "up country" and along the coasts. Thousands fled to Jaffna. Estimates were that nearly a thousand Tamils perished and a small number of Sinhalese. The official estimate for Tamil deaths was around two hundred and fifty.

Ganesh: The elephant-headed god, son of Siva and Parvati or of Parvati alone, much beloved of Hindus of Jaffna. Associated with beginnings and with overcoming obstacles.

Gold Melting Ceremony: Rite performed by Hindu priest when the Goldsmith begins the making of the thali for the wedding.

Goods Waggon: A railway freight car or bogey.

Hundredweight: 112 pounds. Abbreviated cwt.

Insurgency: An attempted revolt of unemployed Sinhalese youth, students and young political radicals in 1971. Trained for a "one day revolution," they tried to seize major police stations of the country as the means of taking over the government. About 14,000 were imprisoned and informed estimates are that at least six thousand were slain by the police and army, mostly without trial. No Tamil youth were involved.

Jaffna Region: Jaffna Peninsula and the islands.

Jaffna District: One of 24 administrative units (Districts) which includes Jaffna Region plus territory on the mainland to a point about 30 miles south of Elephant Pass which just includes Murugandi Temple. Total area, 964 square miles.

Jaggery: Sugar or syrup made from the juice of the palmyra or coconut palm.

Kachcheri: The central administrative offices of a District and the buildings housing them, for which the modern term is "Secretariat."

KKS: Abbreviation for Kankesanturai, a town on the northern tip of the Jaffna Peninsula.

Koda: Potent brew in which Jaffna cigars are soaked.

Kodi: Gold chain which supports the thali.

Koorai: Expensive wedding sari, gift of the groom to the bride.

Lacham: 1/16 of an acre if measuring residential land: 1/24 of an acre of paddy land.

Lakh: One hundred thousand.

Mamoty: A large hoe with a handle about three feet long; the chief agricultural hand tool.

Niraikudam: "Full pot," a pot generally of metal, filled with water or paddy and decorated with mango leaves around a coconut which sits on the mouth of the pot; a symbol of Siva and Parvati; also of fullness.

Noblesse Oblige: A French term signifying the obligation of the nobility to supply traditional services for the benefit of the serfs who were bound to them by custom.

Omam: Sacrificial fire at wedding ceremony.

Out Station: Villages and rural locations outside the larger towns and cities.

Pandal: Ornamental gateway and adjoining canopy which shades seating area at social events, especially weddings.

Pandal Kal: Pole erected in front of the homes of the bride and groom in preparation for the wedding.

Papardam: Potato chip-like food, several inches in diameter, made of ulundu (black gram), a grain about the size of rice.

Parvati: A Hindu goddess, the consort of Siva.

Petrol Shed: Gasoline filling station.

Pillion: The rack on the back of a bicycle or motorcycle.

Plantain: The small, moist banana of Jaffna, three to five inches long.

Ponnurukku: Gold melting ceremony (see above).

Pottu: Beauty mark made of saffron or other coloured substance and placed on a lady's forehead between the eyebrows.

Puja: Worship.

Pujari: One who leads worship, a priest.

Road Metal: Crushed stone. A metalled road is a macadam road.

Rupee: The standard coin of Ceylon worth about seven U.S. cents or fifteen rupees to the U.S. dollar. The Indian rupee is approximately twice as costly (eight to the dollar). Both coins are decimalized.

Sarong: Three yards or less of coloured cloth worn in place of trousers and as pajamas by men and boys. The ends are sewn together so the garment is circular.

Scheme: Plan. The term is not used to imply anything unethical.

Sinhalese Only: Slogan of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and the SLFP when he won the election of 1956 and Sinhalese Buddist nationalism became the dominant force in Sri Lankan politics. Sinhalese Only meant that Tamil and English were to be subordinated in importance to Sinhalese which was made the national language exclusively.

Sovereign: A gold piece used as coinage years ago but in modern times used as a standard of measurement in jewellery. Worth Rs. 75 twenty years ago, it was valued at Rs. 900 in late 1979 and Rs. 2,500 in January, 1980.

Standardization: Euphemism for recalculation of grades of students on University entrance examinations. Since disproportionate numbers of Tamils were gaining admission, Sinhalese students were given additional marks to bring up their marks above those of some Tamil students.

Tank: Lake created by building a dam; used for irrigation.

Thali: Wedding pendant, always made of gold.

Thesavalamai: Ancient code of laws of Tamil people, codified in modern times. Originally they were unwritten.

Up Country: Highlands and mountain areas of central Ceylon.

Verti: Four yards of white cloth, similar to a bedsheet, worn by Tamil men in place of trousers. Part of the national costume.

VVT: Abbreviation for Valvettithurai a town on the northern coast of the Jaffna Peninsula.

Wanni: The land immediately south of Elephant Pass on the mainland. By 1980, a large portion of this former jungle had been turned into farms. Deer, jackals, wild boar and elephants are still found there but are disappearing fast.

PREFACE

In modern times there has not been a general book on Jaffna in English, nor, I think, in Tamil. The two most recent books about aspects of Jaffna were H. W. Tambiah's *The Laws and Customs of the Tamils in Jaffna, 1951,* and the unpublished doctoral thesis of Dr. Luther Jeyasingham, *The Urban Geography of Jaffna, 1958.* There have also been a few other theses which are cited in Chapters Five and Ten, mainly. To some extent I hope to bring portions of their data up to date, to the threshold of the next to the last decade of the twentieth century.

I am dealing with the Jaffna Region as that Region is sometimes defined by those working with it: the Peninsula (365 square miles) and its adjoining eleven islands, ignoring smaller islets. The total area of the eleven islands is 71 square miles, so the total area of Jaffna Region is 436 square miles.

"Jaffna District" is a term much more commonly used than "Jaffna Region." While the latter means the Peninsula and the islands, "Jaffna District" is a governmental administrative term regularly used to include the Region and a portion of the mainland down to Murugandi (nearly twenty miles south of Elephant Pass). The area of the mainland comprises 528 square miles, so the total area of Jaffna District is 964 square miles. There are 24 Districts in the country.

As much as possible my study focuses on Jaffna Region and I have sought to get as many statistics as possible for the Region. Where figures for the District only are available, I have so indicated.

The purpose of my book is to describe Jaffna Region as fully as I can, including many of the customs of the people, their numerous ways of making a living (including several not found in the western world), their all-important families and what they eat, wear, worship and talk (incessantly) about. That is, I want to present a snapshot of what is going on in Jaffna in 1980—the way the people live—so that in the future when an inquirer appears, he will have a more complete picture of Jaffna than that presented by currently available materials:

the census, some production and climatic statistics and a thesis or two on a segment of life in Jaffna. There is at present nothing available on what most of the people are doing most of the time.

There is no separate chapter on Geography. This subject was exhaustively treated by Dr. Jeyasingham in the thesis mentioned above and Jaffna's physical geographic features have, of course, not changed much in two decades. However, many aspects of the general subject of geography will be mentioned herein.

This volume on Jaffna and the Jaffna Man will, I trust, arouse the curiosity of people in Jaffna as well as elsewhere in Sri Lanka. However, this book is not being written for the people of Jaffna but about them. If I were writing for them, I would have little to say for they are more familiar with Jaffna than I am. The fact that so many people in Sri Lanka are familiar with the facts of life in Jaffna is presumably the reason why this book has not been written previously by a Ceylonese. I have badgered various of my friends in Jaffna to write a description of Jaffna and they have always replied, "Everybody knows it." Everybody, that is, except 99% of the world's population!

In undertaking the task myself, I am painfully conscious that local readers will find the book full of familiar information but there will certainly be portions of the book of interest to them. Even the familiar, when presented by a foreigner and therefore from a different point of view, can be of interest. But as I write, I do not have the population of Jaffna in mind as much as people from outside who are interested in Sri Lanka, especially those coming to Jaffna for a longer or shorter stay. I shall always be pleased if I hear that residents of Jaffna are sending copies of this book to their children now working in Australia or New Zealand, Arab lands, African, European, or other Asian or American countries to share with those who are becoming a generation removed from Jaffna.

Since Jaffna is a very varied society of several religions (but overwhelmingly Hindu) and of many castes (but overwhelmingly high caste) and dominated by the prosperous and rich (but predominantly poor), it is difficult to write of Jaffna today without making generalizations which are only partly accurate. "All

generalizations, like this one, are false" was a proverb of my youth. It applies very well to the topic of "Jaffna" and many of my generalizations will illustrate the proverb. Bishop Kulandran wrote in his first book on Hinduism, "There is no statement which can be made about Hinduism which is false." I feel like paraphrasing it, "No statement can be made about society in Jaffna which is entirely true." However, I shall do my best. I regret that there is not time to write separate paragraphs or sections for smaller groups within the society where to do so would require further research. As much as possible I shall try at least to allude to the existence of variations from what I have described.

This book is full of inaccuracies. The subject of caste alone is so diverse as to make summary statements very difficult, if not impossible. With 24 castes (more or less!) each in varying degrees of disintegration and reintegration depending upon where they are located, how numerous the component members are, how many have left traditional employment and so forth, the varieties, permutations and shadings of differences in human relationships are literally innumerable and indescribable except in a limited way.

My goal has been to write as charitably as possible. Writing this book certainly involves both compliments and criticisms. I hope the people of Jaffna will appreciate the compliments more than they resent the criticisms. I should add that though I love the Tamil people, I also am fond of the Sinhalese people. I have tried to write in a way which, while remembering my hundreds of Tamil friends, did not indicate that I had forgotten my scores of Sinhalese friends.

Although I am writing for the foreign reader in the sense that I am spending time on description which would be unnecessary or positively insulting for the Ceylonese reader, still I accommodate myself to customs of Ceylon so that I use some local terms such as pillion, lakh, pandal, tank, scheme and cattle (not cow) manure. I have attempted to define all unusual words in the Glossary. I also adopt local spelling of words like programme, theatre, labour, and plough.

This book is written in English. Since I am not fluent in Tamil, I have obtained nearly all of my information from English-speaking

Tamils. Only a small amount has come from non-English speakers through friends who have acted as interpreters. So my account must be biased toward the English-educated people of Jaffna as well as toward the Vellala Community. I have tried to offset these biases by having representatives of various minorities—if fluent in English—read my manuscript and advise me on corrections and adjustments which should tend to make my descriptions more accurate.

Each chapter begins with a saying more or less familiar to Tamil readers. Most of these sayings come from the classical poem *Tirukkural* by Tiruvallavar, a Tamil who wrote approximately 2,000 years ago. He wrote in rhymed couplets short, pithy statements on all aspects of the life of his day. His style reminds us of Alexander Pope, the English poet of the eighteenth century. The English reader finds it almost beyond belief that Tiruvallavar's Tamil, unchanged, is clearly understood and widely quoted today.

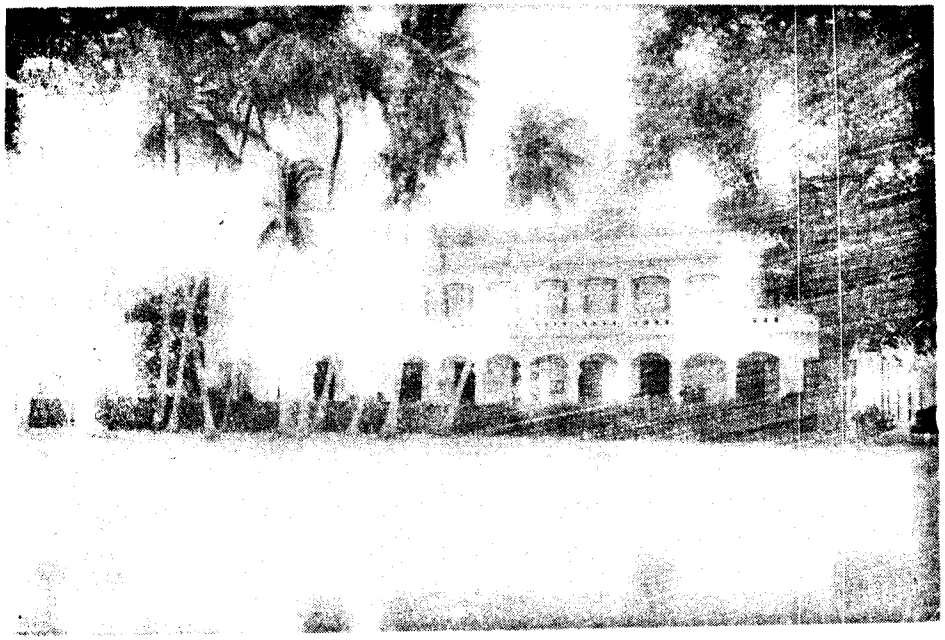
My quotations from the *Tirukkural* are from the version edited by C. Rajagopalachari, first President of India and later Governor-General of India. If the *Tirukkural* selection is a rhymed couplet (in English) it is from K. Sreenivasan's rhymed English translation. Those chapter headings called "Tamil Proverbs" are from the book of 6,000 Tamil Proverbs compiled by the Rev. P. Percival.

What rules to follow regarding capitalization have not always been easy to determine. Although I prefer a minimum of capital letters, I capitalize all caste names, whether Tamil or English; e.g., Thachchar, Carpenter or Mukkuvar, Fisherman.

I make no more effort to follow a consistent practice in the use of "Ceylon" and "Sri Lanka" than do almost all English-speaking Ceylonese-Sri Lankans. Technically, the country was Ceylon until May 22, 1972. A rigid application of the date would lead to such sentences as "Unemployment in Ceylon in 1971...but by 1975, the rate for Sri Lanka...." "Ceylon" is still used very much, especially in Jaffna.

After this book was printed, Professor K. Indrapala informed me that "Hanging and wiving goes by destiny" was spoken by Portia's maid in *The Merchant of Venice.*

I have been very free about expressing my opinions on subjects on which certainly different, and perhaps better views are possible. I shall be very happy to hear from readers who differ from my views and also from those who can correct, clarify or add to my facts. My permanent address is: 106 Knox Road, Lake George, New York , U. S. A. 12845.



A SCHOOL HALL JAFFNA COLLEGE

CHAPTER ONE

Those who live by the plow truly live; others follow respectfully.
Tirukkural

Introduction

"Ceylon is the best island, for its size, in the world," wrote Marco Polo, about 1300 A.D. Although there is no other island in the world exactly the size of Ceylon (Tasmania probably comes closest) and although, taken literally, the statement has no meaning, it is still the most dramatic sentence with which to begin a book about Sri Lanka or any part of it! Almost everyone who visits the island agrees with Marco Polo's statement, believing it to be a high tribute from the greatest medieval traveller.

The beautiful island of Ceylon, or Sri Lanka, as it is now officially named, is shaped like one of its best loved fruits, the mango.[1] Mango-shaped Ceylon has a stem on it which is Jaffna Peninsula, barely attached to the mainland naturally by a strip of sand east of Elephant Pass and artificially attached by the causeway on which are the highway and the railroad. In fact, in time of storms the rain water and the waves of the Bay of Bengal intermingle and so for a few hours or a day or two, Jaffna becomes a genuine island. The stem is temporarily removed from the mango.

The non-vegetarian Dutch who took over Jaffna in 1660, saw in the island the shape of a ham (for which their mouths watered) and Jaffna was to them the "heel of the ham" (Hammenheil).[2] The small

---

[1] The form of a mango appears elsewhere in the world of today. The parameciumshaped motif which is the chief figure in the cloth design called "paisley" is reputed to be a stylized mango which evolved from a design found by European traders on the southwest coast of India.

[2] *Francois Valentijn's Description of Ceylon,* tr. and ed. by S. Arasaratnam, 1978, London, p. 102.

fort built by the Portuguese and taken from them by the Dutch in 1658 is located in Kayts harbour off the west coast of Jaffna Peninsula. It still bears the name of "Hammenheil." The little fort is a favorite tourist attraction. It has also been used for the quarantine of patients in time of epidemics and when the political epidemic of the Insurrection of 1971 struck the island, some suspects were imprisoned there. However, returning to the name of "Hammenheil," the stem of the mango rather than the heel of the ham is the more appropriate metaphor for the culture of a people who greatly respect vegetarianism.

The name "Jaffna" requires a little explaining. One or another ancient king, some legendary, some real, is credited with this story but perhaps it was the great Elara himself, ruling at Anuradhapura in the second century before Christ who gave this Peninsula as a gift to a singer and harp player who pleased him with his music. Many scholars disbelieve the story of the gift, but none of them was alive at the time! The rest of the story is that since the instrument used was called Yal or Yarl in Tamil, the singer received the title of Yalpady and the Peninsula was called Yalpanam which is still its name in Tamil.

A colloquial form of Yalpanam is Yappanam. In Tamil, the sounds of Y and J are interchangeable as are P and F. (There is no F in Tamil.) So Yappanam progressed to Jaffanam. The passage of centuries, as well as the passage of Portuguese and Dutch conquerors, no doubt had an effect. For two hundred years, the English have referred to it as Jaffna.[3]

The island of Ceylon, 25,000 square miles in extent, is about half the size of the state of New York or of England. The population of 14.5 million is about 72% Sinhalese, 20% Tamil and 7% Muslim. Jaffna, however, is the home of the Tamils; very few Sinhalese live in Jaffna and Muslims constitute scarcely three percent of Jaffna's population. The flag of Sri Lanka has a saffron stripe to signify the Tamils and a green stripe for the Muslims.

[3] Katiresu, S., *A Handbook to the Jaffna Peninsula,* 1905, ACM Press, Tellipallai.

Like most residents of south and southeast Asia, the average Tamil is smaller than the average European, the men averaging 5'5" to 5'9". Their hair is almost always black and their skin is of all shades of brown from " cream to coffee to coal."[4] The person with pale skin is called "fair" and regarded as beautiful with little attention being paid to the features. The colour of skin is a frequent source of comment and amusement among Tamils—and also a handy point of reference and identification of persons whose names are unknown: "that black fellow," "that fair girl."

Jaffna Peninsula consists of coral, covered with soil. While in numerous places the coral crops out on the surface, it is in most of Jaffna buried by soil up to twenty feet deep; some of it rich soil which the Jaffna farmer cultivates intensively and increasingly profitably though variations in prices make such generalizations inaccurate. But the rains in Jaffna come almost exclusively in October, November and December and many do not have sufficient water for agriculture in the dry season. Furthermore, the farms are unbelievably small—fractions of an acre—so the farmers of Jaffna are mostly poor, frequently unemployed or underemployed and all about them are other partially employed people.

The soil is not everywhere fruitful and water is in short supply for part of the year, but not quite enough to reduce the humidity as much as comfort requires. The weather is a few degrees too warm for the average person. There is a good deal of self-deprivation and of "belt-tightening"—though Tamil men do not wear belts on their native costumes, in contrast to Sinhalese men. The above description adds up to this: Jaffna is a moderately harsh area in which to live. Its innumerable redeeming features, however, will grace the pages which follow.

The Jaffna Man

I speak of the Jaffna man although I know that some Jaffna women are more men than their menfolk, but there is no doubt that

[4] Chitty, S. C., *The Castes, Customs, Manners and Literature of the Tamils,* 1934, Ceylon Printers, Colombo, (Reprint), p. 62.

Jaffna is a male preserve. Also, as is true in many other countries, some of the standards and strictures of society, particularly in religion, are enforced by the wife and mother. The Jaffna man lives here because he has learned how to cope with all that nature can deal out to him, without flinching. Generally he is helped in maintaining the struggle by the womenfolk in his household. Although most of the development of equality for women lies in the future, it is appropriate to remind my readers that the first lady Prime Minister in history was a Sri Lankan (in 1960). But Jaffna has never sent a woman to Parliament in the fifty years since 1931 brought the vote to women, nor has any woman contested a Parliamentary election in Jaffna.

The Jaffna man is spare of build, his eyes narrowed against the sun's glare off the sandy soil; his jaw muscles seem set firmly in dedication to the struggle for a living (cynics might insist he is only gripping his betel more firmly!). Although there is a strong tradition of "relative emigration," most Jaffnese remain behind in Jaffna and expect to welcome the less than lifelong emigrants when they retire after a generation of earning a living overseas.

Economical—The Jaffna man is known as the Scotsman of the East for his unbelievable economy of living, for his deep and abiding conservative view of life, for his triumph over the handicaps with which nature has endowed his land, for his great confidence in education and for his occasionally stern, silent personality, sometimes a little forbidding. In his devotion to education, the Jaffna man is ready to spend more than he can afford to educate his children. He will mortgage his land or his wife's jewellery to continue the education of a promising child. The Hindus of Jaffna certainly want their children to have a better education than Lord Krishna received when a boy.

Dour, Hospitable—Whatever dourness he has is warmed and brightened by his hospitality. George Eliot observed that only the poor can appreciate the luxury of giving. But the Jaffna man, whether poor or well off, is prepared to demonstrate his hospitality generously, even to his own hurt.

Industrious—"It is assumed that the struggle with his difficult environment helped to make the Jaffna man industrious and thrifty," says Professor Nesiah. I would add: frugal.

The Jaffna man and his wife are really frugal. A Scotsman could learn much from them. The bag in which I bought some oranges was made up of two double pages removed from a child's notebook and carefully pasted around three sides to form a paper bag which the street vendor might have made himself or purchased (I learned) at the rate of Rs. 4 per hundred. All sides of the paper from the notebook were covered with arithmetic and algebra problems; the notebook from which the bag was made had been actively used before being sold for scratch paper.

Some envelopes which arrive in the mail have been carefully turned inside out—used once, in other words—with a stamp and address inside, next to the letter just received. Or the address on a used envelope is scratched out, a new address and a new stamp added and the envelope makes one more trip before being retired. A sign of the current prosperity is the fact that re-used envelopes are less common today than twenty years ago. The practice of such economy would contribute to helping to reduce the energy shortage if followed in First World nations.

The reason for Jaffna's frugality is not merely to educate their young or simply that many are poor but "they seldom fail to save some money however poor their income may be." This is as true today as when Mr. Katiresu wrote it in 1905 in his *Handbook of Jaffna Peninsula*. The Scotsman also saved his money and it is at this point that the Scots have been wiser than the Tamils for the latter put their hard-saved money into dowry, weddings and funerals, that is, they kept it entirely within the family. The Scots invested theirs in factories, shipyards and a host of other productive enterprises with only a minimum kept within the family and almost nothing spent on the rites of passage through life. This may be an important reason why the per capita income of Scotland is higher than that of Jaffna and of Sri Lanka. It is probable that private money invested gets a lot more development accomplished than larger investments by government, since a greater personal interest is involved.

Utilitarian—A well informed Jaffna man suggested to me that the best single word for the subject at hand is utilitarian. If we must settle for a single word, I have not come across a better one. The Jaffna man applies a utilitarian point of view to education, work, marriage, religion, caste and politics, in my opinion. We have already spoken of his view that education is for employment and not for the purpose of improving and ornamenting the mind. When he gets a job, he does not regard it as an opportunity to serve mankind nor as a trust given to him by God who holds him responsible for his stewardship, though the theology of dharma should encourage such a notion, but to him his job is merely a way of making a living and generally nothing more. Marriage is delivered to the Jaffna man forced through the knothole of dowry and thus wrung dry of all spiritual meaning, of its possible joys of sharing, of its contribution to the flowering of two personalities and the love of two persons. Any of these splendid attributes must be taken on after the wedding. Yet marriage could not be more utilitarian—it lasts! Religion and caste are very conservative phases of life in Jaffna—yet each has changed in various ways in this century and the changes one thinks of are utilitarian in nature. In politics, his utilitarian views on human rights are affected by idealism, by youth, and in grotesque contrast, by caste. However, I see nothing utilitarian in his regard for music, drama and dance.

Rather, we witness traditional arts being replaced, to a considerable extent by modern forms. This brief survey, I think, justifies the conclusion that there is no better single adjective for the Jaffna man than utilitarian.

Mindful of his heritage—Since the present is not so happy and the past 25 years have not been as favorable for the Jaffna man as the more distant past, he has a strong interest in the good old days when anyone who passed out of high school, or even failed his high school examination, would get a job in the government as was the case in the forties and early fifties. Such dreaming is denied today's youth for they were not living in the good old days. The older generation cannot turn to the future with much confidence so they find it pleasant to think of the more ancient past. This accounts for much of the Jaffna man's love of his history and literature. "Everyone" in Jaffna assumed this book would be a history of

Jaffna. They saw plenty of reason for a history, but little for a description of Jaffna as it is today. History is good for the Jaffna man's morale. What he believes was the greatness of the Tamils 2,000 years ago sustains him today when he feels that he amounts to little. He is proud of his ancient literature although he and his contemporaries are producing none today of lasting quality.

View of amusement—One thing that helps the Jaffna man save money is that he spends so little of it on recreation or amusement. Jaffna society is austere, not pleasure-loving. The new generation of youths insists on more music in their lives than was in their parents' lives. And the youths love the films but not necessarily more than their parents did. However, the whole society is short of recreation and of cultural events. While the leading recreation is films and listening to the radio, the citizens also attend meetings of social, political, religious, economic or educational organizations and have a considerable capacity for speeches at every sort of meeting—commonly referred to as a "function." Their fondness for attending political meetings has on more than one occasion misled the candidate, causing him to think that he had strong support. But when the election was over the speaker discovered that many he had assumed were supporters had come for the entertainment value of his political speech and had voted for someone else! This pattern may soon be changed by the new sophistication resulting from television viewing.

The extent to which the need for amusement is filled with native music, dance and drama is taken up in the chapter on Fine Arts.

Reading—Only a very small minority find recreation in reading. One of the best informed of the residents of Jaffna, who reads omnivorously, told me, "Most of the people in Jaffna have no academic interest. They do not read books. Even the wealthy man who has two cars will not have a library. If he is a doctor he will have a few medical books; if a lawyer, some law books, although one of Jaffna's most prominent lawyers has no books in his possession except a few which belong to a friend whom he accommodates by storing them in his office. Only the exceptional person possesses books."

A citizen of Jaffna, more witty than most, alleged that his reason for not reading was that all material that he might read would fall into one or the other of two categories. It would either be material he agreed with or disagreed with. He saw no need to read what he agreed with; that would be redundant. And he certainly would not read what he did not agree with as such material would be patently false!

Sober—The Jaffna man generally has a sense of humour but the Tamils are not the Italians of South Asia. He enjoys humour and contributes some but in the main he thinks in other terms and is rather on the serious side. The humour he enjoys most is a little barbed, that is, it is at the expense of someone else. In some cases his seriousness may be attributed to the fact that he has been reared in a large family where his parents held him to a strict discipline and humour, amusements and toys did not play much of a part in his upbringing.

Pessimism—The Jaffna man is not an optimist. When the worst happens, he is not too surprised—he was rather expecting it, based on previous experience. But he expects to find a way to deal with even the worst, and to survive. If nothing else, he will simply endure. Having done all, he will stand. He does not enjoy dwelling with life's calamities and he will certainly complain about the hardness of life, but in the main he is resolute rather than fearful. He is comforted by his belief that whatever happens was ordained. It is all predestined. If you comfort him at a funeral, he says, "God ordained it." This is a positive effect of fatalism; negative effects will be seen later in this chapter. He would understand the words of the Emperor of Japan in his speech of surrender which ended World War II, "Let us endure the unendurable." Normally, life in Jaffna is much better than that, but when tragedy or calamity strikes him, the Jaffna man can usually cope. Still, suicide is not unknown.

View of time—The Jaffna man has successfully resisted the pressures of civilization to force him into a stricter time table. At the cement plant, Jaffna's only large scale industry, the workers due at the 6 a.m. shift are permitted to be ten minutes late up to four times per month. Any excess tardiness beyond the limits is charged as half an hour. These "grace minutes" permitted each month are indeed a

gracious touch. In Jaffna, "eastern standard time" remains a synonym for "tardy." The people of the East march to the tune of a different drummer—or perhaps of an indifferent drummer.

Cynical, Suspicious—The Jaffna man is suspicious and, with regard to his own kind, irredeemably cynical. The milk of human kindness is allowed to sour before he shares it with his fellows. It is probably the cynical aspect of the Jaffna man which provoked the dishonourable mention in the litany, "Colombo is the voice of Ceylon, Kandy the echo, Anuradhapura the sigh, Jaffna the sneer and Nuwara Eliya the smile." Hindu though he may be, he is prepared to embrace the Christian doctrine of the total depravity of mankind as soon as he hears of it for it fits his own view of human nature admirably. But to foreigners he gives the benefit of almost every doubt; his affection is devoted generously to them. Critics tell me my views of Jaffna hospitality have been distorted by this xenophilia which they assure me is generally self-serving. The negatives in this paragraph demand that it be said that Tamils are not lacking in affection; they are simply rather careful about whom they bestow it upon. Such charity definitely begins at home. And the channels of affection are severely restricted by the caste system.

The Jaffna man's cynicism is most scathing when one of his fellows does something generous. The clear assumption is that, if a person is rational, he will not do anything "for nothing." The attributing of unworthy motives becomes a fine art in Jaffna.

If the community inclines to suspicion, perhaps it is true that the smaller the community the greater the suspicion of each member. Even the greatest of Indian Christian saints, Sadhu Sundar Singh, who came to Jaffna in 1918, was never in his career accused of being an impostor—except in Jaffna.

Competitive—What adds strength and virulence to the expressions of doubt about the inherent goodness of the human heart is the spirit of competitiveness with which many Tamils view their neighbours. "Keeping up with the Kandasamy's" is very important and few Jaffna competitors willingly further the good work of a rival. Many times, two excellent candidates for a desirable post are each so successful in keeping the other from getting it that a third

person, of somewhat lesser qualifications, is appointed. The satisfaction of depriving the rival seems to compensate for the pain of the loss of the post. There is room in Jaffna for Samuel Johnson's aphorism, "Many need no other provocation to enmity than that they find themselves excelled." It has been remarked by a number of authors that Jaffna farmers cooperate very nicely in certain social and ceremonial occasions but not in cultivation; to the latter the old competitiveness returns. Sometimes the question is raised—How far would the people of Jaffna have gone if they had not worked so hard at holding each other back?

Emotional—The Jaffna man is emotional. At first he seems reserved and taciturn and as long as he remains quiet, there may be no hint of deep stirrings within. But let the man (some men) begin to talk—and the subject by no means has to be an important one; he can wax as eloquent on an imagined slight by a friend as upon the death of a loved one—and a new personality appears. Brooking no interposition of reason, or wifely cluckings of prudence or perspective, he allows the fountains of his deep to be broken up. The flow of Tamil, like the lava from a volcano, is the means by which he turns his inside out, and sometimes this may prove to be the wrong side. Most people do not behave like this, but it happens frequently enough to be easily recognizable.

Or he may himself be the audience and the spectator while his wife soars into the heights concerning an incident on the bus or in the market.

Of course, such an all-out effort, while it tends to have a purgative effect on the performer, is not at all necessary to demonstrate that one feels strongly. Most Tamil people show their emotion by their deep concerns for family and friends. Tears are shed and sympathy is shown abundantly.

Politicians seem to be expected to be emotional speakers and the crowd expects to be excited by their remarks. Unfortunately, this sometimes leads to exaggeration and to excessive claims and demands.

Yet undemonstrative—"There is very little affection shown anywhere," said one veteran of many years in Jaffna. She meant

that, while family ties are so strong, the Tamil people dislike demonstrating affection in public. Smiles and handshakes are warmhearted and tend to be prolonged but no man embraces his wife, his daughter (unless she is very small) or his mother in public. Nor do women do very much hugging or kissing of each other, except at weddings. A one-arm embrace is as much as is generally seen.

Babies are another exception; plenty of affection is showered on them. Even that is tempered by the proverb "To kiss the child of another is bad for the lips." Compared to Russian bear hugs, French and Arab kisses on both cheeks and American displays of affection, the Tamil people are remarkably undemonstrative. Yet one feels the warmth of families and friends and within its prescribed circles, affection is real and deep and abiding. The newcomer from beyond those circles will be greeted courteously and if he stays long he will soon become aware of affectionate feelings.

Litigious—The man of Jaffna, because of his suspicions and competitiveness, and perhaps to some extent due to his emotions, is also given to litigation, by which he seeks to confirm his suspicions or to establish beyond challenge things which mean much to him. The Rev. Philip Baldaeus, the ablest of the early Dutch ministers, wrote in his book of 1672 that the high caste people of Jaffna "are very litigious and will go to law for a trifle." Three hundred years have not changed this characteristic for the lawyer who occupies the highest legal-academic position in the land told me in 1979 that Baldaeus was right about this!

Fissiparous— By the same token, his suspicious nature makes it difficult for the Jaffna man to support any organization over a long period of time for sooner or later the leaders of the organization are bound to excite suspicion and loyalty wanes—a phenomenon not unknown in other countries, of course. So political parties have a rough time in Jaffna although the government, by its discriminatory policies against the Tamils, has unified them to a greater extent than

normally would be the case.[5] To many of the people of Jaffna, faction seems to be the better part of satisfaction. Or, as an Indian friend said of his fellow-countrymen who share this trait with the Ceylonese, "We have fissiparous tendencies."

Loyalty to an institution is a fairly rare emotion although some time-honoured institutions are fortunate to have retained such leadership as is still able to evoke loyalty. Much more congenial to the Tamil, however, is loyalty to home and relatives.

Togetherness—In Jaffna's warm climate, foreigners like space and ventilation as aids to keeping cool. The Tamil people feel the heat also but the heat is overridden by another consideration: togetherness. Relatives and friends would often rather sit close together on a car seat than to divide up with two in the back and one in front. School children sit tight packed on a bench instead of moving to the space on the bench behind or in front. The feel of a human being next to them seems to be very reassuring and no doubt it is. "In rice plants distance is required; in kindred closeness," says the *Tirukkural.*

Non-individualistic—People who like togetherness, socializing and the big family system may be expected to take a dim view of individuality. Independence, particularly in schools, is much reduced by the comments of one's peers; in one's home, by the observations of the rest of the family. The group view is what counts in Jaffna. If a teacher asks a student for a "Yes or No" answer, the student does not think about the question. Instead, he or she looks to right and left, obviously seeking to grasp the consensus and anxious to be sure that when he gives his answer it represents majority opinion.

In a well-known college in Jaffna years ago, one girl decided to cut her hair fairly short. Surrounded by 400-500 girls with one or two braids, one resolute young lady dared to wear a different hair style. Her parents grumbled about it but she dared to be different. Such individualism is very rare in Jaffna, although in this case, short

[5] In calmer days the Tamil Congress vied with the Federal Party. Neither had anything to do with the estate Tamils.

hair has become more popular and, decades later, others now follow her long-forgotten example.

Signature—Since the Jaffna man is famous for his hard-headed, practical outlook it is difficult to account for the tradition that signatures should be illegible. It is a very rare name that can be read at the end of a letter or a document. Since the uselessness of this practice is obvious to anyone who needs to know the author's identity, while any possible utility to the scrawler seems to be minimal it is hard to understand how this irresponsible practice ever caught on. It can only be dismissed as a bad habit imported from outside Ceylon!

Old, Solid—The Jaffna man's view of life is reflected in his attitude towards ladders—he avoids them. A ladder is for workmen and all other sensible people keep away from them, feet firmly planted on the ground.

He likes old things: furniture, Austins, buildings, for they represent soundness, durability and one's money's worth. He likes old people for some of the same characteristics and for trustworthiness; solid things like mahogany and concrete walls. The rest of the world's buildings are made of hollow concrete blocks; the Jaffna man wants everything solid, even though cement is in short supply and expensive. He is down to earth; there are few second story buildings in Jaffna; most of those in existence are in Jaffna Town. The great majority of Jaffna homes are very sparsely furnished. The homes of the poor contain very little that could be called furniture. Better homes contain a few chairs, tables and beds, almyrahs and perhaps a sideboard or cabinet. Few or no books are visible and only in wealthier homes are there any toys for the children (who are expected to entertain themselves) and also more furniture as well as increasing numbers of electrical appliances. If there is anything to read beside school books it is most likely the newspaper.

Expert on people—The Jaffna man has a great deal of time at his disposal. This is the time he saves by not watching television. Even if he has one of the rare TV sets, its programmes occupy only four hours per evening. He does not read much, nor go to many

public entertainments and indulges in no hobbies. To occupy his time, he talks with his relatives and neighbours. After a lifetime of concentration on this narrow but attractive field, the Jaffna man builds up a mass of information, cross-checked at a hundred points, on a great number of people. To begin with, he knows all of his relations to the farthest reaches of cousinhood and knows all of their marriage connections. And he knows them so well that when his wife's aunt's mother dies or a fourth or thirty-second cousin expires, he feels it as a personal and intimate loss in a manner scarcely believable to a foreigner. His neighbours and relatives rarely make a move which he does not understand for he knows their movements and habits as well as they do.

I sat in the office of the medical superintendent. A man entered and said he had a good candidate for the low-level clerical job vacancy in the hospital.

Dr.: Who?
Man: K. Balasubramaniam.
Dr.: Who is that?
Man: Do you know A?
Dr.: Only slightly.
Man: Do you know B?
Dr.: I'm afraid not.
Man: Do you know C?
Dr.: The C who married D and is E's son-in-law?
Man: Yes, that's the man. This is his son. Third son. Passed the O level in five subjects. Knows a little English.
Dr.: Ah, C's son. Ah, yes. All right. We will give him the job.

I felt that I had been watching a television screen the size of half a football field. On it were the faces of all the thousands of people the doctor knew, in neat groups, by families, cross-references to school, occupation, religion and other headings. To locate a suitable employee it was not so important if the candidate had excellent qualifications—although they should at least be fair—but it was absolutely essential that his face appear in the family group on the giant television screen.

A sage observed that the most intellectual people talked about ideas, the next best educated people talked about things and the least educated talked about people. In Jaffna, whether people are highly educated or not, they very much enjoy talking about people. Yet all this detailed knowledge of people does not make them more proficient than citizens of other lands when it comes to "handling" other people, getting along well in interpersonal relations. And this is hard to understand, for the men and women of Jaffna are experts on the details of the lives of those about them. Perhaps those who err in their relationships with others may be thought of as observers and critics of others rather than as successful analysts of human behavior. The point should not be belaboured; there are plenty of Tamil people in all walks of life who get along well with their neighbors and understand very well the mechanics of interpersonal relations. The concerns expressed by some of my friends in Jaffna regarding those about them indicate a very fine knowledge of the give and take which oil the wheels of human relationships. They appreciate and practice the truth of the dictum that a gentleman, or a lady, is one who puts more into society than he or she takes out.

This great collection of facts about others should turn all Jaffnese into novelists or diplomats, or psychologists. But there is no novelist in Jaffna and only a few writers of short stories. A very few of the short story writers have produced a novel or two but these are rare. Some of the people of Jaffna obviously use their knowledge of others to help them in their interpersonal relations but many others do not seem to apply their immense social data to the bettering of human relationships.

The Jaffna man is particularly fond of talking about politics and enjoys hearing and spreading all kinds of rumours. The July 1979, threat of Skylab illustrates the observation. Although there was virtually no chance of Skylab falling in Sri Lanka and although Arthur Clarke offered one hundred thousand rupees to anyone harmed by Skylab (in order to reduce the fears of the populace), many Ceylonese, both Sinhalese and Tamils, stayed home from work or from school for the day of the return to earth, made fearful by gossip and rumours.

Speech-loving—The previous several paragraphs indicate that the people of Jaffna spend a lot of time talking. Of course, this does not distinguish them from a large portion of humanity. However, the Jaffna man is not only fond of speech but of speeches. Even though he may have heard every idea repeated several times before, he enjoys hearing them again. The whole performance takes one back to the eighteenth century British Parliament. Even college students will turn out in large numbers to hear a speaker on any subject or to listen to their own classmates debate almost any topic.

Caste-ridden—The educated men and women of Jaffna are nearly all of high caste—the landlord caste. Persons of almost any other caste can, by education, money and good work in acceptable professions, get themselves and their family accepted in high caste society. But such an occurrence is rare in Jaffna even though the acceptance has gone as far as intermarriage in very rare instances. For most practical purposes, Jaffna is bound in caste.

Caste counts in Jaffna. The one-half of the society which is not high caste suffers disabilities and various affronts to its human rights and dignity because it consists of the lower castes. But the system is under attack from several sides and is changing more rapidly than ever before. The subject will be explored thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Fatalistic—Jaffna society is harmed more than helped by an ignorant and pervasive fatalism particularly among the poorly educated. They accept a larger part of life as inevitable and unchangeable—as their fate—than they should. Where their fate or karma has been a handicap to them they are often less accepting of it. Some people work very hard to avoid the fate of a poor man by becoming a prosperous one, but for those who do not wish to make the effort, karma is a ready excuse. Everyone who is pursuing an education is seeking to improve his karma and interfering with his fate.

If you ask the pedestrian why he is so careless about the way in which he walks on the highway, barely escaping death many times, as fast moving vehicles miss him by inches, he will reply, "If it is my day to die, I cannot escape even if I climb that palmyra tree; if it's not my day to die, why should I worry?" This attitude certainly

increases the number of pedestrian accidents and deaths. It is a negative result of a belief in fatalism.

There is at least one positive result of fatalism. The population of Jaffna, and Tamils all over Ceylon, know that they may be the victims, once again, of the kind of violence that flared in 1958 and in 1977. To carry on life from day to day in the face of this realization requires genuine inward strength. In this situation, fatalism is no doubt a source of strength to many a person; generally, of course, it is combined with a faith in God.

Religious—The people of Jaffna are religious—over 85% Hindu, 12% Christian and 2.5% Muslim. Their various faiths will be described in Chapter 4. Unfortunately, many Jaffnese are also very superstitious. Most superstitions are innocuous, some are interesting or amusing but it would seem that the Jaffna man is handicapped somewhat by some superstitions and helped by none. They will be discussed in the next chapter.

Clerical—The Jaffna man is unusually and unfortunately dedicated to the proposition that a desk job is better than a bench job even if the man at the bench gets twice the salary of the clerk. It must be presumed that caste taboos are at the bottom of the objection to manual labour. Such labour around one's own home is approved but outside one's compound it is *infra dig* for there are men of lower caste whose responsibility it is to do such work. Obviously this view of the indignity of manual labour is that of high caste people who compose at least half of the society.

Jaffna society has endowed clerical work with a halo so bright that it blinds people to other facts of life and history: the Industrial Revolution of 1760 was a manual operation, not clerical. Virtually all the inventions that make life more pleasant are mechanical, not clerical. The manual worker frequently has the option of using his skill for other purposes while the clerical worker is generally helpless if his job ceases to exist. There is a vast surplus of partly or wholly educated people looking for clerical jobs and a relatively few looking for jobs of a mechanical or manual nature. Sri Lanka needs a great many kinds of manual workers; it has a constantly growing surplus of clerical workers. Most of the jobs advertised for overseas

are mechanical, some are even manual, but few are clerical. Although they do not need to be, many clerical jobs are sterile and unproductive.

For all these reasons, the enchantment of Tamil—indeed of all South Asian—society with desk jobs is hugely irrational and each year becomes more so. Here the Jaffna man remains blind to his own and his country's welfare, only falling back to non-clerical work when his children totally fail to find employment at a desk. "I am struck by the sharp distinction that still persists between the jobs 'an educated man' should accept and the work the country urgently needs to get done. Waiting for a job in the white collar bureaucracy is not what the country needs," said Dr. Howard Wriggins, the American Ambassador to Sri Lanka, recently.[6]

The great harm that this clerical psychosis has on the development of all new nations is that the mechanic who succeeds in making more than a mere subsistence immediately puts his child in school and does not train him in his traditional skill but proudly watches him desert his father's useful profession or craft and all too often become a drone in the society. Our excellent cook is educating his sons so they will not be cooks.

About the only good thing that can be said on this subject is that there are more people in Ceylon going into technical and mechanical trades than ever before, so some people are facing up to reality even though the numbers are small in comparison with the traditional students.

Tolerant of Oppression—Almost all societies, rich or poor, large or small, are unable to protect their people from oppression by the ruthless, the rapacious and the rascals within the society. The new emphasis on human rights is helping here and there to enable citizens to lighten or to lose their load of oppression. In Jaffna, there is a great deal of oppression of the lower castes by higher castes, of landless by landowners, of the poor by those better off and of the weak by the strong. People in Jaffna are very much used to this kind of behavior and generally look the other way. Jaffna is in terrible

[6] *Tribune,* Sept. 22, 1979, p. 26.

need of a Gandhi, a Bhave or simply a good Hindu or a good Christian to go quietly, like the Quaker, John Woolman, to those guilty of oppression and ask them to mend their ways or to make the oppression known in public if it persists, as it generally will. The Jaffna man's social conscience has stirred in one notable way in the past twenty years: All the larger Hindu temples have opened their doors to all castes.

For another example of oppression, the Toddy Tappers are another miserably poor group in the society, although many of that caste who have turned to other work are doing better economically. The Tappers sell their toddy daily to the tavern keeper and are paid at the end of the week by the keeper who pays them only part of what he is supposed to—that is, in some cases he keeps some of their earnings. It is said that government officials who know of this seem to be unable, or unwilling to protect the poor for they tend to support the tavern keeper when a Tapper complains.

In Ceylon, the members of the legal profession seem to be scarcely aware of any responsibility they should assume for the defense of the oppressed. A few of the youngest lawyers are showing some interest in defending the poor and the harassed but by and large the lawyers of this part of the world show even less interest in justice than do their counterparts in the West. In this context, it comes as a surprise to learn that Gandhi was a lawyer!

Family-centered—Various cultures differ as to which social group within the culture deserves the greatest loyalty. While primary loyalty to family is common, there are societies which put larger groups ahead of the family: the clan, the tribe or the nation. There are public-spirited persons in most educated societies who atypically decide to put their city or state or nation ahead of the normally smaller circle to which primary loyalty is given by most.

Tamil society is in complete agreement that the family comes first. In fact, the family is so very predominantly first that loyalty to other groups such as school, church, political party, or other community organizations is relatively weak. In Jaffna, as in some foreign countries, when to sacrifice for the good of a deserving cause citizens are urged to contribute, or even to sacrifice for the

good of a deserving cause, it is not unusual to find the attitude expressed, "The organization is larger than I am, so let it help me!" Jaffna Tamils are not famous for their civic-mindedness, although there are individual exceptions.

An amusing example of the above fact came to our attention on a visit to one of the islands, though it is an attitude by no means confined to the islands. A Tamil member of our party had arranged for a poor farmer to take us around in his bullock cart. At the journey's end he asked the farmer about his charges and was told "Ordinarily I charge three rupees but since you are friends, I will charge five!"

A very knowledgeable Tamil friend remarked, "Our country is held back by the fact that we do not ask, 'Who is best fitted for these jobs?' Instead we ask, 'How can we get the maximum number of our relatives into these jobs?'"

The Jaffna man's loyalty to his family makes him willing to undergo the pain of separation, the terror of the unknown and the fear of entering into new situations all of which are involved in going overseas to work at the behest of the family. The Jaffna woman's loyalty to her family causes an older sister to give up marriage and the costly dowry it involves and to throw herself into a lifetime of employment so that her salary can help educate her siblings and accumulate dowry for the other sisters. The giving of first loyalty to the family may be the cause, or the result, of the fact that the family in Jaffna is generally a pillar of strength to its members.

All too often, the welfare state does not contribute to civic-mindedness. The era of the welfare state has had a debilitating effect on voluntarism, personal concern for one's neighbour and individual responsibility for nation building. Both countries with a socialist background and those with a free enterprise history have reared a generation or two which increasingly expects the government to do all the development which occurs. Particularly in Sri Lanka and even more in Jaffna, there is a woeful lack of citizens who are building the society, or the young, or the future or the nation. Admittedly, the political climate is not conducive. Even the teachers

to whom are officially committed the youth of the society, all too often have a "government servant" attitude toward their positions and withhold that dedication and the "extra" which transform a job into a calling, a day's work into a sacrament. The one place where "voluntarism" is a runaway success in Jaffna society is "tuition" of which there will be more later.

Authoritarian—The school Principal attends the first rehearsal of an important event in the life of the school—the annual programme for the public in which talented children of all classes perform. The programme has been committed to one or more teachers to get into shape but at this first rehearsal the Principal gives the decisive form to it by his criticisms and orders. Occasionally, as a routine acknowledgment of what he learned long ago in a course in school administration, he turns to the teachers and asks, "What do you think? Please make suggestions." They all think what the Principal thinks. Years ago they learned that the boss is always right, that he really does not have time for other suggestions and total agreement gets you home from school earlier than any other method.

Not all principals, managers, directors, teachers, managing directors, deans, parents and government officers are authoritarian but most of them are, at least most of the time. The Jaffna man is born into an authoritarian society which has elements of democracy in it. He grows up in a home where he is expected to obey the central authority figures and a number of subsidiary ones. The moment he gets to school another group of authorities is right there to take the place of the ones he left at home. Until politics brought interference with the system, the army, navy and the police were popular places for the Jaffna young man to serve—the hierarchy of command was congenial to him.

The proper response to an authoritarian system is obedience. Without obedience the system works poorly and eventually breaks down. There is still a lot of obedience on the part of those in the inferior positions in Jaffna society—the employee, the teacher, the junior whatever, the wife, the child, the student, the lower caste person—and so the society functions fairly smoothly. It functions very much better than it would if the orders were being challenged.

Employees who strike and students who remain away from classes are almost the only segments of society where authority has occasionally been challenged. In the 1970s, a large and alarming challenge has arisen in the form of the Tigers, the new Tamil youth organization which struck murderously at the highest authority—the government. As members of Jaffna's authoritarian society, traditionally opposed to challenging authority, many Tamil citizens could only view developments with mixed reactions and confused and ambiguous feelings.

Man's World—The people issuing the orders in the authoritarian society are, in the large majority of cases, male. The world of Jaffna, and all of Sri Lanka, is a man's world. And a great many of the males are unabashedly chauvinistic—they know their place is superior to that of women and they like it that way. The wife knows her place too. When walking in public, she traditionally follows a step or two behind her husband although modern couples are changing this custom.

Admires asceticism—Although self-denial and deprivation are often practiced by people in Jaffna, it would be misleading to say that the Jaffna man is ascetic. Rather, he admires asceticism as an ideal and in more than a few cases, he practices some form of it. The Hindu scriptures occasionally commend restrictions on diet, condemn drinking of alcoholic beverages and advise various forms of self-denial and restraint. During festival times many Hindus fast each day for one or two weeks. The fast generally means only one meal a day and meat and fish are avoided. The price of fish in Jaffna, in fact, drops in August, the chief festival month.

From some source unknown to me, the Tamil people have an idea that discomfort or pain is good for the character. Asked why they sleep on the floor or on a plank bed instead of a mattress, a common answer is that sleeping on soft materials makes a person soft. If one sleeps on a hard bed it makes him a better person. Allied with this is the recent reply of an Uduvil farmer about his ploughed field: "The crop will be better if you work harder (by ploughing the field with bullocks or chopping the soil with a mamoty) than if you use a tractor."

A friend has suggested that, for some Jaffna Tamils, sleeping on a hard bed is quite unrelated to character. In warm weather, which is most of the time, some people feel less sticky when lying on a hard surface than on a soft one.

Masochistic?—In *kavadi* processions and other Hindu religious ceremonies, devotees suffer pain in the performance of the ritual as will be seen in Chapter 4. To some extent, value is attached to self-inflicted pain.

Materialistic—The Jaffna man is materialistic. He may have heard that the East is spiritual in outlook and the West materialistic but in his experience in Jaffna the reverse seems to be true. The westerners he has known have often been purveyors of spiritual values as epitomized in Christianity, equalitarianism, sportsmanship and parliamentary democratic institutions. But the Jaffna man, while revering Gandhi and paying lip service to spiritual values, is single-mindedly dedicated to getting his children educated, not for the liberalizing effects of education, but to equip them for as good a job in life as possible. To the teacher or principal who tries to broaden that education a little by introducing some supplementary reading, he, or his son if the latter is in the upper grades, will direct the tragic question, "Is it on the syllabus?" That is, the pupil and his father are saying, "We are interested only in material about which there may be a question on the examination; we have no interest in knowledge for its own sake." The Jaffna man devotes his talent for economy to building up the family fortunes and ponders long and earnestly the problem of maximum security for his children. In all his preoccupation with getting ahead in the world, surprisingly little is said and done about spiritual values. One listens in vain for such a statement as "This is where he can serve his country or make his contribution to society." One's work or profession is seldom regarded as a calling or as an opportunity for service. And as they pass middle age, few Hindus practice the ideal of becoming forest dwellers and finally ascetics.

The materialistic view is reflected in the paucity of ideals. There is no life or strength in Gandhianism any longer. The Mahatma is invoked in an incantatory fashion by speakers and writers, but there is no conviction nor power for action. Gandhi is a saint, and in

heaven after death—of no earthly good any more—a terrible fate for one who was down to earth in so many ways while he lived. Spiritually, the people of Jaffna have almost no present day heroes or leaders to whom they can look for inspiration, ideals or ideas. *Eelam* is an ideal for some but it is a concept all details of which are lacking and so, a vague idea.

Tolerant of noise—The Jaffna man's tolerance of noise is amazing. Students who live in hostels where every noise is sustained, not deadened, by the concrete floors and walls, often disturb the sleep of others with noisy shower clogs, alarm clocks or slamming doors. In my years as a hostel warden, I have never known any student to complain of such disturbance. While there are complaints from a few of the local residents, it seems likely that for the indefinite future the populace will continue to tolerate the loud speakers at temples or at wedding houses, shattering the peace for a mile around, with a hideous screeching which might well be pleasant music if the volume were reduced. The tolerance of other nuisances is equally surprising, such as stray dogs and trash disposal.

Sweeper's revenge—As in India, the responsibility for keeping public toilets clean is left to the lowest level of society—the untouchables—and the dismally low standard of cleanliness is the sweepers' revenge. The resulting highly odoriferous "public restrooms" are commonly tolerated. There are a number of places in Jaffna Town where a bad smell is permanent. It is not necessary for the residents of those areas to endure this. According to the chroniclers of the time, a medieval town in Europe could be smelled a mile away. It is time for Jaffna to progress beyond that era.

The visual sense is assaulted by the drains of Jaffna Town, particularly some in the central bazaar area and by piles of rubbish along the roads and streets, as well as accumulations of rusty tins and broken pottery near the road in the open countryside. People rarely take responsibility for the area between the front wall of their compound and the edge of the public road. This margin is regarded as public property or the responsibility of the municipal sweepers. In any case, the result is blocks and blocks of untidiness in every town. The practice of dumping the rubbish of Jaffna Town along what

could be a very attractive seacoast greatly disfigures two miles of Jaffna Town's sea front. While the landfill is a good idea, it has been permitted to render unattractive a larger area than necessary. The employment of municipal sweepers to clean out the privies of those citizens who do not yet have septic tanks is a disfigurement of another sort. Fortunately, the number of such privies is declining.

Changing—By going to the far corners of the earth in pursuit o a livelihood, the Jaffna man has demonstrated his adaptability and versatility. He surprises us, then, by his conservatism and resistance to change in Jaffna itself. Jaffna is one of many places in the Orient today where the "unchanging East" still is a phrase with some meaning.

It is certainly clear that the Jaffna man is a conservative and a traditionalist but, in a time when the world changes more widely and more swiftly every year, even conservatives and traditionalists are changing a little.

Change is proportional to wealth; the poor change very little; the middle class some, and the wealthy who can afford the cars, refrigerators, gas stoves and stereos, are affected the most by the changes in life style which gadgets, sometimes forced upon them by their younger relatives' demands, bring into their homes.

The poor cannot change much for they cannot afford it. Though they earn three times as many rupees as twenty years ago, the increase merely keeps them more or less abreast of inflation; they have no greater real income and hence are still merely subsisting, though there is some debate as to whether many of the poor may not be just a slight bit better off than a generation ago. Only when a poor man's son manages to get a job overseas does the way of life change as the money comes back which makes possible a change in the standard of living.

But even Jaffna, in the twenty years since 1960, has had to respond to the steadily wearing effects of the highways and what passes over them, the railway, new governmental schemes and institutions, cooperatives, the supply of electricity and an increasing number of machines driven by electricity or oil. Change comes in like the dew. The old was with us; now it has subtly changed. But

mostly it's the same old Jaffna of twenty years ago. The unchanged almost drowns out the changed but as we look for signs of change, they appear. And in the long run the unchanged will become the minority element in the society. Will the emigrants Jaffna has temporarily exported to work in Arabia, Australia or Africa, many of them dreaming of early retirement in Jaffna, be able to return in the early twenty-first century and still feel at home? Or will they want still more change?

Future shock—The Jaffna man is already suffering from "future shock" but he will suffer more deeply and on a much wider scale in the years ahead. Future shock is the distress caused to a person by such a succession of changes thrust upon him that he begins to find himself unable to cope with them. I am hearing complaints in Jaffna which indicate the early symptoms; there will be many more to come. Presumably the stress is more painful for those not used to change, who had expected all their lives that they would die as they had lived—set in their ways. The shock waves from Sinhalese Only, including Emergency '58 and subsequent riots large and small, the money coming in by mail, the music and folkways coming by radio and cinema, the unprecedented attention paid to youth who traditionally were obedient and who spoke only when spoken to—most of these factors causing change will speed up from 1979 onward when television comes to Sri Lanka (as these words are being written). Television will invade the privacy of the home as no other honoured or revered teacher and musician ever has and the entire family will sit entranced before it.

Then the pangs of future shock will become more intense in those who try to resist the increased changes, less in those who join the way of the future; who are aware of what is happening. In 1979, a seminar held in the Central YMCA in Colombo considered the theme "Survive the Rat-Race," "a stress on modern sickness." A team of medical personnel tested the participants in an endeavor to determine to what extent they had been "affected by the stress of modern living."[7]

[7] *Morning Star*, September 28, 1979.

In Jaffna, future shock's pains will be sharp for, like much of Ceylon, Jaffna society is feudalistic in some respects—still clinging to folkways laid aside hundreds of years ago by some of the nations of the earth. The caste system is feudalistic in that the relationship between high caste landlord and various subservient castes was and is based on homage and services which were the conditions of landholding.

People of Jaffna used to laugh at the social transformation which often occurred at Elephant Pass. As the scion of the family, employed in Colombo, entered the Peninsula on the Ceylon Government Railway, he replaced his trousers with a *verti*, changed his modern shirt for the traditional one and perhaps got rid of his cigarettes. By the time he reached home and parents (and especially, grandparents) he had eliminated all or most of the things which on earlier occasions had provoked complaints or tongue lashings and he had adopted those mannerisms which would permit him to spend two days and nights under the same roof with his grandparents without annoying them. There is less changing of clothes at Elephant Pass today-a sign of some acceptance of change. The "cadjan curtain" wears a little thinner every year.

Many Jaffna Tamils are culturally ambidextrous. They enjoy the amenities of city life outside Jaffna but they also enjoy their childhood habits, the pace of the village, the presence of the familiars and so they return to Jaffna regularly for weekends. Often, they leave their families to grow up in the economical environment of Jaffna. They are apt to contribute something to change in Jaffna. But these men enjoy much of the good of both worlds. Let us leave our consideration of the Jaffna man on this euphoric note and examine several aspects of his environment—Jaffna Peninsula.

Climate

The seasons in Sri Lanka, like babies, come in two varieties—wet and dry. The rainy season begins in October and, by early January, brings 30 to 40 inches of rain out of the average annual fall of 52 inches (see chart, following). According to Dr. George Thambyahpillai, professor of geography at the University of Sri Lanka at Peradeniya, rainfall describes twenty-year cycles, 1960-80,

1920-40 and 1880-1900 being wet phases and 1940-60, 1900-20 and 1860-1880 being dry. However, the 19 years, 1960-78 inclusive, average only 46 inches per year and seem to be somewhat of an exception to the generalization. For the 30-year average, 1931-1960, was 52.34.

The rainy season comes on the wings of the Northeast Monsoon,[8] which wind lessens in March and April and in May is replaced by the Southwest Monsoon. The Southwest brings plenty of rain to Colombo and much of south Ceylon but very little to Jaffna. Here, it is the warm, dry and very windy monsoon.

The Dutch in Jaffna called the rainy Northeast Monsoon "the good monsoon,"[9] and certainly the Jaffna man will agree with the appellation for the rain on which most of his agriculture is based comes from the Northeast. Although it brings on the average only a scant two-thirds of the year's supply, the rain is sufficiently concentrated to accumulate a surplus which floods the paddy fields and replenishes the fresh ground water whereas the rest of the rainfall is dissipated over nine months and most of it is lost by the very high rate of evaporation which Jaffna suffers from because of the high temperature and the strong wind of the Southwest.

It is these five dry, warmer months, April through August, which make Jaffna a hardship post for the foreigner. It is fair to call the people of Jaffna "weatherbeaten," for the Southwest Monsoon is not as kind to them as it is to their fellow countrymen in much of the rest of the country. And so when the rainy season comes, it is a real relief as most of Jaffna is brown and sere from March to October, covered with paddy stubble or weeds from which all succulence has been extracted by the hot blast of the Southwest.

[8] The Northeast Monsoon is actually the Northeast Tradewind of the eastern hemisphere. Thambyahpillai, G., "Dry Zone Climatology," *Journal of the National Ag. Society of Ceylon,* vol. 2, no. 1, 1965, p. 22.

[9] Pieter Van Dam quoted in Raghavan, M. D., "The Malabar Inhabitants of Jaffna," 1926, p. 80.

Annual Rainfall Jaffna
(in inches)

	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June
1956	1.08	0.06	0.58	1.32	0.00	2.75
1957	0.36	1.05	0.00	2.68	1.64	0.00
1958	1.92	0.19	3.50	1.72	4.68	0.04
1959	2.41	0.74	0.00	4.38	2.15	5.44
1960	6.16	5.91	0.06	3.11	0.98	0.09
1961	9.18	0.04	0.36	2.80	0.44	0.08
1962	1.08	1.61	0.40	1.84	5.30	0.30
1963	0.89	1.62	2.68	2.01	0.01	10.49
1964	0.25	0.10	0.86	1.12	0.32	0.00
1965	0.04	5.30	2.83	1.30	1.04	0.03
1966	1.08	0.81	2.84	4.28	0.03	0.00
1967	0.50	0.15	1.29	0.32	2.98	2.14
1968	0.52	0.00	1.36	3.29	0.30	0.00
1699	0.74	2.66	0.00	2.72	3.94	1.14
1970	2.34	2.22	0.76	2.25	5.32	1.32
1971	4.49	1.02	0.24	0.11	1.76	1.74
1972	0.28	0.00	0.00	0.94	6.08	1.96
1973	0.15	0.84	0.74	0.61	2.94	0.25
1974	1.36	0.94	0.06	1.08	1.21	1.20
1975	3.56	0.56	1.04	1.44	1.35	0.03
1976	0.80	0.00	0.36	4.13	0.00	0.05
1977	0.25	2.20	0.70	2.05	5.96	0.64
1978	0.00	0.18	0.07	0.80	1.76	0.00
1979	0.17	0.00	0.41	0.60	1.57	4.60
24 yr. average	1.14	0.83	2.00	2.24	1.00	2.05

[1] The annual rainfall 1911-1940 averaged 53.12 for Jaffna Peninsula.

[2] The annual rainfall 1931-1960 averaged 52.34 for Jaffna Peninsula.

Annual Rainfall JAFFNA (continued)

(in inches)

	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
1956	0.11	0.42	0.06	12.32	11.58	11.78	42
1957	1.20	1.79	1.52	13.65	24.40	3026	77
1958	0.15	1.98	0.02	9.32	15.89	1.29	41
1959	0.02	0.15	0.00	9.48	25.85	4.34	54
1960	4.46	0.40	0.11	8.74	21.89	1.70	53
1961	0.22	0.00	0.31	2.94	15.36	6.64	38
1962	0.00	1.51	2.68	19.42	13.93	5.36	53
1963	0.02	0.23	0.31	8.36	14.74	13.00	54
1964	1.36	1.35	1.53	6.16	8.18	3.60	24
1965	0.09	1.66	1.00	9.90	13.10	11.25	47
1966	0.11	2.94	9.55	14.24	8.64	7.26	51
1967	0.40	1.20	1.11	11.88	18.37	24.71	64
1968	0.00	1.04	2.04	2.52	9.96	7.42	28
1969	0.00	6.38	0.25	12.10	14.57	17.21	61
1970	0.55	0.33	1.68	8.08	25.53	2.48	52
1971	1.40	0.58	1.74	5.00	4.22	24.08	45
1972	1.58	0.04	1.89	15.60	11.12	6.55	46
1973	0.67	3.62	2.04	7.98	7.36	15.29	42
1974	0.13	0.53	1.68	2.23	3.20	9.26	22
1975	2.44	0.98	3.20	14.44	10.92	17.15	56
1976	0.49	0.00	0.46	10.08	11.84	12.13	40
1977	1.74	3.46	0.46	24.58	15.72	3.08	60
1978	0.03	0.05	0.88	7.38	15.84	19.44	45
1979	0.68	1.36	7.00	9.80	22.28	10.74	59
24 yr. average	0.77	1.33	1.73	10.42	14.00	11.20	48

The annual rainfall 1911-1940 averaged 53.12 for Jaffna Peninsula.

The annual rainfall 1931-1960 averaged 52.34 for Jaffna Peninsula.

Early morning—Early morning in Jaffna is hard to surpass. The coolness welcomes one into the day. A breeze rattles the palm fronds, twitches every leaf and tries to pull the curtains out the windows. A school bell summons the boarding students to study and an hour later releases them for breakfast. The screaming coel, a bird that looks like a crow but sounds like a high pitched siren, gives its piercing call, mounting in a crescendo and reverberating around us. It is, par excellence, an advocate of early rising.

The parakeets are also very noisy, for there are many more of them. But all is forgiven them because of their great beauty. A medium pale green streamlined bird, with a rose ring around the neck of the male, the parakeets trail a long graceful tail and are as marvelous in flight as falcons. Crows, mynas and other birds of lesser volume add to the impression that every day here, nature is "busting out all over."

Temperature—The most amazing thing about the climate of Jaffna is its unvarying temperature.[10] It is not often that the thermometer reaches 90°F. Its high in January is 84° or slightly more and in July 89°. But overnight it drops less than ten degrees, and so it continues throughout the year—the mercury rarely leaves the eighties. Such constancy is unimaginable in the Western world. The net impression left by the thermometer, however, is that Jaffna has a hot climate. A visitor to Jaffna once observed, "I find the heat such that I feel like doing nothing. I would not blame anyone for not working in a climate like this." But the Jaffna man works, in spite of the climate.

While the geography of Jaffna is fascinating to the foreigner, it must be difficult to teach physical geography in Jaffna Peninsula where there are no mountains, or even a hill, no river or lake, no snow, ice, hail or glacier nor even a temperature variation discernible to anyone except the keenest observer.

Because of the regularity of the temperature and of the coming of the two monsoons, it is possible to predict what the weather will

[10] O'Dwyer, "The Climates of Ceylon," Dept. of Economics, *Research Report No. 14*, April, 1950, U. of Western Australia, pp. 1-4.

be for most of the year and rarely be wrong. Only the timing of rainy days will throw things off. For in any of the eight dry months a good rain or some light showers will come occasionally. However, even though the weather is incredibly reliable and repetitious year after year, in its general patterns, the subject of the weather is as popular a topic for discussion in Jaffna as anywhere else in the world. One astute observer of the Jaffna scene maintains that, to the jaundiced eye of the Jaffna farmer, there has never been a good season for agriculture!

Folk tale—One of Jaffna's best folk tales is about the weather. Millenia ago the people of this part of the world are said to have complained about the weather (this has the ring of authenticity) so much that a sympathetic god, in whose department the climate came, offered to do them a favor. He let down a rope from heaven with the word that whenever they wanted rain they should pull the rope. The rope, of course, instantly became the apple of discord. When the farmer wanted to pull the rope, the laundryman had just spread out his clothes to dry. When the laundryman agreed to pull the rope, some other farmer had his paddy drying. The quarrels were endless until, in desperation, the people prayed the god to pull up the rope. For a few years, at least, there must have been a minimum of complaints about the weather!

Rain—During October, November and December, the Northeast Monsoon brings many days of showers and a number of days of very heavy rain, sometimes continued for a second or even a third day. A great deal of water falls on such a day or days and most of the Peninsula will then be under an inch or more of water—to three feet in the low places—for a few hours or a day or two. Jaffna Town once had 20.48 inches in one day! On such a day the paper in one's typewriter is limp.

"On the average," Jaffna Peninsula is a well-watered area, receiving a little over four inches of rain per month or 50 inches per year as compared to 30-40 inches received in good agricultural areas of Europe and America. Unfortunately, it does not rain "on the average" in Jaffna but there is a flood between early October and early January, followed by many months of drought, relieved in almost half of the Peninsula by irrigation from wells.

Paddy green—And after the rains have come, the brown fields turn to paddy green—the loveliest green in the world. One hundred fifty years ago, the lady who founded Uduvil Girls College, Mrs. Harriet Winslow, described it classically:

> Jaffna never looks more pleasant than at this season, after the first rains, when the springing grain is about two or three inches high. In going along the road which winds among the rice grounds you see on each side as far as the eye can reach, or until the view is terminated by villages and groves of palm trees, a beautiful green, almost like moss, covering every inch of ground except the ridges of fresh earth, which divide the whole into little square fields and form mounds to retain the water.[11]

On the other side of the ledger, the rains bring high humidity—one's clothes feel damp and "sweat." Mildew appears on all things made of leather, on some book bindings and some cloth items, necessitating a fortnightly inspection.[12] For the people of Jaffna, the rainy season is an unhealthy time. Colds, coughs and flus are increased. And as the rains end the dew comes—in January and February. What feels cool and welcome to the foreigner is disliked intensely by the permanent resident who wraps his head in a wool muffler to ward off the dew's pernicious effects.

To return to the wells for a moment, the effectiveness of well irrigation depends upon the supply of ground water, a subject studied with increasing interest these days all over Sri Lanka. On the careful maintenance of ground water levels depends the present prosperity of Sri Lankan agriculture, including Jaffna's, and upon the increase of ground water levels by new scientific methods depends the future prosperity of a more prosperous Sri Lanka.

Jaffna versus Colombo—There is a myth concerning the climate of Jaffna which one hears in Colombo and comfortable

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[11] Winslow, M., *A Memoir of Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow,* 1835, New York, letter of Nov. 6, 1829.

[12] The latest theory is that naphthalene balls or flakes will take away the mildew.

upcountry locations. It is that Jaffna's climate is almost unbearably hot. An examination of the temperatures reported in the newspapers will reveal how often Jaffna's maximum temperature is the same as Colombo's or within a degree or two of it. It will also reveal that Jaffna's high is rarely above 90°F (32C).

What the papers' report will not reveal is that Jaffna is often more comfortable than Colombo because, during its many dry months, it has less humidity or greater wind velocity or both. Most of all the papers will not reveal that the citizens of Colombo endure their muggy heat with a bit more grace and patience because they are comforted by the thought that "it's much worse in Jaffna," as many have informed me. Of the 36 sample temperatures reported below, Colombo's temperature was the same as or higher than Jaffna's on 22 days.

1979 Temperature Chart[13]

Date	Jaffna	Colombo	Date	Jaffna	Colombo
Jan. 10	28°	31°	July 10	32°	31°
Jan.20	29°	31°	July 20	31°	30°
Jan. 30	30°	31°	July 30	31°	30°
Feb. 10	31°	32°	Aug. 10	32°	31°
Feb. 20	30°	31°	Aug. 20	30°	30°
Feb. 28	32°	32°	Aug. 30	30°	30°
March 10	33°	32°	Sept. 10	30°	30°
March 20	34°	32°	Sept. 20	30°	30°
March 30	34°	32°	Oct. 1	30°	30°
April 10	34°	33°	Oct. 10	32°	30°
April 20	34°	31°	Oct. 20	31°	31°
April 30	32°	32°	Oct. 30	32°	30°
May 10	34°	32°	Nov. 10	30°	30°
May 19	28°	30°	Nov. 20	29°	30°
May 30	34°	32°	Nov. 30	31°	32°
June 9	31°	32°	Dec. 10	26°	30°
June 20	32°	31°	Dec. 20	30°	32°
June 30	31°	31°	Dec. 31	29°	31°

[13]Temperatures given in the papers were registered on the previous day. In those instances where the reading was missing in the newspaper, I have given the reading on the same day in both cities, but on a slightly different date, as indicated.

The previous temperatures are Centigrade; Fahrenheit equivalents are:

Zero	C—32F	30C—86F
10	C—50F	31C—88(87.8)
20	C—68F	32C—90(89.6)
30	C—86F	33C—92(91.4)
40	C—104F	34C—93(93.2)
		35C—95(95.0)

Insect life—The Northeast Monsoon brings not only the rains and the greenery but a great revival of insect and aquatic life. Within only a night or two of the first shower, a horde of flying ants comes to one's reading lamp, and any other light which may be burning, so it is necessary to extinguish the lights for some time or to go to bed early. The next morning, a pile of inch-long, tawny-brown gossamer wings litters the floor under each light. Most of the ants, liberated from their wings, have crawled back into the earth. They go but return again from time to time. The ants go, but the mosquitoes remain and are joined by the tiny eye-flies which whine harmlessly but annoyingly around one's head in the daytime. At dusk, they turn the patrol over to the mosquitoes.

Night noises—After the first shower of any size, the silent night of the Jaffna countryside ends. A little moisture is evidently all that an army of insects, frogs, toads and peepers, beepers and creepers has been waiting for. They warm up their vocal cords for a few nights and then when the fields are flooded, the chorus which arises is beyond belief—a wall of sound so palpable that when a sudden loud noise silences all of the noisemakers at once, the listener feels,

that he moves forward all but imperceptibly, as if he had been leaning upon that wall of sound. The sound is so overpowering that it seems to surge through one's head like certain piercing siren sounds. This aquatic life abounds in and around the numerous tanks which fill up at this time after months of being dry. Mysteriously, within a very few days, fish of one to three inches in length appear in these tanks.

Standard time—The time in Ceylon is five and one-half hours ahead of Greenwich, that is, the sun rises here when it is only one or two in the morning in England. The half hour makes it more easily possible for all of India and Ceylon to be in the same time belt, an incalculable blessing for which the citizens of both countries should be eternally grateful. Whoever was responsible for this decision long ago should have a great monument erected to his memory for he has saved the citizens of both countries a lot of bother. Although excitement is in short supply in Jaffna, the weatherman can generally be counted on to supply some once a year. Almost annually, and nearly always in the month of November, Sri Lanka hosts a cyclone in some portions of the country which disturbs Jaffna more or less. The most destructive such storm in the nation's history leveled the city of Batticaloa in 1979, took 915 lives and destroyed three million coconut palms. Jaffna escaped unscathed.

Nature

Like Gandhi, who rarely mentioned the subject, the people of Jaffna have very little interest in nature. Ancient Tamil poetry like *Pattupattu* (Ten Idylls or Descriptive Poems) of about 2,000 years ago is full of poetic references to nature. This author has clearly and thoughtfully observed "mountains, clouds, the ocean, rivers, fields, woods, animals, birds, trees, plants and flowers."[14] In one of these poems the writer lists 99 varieties of flowers! Not so their present day descendants. Sunrise, sunset, stars, clouds, trees and birds do not figure in the conversations of one's friends—only flowers and shrubs are spoken of with appreciation for their beauty as seen in

[14] Chelliah, J. V., trans., *Pattupattu*, 1962, Madras, p. 5.

one's compound, and, of course, all plants, with utility, like vegetables and field crops.

Yet there is a great deal of beauty in Jaffna—definitely "in the eye of the beholder"—where else! Any comments previously about Jaffna's rigorous climate or heat are not intended to detract from the fact that at all seasons of the year a profusion of plants is growing, beautiful trees are in many places and still more beauty is contributed by temple trees (frangi pani), bougainvillea, hibiscus, Christmas flowers (poinsettias) and other flowering shrubs like ixoras and Burma creeper. Skies are generally blue in Jaffna but manage to muster sufficient clouds, morning and evening, to produce many a lovely sunrise and sunset.

In the midst of the dry season as I bicycled down a narrow village lane lined with old palm leaf fences mouldering under the assault of the white ants and assuming the same colour as the dust of the lane, I was fed up, for the sun was reflected off the dust back through the shimmering waves of heat. I delayed my lunch a few minutes while I got my camera, which luckily contained some colour film, and I took a picture of that scene to show how harsh the noontide was. When the picture returned, developed, the dusty lane resembled the Garden of Eden! The camera's filter had reduced the glare and the picture revealed the beauty which nature had lavished on even the dusty lane, hidden temporarily from my eyes by the glare and the negative thoughts.

Hibiscus—Of all the flowers of Jaffna, one of the most popular—perhaps because it grows so readily almost anywhere—is the hibiscus, generally flaming red. It is commonly called the "shoe flower" because its velvet petals are effective for polishing shoes.

Birds—As an amateur ornithologist, I have found that Jaffna abounds in birds. An early morning walk of ninety minutes will turn up forty-five species in the migration season (September to March) or thirty in the warmer season. After an absence from Jaffna of nearly two decades I was surprised to find that the pariah kites, so common in Jaffna in 1960, had all but disappeared. Partridges have become more common, it is said, because guns have mostly been confiscated and hunting is therefore almost eliminated. For the same

reason, rabbits are seen more frequently. The only other wild animals in Jaffna are monkeys in the southern part of the Peninsula and *maranai* ("tree dogs"), mink-like animals which live among the rafters of houses.

Stars—Visitors from the Occident are charmed by the splendour of the skies at night and insist that the stars are brighter and more numerous here than elsewhere. Furthermore, many of the brighter stars shine with a light composed of red and green as well as yellow rays; the planets, however, remain pure yellow in ray. A full moon night in Jaffna, or anywhere in Sri Lanka, is a heady experience; the effulgence is intoxicating and the pattern of leaves, especially coconut leaves, imprinted upon the light-coloured soil, is delightful.

The Southern Cross is clearly visible in Ceylon anywhere except on the "wrong side" of river valleys. According to Baldaeus in 1670, the constellation known as the Pleiades was called by the people of Jaffna "the six fishes" (*Arumin*) because the people said they could see only six stars there. Today the Pleiades are referred to as the Seven Fishes (also, Six Girls) and the Big Dipper is called the Northern Group of Fish, as well as the Seven Rishis (Holy Men).

Flying foxes—September and October are the months when the wild olive tree bears its fruit, each one of which contains smooth, shiny brown seeds. Parakeets feed on the pulp during the day and "flying foxes" at night. These giant bats, with a wing-spread of over two feet, come lumbering in the dusk, disturbing the silence with their raucous screeches. Sometimes thorny shrubs, such as lantana, are hung up near the olive trees or mango trees in an attempt to rip the membrane of the bats' wings, which will bring them helplessly to the ground. Bats' flesh is considered a delicacy by some in Jaffna.

Ant bears—One of Jaffna's most interesting specimens of nature is never seen by most of the population for it is only half an inch long—the ant bear or ant lion. This little creature with a formidable name generally lives in small colonies of three or four or a dozen and its presence is revealed by a series of small, neat holes in the dust near the wall of a building where the roof overhang keeps the soil powder dry. The holes are shaped like inverted cones from half to three-quarters of an inch in depth and width. When an ant or

other insect falls into this little trap, it starts to run up the sides to escape but these sides are of very fine sand and the luckless victim keeps sliding back down. Just to make sure that he does slide back, a strong little leg kicks dust from the bottom of the pit and "washes" the insect back from the sides and down to the bottom again. The moment the insect stops struggling, a small but sturdy arm or leg reaches out and inexorably drags it down and slowly into the dust until it disappears. It is a grim life and death struggle carried on in an arena which a postage stamp could cover.

Ant hills—Ant hills reach a fairly good size in some places in Jaffna, as much as four or five feet or a little more. Cobras and rat snakes, at least, are species that sometimes take up residence in an ant hill. There is, in fact, a Tamil proverb, "The busy ant makes the hole and the wily serpent lives in it.." The dirt of an ant hill is valued for its sealing qualities, being mixed with earth and cow dung to make a long-lasting topping for a dry-mud verandah or for a tennis court.

The Tamil Language

The language of the people of Jaffna is Tamil, brought by their ancestors when they migrated from India, in the dim ages of antiquity or in more recent times. Tamil is one of four important Dravidian languages each one of which is associated with a state of the Indian Union whose official language it is. Tamil is the language of Tamilnadu or Madras State, Telugu of Andhra Pradesh, Kanarese or Kannada of Karnataka (formerly Mysore State) and Malayalam of Kerala. As an ancient but still living language, Tamil enjoys the patronage of a considerable group of scholars in many countries of the world who have done extensive research and written scholarly treatises on the language for over a century. My remarks here are not those of a Tamil scholar but simply some random observations.

The word "Tamil" means "sweet" and no doubt it is sweet to the ears of those that speak it, as their native tongue can be expected to be. An early European student of Tamil rendered the opinion that the language was one of the "most copious, refined and polished

languages spoken by man."[15] Plenty of people in Jaffna today, listening to hours of speeches in Tamil at public meetings will strongly agree as to its copiousness. But Miron Winslow, the nineteenth century American missionary who produced the first scholarly dictionary of Tamil and English, affirmed that "in its poetic form the Tamil language is more polished and exact than Greek."[16]

Tamil is the language of about three million persons in Sri Lanka and nearly fifty million in South India. It is not an easy language to learn because of its complexity, its lack of relative pronouns and because of the great difference between the literary Tamil and the ordinary spoken language. Beginners are shocked to learn that it has 247 characters in its alphabet but since most of these follow a regular pattern, it is not hard to learn to write the alphabet.

Tamil people are proud of their language—as well they might be in view of its ancient literature and great age. English speakers today cannot understand the English of 1300 AD but a college-educated Tamil of today can understand "popular-based" Tamil religious literature written as far back as 700 AD and also comprehend Thiruvalluvar's celebrated poem *Tirukkural* which is usually dated not later than the third century AD. In that area of language, the vocabulary's evolution seems incredibly slight.

In the past generation, more foreigners than ever before have learned Tamil. Missionaries have commonly learned the language in the past but their numbers have been augmented by scholars, in Europe and America especially, who have been interested in Tamil as a field of study. The American Peace Corps also introduced some hundreds of persons to the language. Whenever foreigners study a language, amusing stories of mistakes arise. A missionary bishop who thought he was preaching in Tamil on the text, "Be ye watchful," found that his accent had made it sound more like "Be ye drunken."

[15] Winslow, M., *A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary,* 1862, p. vii.

[16] *Ibid.* [the same], p. vi, quoting a Dr. W. Taylor.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka, particularly those well-educated in Tamil, take justifiable pride in the interest which foreign scholars have shown in the Tamil language and its literature, especially in the past thirty years. This interest is celebrated every few years by the International Tamil Congress where for several days scholars from many parts of the world present papers and participate in learned discussions. This conclave was begun in 1966 by Fr. Thananayagam, professor of Indology at the University of Malaysia when the first such congress met at that University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Since that inaugural occasion it has convened in various cities including Madras, Paris and Jaffna (1974) and in 1980 is scheduled for Madurai, South India.

It is a pity that Tamil for the present, and for the past nearly twenty-five years, has been the symbol in Sri Lanka of the dtermination of the Tamil people not to be deprived of their civil rights, of which one of the most precious is the right to have one's language recognized as acceptable and useable by all who wish to do so. The subject will be discussed under Politics and especially under Education below.

In the Tamil language, there is a practice of categorizing colours and foods which is of interest to outsiders. Red, orange and yellow are "warm" colours (fire colours) while green and blue are "cool" colours (water colours). Common (neutral) colours are white, gray and beige. Black is unclassified. Foods are classified as "cooling" or "heaty," although most foods are not in either category. The most common cooling foods are: milk, curd, cucumbers, okra, onions, mutton, sugar and all fruits including raisins. Heaty foods are chicken, drumsticks, a vegetable, chillies, chutney,[17] pepper, cinnamon and ice cream! If one eats a melon, one is warned to eat it again the next day due to alleged mysterious properties which this fruit possesses.

In vernacular English, it is common to refer to large machines such as locomotive engines or ships as "she" rather than "it." I am

[17] See Glossary in the introductory pages of this book.

told that in Tamil this is rarely done except that Fishermen do refer to large boats or small ships as "she."

The pride which the Tamil people take in their language is shown vividly in their attitude toward Sanskrit. Perhaps because of the pressure on their own language by recent government policy, the Tamils have changed their attitude towards Sanskrit in the past twenty years. Formerly, for example, when the word for book — *pusthaham*—was mentioned, the Tamil instructor with a touch of pride said, "That's a Sanskrit word."

In 1979, when *pusthaham* was mentioned, the comment was, "That's the Sanskrit form (derogatory tone of voice); the Tamil form is *putaham* (with a touch of pride)."

The Islands

Seventy-eight in number and seventy-eight square miles describe the islands clustered around Jaffna Peninsula's southwestern side, according to one source I found. Unfortunately, such splendid round numbers, which have the added charm of being reported in 1978, were too good to be true. The Surveyor General's Office informs me that there are eleven islands of a fifth of a mile in area or larger. Their area totals 71.4 square miles. In addition to the eight inhabited islands listed below, the Surveyor General's Office numbers Palativu (.8 square miles), Mantivu (.2) and Kachchativu (.26) as islands of Jaffna.

There are other islands, of course, but they are too small to count for much. Inevitably it finally becomes a question of whether a few square yards with a shrub growing on it in a shallow lagoon should be regarded as an island or not. At any rate, the authorities have settled the matter by drawing a line at 20% of a square mile. Only the eight largest islands are inhabited (disregarding a lone goatherd).

English	Tamil	Sinhalese	Dutch	Area (Sq. mi.)	Population 1958	1979
Kayts	Velanai or Urathurai	Thannidivaina	Kayts	24.5	23,870	16,244
Delft	Neduntivu	Pokurudivaina	Delft	18.3	6,400	5,800
Punguditive	Punguditivu	Puwangudivaina	Middleburgh	10.6	12,280	16,950
Karainagar	Karativu	Karadivaina	Amsterdam	8.8	15,800	17,777
Mandaitive	Mandaitivu	Mandaidivaina	—	3.4	3,000	3,900
Analaitive	Analaitivu	Agnidivaina	Rotterdam	2.2	3,000	3,375
Nainative	Nainativu	Nagadipa	Haarlem	1.8	3,780	5,100
Eluvaitive	Eluvaitivu	—	—	0.6	500	490

Like the Peninsula, all the islands are flat—none is higher than twelve feet above sea level—and, even more than is true of the Peninsula, their land is barren salt flats and shallow soil areas on which only shrubs and palmyra palms will grow, if anything. Flocks of goats and sheep graze frequently, with unjustified optimism, over the areas withered and barren except in the rainy season. The average rainfall of 25-30 inches per year is only a little over half of the Peninsula's average. Wherever the soil is deeper and the water is better, houses, compounds and tiny fields spring up, followed by shops, schools, government offices and Hindu temples. There are also Christian churches on five of the eight islands (eight Roman Catholic churches on Delft alone) and a famous Buddhist temple on Nainative attracts thousands of pilgrims annually to the longest pilgrimage possible for most Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

The water in many of the wells on the island is brackish and much of the water in the lagoons which surround the islands is so shallow that birds can wade in it. Its depth reaches thirty feet, however, on the farther side of the islands but is only thirty-five feet deep between Nainative and Delft. A twelve-mile ferry takes one from Kayts to Delft but many people take the bus from Jaffna Town to the far end of Pungudutive where the ferry ride is about five and one-half miles to Delft. Delft is only twenty-four miles from Rameswaran in South India where the ferry from Ceylon brings rail passengers to India.

Although the islands are generally more barren than the Peninsula, palmyra palms on the islands produce the largest amount of toddy of any place in the Jaffna region. Likewise, chillies growing on the island of Velanai will produce twenty hundredweight per acre while those in the rich red earth region of the central Peninsula normally produce twelve.

Little or no rice grows in Delft but wild horses do. The Dutch, who left Jaffna in 1795, abandoned their horse farm on Delft where they bred Arabian steeds. Their equine descendants, toughened and somewhat smaller, still survive. Although most of these horses are used for little or nothing (not half a dozen are working in all of Jaffna Peninsula), each one is owned and his owner knows which

horse is his. As petrol becomes more expensive, perhaps horses will return to Jaffna!

It was said a generation ago that a good many of the people of Delft went to the Wanni, the land just south of Elephant Pass, and took up farming. Likewise a good many from Delft came to Jaffna Peninsula and became domestic servants. Still a third occupation was running "rice shops" in Jaffna Town, other towns and even Colombo. These were not shops which sold rationed or unrationed rice but were poor men's restaurants specializing in cooked rice with a few curries. In this year of 1980, the employment pattern for people of Delft has changed somewhat, although they are still associated with "rice shops." Traffic to the Wanni has declined and traffic to the Middle East has increased. Few from Delft become domestic servants any more; anyone who is so inclined is more apt to obtain such work in Arabia where the returns are manifold better.

Pannai—An important liberating force in the lives of the residents of the islands was the completion of the Pannai causeway across from the Jaffna Fort, connecting Jaffna with the island of Velanai. This greatly reduced the distress caused to people whenever they had to journey to town from any island except Karainagar. Not only have ferries in Sri Lanka cost people their time but they have also occasionally cost them their lives due to accidents, carelessness and overloading and this unfortunate fact has not been unknown in Jaffna.

Now the chief gap remaining to be bridged between the islands is the one between Karainagar and Velanai-Kayts at the town of Kayts where a rheumatic ferry still holds trade and traffic in bondage over the mere 300 yard gap. In 1973 a research student found that 400 people cross here daily.[18] Nainative and Delft, Analaitive and Eluvaitive are more distant and there is little hope that causeways will ever link these less populous islands. As for the gap at Kayts, there is need for various vessels to ply to and fro, so it is not desirable to shut off the gap entirely with a causeway.

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[18] Senthirajah, A., *Population Analysis of Karainagar*, unpub. bachelor's thesis, University of Sri Lanka, 1973.

However, the distance of the ferry trip could be reduced by a jetty protruding some distance on each side. At the Kayts harbour, on the Karainagar side, a small naval base is located which supplies a number of service kinds of jobs to the community.

There is bus service on the island of Delft but not a single automobile is located there.

Pannai causeway which connects Jaffna Town with the eastern end of the island of Velanai almost touches Mandaitive at that point. Since another causeway, completed almost 30 years ago, connects Velanai with Pungudutive, and since Karainagar is connected with the west side of the Peninsula, these four islands, Mandaitive, Velanai, Pungudutive and Karainagar, may be referred to as "the connected islands."

Recreation and amusements are even less on the islands than on the Peninsula. A Delft resident once informed me that the only recreation on Delft was drunkenness and adultery. There is no cinema there; the only cinema in the islands is at Kayts. But the radios have contributed greatly to the brightening of living conditions at this last outpost of Sri Lanka. And here and there is a new television set.

Courtesy, Manners and Salutations

One of the priceless things in Jaffna is the courtesy of its better educated citizens. The Jaffna man is of the old school, respectful of his elders, especially his teachers and parents; solicitous about the health and welfare of his guest and the guest's family; dignified and painstaking in his manners. The etiquette of urban civilization declines steadily, which means that it leaves more to be desired all the time. As the courts of the kings originally established *courtesy* in the western world, so it is to be hoped that the courts of oil princes and monarchs of developing lands will continue to insist on social proprieties. Social behaviour, by gradually becoming more "businesslike," bald and brusque, becomes barbarous. Many modern parents abdicate the rearing of their children by depositing them in a reluctant school which desperately hopes the children have been

tamed before being caged. If not, there are no courses anywhere for manners or etiquette.

What one sees on the screen, one does, though it takes quite a while in Jaffna. Much too late the western world has found out the utility of manners; without them, a person is uncertain how to proceed in society. Courteous people are much more apt to know what to do next. Courteous people lighten the burden of daily living.

In his book on Tamil customs written nearly 150 years ago, Mr. Simon Casie Chitty quoted from an ancient Tamil book[19] nine different ways the host should show courtesy when another pays him a visit:

1. Pay him due respect.
2. Address him in courteous and pleasing language.
3. Receive him cheerfully.
4. Entreat to advance.
5. Rise on his approach.
6. Entertain him with exhilarating discourse.
7. Attend assiduously by his side.
8. Accompany him for a space when he departs.
9. Treat him with the sixteen kinds of civility during his stay.

These sixteen exercises varied from giving the guest a seat and water for his hands and feet, to the giving of rosewater, a garland, food, and betel.[20] In present day Jaffna, the nine courtesies continue

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[19] *The Castes, Customs, Manners and Literature of the Tamils* (reprint), 1934, Colombo, p. 86. He was quoting from *Illaram Kooriya Addhiyayam.*

[20] The complete list, "Sixteen different kinds of civility given to superiors," is as follows:

1. Giving a seat
2. Giving water for the hands
3. Giving water for the feet
4. Giving water for bathing

to be expressed in the fine manners of the Tamil people although certainly not all on one occasion, but the sixteen varieties have been abbreviated to giving the guest a seat and a cup of tea and perhaps a chew of betel.

They have retained a very great deal of the ceremonial courtesies and done away with the excess although portions of the remainder may be temporarily revived if the occasion is sufficiently glorious. In the present day, though the foreign guest may be given tea by his host, the Tamil visitor is much more likely to be offered the betel tray.

What this all boils down to is this: The Tamil people are past masters at making guests feel welcome and at solicitously caring for them.

Mr. Chitty wrote so long ago, "Kissing by way of salutation is not known among the Tamils. In some parts of Ceylon, however, when relations meet together on the holy days or after a long separation they embrace each other and kiss on the cheek." After 150 years, there has been very little change in the attitude of Tamils toward kissing, as noted. It is not a social custom which commends itself to them nor have they been pleased with its appearance on the movie screen.

Greetings—When friends meet they often say in Tamil the equivalent of "Howdy," for that is the short, slangy form of the most common greeting which translates in its full form as "How is your health?" The more formal greeting is *Namaskaram*, which can be said with palms together almost under the chin, that is, the *namasthe* gesture of India with which everyone is familiar. *Vanakkam* is also used as is *Salaam*. All four words or phrases serve equally well as greeting and the latter three are used for farewell also. The words can be pronounced with the gesture of the palms pressed together except in the case of "How's your health?" But as a matter of fact, in Jaffna the practice of *namasthe*-ing has almost ceased except when revived by someone from India. And in India, it is fairly rare in the south; it is a north India custom. Two decades ago, it was at least seen more commonly in Jaffna than it is today. Ladies who did not like strange men shaking their hands could fall back upon *namasthe*; it is both modest and graceful.

A Jaffna lady recently explained to me that the use of *namasthe* is conditioned by costume and occasion. When all dressed up at a wedding, she feels that *namasthe* is natural and most appropriate. One does see it more often on formal occasions.

A substitute greeting—Another of my friends pointed out that the Jaffna man has substituted questions for some of his greetings. My own observation of this phenomenon I describe thus: The Jaffna man knows all about you except for the latest development. That is, he has a detailed knowledge of your life in general and your daily habits if he is a neighbor of yours and if you appear about to deviate from your normal path, he is curious as to your next move. So curious, in fact, is he that if you are reasonably well acquainted, his normal impulse to extend a greeting is simply overpowered by his inquisitiveness and his greeting is "You have just come from town?" or "You are going to Manipay?" There is no prefatory greeting, just the abrupt question. He asks because he wants to know. A small chip of social data is lacking and I am happy to supply it.

Caste—The folkways of caste introduce an ugly blemish right across the picture of courtesy in Jaffna society.

Refined manners are focused on equals and superiors. Children, students and servants (especially) receive less or none. And persons of lower caste, particularly outcastes, evoke treatment and forms of address which the society has been very slow indeed to humanize and to harmonize with modern standards of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

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5. Giving milk, the juice of sugar cane, and the water of young coconuts
6. Assisting in putting on garments
7. Putting on the triple cord
8. Sprinkling perfumed water
9. Adorning with garlands
10. Strewing turmeric-coloured rice
11. Offering incense
12. Getting up a lamp
13. Burning camphor
14. Furnishing food
15. Worshipping and scattering flowers
16. Giving betel

Small courtesies—A number of small customs follow: When one hands something to a servant, the latter extends his right hand to receive it, then supports his right elbow with his left hand. The significance of this is that he is showing extra caution and care, not to say obsequiousness, because of the great importance of the person he is dealing with! Good manners dictate that one should always receive anything from another in his right hand. The right hand is the "clean" hand and is also used almost entirely for eating, although the left hand can help out when necessary. The left hand substitutes for toilet paper (with water) and hence has acquired its reputation for being unclean. During or after meals a belch is no sign of bad manners but is commonly indulged although by no means by everyone. Some say the belch is beginning to be less tolerated in polite society.

***Verti* at half mast**—An interesting Jaffna courtesy has to do with men and boys wearing their *vertis* at knee length to facilitate walking. This is apparently regarded as faintly impudent. Whenever they meet an elder or respected person, and especially if there is conversation, the wearer untucks his skirt and it drops gracefully and instantly to ankle length. Only the full length *verti* is fully dignified and regarded as proper attire.

Smoking etiquette—Somewhat akin to this feeling about the *verti* "at half mast" is the feeling in Sri Lanka (and in India) that smoking is somehow slightly disrespectful of one's elders or superiors. A University Dean at Banaras Hindu University told me, "I have never smoked in the presence of my father." In Jaffna, that feeling is generally displayed by the younger person removing his cigar or cigarette (hardly anyone smokes a pipe in Jaffna) from his mouth and often hiding it slightly in the palm of his hand while he speaks with his elders.

In view of the loving concern for one's guest or friend displayed by these elaborate forms of courtesy (or etiquette), there is a form of thoughtlessness displayed at every public function in Jaffna which calls for comment. When four friends approach a row of seats and take seats numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, the logical way to do this would seem to be for the first entrant to take the fourth seat, the next the third, the next the second and the fourth member of the group to take the

seat by the main aisle. However, what happens very commonly is that the first person sits in the first seat and the other three scramble over him. The fourth and last entrant runs the gauntlet formed by the other three until he tumbles into the fourth seat.

Mother Earth—The foreigner regards the earth as dirty unless it is covered with grass, either green, or dried and woven into a mat; and he regards the floor as dirty unless it is covered with a carpet or kept quite clean and shiny. The road, even if paved, is also regarded by westerners as dirty. People in Sri Lanka regard the earth and the floor as friendly and acceptable. When a cart or lorry breaks down along the road, for example, while waiting for help to arrive, the driver and his minion (called "the cleaner" if the vehicle is a lorry) make themselves comfortable stretched out full length on the road under the vehicle or in its shade beside it on the ground. In one's own compound or in the school, various chores are performed in which the earth is the working or playing surface. And any fashionable lady who in polite society is wearing a lovely sari is not concerned if a generous border of that sari touches the ground or lies carelessly draped around her feet on the floor. In Sri Lanka, it's the Good Earth.

Ideas of cleanliness vary. One of my students wrote, "In order to keep the floor clean, we mix cow dung with water and rub it on the floor." Cow dung is also used as a poultice for burns and is a part of the ayurvedic pharmacopoeia.

The Sounds of Jaffna

It is Thai Pongal, the harvest of the Hindus, celebrated in mid-January, generally before the harvest is barely begun. A resident commented, "It is about the only thing for which we are early in Jaffna!" The harvest referred to is, of course, paddy, as the unhusked rice is called. It is Thai Pongal and the sounds of "warfare" began yesterday. All night long, whenever one awoke, the firecrackers set off in honour of the event were crackling incessantly. By afternoon, it is more desultory.

Funerals—Firecrackers are also set off by the members of the funeral procession who alternate in carrying the coffin to the

cremation grounds. Why the crackers? To scare off the devils, we are told. Near the front of the funeral procession there are a few tomtom beaters, low caste men enjoying an hour of importance, for this is their traditional task. Not all Parayar people do tomtom beating; only a relatively small number, who jealously guard their prerogative. It is their tradition to cease the drumming whenever they pass a Hindu temple or a Christian church.

On the road—Since we are talking about sounds, the sounds of traffic are, of course, present for anyone who lives near a main road, the hum or roar of the motor, the beep or hoot of the horn whenever the driver sights anything on the road ahead (which is almost always); and the businesslike purr of the farm tractors—a new sound which was not here twenty years ago. The tap-dance of bullocks' feet on the pavement, the shouts of the carter urging them on, the creak of the cartwheels and the merry jingle of small bells tied around the necks of the oxen, all combine in the symphony of the bullock cart.

The bleating of goats, bawling of cattle, the snarling and barking of village dogs, the tapping of a woodpecker, the loud calls of other birds, particularly the half dozen noisiest species—these are nature's voices in the countryside and in the villages and towns of Jaffna. But the best sound of all is the bells.

Bells—Anytime one is awake after four in the morning he may hear a distant bell for there are temples all around. Even earlier they may ring on occasion, or hardly cease for a whole night. In the neighborhood of any church there is apt to be a wakening or morning prayer bell at 5:30, a bell to call to worship services on Sunday and sometimes during the week; and at 6:30 p.m., angelus sounds. One feels that a bit of medieval Christendom has been transplanted into this Hindu culture. If a member of any church dies, the bell is tolled from time to time until the funeral. John Donne is remembered through 300 years, for his famous question and answer, "For whom does the bell toll? It tolls for thee—no man is an island."

If one lives near a school, class periods may be separated by bells. If it is a boarding school, a bell will be rung for each event of the day. And at the railway station an employee swings and rings the

largest handbell ever seen to announce the joyful tidings that a train is coming, finally.

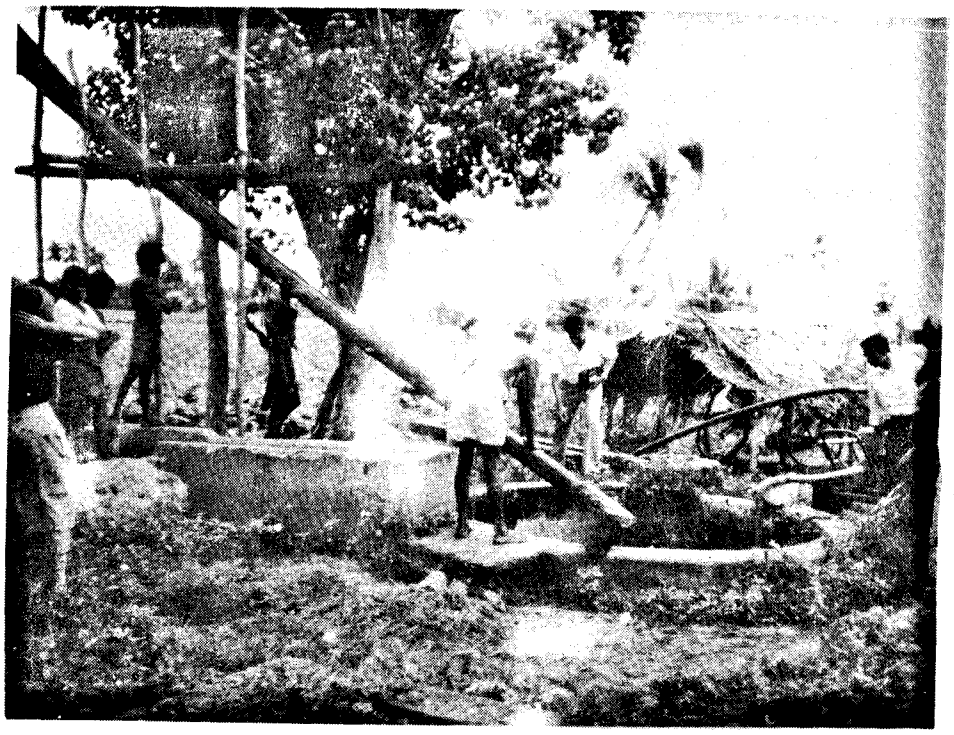
An amusing by-product of the pealing bells is the canine chorus which is often aroused by any prolonged ringing of a bell. The sad and mournful howling of dogs is very humourous. There is also a tendency for the village dogs, if awakened at night during full moon time to join once again in their mournful chorus, serenading the moon.

On our dining table is a small brass bell whose mild tones tell our cook it is time for some service to the table and those about it. Near our front door dangles a similar bell on a cord. By the latter our visitors summon us as we summon the cook by the servant bell. Our postman, however, does not ring the bell. He has his own personal whistle whose characteristic and pleasant tone tells us without our looking that the mail is at the door.

The visitor to Jaffna has undoubtedly never heard so many bells as ring in Jaffna—and hardly a one in response to electricity.[21] Every peal or toll is a genuine hand-made sound. They sound better that way.

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[21] Class bells in some schools are now electrified.



IRRIGATION OF THE FARM
A MODERN SUCTION PUMP IN ONE SIDE, BESIDE A SIMPLE MACHINE CALLED THULA, WHICH IS A LEVER WITH THE FULCRUM BETWEEN THE LOAD AND THE EFFORT THE LEVER IS MADE OUT OF THE PALMYRAH TREE TRUNK THE WELLS ARE 25 - 30 FEET IN DEPTH

CHAPTER TWO

Home and Everyday Living

Who lives domestic life with grace
With gods in heaven will find a place

Tirukkural

Compounds—The visitor to Sri Lanka, or for that matter, to India, soon finds that he cannot get along without adding the new word "compound" to his vocabulary even though, until that time, he has got along very well without it. It describes the home and adjoining soil on which he lives. In England, that is called "house and garden." In America, it is called "house and yard," even though "yard" is an ugly word conjuring up images of trucks, piles of lumber or numerous railroad tracks. In the Orient, "yard" is incomprehensible in so domestic a context and while "garden" is appropriate and is also used, the usual term is "compound"—one's house and adjoining flowers, trees, grass or sun-baked soil. Generally the compound is fenced in or surrounded by a wall. It is the enclosing of the domestic domain which gives the right ring to the word "compound." You and yours are sealed in, safe and sound, in your compound. Strangers can only enter through the gate, which is more or less under observation by those inside.

Privacy—Compound fences or walls in Jaffna are as peek-proof as possible. If one is too poor, his fence can be seen through and seen over. But if he can possibly afford it—and most Jaffnese can—he will have a six-foot wall surrounding his property or a thickly woven fence. The reason for the fence is protection and demarcation because boundary disputes are common in Jaffna where land is very costly, but the reason for the solidness of the fence is to insure privacy. With a good, tight fence around one's compound, the whole area becomes an enlargement of one's house. Mother and older daughters can move around freely in work clothes or housecoats. Father can relax in a chair on the front veranda, draped in a sarong

and bare-bodied from the waist up. If a visitor comes, one is permitted to disappear inside to change or to add more garments.

However, one feels in Jaffna that the compound has entered the mind of the people. The Jaffna man has walled himself off and walled his mind up. One such told me, "We not only like the privacy, we enjoy a bit of secrecy as well." Although the walled-in compound causes one to feel isolation within a society whose members are very friendly and hospitable once their acquaintance has been made, a very large proportion of the population in Jaffna has one or more relatives working outside Sri Lanka while a great many more are working outside Jaffna but inside the country. So the Jaffna man is vocationally a man of the whole world but personally, socially and spiritually he is most at peace with himself inside his compound. At times, one feels that his outlook is limited by the wall he lives behind. The chief wall around a large share of the society, however, is caste—a subject for Chapter Five.

Sturdy construction—The larger the compound the more likely it is to contain a house made of concrete blocks, or if built years ago, of large coral stones plastered with mud or mortar and with the appearance of a concrete house. The house will consist of several rooms and a front and back veranda. Verandas are very important as places to dry household materials, to sleep at night and to catch the breeze in the daytime.

Frequently the house has an atrium or central or rear court open to the sky and used for drying purposes in all seasons including drying bed clothes in the rainy season. The atrium may be screened across the top to keep out the ubiquitous, iniquitous crows. Some houses are open and airy, with numerous doorways, windows and grills positioned to bring in as much breeze as possible. Others reflect the owner's concern with security; he conceives of his home first of all as the place to store his treasure. He has therefore built it primarily as a bank vault with few apertures, convinced that if he felt safe he would be bound to feel comfortable. Many houses have a granary room for the storage of grain, especially paddy. As pointed out in the religion chapter, one room in the Hindu house will be a

shrine room where the images of the gods are who are worshipped daily.

Decorations—The houses are whitewashed or colourwashed, sometimes in two colours if the taste is for more. Many are finished quite plainly but a good number of stone houses are decorated with grill work in place of some windows, or above the windows there will be ornamental wooden trim along the edge of the roof, carved doors or door-posts or the concrete floor of the veranda may be laid out in various designs. The front compound wall is a very common arena for artistic variations.

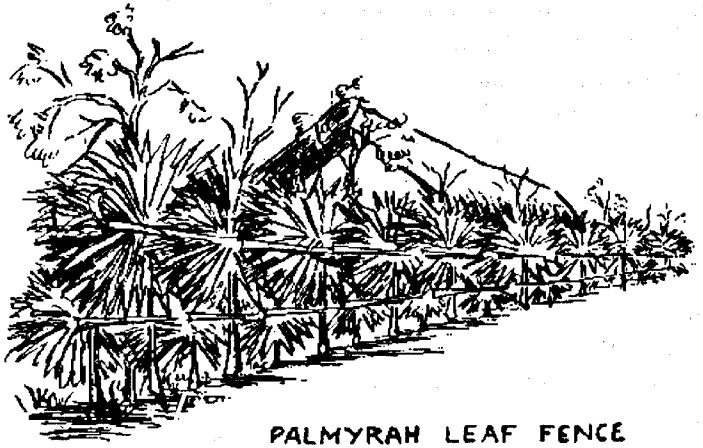
Veranda extension—The housewife who has no veranda and the Carpenter or Mason with insufficient room in his compound, if fortunate enough to live beside a paved road, do not hesitate to make use of it. The public road is treated as an extension of one's veranda or as a substitute for it. The housewife spreads out her paddy to dry on the pavement. The Carpenter who is dressing palmyra trunks for rafters or well sweeps puts the long timbers beside or upon the edge of the highway and proceeds with his work, oblivious of the passing traffic. And the Mason mixes his mortar on the road.[22]

Planting—Home owners with a green thumb plant their compounds completely full of trees (mainly fruit trees and coconuts with a margosa or two to medicate the air) and flowering shrubs and vegetables so that they combine shade, beauty and utility. Now that grapes have been found to grow so well in Jaffna and to be so profitable, grape arbours sometimes cover major or minor areas of the compound. Not all who wish to do so, however, can live in Shalimar for if the well water is brackish, one's compound cannot be so luxuriant as that of the fortunate people who have good water.

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[22] The paddy growers of Taiwan, however, have gone the Jaffna farmer one better. A recent ruler of Taiwan specifically announced that the unthreshed paddy could be laid on the public roads while the vehicles passing to and fro in traffic threshed it!

However, in the villages studied by Selvanayagam in 1962-3[23], he found that many compounds were not planted as fruitfully as they might have been. Mango and drumstick trees, which are almost impervious to drought, could be planted in any compound while if irrigation water is available, additional crops or plants and trees would flourish. It is hard to account for this underutilization of his compound by so thrifty and capable a farmer as the Jaffna man. This would seem to be a prime area in which the agricultural extension services of the government could demonstrate and educate until most compounds were filled with greenery. Probably most barren compounds are due to a deficiency in the soil or the water.



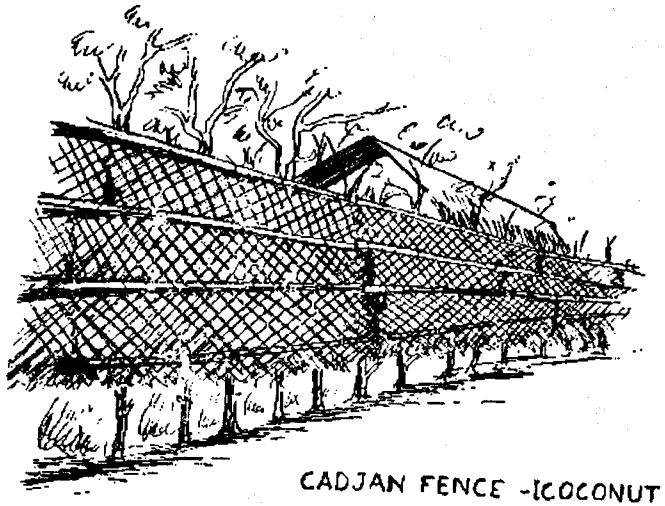
PALMYRAH LEAF FENCE

Huts—The poor man's compound is generally very small or non-existent. That is, his hut or little house may be erected on property belonging to a larger landowner to whom he will owe certain feudal obligations in lieu of rent or in addition to rent. The houses of the poor are made of sun-dried brick or of cadjan or of mud and wattle or of mud alone treated rather like concrete. Wattle is defined in my dictionary as "Poles intertwined with twigs, reeds or branches for use in construction, as of walls or fences," and this

[23] Selvanayagam, S., *Land Use in the Jaffna Country, Ceylon,* unpub. M. A.thesis, University of London, 1963.

says it very nicely. The skeleton of the walls of the house is erected of poles and branches, then plastered with mud which means the wood materials are the "reinforcing rods" of the structure. The householder must keep a sharp eye out for termite trails which would reveal that his reinforcement is being eaten by the indefatigable white ants. However, solid mud walls are very much more common than wattle in Jaffna. While mud is an important component of so many small houses, the roofs are a different matter. For a roof, rafters are erected to support a thatch roof of palmyra leaves or of cadjan.

Mud melts—Houses of mud, whether as just described or of sun-dried brick, are vulnerable in the rainy season. In every monsoon deluge, water rising about the house and lapping at its foundations, or pouring onto an exposed wall, may bring a collapse of one or more walls.

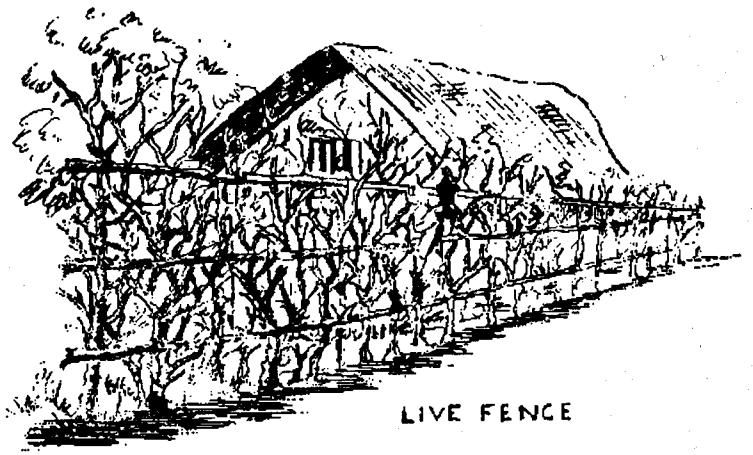


CADJAN FENCE -[COCONUT LEAF]

Walls—Some of the compound walls are permanent, made of cut and tooled stone, but most are of natural products or of concrete. The latter are sometimes plain, sometimes with designs wrought into the mortar. Some walls remain the natural colour of concrete; others are colourwashed. The concrete walls are neat and sturdy but they do not demonstrate the craftsmanship and artistry of the Jaffna man

as do the fences. The ugliest of fences is composed of concrete posts and barbed wire (and these may be quite neat), or perhaps of a solid row of highway department tar barrels, cut, rolled and flattened (ingenious but rusty!). But the most interesting ones are made of natural products (see illustrations).

Live fences—The live fence is a row of small trees of two species (most commonly) which grow quickly, produce many leafy little branches and do not die when virtually all the new growth and leaves are cut off to be fed to goats or used as green fertilizer. These trees (tulip or glyceridia) are planted so close to one another as to constitute quite a satisfactory fence but they are generally laced together in addition with two to six strands of barbed wire or rope and thus made goat-proof and cow-proof and even chicken-proof.



LIVE FENCE

Palm fence—As our illustrations indicate, another type of fence is made with the leaves of the palmyra palm lined up, interwoven and tied together to make quite a sturdy barrier. When new, it is quite good looking. Another variety uses the leaves of the coconut palm split down the middle and woven into cadjan to produce a fence of panels of quite a different appearance from those of the palmyra. These are the basic types of fences; a number of variations of these designs are also found.

Furnishings—Inside the house, many homes seem very sparingly furnished, although chairs are much more common among Tamils in Ceylon than in India. And some homes are now becoming filled —sometimes to overflowing—with a collection of gadgets which make life more comfortable, plus knick-knacks and souvenirs sent home by the emigrant member of the family whose chief joy in a grueling climate or a lonely existence is in spending some of his earnings on coveted goods.

Pictures—In many homes there are pictures hanging on the walls, pictures of family members, especially wedding pictures or of Tamil deities or of beautiful scenes from nature. Tamils like to look up to their pictures: they are usually put well above eye level and are often seven or eight feet above the floor.

Food and drink—In bygone days, food was often served on a banana (plantain) leaf on the floor but nowadays it is more likely to be served on a plate, or on the leaf, which is regarded as both clean and disposable, but at a table; without cutlery, however, as food tastes better to Tamil people when it comes off friendly fingers. Glasses are not always used although they and cups are certainly very common. A hygienic habit of the Tamils is to pour water directly down the throat without letting the lips touch the vessel. Or a person may drink from a bottle by putting his thumb and first finger around the mouth of the bottle and putting his lips not to the bottle but to his own fingers (If there be germs, let them be my germs!). In the same manner, smokers sometimes smoke cigarettes without their lips touching the cigarette, but touching only their fingers. Perhaps it has something to do with a preference for the feel of one's own fingers or perhaps it is merely a fad—a different style of holding a cigarette.

Food—Vegetarianism is declining in Jaffna; it is the practice of a minority but that minority is very numerous, it is respected and it is catered to. By his respect for vegetarianism the Jaffna man seems to say that he has a deep-seated feeling that it is the better way to live, but the feeling seems to be so deep-seated that it is buried under more immediate, current concerns. There are almost as many kinds of vegetarianism as there are vegetables. A few people try to

eat fruit almost entirely, claiming they are "fruititarians!" But they are rare indeed. Most eat vegetables but some will not eat onions, or leeks; others eat vegetables and eggs, or milk or fish; or any combination thereof. Personally, I am a meat-eating vegetarian.

Country rice—Nutritionists always praise the people of Jaffna for their preference for "country rice," that is, the unpolished rice which is the product of pounding off the hull, a process explained below. The hull is removed by the pounding but the bran continues to cling to the grain and the bran contains vitamin B1. Because of the superior nutritional value of unpolished rice, it is incredible that most of the world, and the Third World at that, continues to polish off the bran and waste it, or perhaps feed it to livestock. Country rice is a red-brown colour and, to the affectionately prejudiced eye, looks alive with healthy food qualities of which the chaste, colourless, polished rice appears to be devoid. However, modernity is threatening the Jaffna man's fame in this department; because of its convenience (it can be cooked more quickly), polished rice seems to be slowly replacing country rice in popularity. An additional factor in favour of polished rice is that it is usually cheaper in price.

One additional interesting fact about rice in Jaffna is that a species of imported, polished rice commonly used here a generation ago had an unpleasant odour which offended some people but plant breeding has produced equally good rice without the odour.

Rice and curry—The staple food of the Tamil people is rice and curry. In general, curry is what goes with rice; viz., almost any meat or vegetable can be curried (prepared with various spices) and goes tastily with the rice. The flavour of chillies and of chilli pepper is so strong in most curries that few foreigners can take much of them at first. The chillies are so hot, in fact, that sometimes when I eat an extra hot curry with my fingers, Tamil style, they tingle from the hot spice for some time after the meal. But as one learns fire prevention techniques in tackling curries (best: remove all green chillies which are found in any curry; eat a banana along with the curry), one generally develops a fearsome passion for the food so that a whiff of the odour of someone's kitchen will quite literally make the mouth water.

Fresh food—In one respect at least, Jaffna should be a gourmet's delight: the wives and others who prepare food in Jaffna use almost no prepared food. Everything is freshly made although it is common at night to eat leftovers from lunch. Rice and curry is prepared from scratch. The spices are fresh ground, the coconut is grated and the coconut milk or cream is wrung out of the pulp to be used in cooking. It is this coconut milk which gives the distinctive richness to the taste of Tamil cooking. The water which runs out of the coconut when it is broken is generally not made use of by the housewife.

Prepared foods—By the same token, the working wife who wants to buy already prepared foods in order to save some time and labour is doomed to disappointment. Packets of spices ground and ready for use are sometimes available. The most common tinned or bottled foods are fruit, fruit juices, jam, tomato sauce and chutneys. Baked goods, of course, are available at bakeries: bread, rolls and cakes of various sorts. The standard butter cake which sells for Rs. 10 per lb. is quite tasty even though made generally with margarine. Biscuits (cookies) boxed by Maliban and other companies, are abundant and relatively expensive; biscuits loose (in bulk) are half as costly. Salted chillies can be bought in clear plastic bags. *Papardams* have been purchasable for years. Sweets (candies) made of jaggery or coconut milk or cow's milk or combinations thereof are abundantly available in appropriate shops. The Milk Board produces quite a good cheese but it is sold out in Colombo and some other towns and never gets to Jaffna. Only imported, tinned cheese can be found here.

Seafood—Fairly poor people used to be able to buy a little seafood for a nutritious curry. But prices are too high for many people today. At least a lorry load of seafood goes to Colombo daily from Jaffna, some for the tourist trade and some for export so the fishermen in Jaffna are a little better remunerated, and the cost stays up. Years ago, fish was so inexpensive it was not regarded as good enough for guests. Either chicken or mutton had to be provided for company. But seafood is now perceived as more of a delicacy in Jaffna today and quite appropriate for guests.

Adulteration—The adulteration of food is constantly complained of in the newspapers. Water is added to milk, jaggery to honey and prepared spices were found to contain wheat flour, saw dust, sand and a prohibited yellow dye. In October 1979, a minister of the government announced that the health of consumers in Sri Lanka was threatened by "safety matches that were hardly safe, milk contaminated with bacteria, adulterated chilli and coffee powder, fruit drinks and beverages with an excess of carcinogenic sugar and saccharin, popsicles coloured with carcinogenic dyes, jams made of pumpkin being sold as strawberry jams, and hazardous electrical appliances."[24]

The Jaffna man, not to be left behind, has been found to be putting Cook's Joy, a cooking oil with coconut oil base, into his gingelly oil which is much more expensive than coconut oil. Since the latter is the only vegetable matter I have heard of which contains cholesterol, and gingelly oil, a favorite ayurvedic medicament, is sometimes prescribed for persons who should avoid cholesterol, the consequences of this trickery could occasionally be serious.

The residents of Jaffna consume a great deal of rice daily, as well as bread made from wheat flour. People prefer the taste of rice flour but because of its cheapness and convenience, bread seems to have established itself in the diet of the Jaffna man, replacing to some extent more nutritious green peas, black gram and millet. Food habits have changed.

Rice—Wherever wheat (and not rice) is the staple food grain this fact is one of the greatest favours bestowed by nature on that portion of the earth. Or to put it another way, if wheat would grow in fields of water, it would have been a great boon to many lands. For as soon as wheat is threshed, it is ready to be ground into flour or cooked as it is. But rice, like oats, is a much tougher proposition. The wheat grain tumbles out of its husk; rice has to be pried out.

[24] *Ceylon Daily News*, October 13, 1979.

Hulling Paddy—When the rice fields are harvested and threshed, the resulting grain is called paddy and a considerable assault upon it is necessary before it is ready for human consumption. Increasingly, that assault, the removal of the outer covering or husk, is done by machinery. After hulling, a bag of paddy becomes half a bag—approximately 50% of paddy is hull. In Jaffna in 1979 it is estimated that considerably less than half of the rice consumed has been hulled by machine. One must be sympathetic with those who process by hand the remaining portion of the paddy. It is indeed dismaying to think of the great amount of human labour expended on this process although not so much in Sri Lanka where probably less than a million people each day are pounding paddy. But in so many populous countries of south and southeast Asia which are rice-eating and whose poor must hull their own, it is a labour so immense as to stagger the minds of people used to processed rice, or whose staple grain is wheat or maize. The pity is that this labour would never have been necessary had the rice grain been wrapped like a grain of wheat or maize. The Scotsman of the East has the same struggle to peel his paddy as the Scotsman of the West had to peel his oats.

Let me describe the labour I am referring to. When the lady of the house or her servant if she is fortunate enough to have one,[25] has paddy to be processed the old-fashioned way, it must first be boiled for an hour, then spread out in the open to dry. This cooking is believed to make the grains more nutritious and more digestible as well as giving the rice a taste preferred by Tamils. The Sinhalese, incidentally, prefer rice which has not been parboiled. This cooking involves the use of fuel which is often in short supply. After it has been boiled and dried, or while it is still somewhat damp, the paddy is put into a mortar. There must be several methods by which the hull of the paddy can be removed but in Jaffna and throughout Sri Lanka a kind of oversized mortar and pestle is used. The mortar is a block of wood or stone about two feet in height and one foot across. Its upper half has been hollowed out to form a very sturdy bowl. In

[25] The majority of householders are poor and the poor do not have servants.

that bowl is poured, in manageable batches, the amount of paddy required for the household, and mother or a servant or a child picks up a pole about 2-3 inches in diameter and four feet long and starts to pound the paddy with the end of the pole, like a pharmacist's pestle. The daily requirement for a family of four normally takes less than half an hour's pounding to loosen the hull and make the rice ready for the cooking. After the pounding, however, half of the volume is blown away as chaff.

Backyard jobs—From the standpoint of the poor, usually low caste, women who receive a small payment for doing the work, however, it is fortunate that the paddy requires pounding. Not all families have a member available to do the work. Pounding the paddy is one of the "backyard jobs," as a friend of mine calls them, which help to sustain the poor. Other jobs in this category are sweeping the compound, weaving cadjans, hulling coconuts and shredding the coconut meat and even helping in the kitchen. Men split firewood and men and women work together on fencing. Many low caste people would be hard hit if these kinds of backyard work were not available.

Fuel—It has been mentioned that one of the vexations of preparing paddy is that the expenditure of firewood is required. According to a newspaper report, 94% of the population of Sri Lanka uses firewood.[26] Every year more people in the world have to walk further and look longer for fuel. The people of Jaffna and most of Sri Lanka are very fortunate not to have to use fuel for keeping their homes warm, in addition. Those Sri Lankan citizens who live at the higher elevations, however, need fuel to keep warm also; whether they have such fuel or not is a different question.

But even the fuel required for cooking is a great problem especially in a thickly populated area like Jaffna Town since people are poor and mineral fuels are absent except for expensive petroleum products. Electricity and gas are beginning to be used by the more prosperous. The poor man's fuel is waste from palm trees, and

[26] *Ceylon Daily News,* October 26, 1979.

scraps of wood but in a large town many are shut off from all such supplies. So they have to buy in the most meagre quantities what more affluent people buy a bit more generously: firewood cut in the jungles a hundred miles south of Jaffna and distributed all over the Peninsula through firewood depots. And each year for a number of years, kerosene stoves were purchased in greater numbers—until OPEC struck.

Kitchen—The frugal people of Jaffna are extremely skillful at husbanding firewood. With only a tiny fire they do a great deal of cooking. However, the kitchen, where the cooking is done once more shows what is already writ large in Jaffna: it's a man's world. The kitchen may well be the least attractive room in the house, dark, ill ventilated and smoky. Many men would not tolerate the smoky conditions under which they allow their wife and children to labour for a lifetime. This is one area in which the women of Jaffna should assert some requests for improvement — at least a smoke-free kitchen. Many kitchens, even with a modern "cooker," still make regular use of the three stones on which a pot is set and among which a fire is built. But there may be no chimney to lead the smoke out. The three stones are always a sign of smoke. The thought of cooking brings tears to the eyes of many a Jaffna lady but not for reasons of nostalgia!

Hollow block—Before we leave his compound, we will make one "concrete suggestion" to the Jaffna men, for we have the rare opportunity to suggest an economy to some of the world's most economical men. For a great many years, the Jaffna man has been wasting cement by casting solid concrete blocks for his walls while most of the rest of the world is using hollow blocks. In the late 1950's some machines for making hollow blocks appeared in Jaffna but they seem to have disappeared. For once it seems that economy is sacrificed to emotion — the feeling he has that his house is better if it is solid.

Roads and traffic—Safety-consciousness, particularly on the streets and highways, is not characteristic of the population of Jaffna nor of all Sri Lanka. The pedestrian seems to be content to have the car almost touch him as it squeezes between him and other obstacles

with which the road is cluttered: chickens, dogs, goats, cattle, other pedestrians, bullock carts, bicycles, cars and lorries. Since there is a great deal of emphasis in the Orient on the personal, we should not be surprised to find that the pedestrian has personalized the car and, as much as he can or dares, the lorry. That is, he treats the approaching car on the road quite as if it were another person. He assumes that its approach is non-threatening and he allows it the same amount of clearance as he does a fellow pedestrian, i.e. virtually none when the street is crowded. I have seen a lady swing her hips over to leave room for the front mudguard to pass by her, without shifting her foot which was cleared by the wheel, for everyone knows that a mudguard (fender) protrudes farther out into the street than does the wheel beneath it.

A little reflection should make the driver aware that the roads belong to the people and to their livestock and the driver of any vehicle has only a secondary right. For each car in Sri Lanka there are almost 140 persons; the majority should rule!

Tractor drivers—So far as the car driver is concerned, the prize for cooperation on the highway should be awarded to tractor drivers for they are most prompt and careful about pulling to the side of the road when a car horn is hooted for purposes of overtaking. It has been suggested that this cooperative attitude is due to the fact that the tractor driver has no ambition to compete in speed with the car driver while bus and lorry drivers often do.

Fatalists—The pedestrian's faith in the skills of all drivers of cars and lorries is apparently as absolute as ever. He stakes his life on those skills a thousand times a day if he gets out on the road. Though it is *his* life which is in danger, he never looks behind him. In truth, however, his faith is not so much in the drivers behind him as it is in his fate. "If it is not my day to die, I'm safe; if it is my day to die, no precautions would be effective." He treads his path of life secure in the belief that he is indestructible until his ordained moment of death arrives.

It must be luck—It is not surprising that there are occasional accidents on the roads of Jaffna and Sri Lanka. What is most

surprising is that there are not many more. For example, many a cyclist pays very little attention to a junction or a cross road. He clearly does not regard it as a possible threat to his life or as a traffic hazard; rather it is just another stretch of a road with which he is thoroughly acquainted. He has had no accident on it so far and he does not expect one today. So he cycles out of a lane or side road fearlessly and quite unexpectantly. He is surprised if some other vehicle is found ready to occupy the same place as he. It is fairly likely that he will have no brakes or very poor brakes. He is used to shoving his calloused heel against the back wheel which slows him down gradually but not soon enough to save his life sometimes.

Bicycles and male pride—An additional hazard is the fact that a great many bicycles are ridden by men and boys who wear a skirt-like garment, the *verti* or the sarong, rather than shorts or trousers. Since they proudly reject the obvious solution of using a "lady's bicycle," which eliminates the troublesome crossbar, every skirted male cyclist begins his ride by a delicate balancing act. While most mount from the left side, one sometimes sees a man stand on the right pedal with his right foot; he pushes off to give the bicycle a little momentum, seats himself side-saddle for a moment, lifts his left leg over the crossbar (at which time he is most vulnerable) and is then underway. Mounting from the left side is less risky. Many who ride cycles without brakes rely entirely on dismounting whenever a need to stop arises. Every time a skirted cyclist mounts or dismounts he takes an avoidable risk. Fortunately, he rarely pays for the hazard.

Signals—In all of Ceylon there are a few traffic signal lights here and there in Colombo, mostly on Galle Road, and nowhere else. There are no traffic lights on any Jaffna streets except at certain railway crossings which are not provided with gates. The great majority of the cars in Ceylon are too old to have been equipped with turning signal lights; or if once equipped, the signals have fallen into disrepair. There are many modern vehicles in Jaffna today which are equipped with directional lights, but in Jaffna these are no longer used for that purpose, or only rarely so. The latest practice of Jaffna drivers is to use the right hand directional, when

they are meeting another vehicle coming in their direction, as a blinking light to call attention to their approach and claim room for that side of their vehicle on which the light is shining. Few modern drivers in Ceylon today signal regularly. But many traditional drivers do. Such a driver extends the arm out straight to the right if he is going to turn right He pushes downward with his hand to indicate that he is slowing down. When he is going to turn left or when the coast is clear for the driver behind him to overtake him, he swings his arm forward several times which says plainly, "Come on past me."

Road signs—Sixty years of the automobile in Jaffna have caused the roads to be improved to some extent but have brought virtually no change in traffic regulation. The only traffic signs in Jaffna are those which warn of "One Way Street" which are heeded, in the main; and the Railway Crossing signs which are not, since most of them are provided with watchmen who close the gates when a train approaches.

A new sign which is to be seen near a very few Hindu temples (Such as Nachammal Temple just outside Jaffna Town on Road) reads in Tamil and English: "Drive Slowly Place of Worship Ahead Devotees Crossing the Road." A great many more of these should be provided.

One type of old sign which was fairly numerous in 1960 has almost disappeared (there is one on KKS Road north of Kokkuvil and in a few other places.) It reads in English "Motor Bus Halting Place," surely the world's most ponderous synonym for "Bus Stop. Presumably the missing ones have been knocked down by reckless drivers but the loss of the signs will not be regretted

Waiting places—All too often the traveller, while waiting for the bus, is unsheltered from the sun and rain. There are a number of small, open rooms which have been built as bus stop shelters, generally erected as memorials by public spirited organizations or individuals who evidently care more for bus passengers than does the Ceylon Transport Board.

Roads—The roads in Jaffna seem to be somewhat worse than twenty years ago. There is more traffic but apparently little or no more funds for repaving or else the increase in funds has gone to the oil-producing nations for the higher price for the tar used. The roads, composed of crushed limestone, tar and sand, formerly were put into fairly good shape during the dry season and then the rains quickly produced their annual harvest of pot holes. Now we enter the rainy season with a considerable backlog of bad roads all over the Peninsula and the islands, troubling the public.

Road cutting—In addition to the potholes, the rains cause another kind of attack on the roads. The first heavy rain of the year floods hundreds of compounds and leaves many a family feeling isolated on the little island on which their house or hut stands. Or the rain water may rise up enough to cover their floor—a frightening experience. In many cases, the pond in the compound is caused by the fact that the road in front of the house constitutes a dam which confines the water to that compound or perhaps also to several neighboring ones. Wherever the road seems to impede the immediate dispersal of the waters, someone promptly and impatiently cuts a trench right across the macadam road to help to drain the compound or perhaps to dissipate the citizens' frustration and unhappiness at being isolated by the flood (even though his neighbours are only a few watery feet away).

If the trench is cut carefully and narrowly, buses and cars can cross it but sometimes it is of sufficient width to stop all wheeled traffic except bicycles (carried by their riders) and bullock carts. It generally requires from two weeks to two months for the highway department to fill in the trench again in any other than a very temporary fashion and sometimes the job is so poorly done as to constitute another pot hole.

Pets—In a manner which no economic theory can explain, the poorest family has something to feed a dog or two and perhaps a cat and a parakeet. Cats are comparatively rare in Jaffna and all over the island. This phenomenon became true twenty-five years ago and was attributed to DDT which had just then succeeded in temporarily driving malaria from the island. In the process, DDT killed a great

many of the insects on which the cats of Ceylon fed. It is believed that the gradual accumulation of the chemical in the felines' systems proved fatal.

Dogs—The dogs, however, are virtually indestructible. Accidentally, I have run over three in my car at one time or another. All ran off, yelping. The quality of village dogs has not improved a hair in the past two decades. Miserable, mangy refugees from the happy hunting grounds, they skulk around, apparently enduring a joyless, painful, half-starved existence; only showing signs of life when threatened by their own kind with the possibility of ending it. Only crows, cats and small rodents show them any respect.

The better looking dogs are inside the compounds where they receive more decent treatment, safe from the dangers of the highways. Those that range the lanes and roads and slink about where humans gather, particularly at public functions where they vie with crows for crumbs and crusts, have neither personal appearance nor charm of personality to appeal to the viewer. The word "cur" is made for dogs like these.[27]

Palli—Most visitors to Ceylon are charmed by the harmless, toothless little gecko or mini-lizard, four inches or so in length, which runs about the walls and ceilings silently seizing small insects and so, greatly benefiting his human hosts. They leave in unused places their small white eggs, scarcely more than a quarter inch in diameter. Their only defence is speed and one additional mechanism used *in extremis:* the ability to jettison their own tail which wriggles and twists about and is supposed to distract the enemy while the main body escapes. (Nature supplies the retailing service eventually.) However, Sri Lankan cats, a leading enemy, are on to this trick and calmly retain their grip on the luckless little lizard while saving the quivering tail for dessert.

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[27] "An unkind fate with mystery dogs them, with every ailment known to dogdom." There is no birth control in dogdom. In practice, every little bitch whelps. So thin are they sometimes that light can be seen shining through their udders, which are translucent like the human ear.

How a poor man lives—K. is employed as a cook. By caste he is untouchable but he has learned moderately good English and has been lucky on more than one occasion to have a European employer who paid him well above average. The reason for this "luck" is that he learned to prepare western food rather early in his career and he is a good cook of both styles now. Luck has come to him who is prepared, as Napoleon is supposed to have said.

One of his foreign employers gave him money enough to build a fairly good sized mud walled house. Some of his relatives lent him money enough to construct four sturdy corner pillars of concrete and stone, to hold up his roof supports. So he has a fairly good house on a compound 80 x 100 feet. His lot is entirely surrounded by a grove of palmyras but his own compound is fairly bare.

He is about fifty years old, has five children and the eldest, a son, is married. The second, a daughter, has quit school after eight years of it, because her mother needed help with cooking, housekeeping and to fetch water which is some distance away. Children 3 and 4, boys, are both in grade eight but take the bus to different schools, one paying one rupee, the other 60 cents, each day, for bus fare. In 1979 their books cost Rs. 155 and Rs. 110 respectively. The little girl goes to school nearby.

Mother puts the kettle on at 6 a.m. daily, though she has risen much earlier. She and the older daughter clean the house and start preparations for breakfast and lunch. All pray together before the pictures of Pillaiyar, Saraswathi, and Laxmi. Occasionally the menu is stringhoppers, or *dosai* or *pittoo* with *sambal* (coconut mixed with chillies) and *sothi (* flavoured coconut milk and water); more commonly it is rice left over from the day before. The school-going boys are given some stringhoppers and a bit of curry or a banana for their lunch at school. The fifth child has lunch with her mother and sister when she gets home at one o'clock. Lunch is rice, two curries and a bit of fish or prawn. The family does not eat beef and mutton (goat) is too expensive.

The boys get home slightly before four, swallow a cup of tea and rush off to an hour's tuition with a neighbouring teacher who

receives Rs. 20 per month per child. They also go for the hour of tuition on Saturday.

For supper they have left-over rice or another of the three forms of rice and wheat flour: strings, *dosai,* or *pittoo,* with perhaps the same curries as at lunch. When the boys are free, they play *thatchi, kitti,* cricket or football.

At bedtime the family jointly worships again before retiring. Recreation mostly consists of visiting friends and neighbours. For a time, K. had a transistor whose music they enjoyed very much. K. says his children are perfectly obedient to him but he was very much distressed when his eldest son, after marriage, disobeyed him in a rather important matter.

K.'s next immediate problem is to marry off his older daughter; a problem, however, which he has in common with much of the population.

Dress—I met a Sinhalese gentleman in 1978 who said that he had come to Jaffna for a wedding in the 1940's. All the guests were well educated, they all spoke English constantly but he was surprised to see that all the men wore "national dress." After a lapse of thirty years and more he had returned to Jaffna, once again for a wedding, to find that the same sort of group spoke English much less fluently and preferred to converse in Tamil, but all the males wore western clothes!

Symbols—It is interesting to recall that at the time Ceylon became independent, Ceylonese wore native costumes as a symbol of their independence from the British. At that time a man was asked why he did not wear a sun helmet and he replied, "I will as soon as the British leave!" (Englishmen frequently wore sun helmets.) Today clothes are not so much a symbol of nationalism as of modernity and the youth culture.

One of the most obvious aspects of the society to have changed in the past twenty years is the area of dress, but the change has not been drastic. Most people in Jaffna today dress as they did twenty

years ago. That is, the dress of the poor has not changed much, and most people are poor.

The English essayist, Ruskin, wrote, "Every effort should be made to induce the adoption of a national costume. Cleanliness and neatness in dress ought always to be rewarded by some gratification of personal pride; and it is the peculiar virtue of a national costume that it fosters and gratifies the wish to look well, without inducing the desire to look better than one's neighbors,"

"Nationals"—Ruskin's fellow countrymen rejected the suggestion but the Jaffna Tamils do have a national dress. For ladies, of course, the sari and blouse. For men, it is a plain white *verti* and a distinctively Tamil shirt now worn on formal occasions only and distinguished by unusually long flowing tails which give a cool, airy appearance to the garb. It is always accompanied by a shawl which, though typically six feet long and two and one-half feet wide, is folded flatly and ironed tightly so that it is reduced to a width of a mere two inches while remaining six feet long so it appears as a "string necktie." It is not tied, however, but is hung around the neck and dangles in front of each shoulder. A portion of the shawl may be used to wipe perspiration from the brow or to wipe a moist nose.

Male attire—The ordinary clothing or national dress (informal) of the Jaffna Tamils has not changed much in a century. Male wear closely resembles a single white bed sheet four yards in length called a *verti*, of a soft texture wrapped around the waist and tucked in. Although *vertis* of two yards length are becoming more popular because they are cheaper, the usual *verti* commonly costs between Rs. 40 - 60. It extends almost to the ground and produces a swishing sound as the wearer constantly brushes it with his legs in walking. The upper part of the body is left bare when the man is relaxing at home and a shirt is donned when company appears. The shirts are of every variety, imported ones from many sources being intermingled with tailor-made and factory-made Ceylonese models, including handsome Ceylon batiks and batik prints.

When a *verti*-wearer wants more freedom of movement he flexes one leg at the knee, raising his heel behind him and lifting the

edge of his skirt-like *verti* within reach of his hand. He then lifts the entire bottom edge and tucks it in around his waist, producing a knee-length skirt. This allows him to run or play or walk faster than when the *verti* was full length. It is also cooler in hot weather.

If the *verti*-wearer is engaged in hard physical labour he raises his *verti* to the third and final stage: he "girds his loins" by wrapping it tightly as short as possible, which means he is wearing the equivalent of a pair of slightly bulky shorts.

Many men and boys wear sarongs instead of *vertis* or trousers. The sarong is a circular piece of cloth, two yards in length and preferably more than thirty-six inches wide. Unless her husband is short, the thrifty housewife buys three yards of cloth for a sarong and sews the third yard along the edge of the other two in order to make the sarong more than thirty-six inches wide. A sarong thirty-six inches wide does not reach the feet of the wearer unless he is very short. The sarong is especially popular for male night wear but it is also worn for work or play. A man wearing a sarong does not feel that he is as properly dressed as if he were wearing *verti* or trousers. In the same class with sarongs are shorts which are also very common in Jaffna.

Trousers—More men are wearing trousers than formerly. A generation ago the foreigner could approach any man wearing trousers and be confident that the latter would understand English. This is no longer true. One of the reasons why trousers are popular is that they last longer than *vertis* — they can be laundered for several years whereas the *verti* cloth is soft and not particularly durable. In several random samplings in Jaffna Town, men and boys were found to be wearing the following: (By the time I had found 100 wearing trousers, I had found 60 in *vertis*.}

Longs	Vertis	Sarongs	Shorts
100	60	40	40
100	60	48	30
149	103	86	60

Another reason why *vertis* wear out in less than a year, everyone in Jaffna is convinced, is because the Dhobi uses *verti* cloths for various purposes before he returns them, laundered, to the owner. At weddings, funerals and other occasions, Dhobis perform their traditional duties which include construction of a canopy of white cloth over the area in which guests sit, and in unrolling a white carpet for the bride and groom to walk upon. That carpet consists of a number of *vertis* and these garments generally belong to the customers of the Dhobi rather than to the Dhobi himself.

White collar—The most astonishing fact about clothing of men in Jaffna is: Although the men and women of Jaffna are universally blamed for an excessive passion for "white collar jobs," the men of Jaffna, even when working at a white collar job, rarely wear white shirts! Most of the white shirts worn by the men of Jaffna—and there aren't many—clothe the forms of people wearing *vertis*. But even the wearers of the *verti* are generally wearing shirts of all shades and colours; white is not popular.

All male students in the University of Jaffna wear trousers, part of youth's rejection of its traditions; perhaps a by-product of the invasion of Jaffna by world (urban) civilization. Students who apply for financial aid and whose need is confirmed by a local government official receive Rs. 180 ($12) per month which does not have to be repaid by the recipient. University faculty report that while the girl students apply this money to other living expenses, male students tend to spend it on clothes. To those who can afford them, stylish clothes are very important. A story in the newspaper in October, 1978, reported that when a Colombo shop offered a few men's dress shirts at the outrageous prices of Rs. 450 - 975 (U.S. $30 - 63) each, they were soon sold out.

Better dressed—The fact that the people of Jaffna are better dressed than twenty years ago is not only true in Jaffna but is also true throughout the island. The Sinhalese certainly share in this prosperity. Bare-bodied villagers still abound but shirts are worn more commonly than in the past and sandals as well. Even low class and lower middle class families are wearing relatively expensive clothes and eating a richer diet than ever before—somewhat more

meat, fish and poultry. These changes in clothes and diet are much more likely to be practiced by the youth in the family than by the elders. And those youths are sometimes developing a taste for foreign liquor unknown to their fathers in *their* youth.

More western clothes are worn now because people send gifts of clothing home to relatives from outside the island; the youth enjoy wearing such clothes, some people find some western garments to their taste and it is often said that the quality is better than that of local cloth. Blue jeans and platform shoes are worn by a few of the youth, both boys and girls, who may have paid a great price for them in some cases but are now the envy of their friends.



SINHALESE SARI TAMIL SARI

The sari—I have read many glowing descriptions of the sari, the garment worn by all Tamil women from the age of fifteen or sixteen. The saris of *poor* women, of course, do not figure in these descriptions. Cotton saris are worn almost entirely by the poor. But saris worn on dress-up occasions or by girls attending University classes well deserve the praises heaped upon them. Silk or nylon or cotton or modern combinations of cotton and synthetics are used for saris; the most popular in Jaffna just now is "nylex." Sometimes

called "Singapore Nylex", it is a type of nylon hot and non-absorbent, but it holds its shape well and "looks cool." The same cloth, if imported, is more valued by the wearer, of course. Nylex is made in Ceylon also and the local product is less expensive.

The silk saris, especially when heavy with gold threads and weighed down with an ornamental border, are hot for a tropical climate but Tamil ladies, like females everywhere, are quite prepared to suffer for fashion's sake. The sari of cooler materials and of more ethereal appearance is twice blessed; it makes the wearer feel cool and those who view it feel cool also. Such saris are often of georgette. But, hot or not, the collection of saris displayed at a fashionable wedding (which brings out the best!) is a beautiful sight, like a butterfly convention. One is never aware of seeing two alike.

The sari is invariably referred to as a modest garment but that also is changing in some places. The "hipster" style which is a more sensuous way of draping a sari, hangs low over one hip, revealing a little more flesh. It has spread from Bombay and Delhi in the past fifteen years and is seen in Colombo and even occasionally in Jaffna. Even in Jaffna, some of the youthful sari-wearers have decided to de-emphasize the modest aspect and accentuate more clinging styles which emphasize feminine contours.

Blouses—To go with the sari, all women except the poorest wear a very short and tight-fitting blouse which appears uncomfortably tight and warm. However its warmth is reduced by the bare midriff exposed by the shortness of the blouse. Some poor women wear no blouse, managing to keep themselves well covered by wrapping their saris tightly just above the breasts and leaving both shoulders bare.[28] In the Jaffna bazaar, 100% of the women, both buyers and sellers, wear blouses.

In 1960 a great many of the poorer women did not wear blouses. The assumption was that women did not do so because they could

[28] The blouse is an indication that the woman has improved upon a bare existence.

not afford them. Now in 1980, almost all women wear blouses. The change does not so much reflect increased prosperity as the fact that, from 1965 until the fall of 1977, cloth rationing existed. Four yards of cloth were sold very cheaply every four months to each ration coupon holder. It was used for either a blouse or a shirt and because the rationed cloth was subsidized and its cost was very low, even the poorest women were able to purchase it. When the UNP came again to power in 1977, it halted the cloth ration as part of its programme for "reducing interferences with trade."

I do not want to leave the impression that the poorest classes of the society are rather wretchedly clothed. When they are working, their clothing is frequently shabby but one more reason why it is said that "there are no more (terribly) poor in Jaffna," is due to the considerable improvement in the clothing of the poor women when they appear in public. It has even been referred to as a "revolution" in clothing.



LUNGHI AND BLOUSE SINHALESE GIRL'S SARI

To drape a sari—Women from abroad have learned that it requires considerable skill to put on a sari. Tying the upper corner of

one end to a bedpost and winding oneself into it from the other end will absolutely not do! The sari must be draped carefully in order to make room for walking. The draping involves the creation of pleats or folds which add much to the beauty of the garment. The end of the sari ("tail") is brought up over the left shoulder and is free to lie loosely across the bosom where it is available to serve as fan, handkerchief or shower cap in case of rain. Some women tie loose coins into the sari tip. The sari tail is sometimes pinned on the shoulder and thus held in place. The sari pin is much less common in 1980 than in 1960, however. The great majority of Tamil women seem to prefer the sari loosely tossed over the shoulder from which it keeps slipping off, requiring the wearer to push it back on to the shoulder, a process which is repeated countless times, all day long. The number of woman-hours of labour devoted to this automatic gesture has never been calculated.

Lunghi—The other change in women's fashions in the past twenty years is the widespread use of the lunghi, "a female's sarong," for informal wear at home (a fashion imported from Malaysia) by the housewife and her daughters whether working or relaxing. With a lunghi a blouse is worn, much longer than the sari blouse, which comes down a few inches over the top of the lunghi. (The bare midriff is eliminated.) Lunghis are frequently made of brightly patterned cloth and look very festive but they can be of solid colours as well. The standard width for saris, lunghis, *vertis* and sarongs is forty-five inches.

However, when one surveys the clothing of women at the market or the bus stand, every woman is wearing a sari and her teenage, or younger, daughters are invariably in "frocks." The style and variety of the frocks clearly show the influence of imported models.

Some of the most westernized girls, both in Jaffna Town and in the surrounding countryside, are wearing slacks on dress-up occasions. Many of the female performers wore slacks in the 1979 Talent Show of the Jaffna Y. M. C. A., an event entirely devoted to western music.

Footwear—Most of the population goes barefoot most of the time. "Everyone" patters around his home and compound barefooted. Outside the compound and at work many people wear sandals, economic status largely determining whether they do or not. All labourers and people engaged in agricultural or outdoor work wear nothing on their feet. While leather sandals and shoes are made by cobblers in Jaffna, for years the Bata shoe company has taken over a large part of the footgear market in Sri Lanka with a large factory in Ratmalana which turns out cheap rubber sandals with "Rs. 10.90" (75 cents, US) stamped on each one.

Prices range upward from that point, through a myriad of styles and colours, including sneakers and tennis shoes and culminating in men's leather shoes which reach Rs. 144 at Bata. Their most expensive rubber shoe is a sports model at Rs. 69. Prices of the most expensive shoes and sandals for women were Rs. 45 and 24, respectively.

In Jaffna Town, several censuses of people walking on the streets (1979) showed 60 to 80 were barefoot for every 100 wearing sandals, shoes or boots. In the countryside, however, the ratio changed drastically to about 40 shod for every 100 persons barefoot. It is not uncommon to see people walking barefoot and carrying their sandals.

Hats—In a hot climate in which the sun shines brightly over three-quarters of the year, it is surprising that no protection for the head is thought necessary—except from the cold! However, there are a few more straw hats worn in Jaffna by men now than twenty years ago—some fashionable hats by the more prosperous, some obviously made by the wearer from palm fronds. There are also quite a few more cloth or knitted hats and caps worn by men and boys. As for the "cold" (upper 70's), in the rainy season, many people in Jaffna wrap cloth around their heads, especially towels or mufflers, to ward off the chill.

Umbrellas—People make use of umbrellas for the same reason that they wear hats: the use of both has increased in recent years. Mostly women use them to ward off the sun but occasionally a man

also uses an umbrella as a sunshade. Of course, the rains bring umbrellas out in great numbers. The preferred style is the one which folds into a small, short size; they cost around Rs. 65, a far cry from the days which many Jaffna people can recall when a palmyra palm leaf was the most common umbrella.

Children—The clothing of children begins at zero. The poorest children wear little or nothing for the first few years. Parents in the colder parts of the world will be a little envious of the freedom which warm weather gives to parents in the tropics. The uniformly warm climate of Jaffna means that the naked children may be the most comfortable residents of the Peninsula. Sooner or later the boys don shorts or small *vertis* or sarongs. The girls wear dresses (with a surprising elegance called "frocks") or skirts and blouses until their mid-teens, through high school. University women wear saris although dresses are beginning to carry over onto the campus to some extent. For sports, girls wear uniforms or frocks, while at home they may wear lunghi and blouse as their mothers do while working around the house.

Hair—The hair of children and of men is generally trimmed. Young men who wear western style clothing are apt to have somewhat longer hair and often affect a mustache or neat, short beard. The latter are neither common nor unknown. But the youth do not let their hair nor their beards grow wild. A few older men have the hair on the fore part of the scalp shaved off. Even fewer tie their longish hair in the back in a small knot. These latter two styles have religious significance and are worn by conservative Hindus.

As girls become of high school age, they let their hair grow longer and wear it in one or two braids, or without braiding, confine it with a barrette or sometimes two (high and low). Atchi's taunt of a generation ago, "Why do you have two plaits—do you want to look like a Sinhalese?" is no longer heard! Their mothers "do up" their own hair whenever in public; at home they may have it merely braided.

I am inclined to agree with Captain Percival, who brought out a book on Ceylon 175 years ago, in his opinion of the jasmine which is

a great favourite in Ceylon and India for garlands and to be braided into women's hair, especially on festive occasions. "The scent is too powerful for an European," he wrote, "but is highly esteemed among the natives."[29] Many Tamils today agree that jasmine smells good, but at a distance.

The structure of Tamil faces is strong. There are no "weak-chinned" persons among them. In compensation, many people tend to have slightly protruding teeth and jaw, that is, a prognathous facial structure. This is sometimes caused by being weaned late, Tamil children sometimes nursing until the age of four or even later, though the usual period is twelve to eighteen months

Most Tamils have wide open eyes, normally regarded as more beautiful than smaller eyes, and this beauty is especially apparent in the large-eyed children. The effect is increased by the custom of applying mascara to the eyes of very young children.

Posture—The bearing of women of the lower strata of society is frequently commented upon as being unusually "military" in its erectness. This is due to their custom of carrying burdens on their heads which requires an upright posture. The ladies of higher social standing get lower marks for posture. "Her shoulders were round like the bamboo (that is, drooping)," was a compliment of classic poetry.[30]

Beauty parlours—Since women are as vain as men and Jaffna has plenty of barber-shops (many of which, admittedly, do not inspire thoughts of male beauty), it is a most surprising fact that the Jaffna Region boasts only a single beauty parlour for women. Since there are hundreds of women in Jaffna who have lived overseas for years and some of them must have got into the habit of patronizing beauty parlours, I predict that the decade of the eighties will see

[29] Percival, R., *An Account of the Island of Ceylon,* 1803, Colombo, reprint of second edition, 1975, p. 224.

[30] Chitty, S. C., *op. cit.,* [in the work cited], p. 64.

more lady hair-dressers and beauticians establish themselves in Jaffna.

Superstition

Most of the population lives close to the soil, close to nature and close to the weather. And like most people the world over, who are dependent for the prosperity of their fields upon anything so capricious as the weather, the Jaffna man is superstitious. Superstition is no monopoly of agriculturists, however. Professional athletes in America, at least, have all sorts of "lucky" things which they wear or carry during games, or irrational procedures which they follow in order to avoid bad luck and insure good luck.

The Jaffna man notably fails to live up to his reputation as a hard headed, down-to-earth realist when it comes to the world of his thoughts. The burden of nonsense which a great many persons in Jaffna carry throughout life is well nigh incredible. These vary from the widespread views as to what is lucky, and what is not, to the foundation of the system of native medicine one of whose basic principles is that semen is an important ingredient of health. The Jaffna man appears not to be at all interested in subjecting ancient notions and especially ayurveda, to rigorous testing in order to find which of these beliefs are true. It is probable that some of these customs, dismissed as superstition, are rooted in facts which escape the notice of the modern observer.

I once asked a foreign fisheries expert from Europe who worked in Ceylon if the master fishermen he worked with had age-old skills and wisdom about fishing handed down from father to son from millennia past. He said that master fishermen were generally pretty knowledgeable but he worked with one very closely who disclosed to him his special trade secret. It consisted of tying a thread around the barb of the fishhook which he claimed was unusually effective in catching fish. However, all that this thread did was to blunt the barb which enabled the fish to wriggle off the hook more easily.

My students have contributed the following as superstitions with which they were familiar in Jaffna:

When we start to build a house we must have the door on the east[31] side and not on the south side for evil spirits come from there. It does not matter much if you have the door on the west or north. You must not build a house in front of another house or temple for it will bring bad luck. People must not live in haunted houses or within three years the owner or his wife will die.

The well should be on the north side. Yet it should not be behind the house for the evil spirits will make the people in the house fall into the well. If a house is built where evil spirits dwell they will make the house burn down or throw stones at it and frighten the people. There is a saying that it is lucky to have the well located within earshot of the kitchen close enough to hear the rice bubbling in the pot.

When a person going to an exam sees a Dhobi walking with dirty clothes, it indicates that the person will succeed in the exam. That is, a Dhobi with dirty clothes portends good luck; one with clean clothes signifies bad luck. (This seems to run counter to the desire of people to have their clean clothes returned!)

It is unlucky for one wedding procession to meet another.

If the lizards chatter when a person is going out on important business it is a bad sign. So also are: a cat crossing in front of you; a snake, an oil seller, a fox, an owl hooting; a blackbird crossing from right to left; a hawk crossing from left to right; or a deer coming toward you. When a person goes out to work the people in the house should not call him back for it is a bad sign. I remember I was going down to buy some things. Just as I left my house my brother called me back. I immediately knew that I would not be successful and curiously, I also lost my purse containing the shopping money. Thus I had to return home empty-handed.

If a lizard falls on your head it is bad. If it falls on the right shoulder it indicates death. If a person sees a broomstick in front of

[31] A door on the east would mean light early in the morning.

him when he gets up from sleeping, he will have bad luck for the rest of the day. If a person sees one magpie at a time they say it is sorrow for him for the rest of the day. If he sees two magpies at a time, it is joy and luck for him for the rest of the day. If one sees a magpie when someone else is seeing the same one, the luck will be good for both of them.

If a crow caws for some time sitting on the fence of a house, the occupants will expect one or more visitors or some bad news to come. (Does this mean that visitors are bad news?)

If a person goes to another's house on Tuesday he will not be given anything, including tea, for it is an unlucky day for calling.

Wednesday and Saturday are good days for oil baths.

One should not sleep with his head to the north.

When a person is going to buy land or some other valuable thing or is going to sell something costly or go on an important journey, he will go to the nearest temple and ask the priest to make two small packets, one containing a red flower and the other a white flower. Then after praying to the god for sometime he will choose one packet and see what colour flower he has drawn. If it is the white flower, it is lucky and he will proceed; if it is the red flower he will postpone his plan. (I have been told that a prominent politician used the flower method to determine in which Jaffna constituency to run in the last election and was badly defeated. But who can say that had he run in the other he would have done better?)

After a haircut one is not allowed to draw water from a well. (It is interesting that the student regarded this as superstition rather than a religious custom dealing with ritual cleanliness. After a haircut one is deemed by Hindus to be unclean until he takes a bath.)

These things should all be done for the first time on an auspicious day: thatch a house, dig a well, cut palmyra leaves, move into a new house, travel, launch a boat on its first voyage, build a temple, hold a festival, plough, sow, harvest, break in oxen, begin selling in your shop, cut a child's hair.

Shopkeepers must not sell salt, eggs and needles during the night after the lantern is lighted.

To meet a funeral is good luck. If a cat cleans its face with its paw, it is a sign that guests will arrive. If a sieve slips from your hand while you are using it, it portends guests.

It is unlucky to meet a Brahman, an Oil Seller with oil, or a Barber with his tools or a low caste man with a knife. It is lucky to meet a Sweeper. It is fortunate to have a house surrounded by four lanes but unlucky if surrounded by only three.

Black cats bring good luck, say some people; others say not so.

Over a century ago, Simon Casie Chitty wrote, "It is not uncommon to see men as well as women and children wearing about their waists or arms certain written spells (*atcharam*) enclosed in cylindrical cases of gold, silver or copper as preservatives against the evil spirits."[32] These charms are still worn to some extent in Jaffna although their use is declining somewhat. Today they are also worn around the neck.

A lifelong resident of Jaffna told me that when kerosene stoves first came on the market, people refused to buy them on the ground that somehow their fumes permeated the curry. And when pumps began to be used to supply the water from the wells for irrigation, there were those that maintained that oil got into the wells and polluted them. These were the imaginations of people who were opposed to a new idea. Such reactions, of course, are not confined to Jaffna nor to the Orient. Eventually the utility of both the cooker and the water pump has overcome those prejudices, which remind us of the legendary Indian politician who opposed the government's hydroelectric dam on the grounds that "after the water has had the electricity removed from it, it would no longer be any good for irrigation."

[32] *Op, cit.*, p. 133.

Another old custom in Jaffna which is now declining is the taking of some of the afterbirth of a cow and wrapping it in a palm leaf to make a packet which is then hung on a banyan or other tree which has milky sap. This is alleged to increase the milk production of the animal which has just given birth. The placenta is kept away from the animal which has just produced it on the grounds that it is poisonous. If a cow or goat does eat it, which is the animal's normal, natural reaction, before the owner can take it away, coconut milk or some other substance may be given as an emetic. Since animals in other parts of the world eat their placenta and suffer no consequences, the practice in Jaffna must be regarded as mere superstition. It costs livestock owners some sleep as they have to maintain a watch for the placenta.

Good or lucky numbers are 3, 5 and 7; unlucky ones are 8 and 13.

Christians try to remember not to call on their Hindu friends on Tuesday or Thursday because they would feel it was an inauspicious day and that neither food nor tea should be served. A proverb has it, "Roguish Thursday will sever the neck." While Christians do not pay much attention to this particular superstition among themselves, some do pay attention to some of the superstitions of Jaffna.

Filter of faith or magic—One day as I was thinking of the burden to the mind which these superstitions constitute, I found that V. S. Naipaul, the keen observer of Indian civilization today, had some thoughts on the same subject:

How often—at every level—rational conversation about the country's problems trails away into talk of magic, of the successful prophecies of astrologers, of the wisdom of auspicious hours, of telepathic communications and actions taken in response to some inner voice.

Naipaul asks, "How can Indians face reality without some filter of faith or magic?"[33]

Naipaul's experience is a common one in Jaffna. To the above examples of filters which Naipaul lists may be added stories of yoga of dubious medical treatments, or examples of extreme discipline or accounts of reincarnation. Indeed, your friend with whom you are talking wants to examine reality in the context of the above, or of a saying or a story from one of the Upanishads or he may cite the Gita to create the proper atmosphere in which to continue the discussion. It is often difficult to see the relevance of the allusion; yet it evidently makes one's friend more comfortable in further consideration of the topic.

Whether the Hindu's filter of faith is qualitatively different from the scientist's faith in the omnipotence or omniscience of science or, sometimes, of the omniscience of chance or of evolution, is a fair question; or for that matter, whether it is different from the filter of faith with which the believer in Buddhism, Christianity or Islam observes reality.

Evil eye—Ever since I heard of it in modern Greece forty years ago, I have been interested in the phenomenon of the "evil eye."[34] In Jaffna a blackened earthenware pot generally of about 6-8 inches depth and dotted with white spots of lime, is often displayed on a stick or any protuberance on or around a house which is under construction. This is to make the house, which is the apple of its owner's eye, appear to be ugly and so avoid the evil eye which is credited with a strong interest in spoiling or making trouble for anything which people like too much. The speckled pot is also sometimes put, upside down, on a pole in a field or a vegetable garden for the same purpose. (Scarecrows are also put into fields to reduce the number of birds which otherwise come to feed.)

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[33] *India: A Wounded Civilization,* 1979, Penguin Book, p. 112.

[34] One of my friends, Dr. Clarence Maloney, has since written a book on the subject of the evil eye, particularly as in India, but also in other countries

Servants—A mere 2500 persons in Jaffna gave as their employment in the Census of 1971 "domestic servant or other personal service." Probably a great many children who work as servants were not counted. Children also do not count when it comes to applying to them the laws against child labour. However, Ceylon is a relatively poor country and in some cases the employment of the child is a lucky break for the family as it means one member of the household is now fed elsewhere and occasionally perhaps a few rupees may be paid for his services to the parents.

Very many people have servants in Jaffna, in Ceylon and in India. Certainly many teachers do and others in ordinary walks of life. The reason for their prevalence in the East and absence in the West is that they are the domestic machines of the East. In the West, where their wages would be prohibitive, their work is done in part by the car, telephone, vacuum cleaner, dish washer, and clothes washer. Servants still work for low wages, but do receive more than they used to. Child servants, however, often receive little more than board and room, and an occasional garment.

A servant is necessary for going to market. Without modern shops, procuring supplies is more complicated. The servant sweeps the house regularly. For lack of drinking water by pipe, he goes to a well, brings in a supply and sometimes boils it. Or at least he generally has a tea kettle of boiling water handy. Of course, he also does numerous tasks which the foreigner is used to doing for himself: washing the car or the bicycle, sweeping verandas, scrubbing floors and washing windows, mailing, setting, serving and clearing the table, washing dishes, shining shoes, preparing the bath, gathering flowers, running errands and calling the children.

Messages are generally delivered by servant in villages and the smaller towns since most people do not have telephones. If the domestic fuel is wood, he keeps firewood on hand and manages the cooking stove. He replaces the doorbell in that he answers any noise which callers make to announce their presence and either takes care of the matter himself or calls the person desired.

With a good servant the household runs very much better than with a bad one or with none at all. Servants are quickly addicting; one becomes quite dependent upon their services so that if they are sick or absent, the household routine is upset. It's a bad day. A servant is one of the luxuries of a poor country, and of its citizens.

Young servants are protected by all the laws which protect other children and juveniles. Under twelve, they are not supposed to work(See Chapter Seven). Until they reach fourteen years of age, they are supposed to be given time off for school. This is not a realistic provision for no family which employs a child as a servant would find it convenient to spare the child for school in the mornings. After lunch, the servant needs to rest a little, if possible; if he went to school then, it would be proved that all work makes Jack a dull boy. Furthermore, schools begin ending their day by 1 p.m. or 1:30. It would not be possible to attend school only in the afternoon, normally.[35]

Although servants have legal rights to protection, servants are highly private; hardly ever would an outsider intervene on behalf of a servant. Only in the case of extreme cruelty might a person make the effort to write an anonymous petition to the Magistrate, informing him of the complaint, which might then be investigated.

A number of families in Jaffna, not to mention the rest of Sri Lanka and many other employers of children have an opportunity in 1979 and following, to make a personal contribution to the International Year of the Child by employing an older person and obeying the child labour laws of this country.

Man's work—Whatever time men in the village get up in the morning, they generally do not begin agricultural jobs (as labourers)

[35] In the 1950's the ladies of the Vaddukoddai CSI church decided to conduct a class in conversational English for servants, meeting one hour a week. The housewife who agreed to conduct the class showed her fitness for the task by the very first sentence she selected to teach the class. It was a sentence guaranteed to enlist their attention and to inspire the utmost diligence in learning it: "May I please have an advance of ten rupees?"

hours off for lunch as one. When they are not occupied with work, meals, bathing, washing their own clothes or, sleeping, they are generally free to talk with their family or friends, go to the toddy tavern or play cards. Some who are literate may read the newspaper, but this is rare. In other words, they have a good deal more free time than their wives do who are getting water from the well, finding food and fuel, cooking and cleaning up most of the time. The trips to the well, however, are often social events which make up slightly for the inconvenience of not having a well in one's own compound.

Amusements—The Jaffna man has few amusements. It may be said that most adults see little in life to be amused at. Recreation in an urban sense is not a part of their lives; they are finding it hard to adjust to the fact that their children want to go to movies frequently, to listen to radio music, to drink toddy or beer or stronger drinks. The Jaffna man finds it recreating to sit on his veranda and think, or perhaps, merely to sit. He does not require anything to amuse himself other than to visit his relatives and friends. In many a poor home no scrap of printed material enters from one day to the next; no newspaper or magazine or even an advertisement. These generalizations are not at all true of the upper and middle classes but the poorer the persons and the more distant the village the truer these statements are.

I think the view is a little extreme, but a man of Jaffna wrote not long ago that the Jaffna man was incapable of amusement: "The Jaffna man who lived overseas did make attempts to live a little more comfortably. The qualities of self-denial were so ingrained in him, he was by nature so spartan, that his attempts at enjoying himself invariably looked ridiculous to his friends in the foreign lands. In despair he gave up trying."[36]

According to S.H.T. Taylor, a Tamil gentlemen writing on "Jaffna Past, and Present," seventy years ago, the Jaffna Tamil had already lost a lot of the joy of living:

[36] Kanaganayagam, S. R., "The Jaffna Man, "*The Jaffna Municipal Council Silver Jubilee Souvenir,* 1974, Jaffna.

There is a change gradually coming over our people, which deserves notice. It is the gradual dying out of mirth and merrymaking, of the hilarious propensities to which we were born heirs. For example, in times past, the Tamil New Year season was an occasion of a world of merriment and jollity when even the older folks used to join in the games and pastimes, but now owing to the somber seriousness which is due perhaps to our people becoming more and more matter-of-fact in their nature, or to the gravity born of the burden of the harassing cares and anxiety which their aspiration to make money and become influential begets, their spirits are damped, they move about with an artificial air of heaviness and look down upon the social festivities and rejoicings and games and pastimes as childish. This I regard as a bad omen for our country's welfare.

If facilities for many forms of recreation and amusement are meagre or absent in Jaffna, there is one form which is widely observed here and throughout the island: holidays. On more than one occasion during 1979, as is true in most years, a Minister of the cabinet announced that as an indication of the seriousness with which the government was facing up to its tasks, the number of holidays would be reduced in the following year. However, when the calendar came out for 1980, it listed all the holidays which are listed here for 1979. The list is given to show the typical year. "Poya" is a full moon day, of religious significance to Buddhists.

January 12	Poya
January 14	Thai Pongal
February 4	National Day or Independence Day
February 10	Prophet's Birthday
February 11	Poya
February 25	Maha Sivaratri
March 13	Poya
April 12	Poya
April 13	Good Friday
April 14	Tamil and Sinhalese New Years

May 1	May Day
May 11	Vesak
May 12	Day Following Vesak; Poya
May 22	National Heroes Day
June 9	Poya
July 9	Poya
August 7	Poya
August 25	Id-Hajj
September 5	Poya
October 5	Poya
October 20	Deepavali
November 1	Id-Hajj
November 3	Poya
December 3	Poya
December 25	Christmas

Cinema—The chief private amusement in Jaffna is the music of transistor radios. The chief public amusement is the cinema. In the Peninsula there are 27 movie theatres counting the one being built in Tellipallai; in the islands there is a cinema at Kayts only. (See list of Jaffna cinemas.) Their number slowly increases. In August 1979, the chairman of the State Film Corporation approved the construction of 106 new cinema halls. All were to be located outside the Colombo area. Two were approved for Jaffna, in Tellipallai and in Palaly. In the Northern Province, cinemas were also to be built at Kilinochchi, Mannar and Vavuniya.

While in Jaffna Town the cinemas are crowded out and queues form frequently as people try to buy tickets, in the villages and towns such crowds form only on Saturdays and Sundays. I talked to the manager of a village cinema hall of 500 seats. He reported that his two daily shows (6:45 and 9:45) have an additional show, a matinee at 2:30, on the weekends. During the week the house is only half filled. Ticket prices in August, 1979, were: Rs. 3.50, 2.50, 2.00 and 1.00.

Cinemas of Jaffna Peninsula and Island

Jaffna Town:	*Atchuvely:*	Liberty
Haran	*Chankanai:*	Shanti
Lido	*Chavakachcheri:*	Devendra
		Vel
Manoharan	*Chunnakam:*	Nagams
Raja	*Inuvil:*	Sri Kalingan
Ranee	*Kankesanturai:*	Yarl
Regal	*Kondavil:*	Ranee
Roi	*Manipay:*	Wesley
Shanti	*Moolai:*	Rajee (closed September, 1979)
Sridhar		
Wellington	*Nelliady:*	Mahatma
Windsor		Laxmi
	Pandaterruppu:	Chelva
	Pt. Pedro:	Central
	Tellipallai:	A new one to be built
	Valvetithurai	Yoganayaki
		Ranjana
	Kayts	Raj

I have been able to find only one survey of movie attendance in Jaffna Region. In 1974, a researcher reported that in a small rural village on Karainagar, within a period of six months, 35% of the higher caste men, 26% of the low caste men and 14% of their wives (both castes) had attended at least one movie.[37]

Television—In the chapter on the Fine Arts, I have said all I wish to about radio, but 1979 brought television to Sri Lanka and already it has begun to be a new force in the society. In early 1979 there was a newspaper account which stated that when television

[37] Skjonsberg, E. *A Village Survey*, p. 33.

began on April 14 there would be 3,000 sets in the country.[38] Since some of those would have been more than fifty miles from Colombo, presumably they would have little chance of receiving a Colombo programme as television beams leave the earth's surface after they travel fifty miles; that is, television beams go in a straight line instead of circling the earth as radio beams do. When the day came, there were a number of sets in Jaffna, 260 miles from Colombo and, miraculously, from time to time people in Jaffna have found something visible on their screens! Others report receiving programmes from Bombay, Madras, Bangkok and very rarely, Singapore but none from Colombo.

The reception of programmes by TV in Jaffna is very erratic and the sets are blank most of the time. But it was really not to be expected that any TV programme whatsoever could be received here, more than 200 miles from the nearest transmitter. Since reception of programmes from distant places is so hit-and-miss, it is evident that a satellite is not being used to direct programmes to Sri Lanka and therefore it is hard to account for their reception in Jaffna. But they are most welcome! Presumably they are bounced off cloud formations.

Television programmes—The programmes which began in April, 1979, are supplied by the Independent Television Network (ITN), the first of two private companies granted permission to operate. The second network (National Television) will only begin to operate at the end of 1980. Although the earlier mentioned news article promised eight hours of programmes, only four or five hours are shown at present. A typical bill of fare:

6:00 p.m.	Sesame Street (An interesting classroom for children who can understand English.)
7:00 p.m.	World Around Us: Living Arts of Japan
7:30 p.m	Documentary
8:30 p.m.	Feature Film

[38] *Sun*, March 16, 1979.

Cost—In early April, 1979, Colombo firms advertised TV sets for the following prices: 16, 20, 22 and 27-inch colour sets for Rs. 8,700, 9,950, 12,300, and 14,200 respectively.

As everywhere, television is a status symbol and the symbol of television is the outdoor aerial, clearly visible. In Colombo, it is said that not every aerial has a television set attached! But Jaffna society is too personal, small and intimate to permit such hypocrisy.

A newspaper article[39] pointed out that the average middle class person cannot afford a television set, for the cheapest represents two or three months' salary. The article adds, "The curious thing is the number of middle class families that have gone in for TV even though they could hardly afford it." Millions of other families, the world over, have also found television irresistible. Sri Lanka is apparently the last of the nations of South Asia to provide television for its citizens. Some of the programmes and films now being screened are said to be many years old. "Still, they are entertaining," says Mr. Pietersz, the author of the newspaper article. He added, "To those unable to see the world by foreign travel, it is very stimulating."

Mr. Pietersz noted an interesting film recently televised which presented Ceylon's tea estates and he looked forward to the time when locally produced programmes became a regular feature. He made a brave prophecy for the days ahead: "TV is not a luxury. It is a necessity for a developing economy like ours. Not many of our people may be able to afford a TV set at present but this situation too will change in the not too distant future."[40]

It is not surprising that television owners began to import video tapes and with the number of persons going and coming to and from the world of television, there are probably a fair number of tapes in Sri Lanka today. Progress, if that be the correct term, was so swift in the development of television viewing in Jaffna that after a mere six

[39] Pietersz, C., "TV Lanka," *Sun,* Sept. 11, 1979.

[40] Pietersz, C., *ibid.*

months of existence of TV, the Film Exhibitors Guild of Jaffna was complaining to the government about the illicit practices of some viewers. The charge was that private persons had smuggled video tapes of such recent productions that the S. F. C. had not even seen them.

The Film Exhibitors' complaint was that while they themselves "pay fantastic sums to the S. F. C. as film share (and) we further pay 25% of the gross collection as entertainment tax to the Municipality," after having invested "lakhs and lakhs of rupees" in their cinema halls, the private owners were free of censorship and overhead as their goods were smuggled. The Exhibitors affirmed that without the benefit of admission tickets or entertainment tax, the video tapes were exhibited to persons who simply paid two rupees for the privilege of seeing them. The Exhibitors attempted to strengthen their case by warning the government that the use of video tapes in such a manner would mean that "nude films might be shown in Jaffna in a very short time."[41] It will be interesting to see if the government attempts to view all video tapes which enter the country from now on.

Bullock cart races—To go from the latest form of recreation in Sri Lanka to bullock cart races is a considerable leap to a fairly distant past, not yet extinct in Jaffna. In certain areas in Jaffna, such races are held more or less regularly. One such site was the road from Pandaterruppu to Keerimalai until very recently. Bullocks race on the island of Velanai at New Years (April). A Tamil newspaper, *Thinikaran,* sponsors such races annually. Traffic is held back or diverted and as many as a dozen teams line up and race down the road in a manner reminiscent of the chariot race scenes in the movie *Ben Hur.* One enthusiastic farmer is said to have paid six thousand rupees for what he believes to be the fastest bull in Jaffna. He claims to have won back some of his money in bets and prizes.

Circus—Every few years a circus makes its way to Jaffna; for example, in July, 1979. It seemed to take some time for the

[41] The incident was reported in the *Ceylon Daily News*, Oct. 29, 1979.

impression to get around in Jaffna that the circus was a lot of fun. After a time it caught on and immense crowds began to attend. Because of the proclamation of the Emergency around July 20, it was moved on to Kandy.

Kites—In some areas of Jaffna, notably Valvetithurai, the children and youths fly kites in certain seasons of the year. These are of various sizes, colours and complexity. Some bear a resemblance to a peacock. Some have thin strips of wood which vibrate and make a fairly loud whirring sound. A good deal of care and attention is devoted to their construction.

Resthouses—During their governing of the island, the British established inns or hostelries around over the country, generally at naturally attractive sites with outstanding scenery. Today these resthouses are in process of being taken over by the Ceylon Hotels Corporation, renamed Inns and put into the hands of young persons trained in the hotel business. The prices of board and room have already been multiplied many times over what they were twenty years ago. In Jaffna, resthouses are located at Elephant Pass, Pt Pedro, Kankesanturai, Kayts and Jaffna Town. All of these command a good view of the sea except the last. The Elephant Pass Resthouse claims to have celebrated its bicentennial in the same year as the United States of America.

It is alleged that it was built as a small fort, not as a resthouse, by the Dutch in 1776. A small portion of the present resthouse has a turret visible on one corner and is presumed to have been built on the walls of the fort. It used to be a favourite place for honeymooners to go but no longer has that reputation.

Keerimalai, Hammenheil—Other scenic attractions in Jaffna include Keerimalai, two miles west of KKS on the northern coast where a famous bathing place exists, particularly beloved of Hindus, fed by a remarkable fresh water spring right on the beach within a few feet of the ocean. It was here that a bit of the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi were committed to the ocean for after his cremation some of the ashes were sent to a number of important Hindu centers. Another interesting place to visit is Fort Hammenheil, about one-third mile

off Kayts harbour. Similarly, the great fort in Jaffna is well worth a visit.

Taverns—For some persons, going to a tavern and drinking is sufficient recreation. Certainly it should be included among the forms of recreation in Jaffna. There is a debate at the present time as to whether development projects, such as many of those furthered by the government of Sri Lanka, make the poor poorer, as discussed later. But there is absolutely no doubt that toddy taverns, and all alcoholic consumption by the poor, make the poor poorer, take food out of the mouths of children and wives and reduce the family of the toper to misery. The freedom of the man to drink destroys some of the human rights of the members of his family. In an island village an observer reports, "Toddy is desired by most men and bemoaned by most women. The tavern sucks up meagre incomes and releases irresponsibility and aggression and wife-beating."[42] There is a saying that in Karainagar the children drink breast milk, the men drink toddy and the women have nothing to drink. Since the statement is unfortunately true in many cases, the humour dies on the lips.

Alcohol is the only chemical which melts the barriers of caste. Men of all castes meet at the tavern; "alcohol is a great equalizer." A good caste man explains, "To drink with an outcaste when you are under the influence of alcohol is not bad. It can easily be explained and excused."[43]

No doubt the most cultured form of amusement and recreation is Tamil music and dance of the ancient classical style. We have discussed this form of recreation in the chapter on Fine Arts. Perhaps it should be read as a fitting finale for the way the people live in Jaffna.

Jewellery—But rather than closing this chapter on the high plane of Tamil culture, I have chosen to end on a golden note which brings us to the attractive subject of jewellery. The people of India

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[42] Skjonsberg, *A Village Study*, pp. 23, 63, 125-6. (All quotations).

[43] *Ibid.*

and Sri Lanka appear to enjoy the possession and wearing of jewellery more than is commonly the case in the western world. The women here have a genuine passion for it. Tamil ladies in Jaffna claim to wear even more jewellery than do the ladies of southern Ceylon. The exchange of jewellery and especially the jewels and gold given to the bride are a very important part of the marriage arrangements of those classes who can afford them. The Hindu bride, particularly, comes to the wedding as heavily laden with gold as possible, even if some of it is borrowed. (In America there is a tradition that the bride is to wear something borrowed.)The wearing of the *thali kodi* by middle and upper class women, signifying marriage and sometimes embodying a small fortune, is a matter of pride and obvious satisfaction to the wearers. Some of the joy has gone out of the wearing of the *thali* in recent months because of a number of thefts in Jaffna. The price of gold and the prominent and readily accessible location of the wedding necklace have made it unusually risky to wear it

Every female in Jaffna from the age of one or so seems to wear some jewellery. Even earlier, the very first piece of jewellery a baby girl has is usually a pair of earrings. As a little child there are added bangles and perhaps a tiny ring. Soon she acquires a necklace ("chain"), usually of little value but sometimes of gold. School girls wear bangles, necklaces, finger rings and earrings. Every girl in Jaffna must have pierced ears and most of them a barrette for their hair. Even fairly poor people manage to sport a wristwatch, commonly called a wristlet.

Not only does the jewellery give pleasure to the wearer but the wedding jewellery, especially the *thali kodi*, represents a means of ready credit. In the event of sudden, dire need for cash, it can be pawned and *is*, fairly commonly, in Jaffna society. In a financial crisis, bangles may be sold first, then chains and rings and the earrings last, traditionally. A metaphorical way to speak of poverty is "nothing around the neck and ears." If a Tamil woman has no jewellery she will sometimes borrow earrings before appearing in public.

The most impressive earrings are diamond earrings. They cost in the neighbourhood of Rs. 15,000 ($1,000) and to their actual value is added their considerable status. Each earring has a circle of six diamonds around a seventh diamond, a dazzling achievement of the Goldsmith's art.

On formal occasions ladies like to wear necklaces with pendants, in addition to other jewellery, of course. Even the necklace chain may contain gems while the pendant may be of rubies or other red stones mounted on a golden swan or lotus and ringed with pearls. Pendants for everyday wear will be plain gold in the shape of a figure often of religious significance. These motifs generally are found on the *thali*. The latter is often a gold piece of one sovereign weight while the *kodi* bearing it may be of five to ten sovereigns. The total, for the peace of mind of the wearer, must equal an odd number of sovereigns.

Nose stud—Unbelievably, one piece of jewellery actually declined in popularity in the past two decades and virtually disappeared: the "nose stud." This was generally a tiny gem set in a small base of gold and worn in one nostril which had been pierced to accommodate it. Plenty of pierced nostrils are faintly visible in Jaffna today but the studs are rarely seen. However, just as the decade is ending, the jewelers of Jaffna report that the piece is regaining some of its lost popularity, though often as a clip not involving any piercing. A Jaffna lady wrote to the *Ceylon Daily News* (Oct. 28, 1979) to report that nose studs are indeed returning to fashion and that ladies are queuing up at Goldsmiths' shops to have their left nostril pierced, looking down on the pain-free clip. Years ago this little operation was done when the girl child was thirty-one days of age. And the ear lobes were pierced at the same time. Fifty or sixty years ago, the report continued, both nostrils were pierced.

Simon Casie Chitty could list three different kinds of earrings worn by men in the 1830's (and thirty-two kinds of jewellery worn by women) but men have given up earrings in Jaffna in the past twenty years except as a part of the Hindu marriage ceremony.

"Charm bracelet"—As previously mentioned, this piece is hardly jewelry at all but is of brass or other base metal. Its purpose is utilitarian, to ward off evil influences, especially illnesses. In this case, "charm" has an entirely different meaning from its use in the West.

Jewellery patterns and the popularity of one kind of jewellery over another shift with the winds of fashion. Magazines and films, mostly from India, inspire these changes. A few years ago gypsy type earrings became popular and continue to be. The revival of the nose stud is another example.

Brooches are rarely worn by Jaffna ladies. Nowadays many young girls use imitation stones in their nose studs and sometimes these stones seem prettier than the real thing! Fifteen years ago no middle or upper class Tamil lady would deign to wear costume jewellery. Today it is being done, partly for security reasons.

A Jaffna lady informed me, "During the last ten years there is definitely a desire to use Grandma's thick solid old designs without re-setting them. This may be due to the fact that people are reluctant to melt the old gold, the value of which is unquestionable, in contrast to the stuff available now." The Tamils have no monopoly on people who like thick, solid, old gold!

CHAPTER THREE

The Family and Marriage

She is a true life's companion who proves equal to the tasks of a householder's life, adjusting herself to the breadwinner's resources
Tirukkural

The Jaffna man has already been described as devoted to his family. This means, of course, the "great family," so common in Asia: his immediate family and a large number of relatives. He certainly counts as close relatives persons whom westerners would not think of as other than distant relatives with whom normally they would have no relationships of any kind.

The life of the Jaffna man is family centred. The family comes first, ahead of country and, in the main, ahead of caste. Caste considerations are upheld for the sake of the family a good deal more than family is asked to make any sacrifice for the sake of caste. Family is by far the most potent social force. It is doubtful if the home-centred Jaffna man would have gone for years to alien lands for any other motivation than the welfare of the larger family. One person could be asked to sacrifice years of home life and of home land if it meant his siblings and his other relatives received good educations and his sisters and girl cousins achieved good marriages. His observation is still true of many of those who go abroad for work, but by no means all, for there are today, more than in the past, those who are anxious to go abroad for glamourous reasons and the pleasures of a western life style.

Man's world—It's a man's world in Jaffna. Even though she has the right to vote and has had it since 1931, the earliest in Asia, the Jaffna lady "knows her place." The difference between the sexes is not only emphasized by Hindu scriptures but it is the Tamil way of life and it is reinforced by the fact that the bride's parents pay dowry to the groom, once again putting the woman into a place of subordination with respect to the man. Man's superiority is amusingly proclaimed by the proverb, "if the hen crows, will the sun rise?"

Social security—But the social security of women is very high, greater in Sri Lanka than in Europe or America. First, a woman knows from early childhood that she will be married. The chance that she will remain unmarried is very small, much less than in the West. Second, her person is secure as she walks around the roads and lanes of city, town or village. Generally she is accompanied by a male relative or servant but if none is available she has less to fear than does her sister in the West. Neither is in much danger but what could happen, happens more often in the Occident than here. The Sri Lankan lady is less safe in jungle areas but Jaffna has no jungle worth mentioning.

The wife is subordinate to the husband and usually is obedient. But if the husband is the head of the household, the wife is the neck and, if she is firm of will and equipped with feminine wiles, the neck may turn the head. Some households are completely dominated by father; in some, father is absorbed in his work or recreation, and leaves the household entirely to his wife. There are also henpecked husbands in households where the wife is better educated or stronger willed and where the husband is gentle, quiet and does not assert himself.

Family size—What is the size of the family we are talking about? The 1971 Census showed that the average housing unit in the entire country contained 5.6 persons: 6.2 occupants per household in the city, 5.6 in rural areas and 4.8 on the estates. To say that the average household in Jaffna is between five and six persons is probably a reasonable estimate.

Forms of address—What does the wife call her husband, and vice versa? There are those in Jaffna, particularly large portions of the older generation, who follow the practice of never using the name of his or her spouse. The man says *amma* (mother) or *atchi* (mother or grandmother); she will call him *aiya* (father) or *appa* (father). When they refer to their spouse they do not use any name or title but use only pronouns: he, him, she, her. Sometimes the older spouses call each other "cousin" if, indeed, they are cousins, but never "wife" or "husband." They also use for each other, but for no other relative, a somewhat obscure Tamil word which perhaps

means "Here, you," or perhaps "Look here," but is not regarded as rude or objectionable.

But the younger married people are more commonly calling each other by their names these days, especially in the Christian community. Privately many younger couples, at least, have pet names for each other. The most common are *baba* (baby), *chuti* and *kuti* both of which mean "little one." Children call their father *aiya, appa,* or "papa;" their mother is usually *amma*. In English-speaking homes, "daddy" and "mummy" are common.

The respect in which parents are held is demonstrated by the fact that only very rarely do young men, generally in anger, sometimes use the terms "old man" and "old lady" which youths in other countries sometimes disrespectfully apply to their parents.

Naming—The usual method of naming children in Jaffna is to give them their own name by which they will be known throughout life, with their father's name as an initial. So Mr. Kandasamy's children will be K. Nadarajah, K. Kandiah and K. Saraswathi. His friends and neighbors are expected to know these names and never to forget them, so they are not confused by the system as foreigners so often are. However, not all Jaffnese follow the Tamil system. Some, particularly Christians, keep the family name for generation after generation as is common in the west.

Child's play—While children play at school, and youths at college, all over the island groups of all ages play volleyball, the national sport. Someone has remarked, "It is a surprising discovery for most people who visit underdeveloped countries to find children who play are an exception to a general rule of apathy and inactivity among children." Most Jaffna compounds are devoid of toys, swings or any forms of amusement for children other than what they provide for themselves. They play stick baseball and a very few other games but much of their time is spent sitting around. Of course, many children in poor families have more or less chores to do and very early begin to be of some help to their parents, either at home or in the fields. It is also true that not all children in Jaffna get enough to eat and some may lack the energy for play.

Coming of age—When Hindu girls come of age in Jaffna their families have ceremonial rites to mark the occasion, especially for the first daughter of the family. Although some Hindu families are beginning to ignore this rite, for conservative Hindus it still has meaning. They would feel guilty and unfulfilled if they omitted it. A school principal described the ceremony in 1979: The relatives and close family friends gather at the home. The uncle of the girl concerned first anoints her with milk in which are some green, grassy leaves of the aruku plant which is a symbol of fertility.

Eleven other relatives and friends do the same. Then the girl is sent to the well for a bath, washing the milk out of her hair. She is then dressed as a bride. Meanwhile nine or eleven *alathis*[44] have been prepared. The materials on these trays is different from what was on the tray at the wedding, and at the wedding there is only one *alathi*.

Although the object of this ritual is still a very much sheltered little girl who will be even more carefully watched from now on, the community has been informed that she is becoming a woman and before long will become marriageable.

Some Hindu families still retain the tradition that any member of the household who is menstruating is ceremonially unclean and therefore the woman remains outside the house and lives on the veranda, or in a room behind the house, during those days.

Christians have largely given up the practice of having a fairly large social event to honour the arrival of puberty. In the past twenty years, this custom has declined although many Christian families will have a small group of family and friends in for a meal in honour of the occasion. Until recently the Christian community followed the practice that women who were menstruating did not receive communion but this practice also has nearly disappeared.

The aged—The large family system not only guarantees nearly all its daughters a husband and takes care of children left behind by the death of their parents, it also takes more intimate and satisfying care of the elderly than many aging parents enjoy in the West, living

[44] See Glossary

independently as they do on their pensions. Since the family home, or half of it, is given in dowry to the eldest daughter, the parents generally live with their daughter and son-in-law. That is an additional reason why Jaffna parents so often like to arrange cross-cousin marriages and intermarriages. Such alliances increased the assurance that the parents would be taken care of by their children from the time the latter married, if necessary. This is especially true in a cross-cousin marriage because the son-in-law is also their nephew. He will be very unlikely to ignore the bonds of kinship and exclude his inlaws from his home.

The most fortunate of the retired people are those with a good pension, something which is valued like a treasure by the people of Jaffna on that account. By the time some people reach retirement age, inflation or other changes will sometimes have eroded their pension to a discouragingly low level. But there is at least one group in Jaffna today, and a very numerous group it is, whose pensions have risen steadily. Malaysian pensioners have had the pleasure of seeing their pension increase as the Malaysian dollar has appreciated in value from two to seven Ceylon rupees.

Female freedom—In the past twenty years the boundaries of female freedom have been enlarged slightly. Women move about in public somewhat more freely; even young women of marriageable age who for millennia have been kept cooped up lest any breath of scandal endanger marriage arrangements. Women are working in various kinds of jobs which they were formerly not seen occupying, or rarely. The increased use of bicycles by women is not merely that now and then a college age girl is seen riding one, which was almost unknown in 1960, but one meets a young man cycling with his wife or sister, or mother, sitting on the crossbar—almost unheard of twenty years ago.[45]

[45] A peculiarly painful and unfair restraint on the freedom of women in Sri Lanka (and India) continues: the denial of their excretory functions. While men are permitted to squat almost anywhere, women are expected to respond to no calls of nature except in private.

Women liberated?—A very different interpretation of woman's place in Jaffna society is given by a well educated gentleman born and presently working in Jaffna. He is speaking of the educated middle class, a good many of whom are fluent in English, some of whom are quite prosperous and many of whom have one or more relatives overseas. Of these families he observes that in many cases it is the man and his sons who are subordinate, not the womenfolk. Father, not mother, is the first to rise and the last to go to bed. Father or one of the sons accompanies mother or daughters wherever they go; the boys, however, are sent all over the countryside on various errands. They go on foot, bicycle or by bus; the ladies may require a hired car.

Even if there is a servant, not only mother helps in the kitchen but her husband is brought in to assist also, in some households. Plenty of tasks about the home are assigned to his department, not all of them traditional. He may nowadays be doing some of her traditional work; on the other hand, she may not be doing any of his traditional work. But if she is employed, the balance may be evened up.

The daughters are certainly not treated as if they were burdens until married off. On the contrary they are overprotected and the energies of the family are bent on getting the first son so well educated and so well placed in life that he will be able to help accumulate funds for dowries. The son's education is carefully planned for it is an investment. If money for the clothing budget is short, sister gets the major share; brother's clothes can wait. If he gets clothes, he may have to argue; hers come more easily. And he certainly requires no jewellery but she does.

Parents who are well off in life now say that it's better to have daughters than sons—a surprising idea in Jaffna. Their point is that girls are more obedient, studious, hard working and less likely to get into trouble in school or University.

And even the parent for whom dowry will be a struggle may agree that girls are less trouble than boys for the same reasons and also for the fact that their son, on whom they have lavished their money, time and thought may fall in love and marry a girl with little

dowry—quite destroying their investment. But if the daughter should fall in love while at the University, the young man would have to be bright and capable or he would not have gained admission so he should be more or less acceptable—and a dowry would have been saved. Such philosophizing is exceptional, however.

Last year well over half the students admitted to some department of the University were girls. No matter how much their parents want them to carry the family fortunes by means of education, the boys are less successful at it than their sisters. It is partly a matter of self-discipline but it is also true that the young men are demoralized by the high probability of failure in Sri Lanka and the greater possibility of success outside the country.

It was common a few years ago for the parent to stop his daughter's education at Grade 9 or 10 or 12 as being unnecessary thereafter. No more. She has a chance of getting into the University.

The above revision of the standard view of women's place in Jaffna society does not, of course, apply to large portions of the society There is no doubt that getting one's daughters married is a considerable strain in most families. Numerous daughters, no sons or a small income—any one of these factors can make it difficult. "Debt, dowry and daughters are the three D's which the Tamil man deprecates," wrote an observer in Ceylon at the beginning of this century.

To Miss Skjonsberg, studying the role of women in a village on Karainagar, the dowry whose accumulation is often a tribulation for the family and yet one to which the prospective bride is often able to contribute nothing, is a symbol of the worthlessness of women in the society, one more reason why she deplores the dowry system.[46] This seems a strong assessment but surely many a girl has hated herself for causing her family difficulties, innocently taking upon herself the faults of the society.

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[46] *A Village Study*, p. 48.

Marriage age—The prosperous and better educated classes delay marriage later than do the poor and uneducated. Girls are married earlier than boys. Parents with some economic security do not have to hurry their children so swiftly into marriage. "For the poor, however, early marriage and subdivision of families is often another strategy for survival."[47]

In September 1979, the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs reported consideration of a plan to raise the legal age for marriage by several years. The report[48] pointed out that the minimum marriage age for all Ceylonese females was the shockingly low age of twelve, except for the small Burgher-Eurasian community whose minimum was fourteen. For males, the minimum is sixteen. Fortunately, only three 12-year-olds and nine 13-year-olds married in 1978 as the chart shows:

Number of Marriages

Age Group	Females	Males
12	3	0
13	9	0
14	118	0
15	297	0
16	1,265	4
17	2,580	11
18	8,468	91
19	7,073	268
20	9,344	1,269
21-24	50,041	35,013

The raising of the minimum age for marriage is one more step in the elevation of women from a position of inferiority. Wives who are scarcely more than children will naturally be subordinate.

[47] Skjonsberg, E., *A Village Study*, p. 94.

[48] *Ceylon Daily News*, Dec. 17, 1979.

Family strength—As judged by the duration of the family, the Indian and Ceylonese marriage and family system is better than the system evolved in the West, according to an American sociologist:

> The conjugal family (as the small, Western type family is known) is fragile, since divorce, desertion, illness or death of a spouse seriously disrupts the household, with a likelihood that the children will be adversely affected. Families (based on blood relationships and including the greatest number of relatives) can withstand a variety of such stresses and strains. The latter family is better equipped, economically and psychologically, to take care of aged members as well as victims of divorce or death or desertion—problems certainly not so well handled in Western, particularly American society.[49]

Some idea of how strong the marriages are in Sri Lanka as a whole, and certainly they are no weaker in Jaffna, is conveyed by the statistic that the 1971 Census turned up: The total number of divorced persons in the island was .2% of the population with another .2% legally separated. There were no regulations concerning divorce in the *Thesavalamai*, the traditional, ancient code of laws of the Tamils, unwritten until modern times.

Family strains—Since Jaffna is also changing—albeit slowly—it will not be surprising to learn that the family is showing signs of being affected by some of today's stresses and strains which confront it. It bodes ill for Jaffna that families in Colombo are suffering from many ills familiar to all who know of the effects of the modern city life upon families, especially poor families, for social ills tend to spread from Colombo to the outlying cities and towns. The fact that there are several orphanages in Jaffna Region where formerly there were few or none is relevant here. For an examination of who these "orphans" are shows that many of them have one or two parents alive but the child cannot be cared for at home because of the father's drunkenness, or the desertion of one parent, or the large size of the family or the father's unemployment.

[49] Kephart, *The Family, Society and the Individual*, 1972, New York, p. 59.

Before we look at that still superior family system in detail, let us examine briefly one of its unusual features which admittedly is its most notorious feature: the dowry.

Dowry—There is a theory that dowry for one sex originally reflected which sex was more numerous in the area. That is, the more numerous sex paid dowry to the parents of the less numerous sex—to the parents who had the "scarcer commodity," to put it into economic terms. Bearing this theory in mind, one is surprised to observe in the Ceylon Census of 1971 these figures (rounded):

	Ceylon	Northern Province
Males	6,531,000	444,000
Females	6,158,000	430,000

However, in Jaffna District the females did outnumber the males slightly: 351,000 to 349,000. And in Jaffna Peninsula the proportion of males has definitely been further reduced by their going overseas for work. But this temporary emigration should not actually affect the imbalance between the sexes for in most cases the young men who have left Jaffna are either already married or return there for marriage. Yet one gets the impression that there are more unmarried women in Jaffna Region today than twenty years ago.

Dowry in a small, typical agricultural village in Jaffna in 1957, for high (Farmer) caste, ranged from a very poor Rs. 5,000 to an average of Rs. 12,000. But a few were in the Rs. 25,000 to 50,000 class, even in 1957—a sign of the future. At that time an informed observer stated, "It may be conjectured that as long as the arranged marriage system prevails, the dowry system would also prevail. Romantic marriages will be dissolvents of the dowry system." In 1957, love marriages usually were concluded without dowry. But the observer's guess was very wrong. Twenty-three years later, love marriages are reaching the neighbourhood of 50% of the marriages of Jaffna (it is estimated);.and at the same time dowries have greatly increased. The prediction, however, may still come true in the future when, and if, traditionally arranged marriages should become rare.

Amount of dowry—Today an unmarried male doctor in Jaffna can expect to receive as dowry a few or several lakhs of rupees and a

well located house; an engineer, one or two lakhs and a house; a high school teacher generally somewhat less than a lakh and a house while carpenters, electricians, businessmen and farmers, if all are fairly prosperous, can expect to be in the same range as the teacher. In all cases, plots of land are quite acceptable as dowry. Of course, there is an enormous variation from case to case, including those who ask for no dowry at all.

A change—The pressure of money, in combination with free education in the vernacular, has worked another change in the status ladder of Jaffna, and this, in turn, affects dowry. A generation ago a man told me, "I would give my daughter in marriage to a government servant earning Rs. 300 per month rather than to a businessman (of the same caste) earning Rs. 3,000 per month." He explained that the government job was secure; a pension would come to the couple at the end of his working days. What he left unsaid was that the status of a government servant was much higher than members of the business community at that time. Money has changed that—money, in combination with the fact that formerly the businessman would probably not have been educated in English while the clerk would have been. Today both have come up through the Tamil medium and the gulf between has diminished.

If the girl is educated at the University, the businessman will take less dowry for his son. If the boy is educated at the University, the businessman will cover up his daughter's educational deficiency with plenty of money.

It is these business folk who found it particularly worthwhile to give a gift to the father of the groom, helping the man with much dignity and many daughters to solve his family problems.

Anti-dowry—Although in India, from time to time, a gesture is made against the dowry system, I have not been able to learn of any efforts to work against the system in Jaffna except that of Bishop Sabapathy Kulandran of the Church of South India, Jaffna Diocese. Around 1955, he got a group of Protestant Christians to agree that they would not ask dowry for their sons nor give it for their daughters. But the scheme foundered on the problem that some people within this ring sometimes had to marry their child to

someone outside the ring—to someone who, of course, was not a party to the agreement.

This discussion of dowry has been very much in terms of prosperous, high caste people who have houses and land and large sums of money to give to their children. For the poor—and that is at least half the population and certainly includes a number of high caste people—it is a different story. Most of them are landless and are living in a small hut or other very poor accommodation. For the poor, there is no dowry, no priest, no thali. After the wedding it may not be possible for the son-in-law to move in—there is no room. So a little hut or room of cadjan is added to the already crowded compound in which they live by the kind, or grudging, permission of the landowner to whom they will make some repayment by continuing to render feudal services.

In an oblique way the dowry may contribute very slightly to the strengthening of the forces which uphold marriage and reduce divorce in that, if a man wants a divorce but has squandered the dowry, the courts will insist on his repaying the dowry before he can be granted a divorce.

Unpaid dowry—Despite the utmost caution which is exercised to prevent its happening, now and then a wedding is completed without full payment of dowry, that is, the parents of the bride do not fully pay what they agreed to. Such a situation is likely to result in a very unhappy marriage and lead to divorce or other unfortunate results. In the village of T., after four years of marriage and many requests by the wife, sent by her husband to receive the final, missing one thousand rupees of dowry, the husband finally told his wife to remain at her home and affirmed that the marriage was voided by failure of her parents to pay up. On numerous occasions when she had returned without the money, her husband had beaten her.[50]

[50] *A Village Study*, p. 48.

Ocean taboo—Up to ten years ago or so, perhaps, many Jaffna parents did not want their daughter to go overseas with her husband and rear the grandchildren in a distant land; the parents tried to find a marriage for her here at home. Strict Hindus were not happy about their sons going overseas either, for their belief is that sea travel interferes with religious duties so such travel is regarded as a hindrance to religious life; to stay at home is better. But today, most travel is by plane and a day or two's travel is not the threat to one's habits which a long voyage represented. Painful as the separation is, many parents feel a little better about their sons and even their daughters departing for foreign countries. Certainly, "everybody's doing it."

Charter flight weddings—During the decade of the seventies "charter flight weddings" began to be spoken of. This exciting phrase was applied to instances in which, after careful prearrangement a young man flew into Sri Lanka from his place of employment, generally in the West or the Middle East, and all the details and arrangements of the marriage were telescoped into two or three or four days after which he and his bride flew off to their new life together. Such speedy marriages still occur now and then but they are less common than a few years ago.

Adoption—In this discussion of the family system in Jaffna, we have taken parenthood for granted but not all married couples have children and therefore may adopt one or more and sometimes those who do have children find it appropriate to adopt an additional child or more. Before taking up the subject of arranged marriage let us look at the practice of adoption in Sri Lanka.

A couple who wish to adopt a child applies to the Family Court or if no Family Court is nearby, to a Magistrate's Court. Usually they have a child in mind already; if not they can apply to the Probation Department and a child will be found through an orphanage. Quite often the child to be adopted is born to an unmarried mother and is received when a few days old.

While the adoption procedure is going on (from two weeks to two months), a Family Counselor from the Social Services Department is made the guardian of the child to be adopted. The

Counselor gets in touch with the natural parents of the child if possible; their consent is solicited. If the mother is unmarried, only her consent is necessary. The adoptive parents are talked with to make sure that both are agreeable to the adoption. If the child is over ten years of age, he or she must give consent also. The Family Counselor ascertains if the adoptive parents are physically, emotionally and financially able and suitable as parents. When the Counselor approves the new parents the Court normally gives legal sanction to the adoption. The whole procedure can be speeded up very much if there is some special reason for haste.

If the child already has a birth certificate, it is replaced with a new one which in no way indicates that the child is adopted so that he may avoid any possible stigma in that regard in the future. The parents are free to give the child new names; in any event the adopting father's name must be given to the child as its surname.

Only children below fourteen can be adopted. The adopting parents must be at least 25 years of age or 21 years older than the child being adopted. The age requirement is waived if the adoptee is directly related to one of the adopting parents: his or her own brother or sister or half-brother or half-sister or the child of the spouse by a previous marriage. A court order can make further exceptions but this is rarely done.

If a child's natural parents are dead, the legal guardian (usually the manager or the matron of an orphanage) must consent to the adoption. If a child is in an orphanage but its parents are available, the latter are asked for consent, not the guardian.

No money nor payment in kind can be given for the child but the adopting parents are not penalized if they have previously contributed to the support of the child and its family.

Unmarried or otherwise single persons, male or female, are permitted to adopt a child except that a single male is not permitted to adopt a female child.

The aim of the laws which have been established for the governance of adoption procedures and as administered by the Family Court is to do the best possible to protect the welfare of the child.

The caste of the child does not seem to be a matter of much importance in adoption. This is probably because the greatest number of adoptions are those of the newly born, on whom caste has left no mark. The second most numerous group of adoptees, probably, is related to the adopting parents so they are of the same caste. If the child is not newborn then he or she is often a child of a neighbour for whom the adopting parents have developed an affection which overcomes caste considerations. If the adopting parents had objected to the child's caste they would have had nothing to do with him in the first place.

Adoption by foreigners—Although there have always been unwanted and uncared for children in Sri Lanka, and occasionally foreign parents who wanted to adopt one of them, adoption has been very difficult. In fact, it was all but impossible for foreigners to adopt because the laws governing the subject seemed to be set up on the assumption that the would-be adopting parents actually wanted to enslave the child. In recent years, an amelioration of this position was effected providing that foreigners that established residence in Sri Lanka would be permitted to adopt. But this change which certainly benefitted any child who was adopted out of grim circumstances was struck down by the Supreme Court's ruling in July, 1978 that foreigners could not establish residence here merely for the purpose of adopting a child. Fortunately, in July 1979, the Minister of Social Services got an amendment passed by Parliament which permits adopting couples to come to Sri Lanka specifically to adopt a child. After a few weeks of residence and careful scrutiny by appropriate agencies, the adoption can be accomplished. All cases of adoption by foreigners, however, are to be taken care of only by the Colombo Family Court at Bambalapitiya.

In the first eleven weeks after the July, 1979 amendment was passed by Parliament, 109 babies were adopted by foreign couples as follows:

Sweden	43	U. S. A.	3
Denmark	27	France	1
Australia	19	Italy	1
Netherlands	9	Unknown	2
Switzerland	4		

Foreign couples are rare in Jaffna and only one such adoption in the past twenty years has come to my attention. However, with the simplifying of the procedure, and the increase in the number of homes for children whose parents are deceased or unable to care for them, it may be expected that an occasional child from Jaffna will find a home overseas, by the route of adoption.

One peculiarity in the field of adoption is that Sri Lanka does not recognize the right of a Ceylon citizen to adopt a foreign child. In Jaffna, occasional Tamils return to the island after years in Malaysia, particularly, where they have sometimes adopted a Malaysian child, generally Chinese. Though the parents are Ceylon citizens, the child cannot be.

And now, by whatever means the child has been acquired, the odds are that the child will grow up—in which case a marriage should be arranged.

Arranged Marriage

Most of the people of the earth regard marriage arrangements and weddings as events of unusual interest and endow them with considerable tradition and ritual. So far as I know, only the pitiable Dobu of the South Sea islands[51] have perversely established a tradition of making everything connected with love and marriage joyless and painful. A people as traditional and family-centred as the Tamils may be counted on to have many traditions and ceremonial procedures associated with the entire marriage process. I shall first describe the arrangement of a Hindu marriage and wedding, and

[51] As described by Margaret Mead in *Patterns of Culture.*

then include the details of the same for Roman Catholics, Protestants and Muslims in Jaffna.

Since marriage in Ceylon and in India is very much more a binding of two families than of two individuals, it is but reasonable that the families should be consulted, involved and should play a much larger part in the arrangement than in the individualistic society of the West.

In general, in Jaffna, where the marriage ceremonial is cultural, it is more or less followed by every one. The most obvious difference among the wedding traditions is that Hindu and Muslim weddings are held in the home; Christian weddings in the church. In the past twenty years or so, however, it has become somewhat more common for Hindu weddings to be held in the temple and some temples have a special hall set aside for the reception following the wedding.

Traditional wedding—In the Tamil tradition there are four kinds of marriage arrangement: traditional, cross-cousin,[52] intermarriage and love marriage. The old-fashioned, traditional kind which is getting rarer all the time, but is still common, is that in which the parents make the arrangements from the very beginning for two young people who are usually unacquainted with each other.

Cross-cousin—Cross-cousin marriage is that in which the son and daughter of a sister and brother marry. Sometimes this is the result of planning more or less from birth but generally it is a later development. It is called cross-cousin to indicate that the child of a brother can marry the child of his sister; the children of two brothers or of two sisters cannot marry. Since the principals are from the same family, no time is spent deciding if one family is socially superior to the other, in the negotiations.

Intermarriage—The third form is called intermarriage and it involves a double wedding for a brother and sister to marry a sister and brother. (These are unrelated pairs, unlike the cross cousins).

[52] Cross-cousin is a term used by Ryan, Raghavan and Tambiah in their books (see Bibliography) yet some Jaffna Tamils do not seem to be familiar with it.

However, the personal details of the lives concerned may make it more suitable to have the two weddings at different times. For a long time, intermarriage has tended to be regarded as something of a labour-saving device. Not only were two children married off at the same time but dowry was a good deal easier to arrange. Both sides were on an equal plane socially instead of the usual situation in which all the bargaining advantages are with the father of the groom. Intermarriage, however, is declining in popularity at the present time.

Love marriage—The fourth type is the love marriage in which the young man has seen a girl he likes and has let his family know this. Sometimes he may have struck up an acquaintance with her and the romance may have become public knowledge but generally it is subjective knowledge and only his closest friends know of the matter because, for a time at least, the young man may be fearful of his parents' reaction (with some reason). Eventually he lets his family know of his interest and nowadays there is often much less disturbance in the family caused by this intimation than twenty years ago. (In the 1950's when a parent I knew learned that his son was in love with a girl of whom the parent disapproved, he threatened to kill the family and to burn the house down around them all if the affair was not given up, which it eventually was.) The proverb in the Western world, "All the world loves a lover," is not at all true in Jaffna. Among middle and lower castes, however, love marriage is fairly common.

An important change in the arrangement system in the past two decades is the decrease in the first three types of arrangement and the increase in love marriages. The majority of young men in Jaffna, it is estimated, no longer wish to be told of the virtues and wealth of any young woman with whom they are not acquainted. School, cinema, public transportation and public functions provide increased opportunity for youth to meet and girl-watching has become more popular and more permissible. Jaffna has always had more coeducational colleges than Colombo proportionately and in the past decade a number of Jaffna colleges for boys have admitted girls to the higher classes: Jaffna Central, Hartley, St. John's and Skandavarodya. Coeducation is inescapably a promoter of love marriages.

Among the high caste community, if they learn that their son is in love, the parents are much more willing than in the past to approach the girl's parents, doing their best to cover up the fact that it is a love marriage, partly because they prefer traditional ways and want to seem still to be in charge but also because, if the girl's parents find out that their daughter has captured a heart, the dowry negotiations will be to the advantage of the girl's parents.

Because of the greatly increased frequency of cases in which the young people are already acquainted, the custom of the groom "glimpsing the bride" at an early stage before any further negotiations could proceed, is disappearing or becoming much less common except for bridegrooms working abroad who come home to Sri Lanka to get married.

Likewise, intermarriages are declining very much in popularity because firstly, the parents of the groom wish to obtain as large a dowry as they can and secondly, because as it is said, "If one family has any trouble, the other family will get drawn into it more than in an ordinary marriage because of the double connection." Intermarriage is often desired by a parent who has less dowry for his daughter than he feels is desirable. But this will mean then that his son will be brought into a marriage slightly less advantageously than he would if he were not being used to balance his sister's lean dowry. This leads to the generalization, common in Jaffna, that intermarriage generally involves a bit of sacrifice on the part of one or the other of the two children being married off by each set of parents.

Gift for groom's father—Perhaps the most complained about change in marriage customs in the past decade or so is the present for the father of the groom. This grew out of the practice of the groom's father asking for a contribution in addition tc the dowry to assist him in accumulating a dowry for his younger daughters.

What was a trickle twenty years ago has become a stream today. The practice is so common now that the father of the groom often asks for a cash gift before he will agree to his son's marriage, even when he has no unmarried daughter. The fact that the parents of girls seem unable to ignore this demand suggests that grooms are

somewhat scarcer than a few years ago and also that money is a little more abundant.

However, not everyone objects to the present for the father of the groom. In effect, the gift is a bargain which can be expressed, "You permit your son to become my son-in-law and I will give you some help with your finances." For the man with money, of course, it is not a problem.

Inflation and marriage—Not only is the dowry going up and the gift for the groom's father an additional tax for the bride's family, but for both sides weddings are getting more expensive for food, flowers, clothes, transportation and most of all, for gold jewellery, with sovereigns worth several hundred rupees a year ago now quoted at Rs. 2500 each. This increased cost is one reason why there are more Hindu weddings at the temple. It is cheaper as one saves on decorations, customary payments and other costs, it is said.

Some costs—Recently a middle class family in which the man held a quite respectable position had a wedding for his daughter. In addition to the dowry, the other expenses included:

Rs.	6,910	jewellery
	4,181	reception for 300 guests
	533	decorations
	2,724	clothes
	1,210	transport
	250	music
	695	presents
	84	invitations

These sums should be put into perspective by the fact that the father received a salary in the neighbourhood of one thousand rupees a month.

Marriage brokers—One other change in the procedure of arranging marriage in Jaffna is that marriage brokers have become more numerous. This fact suggests that grooms are more difficult to catch. A common fee for such a service is Rs. 1,000 plus the broker's traveling expenses. Wealthy families may pay him 1% of the dowry.

The new look in marriage brokers is that they are female. In fact, most are women. Since women predominate in marriage arrangements, it is appropriate for them to have entered the profession. Some of them have put it on a more efficient basis by introducing modern filing systems. And their fees may be a small multiple of one thousand rupees.

They have also introduced a new consideration for the feelings of the girl. No longer is she treated as a piece of merchandise as was sometimes the case. If the groom's party wants to see the young woman secretly, the meeting is arranged with every effort made to avoid embarrassing her.

The work of a marriage broker is much more complex today due to the mobility of Sri Lankans. Not only do requests come from Canada, New Zealand and points between; there is also more mobility in Ceylon. The young person from Nallur may have only recently moved there from a less desirable area. Checking origins is a fundamental responsibility of the broker whether the person concerned is in Jaffna or 10,000 miles away. And so is the present occupation of the distant suitor. If a "ground engineer" working in England is actually a grave digger, the potential bride's parents need to know that early.

In discussion of dowry, the most important consideration for the status of the groom is his employment. Medicine, engineering, accounting, an executive in a commercial firm, teacher, lawyer—that is, in general, the order of desirability in the eyes of Jaffna parents The teacher may be put above the lawyer because the latter's work is not necessarily steady and has no pension attached. The latter is all-important. The euphemism for this point of view: "The businessman lacks security of service."

Unromantic—A marriage arrangement has no romance or gallantry in it. It is much more of a business proposition based on hard, sometimes very hard, bargaining, the details of which are not very pretty. This all leads the observer to feel, once again, that it is a man's world. A kindly, well educated Hindu gentleman, just retired from a fairly eminent position in Jaffna society told me, "Though I married very young and my wife is only a junior high school

product, we have had a satisfactory marriage. She is obedient. She knows my wants and she supplies them." He spoke in a kindly manner but he scarcely spoke of her as a person. The thought of equality is totally missing when most husbands speak of their wives. There are exceptions, of course.

The details of remarks which the husband makes as he describes his own marriage arrangement—or those of his friends—are little short of horrifying in their crass materialism or their depersonalizing of the wife. A few mild examples: "My parents liked this girl so they kept after me every day until I agreed." "I never saw the girl until the registration but my friend urged me to marry her and I agreed, but someone came and said she was very dark. However, I said I would not go back on my word." "They brought the young man to the engagement ceremony but they had never told him of her physical handicap; and when he discovered it, he was unhappy and that ended it. And after that rejection, the poor girl had no chance to get married."

The typical Jaffna family arranging for the marriage of a daughter is in complete agreement with Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's drama, "The Importance of Being Earnest," who says to her daughter, "When you become engaged to someone, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself." (Oscar Wilde died in 1900)

Only once have I seen "the shoe put on the other foot." A young University student with a fine sense of humour and self-confidence vastly beyond the average young lady in Jaffna, when asked about her career plans, said, "I'll teach for a few years, accumulate a dowry, and buy me a husband." This is a fair way to describe those situations in Jaffna, in which the girl's father has not been able to lay by a sufficient dowry.

Marriage "compulsory"—Marriage is practically compulsory in Jaffna today as it was 300 years ago according to Baldaeus who said of the Jaffna Tamils "They are of the opinion that a single man is but half a man." He warmly endorsed the arranged marriage

system by saying, "One laudable they have which is that (rarely do) children marry here without the consent of their parents."

Marriages last—After the shockingly callous manner in which all too many marriages (but by no means all) are arranged, with very little attention paid to the opinions of the wife to be and with little or no prior acquaintanceship on the part of the couple, it seems little short of miraculous that the marriage lasts! It is helped to continue because the entire society assumes it will and entertains no thought of any breakdown of the alliance; and also by the longsuffering of many wives who regard it as their duty to accept whatever husband they get, for life. The good Tamil wife is indeed as patient, uncomplaining and enduring as the grinding stone which is part of the wedding ceremony.

Traditionally the wife is subordinate because she believes in fate. There is an English proverb, paralleled in Tamil, to express the idea: "Hanging and wiving go by destiny."[53] The Tamil version is, "The wife and the teacher one gets are according to fate." So the wife does not think of divorce. And in most cases divorce seems impossible for the wife to consider for economic reasons. (Yet if her husband died, she would manage.) If the marriage is unhappy, astrology helps sometimes. The man takes his horoscope for reading and is told, "This is a bad time for you in your home according to the stars but they also indicate that things will improve in a couple of years." There is no one to blame for the trouble, it is in the stars.

One slight drawback with love marriages is that if the couple grows unhappy with each other, they have no one to blame but themselves—and, in some cases, also the stars. "My stars!" is an exclamation which would have deep meaning if used in Sri Lanka.

There are those that are glad when a love marriage fails. (The old order is vindicated once again.) But a traditional marriage virtually cannot fail for "the couple are often so completely encased in a social, moral and religious cobweb that they dare not voice their discontent." So the traditional marriage, threatened with breakdown,

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[53] See p. xx, paragraph 6.

continues to function because anything else would be a letting down of those who had arranged it.

Veto?—But before the marriage takes place, what if the arrangements really have proceeded, roughshod, over the girl's head and heart? What if she is in love with someone else and is either afraid to mention it to her parents or, although they are aware of it, they are angrily ignoring it and insisting that she cooperate in advancing the family fortunes by marrying the man of their choice? There are accounts in the daily papers from time to time of lovers who have jumped into a well together, or who have drunk poison. Sometimes a letter left behind explains, but if there is no letter, the message is equally clear. A substantial reason for this desperate act is the consideration that even if the girl should summon the courage to defy her parents by announcing that she loves someone else and will not marry the man they are proposing, the parents may well be so angry and feel so humiliated that they will reciprocate by not allowing her to marry *her* choice. Dying with one's lover is more spiritually satisfying than enduring a lifetime of spinsterhood filled with sad recollections and painful reminders administered by unkind relatives.

Those who deny some of the negative statements which I have made above have a stock reply: "In the West you fall in love and get married; out here we get married and fall in love." Fortunately this is often true, but true or not, the family endures.

...ever afterward—The Tamil people are to be congratulated on contributing their full share to the great achievement of Indian and Ceylonese culture: families are strong and permanent. The western world must stand in awe of the acomplishment. How this permanence of the family is related to the inferior position of the wife in the marriage remains a mystery. But whatever disability women suffer in the society from a lack of equality seems a great deal less harmful to the social structure of Tamil society than does the immense damage suffered in western society from broken homes and the instability of the family. Few women in the East are interested in equality at the price paid for it in the West where more and more women support themselves, rear their children with an

entirely or largely absentee father, defend themselves from criminals and even serve in the army

Mistreatment—It is the common view that a woman is a man's property after marriage, even though more wives than ever before will not agree today. But the poor agree—and they are the majority in Jaffna—and not only the poor; much of the society condones the view. It is perhaps not surprising that among both good castes and low castes, women are sometimes beaten or slapped by their husbands. Vellala caste wives, especially those less well off economically and educationally, are likely to receive some of the same treatment occasionally. The sociologist who looked into this subject in a village inhabited by Boatmen and Tapper caste people (well below Vellala) observes:

> The use of too much violence against women is frowned upon publicly, but what takes place within the four walls of the home is considered a private matter and others don't interfere unless they are related to the wife. The only security women have in case of extreme abuse is, however, their own family, if they have one, and if it is able and willing to support them. If not, there is little a woman can do, unless she belongs to the small minority that has a profession and thus her own means of livelihood.[54]

A village woman said, "It is because we are afraid of being beaten that women have come always to obey."[55] Their subservient role is by no means always a voluntary one.

Marriage advertisements—For a great many years and for a variety of reasons parents have in some cases found it necessary to advertise for a prospective mate for their child. Such advertisements are found in several columns of the English newspapers each Sunday and also in the vernacular papers. Examples of two

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[54] Skjonsberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 117. A survey of 2143 American families representing all kinds of occupations and areas of the nation indicated that about four out of every 100 wives in America are seriously beaten by their husbands. *Time*, July 9, 1979.

[55] Ibid.

advertisements (slightly modified) seeking a bride and two seeking a groom read as follows:

Jaffna Tamil Catholic parents living in Colombo seek suitable partner for son, sober habits, Diploma in Building Construction permanent employee in Middle East earning five figure salary, 27 years, a pretty educated girl with reasonable dowry, including house. Caste immaterial. Christian also considered.

Hindu Vellala parents seek suitable partner for 28 years son accountant employed in Saudi Arabia presently holidaying in Sri Lanka. Teetotaler. Partner should be below 23 years and height below 5' 7".

Hindu Vellala accountant brother seeks partner for his sister 30. Diploma Holder in Nursery School Training and Dress Making. Reasonable dowry available. Contact with horoscope and family details.

Respectable Tamil Vellala Catholic parents seek kind hearted, sober, professional Executive or Administrative Officer, around 35 for their daughter 29 tall and good looking, English educated. Christian and Hindu accepted. Cash dowry and jewellery

Arrangements Begin

When the arrangement of a marriage begins,[56] initial inquiries can come from either the bride's party or the groom's. But formal inquiry must come from the parents of the girl, for a rejection of the girl's family's inquiry is not regarded as anywhere near as much of a setback as if the girl's family should turn down a proposal-inquiry from the family of a young man. If the man in prospect is not well known to her family or is not related to them, they may well make the first inquiry for information by asking their own family Dhobi. If he does not know anything about the other family, the girl's family will contact persons farther afield until they get in touch with a

[56] I am indebted to G. Rajah's thesis, *The Ceylon Tamils of Singapore* (1957) for her convenient outline of the Hindu wedding. All details have been supplied or confirmed by conversations with Hindu friends in Jaffna.

reliable source of information. Sometimes the family Barber may be able to supply the information but the slowly changing customs are reducing the traditional importance of the Barber more rapidly than modernity has reduced the importance of the Dhobi.

The first consideration is caste and social status. In only the rarest of cases are bride and groom of anything but identical castes. Closely associated with this is family status and there is a strong tradition in Jaffna for each family to imagine, especially in marriage arrangements, that it is a little higher "class" than it is. Indeed, there is a humourous saying that "In Jaffna, every family is a separate caste," which nicely captures the state of affairs, and which naturally must also be referred to in the chapter on Caste.

If either family has a history of even a single member who had a chronic disease, mental illness, other significant ailment, any trouble with the police, or chronic indebtedness it is looked into. Every family skeleton is dragged out of the closet and examined. In spite of this close scrutiny, however, some important traits are sometimes overlooked—or some arrangers are less thorough than others.

Female virtues—The boy's party is looking for the family's ability to pay a large dowry as well as the girl's reputation, looks, character and accomplishments. If she is good at Oriental music or dance or at needlework or household arts, it is mentioned in her favour. The biggest single factor oftentimes is the girl's beauty which means to a considerable extent, the lightness ("fairness") of her complexion. Dowry is less for a beautiful girl.

Male virtues—The girl's party looks at the boy's employment or education, his disposition, character and reputation. If he is fond of liquor or extravagant it is a mark against him. If he has several unmarried sisters it is very much against him because he and his wife will be expected to contribute to their dowries in days to come.

Horoscope—As much information is obtained as can be along the above lines and then the boy's parents send an elderly relation directly to the girl's parents and raise the question informally. After some time there is a reply and if the reply is favourable, the next step is to compare the horoscopes of the proposed couple. The horoscopes are examined to see if there is agreement on such things

as physical fitness, temperament, sexual appetite, faithfulness in marriage and whether the union will lead to children, prosperity and length of years. If the horoscopes differ significantly, the match is considered no further and it is no stain on the reputation of either party. Of prime importance in the horoscope is the lifeline. If an early death is forecast, it is a serious blow. If the other party is rather desperate or determined they will overlook it, however. A Hindu friend of mine, age 60, said his lifeline indicated he would die at 35. He attributed his evasion of that end to the grace of God and his own righteous life and purity of heart.

Confirmation—In order to reassure themselves, some parents consult their local Brahman Priest with the request that he ask the gods if the proposed match is wise and good. The Brahman sometimes resorts to the red and white flower method of determination previously described (Chapter Two). If the red flower falls first, it is a negative reply.

If the horoscopes permit, and the Priest is favourable, the next step is for female relatives of the boy to visit the girl's house and look her over critically. Two or four relatives go on this visit, not three or five which are unlucky numbers. And of course they go on a day indicated as auspicious by the almanac. Usually this visit is planned for with refreshments ready for the visitors and the girl well dressed for the important occasion. But sometimes the boy's relatives make a surprise visit, wishing to see how the girl really is, without any preparation.

Glimpsing—In traditional arrangements, a glimpse of the prospective bride would be given the young man so that if he simply did not like her looks or manner, the matter could be dropped without embarrassment. Many ingenious methods of arranging the glimpse of the unsuspecting girl have been practiced in the past. The girl was sometimes given a glimpse of the boy similarly. One would have thought this would be rather important. The amusing excitement of the glimpsing has declined because most young men nowadays are acquainted more or less with the girl.

Dowry—The painful problem of dowry is next taken up, if the female relatives approve of the girl. The prospective bride and

groom have little or no part in this discussion but their fathers and other close relatives discuss the dowry in the home of the girl. Land, cash, a house or part of a house and jewellery are the usual forms of wealth. The dowry, though given by the girl's parents, is normally kept in the girl's name and if she is firm she can prevent her husband from making any use of it. It is commonly saved, or invested, for dowry of future daughters to be born to the couple.

The dowry arrangement is normally drawn up by a lawyer. Yet the girl herself may not be apprised of a negotiation until after the dowry is settled or nearly settled.

Wedding date—Once the crisis of the dowry is passed, an auspicious day and time are fixed by an astrologer or perhaps by a Brahman Priest. Several choices are given and the parents select the one which is most convenient. If one of the principals' parents should die at this time, the wedding might be postponed for an entire year of mourning; a lesser relative's death might delay matters for a month or so. If a child were born in the bride's house, thirty-one days are allowed for the ritual uncleanness of the house to pass.

By tradition there are good months and bad months for marriage. The good periods are January 15 to February 15 and March 15 to July 15. The 30-day periods beginning in the middle of February, July, September and December are inauspicious times. An effort is also made to avoid the birth months of the bride and groom.

Legalities—Two weeks or so before the registration of the marriage, the two families inform a notary public of the event and thus announce it to the public. The registration can be completed at the Kachcheri, or at the office of the local Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths. It is now time for the relatives to plan the preparations for the wedding but before any preparations of clothes, *pandal,* decoration or refreshments can take place, a ceremonial pole *(pandal kai)* must be planted before the home of the bride and groom.

A certain broadleafed tree with small thorns on its trunk is the traditional tree for the pole. An elderly couple of relatives of the bride and groom plant the pole. Two other married women relatives help them put the pole into a hole dug in the earth and nine different

grains and some milk are poured into the hole after which it is filled up again. The faster the grains sprout and grow the better a sign it is for the prosperity of the marriage.

Decorations—In each compound a *pandal* (ornamental gateway and canopy) begins to be erected by youthful relatives. In the center of the bride's *pandal* a branch of that same broadleafed tree is placed. Nearby is a little ball of dirt on which is a little ball of cowdung mixed with *aruku* grass and this represents a prayer to Ganesh, the god of beginnings. In front of a branch a pit is dug to be used for the sacrificial fire (*omam*). This pit is rectangular and is smeared with cowdung, a substance held in considerable respect by Hindus and used for a variety of purposes in Tamil society.

Gold melting—Sometimes on the same day as the pole is erected, or perhaps a few days later, the gold melting ceremony (*ponnurukku)* is held at the boy's home. A Goldsmith comes with the tools of his trade.

The living room is cleared of furniture. In the center of the room are placed a coconut set on the top of a copper plated pot, an incense brazier of clay, an oil lamp with five points and a little pyramid of cowdung and *aruku* grass, again the symbol of Ganesh. While the witnesses to this occasion are relatives from both houses, the bride is not expected to be present.

When the Goldsmith starts to melt a gold piece or sovereign one of the groom's male relatives, wearing a turban, splits a coconut with a knife, which signifies an offering to Ganesh, praying that hindrances may be removed. The Goldsmith then takes a tray and puts on it a betel leaf on which the melted gold is put, along with flowers, into a coconut shell and this is passed around for all to observe. The shape of the gold is noted as to whether it is a "good" shape or not. The groom then presents the Goldsmith with some gifts like a *verti*, shawl and some foodstuff, or more commonly today pays him a fee for his services and the Goldsmsith departs. (In the next few days he will make the *thali* or wedding pendant and the heavy gold chain (*kodi)* which will hold it around the bride's neck.) The groom's family then provides a meal for those who attended the gold melting ceremony. Whether the meal is breakfast, lunch or

dinner will have been determined by the time of the ceremony as set by an astrologer. The men and children are served first, served by male relatives. Then the womenfolk eat, served by both male and female relatives. The meal is followed by gossiping with men and women in separate groups, and, of course, chewing betel which was distributed at the meal's end.

The wedding will normally occur in the next two or three weeks and during that period members of both households take no oil baths and only vegetarian food should be cooked in the home of the bride. Usually the prospective bride and groom are not to see each other in this period although there are exceptions to this custom nowadays.

Registration—The registration of the marriage occurs during the period between the gold melting (or just before it) and the wedding; and a few days before the wedding, the relatives and friends begin the preparation of cakes and all kinds of food for the big event. As for the registration of the marriage, generally from each party the parents and a few other intimates go to meet the registrar, bringing a lawyer with them to finalize dowry arrangements if these have not already been concluded. No lawyer will be present if the dowry deeds have already been concluded. On the registration day the bridegroom and the bride present each other with an outfit of clothing. The relatives at the registration, including the essential couple, go to the bride's house for a meal but the lawyers and the registrar are not included.

Wedding saris—One of the exciting activities of this time is the bridegroom's purchase of an expensive sari for the bride, called the *koorai.* A second *koorai* is also bought by his party and his mother gives this to her new daughter-in-law when the latter comes to the home of the mother-in-law for the first time after the wedding.

A considerable amount is spent by the bride's relatives also and in the past the bride missed the fun of the purchasing as she remained demurely at home. The bride was traditionally sheltered from the public, not permitted to go out, or to see her intended, but today the couple is allowed to visit the groom's home, suitably chaperoned, after the registration. The bride is also not supposed to do any hard work and is given a diet rich in fruit and milk. If she is

already employed, little heed may be paid these traditions until a few days before the wedding when she stops work.

As a gift from her father, a costly wedding outfit is purchased and this she wears to the wedding. A good deal of money is spent on jewellery by both parties, also.

Wedding day—At last the wedding day arrives and at each household the principal person takes an elaborate ceremonial bath. A few relatives come to participate although only female relatives observe the bride's bath. The bridegroom seats himself in his own back compound on a white cloth provided by the indispensable Dhobi and the almost equally indispensable Barber shaves him. A tray is put in front of him containing cow's milk, some coins and some *aruku* grass. An odd number of elderly couples who are related to the bride and groom take turns, one by one, males first, in scooping up a little milk from the tray onto the groom's head. Then the groom washes his head, the Dhobi comes and takes the coins from the tray, and an elderly male relative helps the groom complete his getting dressed and to get his turban on his head. The same person used to put ear studs of gold or precious stone in the groom's ears but this habit is declining; almost no man in Jaffna wears ear studs any more.

Neither the bride nor the groom is allowed to take any food from the time of their bath until after the ceremony but they are permitted tea, coffee and soft drinks.

The bridegroom, best man and bridesmaid go in procession with other relatives to the bride's house. The best man is supposed to be the bride's youngest brother unless he is too young; then the next brother or a cousin takes over. Even if he is very young, he may be asked to do the footwashing and receive the ring but be replaced by a cousin later on in the ceremony. The bridesmaid should be a married sister of the groom, preferably one who is the mother of a son. She carries a silver tray containing the *koorai, thalikodi*, a mirror, comb, some perfume, small bouquets of flowers, two garlands and a coconut. Another of the groom's female relatives bears a tray of betel, arecanut, bananas, cakes and sweets. Along

with the bridegroom's procession come musicians playing drums, cymbals and an instrument somewhat like a clarinet.

Alathi—At the entrance to the home of the bride, the best man pours some water on the bridegroom's feet and the groom puts a ring on the best man's finger. The groom is sprinkled with rosewater and "blessed" by two married women. This blessing is called the "*alathi*" and it will occur several times during the day. It consists of these two ladies lifting up and down in a circular motion three times a tray on which are saffron and lime mixed with water and three pieces of banana, each of which holds an oil-soaked wick which is lighted and burning. Then the lighted wicks are extinguished and one of the ladies dips her finger in the liquid on the tray and touches the groom's forehead, the saffron making a *pottu*, or beauty mark, on his forehead.

Now the Dhoby participates. He rolls out a carpet of white cloth, universally recognized to consist of the *vertis* belonging to his customers, and makes a path for the groom to walk to the dais which has been erected beneath the *pandal*. He seats himself there with the best man on his left. The dais faces east and just behind it is that branch of the large-leafed tree before mentioned wrapped in a new white cloth and kept in a box open at each end.

Guests—Meanwhile the guests arrive for the wedding. They are greeted by the bride's female relatives who are married or else are under twelve years of age, who sprinkle them with rosewater and offer them some powdered sandalwood which each applies as a *pottu* to his forehead. The guests sit on the floor on mats, women on one side and men on the other.

Religious ceremony—Now the center of attention shifts to the Priest as the religious ceremony begins with a prayer to Ganesh. A considerable number of small objects are part of the ceremony. The Brahman calls three married women, relatives of either party, he gives them some holy ash and requests each lady to put three spoonsful of water into a pot. In the pot are nine cereal grains. Next the three women are given betel and a banana and he asks them to bring him some embers from the kitchen on a tray. These he uses to start the holy fire (*omam)* in the pit dug earlier for that purpose.

Dried mango twigs and clarified butter (ghee) are the fuel which keeps the fire burning until the ceremony is finished.

Accompanied by loud music, the Priest ties a yellow thread around the right wrist of the bridegroom while at the same time an older relative puts on a turban and splits a coconut. The yellow thread is supposed to ward off evil forces. The groom and the best man then step over to where the male guests have congregated and all await the bride. She now comes to the dais in her wedding finery and new jewellery, accompanied by the bridesmaid and married women (of an odd number). When she has seated herself, the Priest ties a similar yellow band on her left wrist and chants some mantrams in Sanskrit. An uncle of the groom takes the *koorai* and *thali* on a tray around among the male guests and an aunt of the bride shows them to the female guests. Only married people are shown these and the guests "bless" them by extending their hands over them and perhaps breathing a prayer.

Next the tray is given to the bridegroom by his father and the bridegroom gives it to the bride. Rising to receive it, the bride goes into her room with her maid to change into the *koorai.* Her place is occupied by the best man while she is gone. When she returns, the giving away ceremony takes place.

The Priest invites the two fathers to sit on the floor beside their respective children and their wives stand beside them. This is a solemn moment and the music is silenced. The Priest mentions the names (on the male side only) of three generations of both the bride and the bridegroom, and says that X, the son of A and the grandson of B will now be married to Y, the daughter of C, and the granddaughter of D. The bride's father clasps the bride's hands together with a couple of betel leaves (and sometimes also with a gold piece), and the Priest then recites, 'The Sun, Moon, this Fire and God are witnesses that C, the son of D now gives his daughter Y as wife to X, who is the son of A."[57]

The groom rises and the bride's father takes the betel leaves and his daughter's hands and places them in the hands of the

[57] Katiresu, *A Handbook of Jaffna*, p. 96, quoted by Raja in her description.

bridegroom. The mother of the bride puts a spoonful of water on their joined hands three times.[58] The bridegroom puts the hands of the bride into the hands of his father to show that she is becoming a member of their family. The music begins again. Sometimes the Priest puts the *thalikodi* on one of the metal water pots which is decorated with mango leaves and has a coconut placed in the top of the pot (*niraikudam*),[59] a symbol of Siva and Parvati and symbol of fullness—and walks around it bearing a tray of lighted camphor. Sometimes he follows a slightly different procedure. After this blessing he opens up the necklace (*kodi)* by loosening a screw and gives the *thalikodi* to the groom to place around the neck of his bride. Since of course the groom is nervous and his hands are trembling, the delicacy of this operation is sometimes reduced by substituting a lowly safety pin and later on the *kodi* screw can be tightened. The *thali*-tieing may be moved up earlier in the programme if the auspicious hour set for this very important function approaches too closely. The *kodi* may be a heavy "rope" of gold but the *thali* is comparataively small, by tradition, three-quarters of a sovereign. It is shaped like a Hindu deity or other religious symbol. It is customarily given to the temple by pious Hindus upon the death of the wearer.

The groom putting the *thalikodi* around the neck of his bride is the climax of the ceremony and the music reaches a crescendo;

[58] The pouring of the holy water (holy because blessed by the priest) signifies a transfer of authority but it also signifies that the bride no longer shares any of her bodily substance with the family into which she was born, explains Dr. Kenneth David. Quite literally and without malice it can be said her family members wash their hands of her. The bride has been transferred or, literally, transubstantiated, into her husband's family. She has become the same flesh and bone as he. When he ties the *thali kodi* around the bride's neck, the pair are united spiritually, physically and sexually. "Before marriage she is identical in natural bodily substance with her natal family; during the ceremony she becomes physically identical with her husband and his kinsmen." Jews and Christians will think of the words of the Bible concerning marriage. "They two shall become one flesh."

David, K., "Until Marriage Do Us Part: A Cultural Account of Tamil Categories for Kinsmen," *Man*, vol. 8, no. 4, Dec., 1973, pp. 521-3.

[59] See Glossary.

fireworks add to the excitement and scare off threatening spirits. The guests of all ages, one by one, throw rice mixed with saffron on the couple as a token of blessing. Again an elderly relative breaks a coconut. The bride removes her veil, they exchange seats and garland each other, using the two garlands the bridesmaid had carried in her tray as the wedding party came to the bride's house. The bride stands and garlands her bridegroom who is seated; then she sits down and he turns and garlands her.

A game—Perhaps at this point in the ceremony, a game is played by the couple. A brass vessel of water is brought and a ring is dropped into it. The bride and groom compete with each other in trying to find it, by reaching into the pot with their hands. When one succeeds in finding it, the ring is dropped back in a second and a third time. The tradition is that whoever first finds the ring will dominate in the marriage.

"Privacy"—All of the ceremony has been public so far. Now the couple has a moment of rather artificial privacy. A curtain is held up in front of the dais cutting them off from the audience. Three times the bride gives her new husband a bite of banana and milk; three times he gives her the same. Eating together is held to be of great importance as a token of living together. A quaint, rural flavour is added to the ceremony sometimes by bringing in a pretty little female calf beside the curtain so that when the curtain is removed, the couple's first sight is the calf. This is supposed to betoken prosperity. An observer of the Jaffna scene makes the observation that in humbler ceremonies where neither rings nor garlands are exchanged, the feeding ceremony is the only place in the entire wedding at which the bride and groom seem to be on a plane of reciprocity.[60]

Rice and fire—Now the central foursome stand in a row and the Priest gives some rice (paddy), which has been warmed, to the best man who gives it to the groom who passes it over to the bride. Then another handful is given to the groom via the best man. The couple offers some of this rice in the sacrificial fire. Then the four of them

[60] Skjonsberg, E., *A Village Study,* p. 52.

march around the fire thrice, throwing a little rice into the fire at the end of each round. As part of the second encirclement of the fire, the newlyweds halt and the bridegroom puts the bride's right foot on the grinding stone for a few seconds. While she stands thus, he points to the sky, in the general direction of a certain star. The grindstone symbolizes the patience, endurance and tolerance which the bride should have and the star is the token of a holy man's wife, Arundhadhi, whose faithfulness was so great that the gods rewarded her by making her a star which shines forever.

Blessing of rice—After the third circling of the *omam,* the couple stand in front of the dais once again while the Priest, chanting, throws some saffron rice on the tray they are holding. Then the *alathi,* or lighted wick blessing, is performed for the couple by two married women to furnish them with protection from the evil eye. In the words of Miss Raju, "The couple then resume their seats and are blessed by the people; firstly by the married male guests headed by the bridegroom's father, followed next by the bride's father. The same order is observed by the females. The manner of blessing is, the person takes the saffron mixed rice in both his hands, drops some on the lap, then on the shoulders and lastly on the head of both the bride and the groom. This is done thrice by each person, saying words of blessing, such as that the couple shall flourish like the banyan tree and take root like the *aruku* grass, and shoot up like the bamboo and live forever."[61] During this time the music stops.

When all the guests have passed by them, they remove the yellow threads from their wrists, return them to the Priest, and give gifts to him, including vegetables, rice, a *verti,* shawl and some cash. In these days, there may be an all cash gift in lieu of the other things. The Priest will receive the cash and take his leave; any other gifts will be sent to his home.

The wedding meal follows with the guests all joining in. The men and children are served first—generally on plantain leaves under the *pandal.*

[61] Raja, *op. cit.,* p. 38.

Symbolic meal—Before the newlyweds can join in the feast, however, they have a little further set of customs to observe. They are led into the house by an elderly married woman carrying an oil lamp which she will soon place in the bridal chamber. At the door of the house she performs *alathi* for the bride and groom. The tradition is that the couple enters the house with the right foot forward so that the marriage will literally "get off on the right foot," as the saying goes. They are led into the bridal chamber and each feeds the other three mouthsful of rice and curry—a second, private, symbolical meal. The groom then goes to eat with the men and the bride will join the ladies when they have their sitting. Or, often, the couple sits together at the feast. After the guests have been fed, the Dhobi and the servants have their portion. However, the Barber is given his food which he eats at home.

Temple—After the wedding feast an older relative and the central four may go to the temple for worship. After their return, the newlyweds sit on a sofa and are given good wishes by the guests as they depart. Each guest is given a portion of betel wrapped in a paper with special wedding sentiments printed on it.

Reception—If the time of day is appropriate, a reception with "short eats" may follow the ceremony, and a lesser number of guests may attend the wedding meal a few hours later. The Christian tradition of a wedding cake and short eats as the food at a reception has found favour in the Hindu community. Even in villages the wedding cake may assume considerable importance. Wedding cakes are expensively made and their taste is delightful.

If the wedding takes place before late afternoon, the couple go to the bridegroom's house on the same day and remain until the third day. But if the wedding is later, they may not visit the groom's home until the third day. The bride wears the *koorai* to her husband's home where the couple are received with the *alathi* ceremony and they in turn honour the parents by touching their feet. Her mother-in-law may give her new daughter a second *koorai* unless the groom presented her with two saris earlier. There is a tradition, however, which seems to be increasingly observed, for the couple to spend their first night in the nuptial chamber at the bride's home no matter what time of the day the wedding is celebrated.

On the third day at the groom's home, relatives and friends visit the couple, especially those friends who were not invited to the ceremony and wedding feast. Refreshments are served in the *pandal* or on the veranda and professional musicians and dancers may entertain the guests. Traditionally the couple return to the bride's home on the third day even if they have only gone to the groom's home on the third day.

On the following day they have oil baths and take non-vegetarian food which, for the first time since the gold melting ceremony, can once again be prepared in the home if those concerned are not vegetarians.

Friends of the couple now begin to invite them to their homes for a meal and give them presents if they did not bring the latter to the wedding. Some people give a present on both occasions. Gifts are most commonly a sovereign, jewellery or saris. If the gifts were rice, fruit or vegetables, these would have been brought to the bride's home on the day preceding the wedding.

The couple normally live in the bride's dowry house, that is, with her parents, if she is the first daughter married. However, if a separate house is dowered to the bride, they will usually live there. Or if they go off to Colombo or elsewhere to work, they will have an apartment there. Sometimes the groom goes a good distance to work and leaves his bride behind with her parents.

And so a new family is established.

Time, both by its limitations and by its passage, has affected these traditions of the marriage ceremony. Not all educated people are launched into married life by means of so many traditions as just described but in varying degrees these customs are adhered to.

Hindu wife—It is surprising that a young woman, often coming right from the classroom, with little experience of life, and sometimes with little training in domestic work, can make the transition to wifehood successfully, for the expectations of her are quite demanding and her work conditions may not be comfortable. The latter is the case if the newlyweds are living with the groom's parents and if the bride has a difficult mother-in-law, but much more

commonly she is living with her own parents. Whenever she gets into a home of her own, however, she is expected to be the first one up in the morning and the last one to bed at night. The Tamil wife's job is in a sense a 24 hour a day task.

This is even truer of those who work in the fields as agricultural labourers; or, on a higher social level, if the wife has a salaried position five or more days a week. However, her position as a salary earner may result in her husband's sharing in some household tasks. Much more likely it will insure her having a servant. But to return to the poor villager, the lifetime of hard work demanded of married women is doubtless the chief reason for women dying before men in Tamil society. But this life of work is regarded as their divinely assigned duty, their *dharma*. While they may never get a vacation in their whole life, they can look forward to receiving considerable aid in household work, in due time, from their own daughters and daughters-in-law. When food is in short supply, the wife is apt to be the last member of the family to get enough to eat.

The changing role of women is illustrated in a small village by the story of an illiterate husband (who might be forgiven some of his superiority feelings and who might not have been exaggerating) who said, "If you want to get to know about our village, don't talk to the women. They don't know anything. All they do is go to the well. That is the only thing that takes them away from the house. Women and children do not know what goes on in the world. They are so ignorant."[62] Yet in that very village in which he spoke a woman was elected president of the Women's Rural Development Society and it was that same speaker or one of his fellow village leaders who took the lead in forcing her to allow him to preside over the WRDS meetings! She complained, "The president of the men's RDS does not like me. He says I am too independent. When I speak to people from outside he always comes and wants to know what we are talking about."[63]

[62] Skjonsberg, E., *op. cit.*, 65, 109.

[63] Ibid.

It is safe to predict that young women being married in these days will not only be elected as presidents of the Women's Rural Development Society but that they will be allowed to function in that capacity. But no contribution which they make to their society, in whatever capacity, is likely to exceed what they do for the society in maintaining the strong family traditions of the Tamil people.

Protestant Christian Marriage

Although there are many similarities between Hindu and Christian marriage arrangements and weddings, considerable differences result from the fact that Christian couples have an engagement service, of a religious nature, some weeks or months before they marry and from the fact that all Christian weddings are held in the church. Naturally, also, the religious elements in the two ceremonies will vary greatly from each other. In this section I shall examine the Protestant Christian marriage system and compare and contrast it, to some extent, with the Hindu system already described. In the next section I shall indicate the ways in which Roman Catholic procedure varies from Protestant. Finally, the Muslim marriage system in Jaffna will be described.

For the Christians, a wedding is the most exciting event of ordinary life; a climax among private events. To be sure, it is at the same time a somewhat public event. For Hindus, the climax each year is the major temple festival they attend. True, it is much more of a public event than is a wedding but at the same time it is a regular, annually recurring event of their year and therefore a part of their private, personal round of life. However, if in a given year there is a wedding in the immediate family, it will also be a climactic event, rivalling the festival for excitement and interest.

Protestants in Jaffna number less than 10,000 in a population of around 800,000 but they are influential and well known because they have been so largely associated with education in Jaffna. The four methods of arranging marriage are true of the Protestants as much as of the Hindus and also the generalizations about love marriage. But when a Christian desires information about a prospective mate for his child, he can usually obtain it from the pastor or members of the congregation of the church which the young person attends. Because

the community is small, many members of it know a considerable proportion of the whole community and it is generally not hard to obtain some facts. The Dhoby is of little assistance; the pastor is a key figure.

The characteristics desired in a bride are very much the same for Christians and Hindus. Perhaps the Protestants emphasize more the desirability of the bride having a job. A lower dowry can be given for a bride who will bring in a second income. (A large portion of the Hindu community preserves the ideal of the young woman quitting her job and settling down to be wife and mother—even when the second salary is very much needed.)

For the Protestant young man, the desirable traits and the hierarchy of doctor, engineer, etc., are the same. And the struggle over dowry is just as stringent in the Christian community. There are those who maintain that men are in even shorter supply in the tiny Protestant community and therefore the pressure for dowry is even greater.

Before the question of dowry is ever discussed, however, it has been ascertained that the young couple are of the same caste and social status. The Hindu can check on caste without compunction for it is an integral part of Hinduism; one's caste is a very important part of one's *karma* or fate and a part of life and one is expected to marry within it. But the Christian parent who asks a question about the caste backgrounds of the other family perhaps has a slight twinge of conscience as he does so for he has heard sermons from. time to time about the unity of all people in Christ and has been exhorted to treat all men as brothers. However, he justifies the inquiry just as his counterparts in churches in the western world justify their concern that their child marry a person of similar race and class: "They are more likely to be happy if of similar backgrounds. An inter-caste marriage will subject the union to additional strains. There is no reason to seek trouble."

However, Protestants live up to their ideals a little better when it comes to astrology. Most of them do not compare horoscopes nor consult an astrologer about the match. Still, when it comes to choosing the day for the wedding, it is common for Christians to

consult the almanac for a "good day." Some courageous souls deliberately flout this belief by scheduling the wedding on an unlucky day but they are few. A great many Christian weddings occur between March 15 and July 15 and in the "bad months" their weddings are few. There is also a tendency to avoid the birth month of the bride and groom in setting the date of the wedding. Christians do not, however, concern themselves with odd or even numbers of relatives who may participate in one part or another of the arrangements.

With love marriages on the increase, there are fewer, but still numerous, arrangements in which the couple are not known to each other and a glimpsing is arranged for the groom, or both of the principals, at an early stage in the arrangements. Frequently this is done at church. In traditional arrangements the dowry may be pretty much settled before the bride gets wind of anything going on although obviously the business is of vital concern to her. Among the Christians as among the Hindus, the girl's attitude is more taken for granted than the boy's; it is assumed that she will be cooperative and this is generally true. It is unheard of for a prospective bride to reject the proposal after the dowry is settled. When the dowry is negotiated, lawyers are normally called in to draw up the deeds

For Christians also the death of a close relative can delay the marriage date by a year of mourning but if the groom must go abroad shortly the taboo may be compromised by having a quiet wedding with few people invited. Few Christians feel that the birth of a baby in the home renders it ceremonially unclean.

The Christian engagement ceremony parallels to some extent the registration of the Hindu marriage. Some engagements may last for a year or even two before the wedding but generally they are for several weeks or a few months. Friends are invited to the bride's home where a short service of blessing is conducted by the pastor of the girl's family. The latter seats herself with an aunt on a sofa and the pastor leads in a hymn, followed by a prayer and a reading from the Bible. Then the young man comes to the sofa and takes the place of the older relative. The pastor holds a Bible in front of the couple and each puts an engagement ring on it. (Each has bought the ring for the other.) The pastor prays God's blessing upon the rings and

what they symbolize. Then the boy puts the ring on the girl's fourth finger on the left hand and she does likewise for him. Sometimes they kneel before the pastor who puts his hand on their heads and prays for them; sometimes they stand before him for the prayer. A group of relatives and friends may sing a hymn for them and the pastor pronounces the benediction (a farewell prayer).

The groom's sister now gives a parcel containing the engagement sari to the groom who presents it to the bride. It is invariably of Indian silk, from Manipur or Conjeevaram. The bride then presents the groom with a length of suit cloth which he will have tailored into the suit in which he will be married. Most Protestant grooms wear western clothes for the wedding but occasionally national dress is worn.

Refreshments follow. Sometimes there is an engagement cake which the couple cut and share with the guests. Or instead of refreshments there may be an engagement dinner, or both. After the engagement the couple may be seen in public or at the groom's home in a quiet and reserved courtship. Especially, they may go to the films together.

As the wedding day approaches, quite a lot of planning takes place. Invitations are mailed out two or three weeks before the wedding and these reflect the colour or colours and motif chosen for the wedding. These colours will not only be exhibited by the saris of the bridesmaids but may also determine the colour of the shirts worn by the groom and his attendants. The flowers, the decorations, the icing and box of the wedding cake and the invitations will as far as possible bear the chosen colours and, where appropriate, bear the selected motif, an orchid, a fan, a horseshoe or a heart.

The bride and her relatives and close friends also plan the church music, perhaps including a choir number or other special music. The banns are thrice announced in church.

About two weeks before the wedding the notary public is informed to conform with government requirements.

There is no goldmelting ceremony. Each family will purchase wedding jewellery and the couple will order the *thalikodi* made to

their design. All Christian *thalis* bear one or more religious symbols: a cross, Bible, anchor or dove. The *thali* pendant is often heart-shaped and may have LOVE or some other word engraved upon it. Sometimes a sovereign will be put on each side of the *thali,* in which case the faces of the rulers on the coins must face each other. The Christians agree with the Hindus, usually, that the *thalikodi* should contain an odd number of gold pieces as it is made up by the Goldsmith.

No *pandal* pole will be erected although Christians in distant villages have been known to do so. But a *pandal* of cadjan may be constructed at both homes by youthful relatives and friends. The bride's *pandal* is more elaborate; the Dhoby will supply the cloths, or family and friends will, for the underroof. Sometimes the *pandal* is omitted from one or both houses if the compound is attractive, or a hall is rented elsewhere for the reception. Two or three days ahead of the wedding more relatives gather and food preparations begin. However, the wedding cake is baked a month in advance, as befits anything so magnificent, so that it will be full-flavoured on the day needed.

On the wedding day there is no ceremonial bath for either the bride or groom nor is the Barber summoned to shave the groom. Non-vegetarian food will usually be served at the reception and wedding dinner but, traditionally, the meal before the wedding is vegetarian.

Most Protestant weddings are scheduled for around four o'clock in the afternoon. Soon after the vegetarian lunch, a married couple of the bride's close relatives and the best man go to the groom's home and wait there until he can accompany them to the church. Likewise the groom's sister and one married couple of his relatives will go to the bride's home. She will be wearing the white wedding sari provided by her parents. The bridal party will help her put on her veil and go with her to the church at the proper time. Generally each party travels to the church by car; the bride and groom usually walk into the church from the car on cloth spead by the Dhoby. A pastor leads in prayer at each home before the bride and groom depart for the church.

One bridesmaid is a young, unmarried sister or cousin of the groom; another is the corresponding relative of the bride or as close as available. The matron of honour will be a married sister of the groom. The best man is the little brother of the bride, and a friend of the groom will be the groomsman. In a Hindu wedding the bride and groom each have one attendant; in Christian weddings there may be one or two or three additional attendants, generally friends of the principals.

The bridal bouquet, the maids' bouquets and all the wedding flowers in the church will be given by the groom, except for those in the church which the bride's family volunteers to bring.

The wedding service in the church follows the order prescribed by custom and by the denomination. It includes hymns, prayers, Bible reading and the giving away of the bride by her father followed by the exchange of vows, the tying of the *thali* and usually a homily (sermon) for the benefit of the newly married couple. Special music is provided by the church choir or by relatives.

When the first church bell rings, the groom and best man come slowly down the aisle and wait on the right side at the front of the church. When the second bell rings, the pastor goes down the aisle and stands near the altar awaiting the bride's party. The flower girl or girls come and strew flowers down the aisle. They are known as "little maids" or "half maids." Then the bride comes, beside her father, followed by her maids and a little boy comes last. A married sister of the groom, the matron of honour, will earlier have been seated very near the front with the groom's party. Her duty is to assist her brother the groom when he ties the *thali* around the bride's neck.

In nearly all Protestant weddings, the bride comes down the aisle as the wedding guests sing the hymn, "The voice that breathed o'er Eden." Later in the service the congregation normally sings, "Oh, perfect love."

Since regularly ordained pastors of churches have the legal power to register marriages, the registration takes place in the pastor's study after which the wedding party marches out of the church to the stirring tune of the traditional wedding recessional and

the guests then leave the church. Most of the latter go to the bride's home or to the hall engaged for the reception. Upon their arrival they will be greeted with rosewater and offered sandalwood paste for *pottu*.

However, if there is to be no reception, but a dinner later in the evening, the couple stand near the door of the church and the guests file past them, shaking their hands; close relatives kiss them and everyone wishes them well. Each guest is given a piece of the wedding cake in a little box on which are printed the names of the newlyweds and the motif.

Before going to the reception or to the dinner, the couple go to the photographer's shop (or sometimes he comes to the church) and a battery of pictures is taken. This invariably makes the couple an hour or so late to the reception if there is one following the wedding. The time is put to good use by all the guests visiting with one another.

The bride's father gives a gift of money to the pastor who performed the ceremony and another gift to the church. It is common for more than one pastor to participate in the wedding, the additional ones being close friends of the families concerned. The groom's pastor, especially, will usually take part in the ceremony.

And so, after considerable delay, the bride and groom arrive at the reception. The bride's parents garland them. Often the best man then receives them by the traditional "washing" of the bridegroom's feet. However, that tradition was established for people wearing sandals. The groom is usually wearing shoes so the best man or the groomsman pours the water near his feet only. The groom then gives him a gold ring. Fireworks are fired off, not to drive away any evil spirits, but to show that the people present are in exceedingly good spirits and wish to express their joy and sense of celebration. Sometimes a band plays at a reception. The couple seat themselves on a sofa, having followed the Dhoby's trail of sheets and *vertis*. The bride and groom then cut the wedding cake. The guests, however, are normally served previously prepared pieces of wedding cake either wrapped in oiled paper or in special little individual boxes.

The bride then leaves and changes into her *koorai*. Upon her return the guests slowly file past the couple, giving them their best wishes and blessings while receiving a parting gift of betel.

In contrast to Tamil tradition, the Christian couple go on a honeymoon after the reception or, if there is a dinner, after that. The bride changes from her *koorai* to a going away sari. No rice is thrown but as the couple departs for the honeymoon, they will be pelted with flowers by those left behind.

They return from the honeymoon on the third day and go to the groom's home where there may be another reception. Their friends invite them out to meals in the days to come and some give them presents. Especially their Hindu relatives are apt to give them gifts at such occasions.

The new couple may live at either of their family homes or at an apartment or their own home if family circumstances permit.

Roman Catholic Marriage

The Roman Catholic Church is famous throughout the world for its devotion to the ideal of permanence in marriage. The church's position is that marriages are made in heaven and "what God has joined together let not man put asunder." Equipped with this splendid concept, the best foundation for society, the Church could never feel more at home than in Jaffna where virtually the entire population is in sincere agreement with the same ideal. Marriages are forever in Jaffna and throughout the country.

Most Roman Catholic marriages are arranged by the parents although it is estimated that perhaps two or three out of ten are now love marriages, and these are slowly increasing in number. A considerable number of Catholic marriages involve little or no dowry. The majority of Catholics are poor and the poor give little heed to the subject for they have little chance of furnishing any dowry. Among the educated, middle class Catholics, however, dowry is as big a problem as for the other educated classes of Jaffna.

As usual, the question of making a match is first raised by the family of the bride. If a preliminary meeting of the two families is

favourable, the boy and girl concerned are permitted to see each other in the company of their parents although they do not meet each other directly. If neither objects, the Priest of the bride's family is informed of the family's intention. Usually the groom's family is from a different parish so the Priest sends an inquiry to the neighbouring Priest who looks up the baptismal certificate and has a copy made. This copy is returned along with a statement that the groom is free to marry. But if the groom is already involved with someone else, the Priest and the bride's family will be informed.

The bride's family then sets up the engagement ceremony which is similar to the Protestant procedure. However, an engagement book is brought out in which each side lists three generations of their family tree

The engaged couple and two witnesses sign the book. The Priest pays attention to the family trees for the Church does not approve of marriage between persons of too close consanguinity. For example, the Church does not favour cross-cousin marriages and if one is proposed, the couple must petition the Bishop for his approval. That approval is not likely to be given except for the reason that no one else of this community (caste) is available, which is not often the case.

Before the engagement ceremony is performed, the amount of dowry will have been settled more or less, if dowry is involved. After the engagement the dowry agreement will be drawn up as usual. The Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths does his duty and banns will be read on three consecutive Sundays in the church of the bride and of the groom. If the couple should have to wait for some time to get married, there could be considerable time between the third reading of the banns and the ceremony.

One of the Tamil cultural traditions observed by some Roman Catholic families is the goldmelting ceremony. For making the *thali*, the Goldsmith is invited to the bride's home and the ceremony follows. Other families order the *thali* directly from the Goldsmith.

Before the marriage the couple is carefully instructed in marital matters, meeting with the Priest on two or three occasions. Each is given a copy of the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry Form which they read

carefully before answering the questions. They are informed of the three conditions for marriage. Roman Catholics are expected to accept these conditions before contracting marriage:

- Marriage is non-dissoluble
- Marriage is unitary—one partner only
- Marriage involves begetting and nurturing children
- The future bride and groom each sign a copy of the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry.

Catholic weddings have traditionally been early morning affairs. Often they are scheduled for 7 a.m. but there is a trend now to late afternoon because hospitality is becoming so expensive. A morning wedding makes the bride's family responsible not only for a mid-morning reception but for lunch and for dinner for a still substantial number of guests though generally less than for lunch.

The wedding begins with the Priest welcoming the bride and groom and their parents and close relatives into the church. The attendants of the bride are the bridesmaid and one or more flower girls; the groom's attendants are the best man and one or more page boys. The bridesmaid is usually the groom's sister and the best man is usually the brother of the bride. At the door as they enter he sprinkles them with holy water and then walks behind them as they go to the front of the church. The bride, groom and their attendants come to the altar and seat themselves on a pew or chairs or on a carpet on the floor. If the couple should have already been living together they are married outside the altar to show the Church's disapproval. The service of the Mass is begun and after the Gospel is read, the Priest gives a homily on the seriousness and responsibility involved in marriage.

After the homily the Priest leads the couple in an exchange of promises. He then joins their right hands and blesses their joined hands with holy water and the sign of the cross. Then he blesses the *thali* and the rings; sometimes the *koorai* is also given for a blessing. The Priest hands the *thali* to the groom who puts it around the neck

of the bride as he says, " I will tie this *thali* around your neck in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The Priest or one member of the party then reads the "Prayer of the Faithful" asking for specific blessings. Next the bridal party comes forward in the offertory procession bringing bread, wine, cakes, smoking incense sticks and fruit to the Priest who accepts them. After the "Our Father" prayer is recited there is a special prayer of blessing that the couple will become parents of children.

The bride and groom receive the bread and the wine in the Mass; the remainder of the congregation is given the bread only., As the couple comes to the door of the church on the way out, they exchange garlands. Sometimes this exchange comes earlier in the wedding, right after the *thali* ceremony. The behaviour of the couple for the next few days parallels that of their Protestant neighbours.

A few years ago if a Catholic wanted to marry a Hindu or a Protestant there were difficulties. If the non-Catholic would receive religious instruction and join the Church the problem was solved, but if he (or she) refused to change his religion, the Catholic would be disciplined by not being permitted to marry within the Church. But waves of ecumenicity have washed up even on Jaffna's distant shores. Nowadays a dispensation can be obtained by the non-Catholic if he agrees to permit the Catholic spouse to come to Church and to rear their children in the faith. But a good number of non-Catholics receive instruction and are baptized before they marry. Conversion to the faith by marriage is a common occurrence both in the Catholic and on a smaller scale in the Protestant Church.

Muslim Marriage

In contemplating the arrangement of a marriage for his son or daughter, the Muslim has a decidedly easier task before him than do the Hindus or Christians who live around him. To begin with, his community in Jaffna is relatively small and so he is acquainted with a large proportion of it. But more conveniently for him and very much to the commendation of the Muslims, he has no system of caste and also ignores both horoscopes and astrologers. It has sometimes been pointed out to Hindus that their Muslim neighbours

ignore practices which the Hindus fear to disregard, yet the Muslims do not suffer the evil consequences which the Hindus fear! Be that as it may, marriage arrangement is comparatively simple for Muslims and they have not followed the headlong rush to absurdly high dowries which afflicts the Tamils of Jaffna and elsewhere in Ceylon. Marriages are generally arranged when the men are 25-30 and the women 18-25. The daughters are given in marriage in order of their age.

The Muslims of southwestern Ceylon (Colombo) traditionally expect that the groom's side will initiate marriage negotiations. On the eastern side of the island around Batticaloa and Trincomalee, the bride's family starts things. In Jaffna, these traditions are melded and either side can raise the first question.

Muslims are fond of quoting a saying of the Prophet, "On three things do not delay:

When the time comes, pray.

If anyone dies, bury him promptly.

If marriage is discussed, finish it quickly."

A relative is sent to negotiate the marriage. If the match looks possible, some female relatives of the groom will go to see the bride and talk with her and her mother. As for ascertaining the views of the bride and groom, they have an opportunity to see each other at this time and the groom can decline the proposal. Apparently it is unheard of for the bride to do so. Dowry is also discussed. A date is set. The month of the Prophet's Birthday (or of any other religious holiday) is a good month. Since all Muslim holidays are based on moon months a holiday will appear in one month in one year and in another month a few years later so there can be no "lucky months" for weddings such as prevail among the Hindus and to some extent among Christians.

Love marriages are very rare but are not unknown, generally among University students.

Weddings take place at the bride's home, at night, generally between eight and twelve o'clock. The compound is decorated with

crepe paper and plantain stalks but not usually with flowers. Some Muslims have music but pious Muslims dislike film music which is all that is normally available on records so they do not have music for their weddings

The groom and the best man come to the bride's house and seat themselves in a kind of bower in the midst of the crowd of guests. When they arrive they are met by the bride's brother who ceremonially washes the groom's feet. (He also knows how to spare the groom's shoes!) The bride remains inside the house—her home. The fathers of the bride and of the groom are on each side of the groom. The imam stands in front of the groom, near the bride's father. The imam asks if the father as guardian gives the bride to him, the imam, to serve as guardian. The father consents and the imam says to the groom, "I am the guardian of N.; do you agree to marry her?" Question and answer are repeated three times. The groom then announces that he will give to the bride the *mahar,* a present of Rs. 900 which is the standard amount for this occasion. The *mahar* is a thousand rupees in Colombo and only a few hundred in other cities of Ceylon. The dowry of the bride can vary from one thousand to a hundred thousand rupees, or even more if the family is very prosperous. Sometimes the groom's family asks for no dowry.

The imam performs the very brief religious ceremony. He gives a homily in which he explains the significance of marriage and then he recites a prayer for the happiness of the couple.

The father of the bride takes the groom by the hand, leads him into the house and joins his hand to the bride's hand or else the groom gently holds the bride by a wisp of hair at her forehead. He sits down beside her. The groom then takes the *thali* from his pocket and puts it around his bride's neck. His oldest sister assists him in fastening the *thalikodi.* The bride's companions bring a cup of milk or a bottle of soda. The groom drinks half; the bride the other half. The groom then joins the male part of the company and they dine together. The bride and the other women eat in the ladies' section. Traditionally there is no honeymoon. The first week is spent at the bride's home; the next week or two at the home of the groom. They usually reside at the bride's home and their friends invite them out.

Whenever possible, the bride's father gives a home to his daughter for her dowry. If he cannot afford it, the bride receives possession of the home only after the death of her parents. If the father dies before the daughter is married, her mother and brother take care of her, or the eldest sister if there is no brother. If a girl should be orphaned, a judge may be appointed to act as her guardian.

Muslims are less guilty of wife beating, they claim. They argue that since drinking alcoholic beverages is forbidden, not many Muslims drink. They believe that drinking and wife beating are directly related, and this is a commonly accepted view, corroborated by Miss Skjonsberg.

Muslims are permitted by their laws in Sri Lanka to have as many as four wives. In the Muslim community in Jaffna, only one man has more than one wife; he has two. Economy seems to loom larger than romance.[64] It is well known that Muslims can obtain divorces easily—a subject, incidentally, rarely mentioned among Hindus and Christians. However, the procedure in Jaffna for divorce among Muslims is responsible and not hasty. A judge exists for such cases and he may invite three jurors to join him. After hearing the complaint and the request for a divorce, they summon the spouse and discuss the matter, hoping to effect a reconciliation. A second hearing is set for a month later and, if necessary, a third hearing a month after that.

If the couple remains determined at the third hearing, the divorce is agreed to and the husband says, "I divorce you," three times and the marriage is ended.

Attitude toward sex—The Jaffna man has a streak of what at first seems like puritanism in his make-up, particularly the older generation. The young people who obey their elders are apt to be imbued with the same attitude, unless they see a great many movies, as many of them do. Films are apt to modify some of their traditional notions, causing the youth to adopt a double standard in

[64] Christians, of course, are forbidden to have plural wives by Jesus' statement, "No man can serve two masters!"

which secretly they "know all about sex" from the movies but publicly they pretend to be innocent of such knowledge.

The Tamils much prefer modest circumlocution to blunt statements. One of my doctor friends said, "If one of my women patients has a discharge from the private sector..."

Perhaps the Jaffna man is not puritanical so much as he is merely prudish. But these are words which come to mind as one attempts to discuss attitudes toward sex in Jaffna. These attitudes were put somewhat humourously but generally accurately in the *Weekend* newspaper of June 10, 1979.[65] A few excerpts: "Sex is still treated as a 'secret field of study.'" "Many couples make love in a hurry, like washing their dirty hands." "In many Asian homes, sex is observed as a humourous experience. Many husbands and wives still pretend not to be interested in it at all and they make love simply because they happen to be (married)." "Most of us are still orthodox in dealing with matters connected with sex. It is a disqualification to be an expert in sexual behaviour."

From a similar source—an Indian newspaper of May 20, 1979 (*Sunday Standard*)—in an article entitled "Morality '79" quite similar views were expressed:

> Immorality in India denotes sex . . . Sexually we are perhaps the most childish nation in the world . . . Spokesmen of our culture rigidly maintain that no respectable, sane boy or girl feels any sexual urge prior to marriage.
>
> If I were a clever smuggler or an unscrupulous, smart adulterator, or if I were to precipitate a communal riot . . . I could still have a respectable public image. But if I dared express my attraction for my friend by holding her hand I would be instantly dubbed an immoral person.
>
> An average Indian or (Ceylon Tamil) would rather wait for half an hour than buy contraceptives or birth control pills in the

[65] "No Sex, Please, We're Sri Lankans," by T. Indra Lingam.

presence of other customers. To acknowledge openly that he or she has a physical drive is an indignity no Indian can bear.

The writer goes on to say that love marriages are looked down on partly because physical attraction is involved in them.

While it might be expected that in such a society young people about to be married might find it difficult to find information about sex, traditionally the Barber and the Dhobi's wife were to impart such knowledge. As an intimate, but by no means an equal, of the ladies of the household, the Dhobi's wife has been the person who, before the wedding, instructed the bride in the mysteries of sex. The Barber performed the same service for the bridegroom. In times past, the Dhobi's wife accompanied the bride's mother to the honeymoon chamber to inspect the marriage bed for bloodstains to testify to the virginity of the bride, a custom now disappearing. Because of her intimacy with the family's female members, the testimony of the Dhoby's wife is of great importance in those rare cases in which some scandalous rumour has been circulated against a female member of the family.

The obscurity and secrecy which surround the subject of sex in Ceylonese society certainly do not appear to have damaged the institution of marriage. At the same time, it is noteworthy that countries that have most openly publicized sexual knowledge suffer from high divorce rates. It would, of course, be difficult to prove a cause and effect relationship but the Jaffna man and his wife can be forgiven for having their private opinion in the matter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Religion

As the alphabet begins with A, so the universe begins with God.
Tirukkural

The people of Jaffna Peninsula are, of course, predominantly Hindu. According to the 1971 Census, 85.2% of Jaffna District were Hindus; Roman Catholics, 11.1%; Muslims, 1.5%; Protestants, 1.3% and Buddhists,.8%. The religious composition of Jaffna Town, however, is very different from that, for only 61% were Hindu; Christians were 27%; Muslims, 7% and Buddhists were 3%. In the town there are 8 mosques, one Buddhist temple, twenty-one Roman Catholic churches and dozens of Hindu temples.

Hinduism—It is interesting to observe that Hinduism identifies very closely with the society about it. In India it is a commonplace to say that Hinduism *is* India and Indian society. Hinduism rarely sits in judgment upon the society. On the other hand, Christianity condemns and preaches against those elements of its surrounding society—whether Western or Eastern—of which it does not approve. So do representatives of Buddhism and of Islam. The latter three religions have a structure from which opinions can originate and be expressed; Hinduism has no such structure.

In contrast to the more organized religions of the world, Hinduism has an informality, a lack of hierarchy, a congregationalism which are at times refreshingly simple and unstructured and at other times maddeningly disorganized. There is no united Hindu voice or view on any subject. There are no Hindu theological seminaries to point up opinion. It is even hard to get agreement as to what the essential teachings of Hinduism are. It is sometimes said that a belief in the truth of all religions,[66] in *karma,*

[66] Hindus believe that all religions lead to God and are willing to receive parts of other religions into their own. This tendency is well illustrated by the bus and lorry drivers who often put above their windscreens (windshields) pictures of

the reincarnation of the soul, the Vedas and the Agamas and the practice of vegetarianism and casteism are the essentials of the religion. But one or another of the great Hindu thinkers of modern times such as Vivekananda or Radhakrishnan, has questioned some of these fundamentals. At any rate, these seven elements are commonly held as true and characteristic by most Hindus in Ceylon. Bishop Kulandran once stated, "There is no statement which can be made about Hinduism which is false."

Vegetarianism—While there is certainly a sound, Hindu theological basis for vegetarianism, the practice is no longer as popular in Jaffna as it used to be. Some of my Hindu friends estimate that much less than half the Hindus of Jaffna are vegetarians, though many may be, briefly, because of a holy day or other religious reason. Vegetarians are admired because they represent simple living and discipline. While Hindus are not generally ascetic in the practice of their religion, they do admire asceticism in others, as desirable manifestations of discipline. Here and there, small examples of asceticism turn up in the society. For example, many Hindus have little furniture in their homes and eat on plantain leaves which are popular also because they are regarded as wholly unpolluted. These people were reared thus and they would rather save their money than buy unaccustomed household amenities. They feel that such simple living is a good way to live. Many Hindus fast once a month, or more—a bit of asceticism. Tuesdays and Fridays are the usual fasting days for the more pious Hindus; that is, they will omit the first meal of the day. Upon breaking their fast, some give the first bite of food to the everpresent crow.

In the past twenty years non-vegetarianism has become more common. Perhaps the culture is slowly returning to its ancient origins when Tamils were meat-eaters.[67] Although the boarding departments of all Hindu schools in Jaffna remain vegetarian, the

several Hindu gods and goddesses, and sometimes also of Buddha, Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

[67] Singaravelu, S., *Social Life of the Tamils: Classical Period,* 1966, Kuala Lumpur, p. 25.

young men, especially, get used to eating meat, even beef, in the shops after they come out of the movies or at public functions wherever short eats are served. They will not ask their mothers to pollute the kitchen with meat but they eat it more often now than formerly. Beef is making inroads despite the taboo against it simply because it is cheaper than mutton (goat meat). These changes in practice reflect a change in values and the influence of world civilization as mediated through the cities of the world and advertised everywhere on film.

Religions divided—All of the major world religions are split into two wings: Buddhism into Theravada and Mahayana; Islam into Shi'ite and Sunni; Christianity into Catholicism and Protestantism and Hinduism into Vaishnavite and Saivite. The Hindus of Jaffna are Saivites; only a few Vaishnavites live there. The detailed teachings of Saivite theology can be found in any book on comparative religion. In this chapter, the religious practices in the everyday life of the people, of whatever religion, will be described, beginning with Hinduism.

Temples—The village or local Hindu temple continues to be the center of cultural activity and the festival held every year is the most notable religious and cultural event of the year in the lives of most Hindus. At the present time secular entertainment, especially the cinema, has become a rival attraction to the cultural activities of the temples; this decline has been slightly compensated for by the increased popularity of the temple as the site for wedding ceremonies.

To the outsider who comes to Jaffna, the most obvious indications of Hinduism are the numerous temples, large and small. There were various reasons for the multiplicity of temples, one of which was that there was a strong tendency for each caste to desire its own temple. There are two outstanding temples in Jaffna Town, the Sivan Kovil in the Grand Bazaar and the Kandasamy Kovil in Nallur. The latter is the premier temple of the Peninsula, although several others rival the Sivan Kovil. The Nallur Temple is more ancient and belongs to the period of the Tamil kings although the actual temple building of that date was destroyed by the Portuguese and the present building is of the eighteenth century.

Nallur Kandasamy Temple—Tradition has it that the site of the original temple which the Portuguese razed, was approximately where St. James Anglican Church is located today. The temple's present location in Nallur is about a quarter mile distant from the old location. It attracts hundreds of worshippers daily, thousands on Fridays and hundreds of thousands at festival time. Sixteen Brahman Priests minister to the needs of the worshippers in performing the various ceremonies; they with their families live nearby. During the festival this number of Priests is doubled. As children, the Priests attend the local government schools like other children. Their priestcraft is imparted by their parents after school; they are reared to be Priests..

Puja (worship) is scheduled for six times a day: at 5 and 10 a.m., noon and at 4,6 and 7p.m. Twice a day *puja* is performed before each of the ten deities in the Temple, one Priest at each shrine. At the 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. *pujas* all 10 shrines are used. This has nothing to do with the size of the crowd of worshippers or even whether there is any crowd but is simply a following of procedure at the Temple. It happens, however, that the largest crowds are generally present at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

A few minutes before each *puja,* an *abishekkam* is performed, an anointing of the image with water, then coconut water, followed by milk and with *panjammurrudam*, a mixture of honey and fruits. Worshippers commonly regard this as bathing the deity and call it *thirtam.*

The Priest who is performing the *puja* presents the light, an oil lamp and some camphor to the deity, recites mantrams and offers flowers. Coconuts, plantains, fruit, betel and cooked rice are also offered before the deity, and the *puja* is concluded.

The worshipper who comes to the Temple at any time walks to an inner courtyard where he stands at some distance in front of the deity. He worships it and stands quietly in meditation for a short time. Then he walks three times around the inner courtyard, returns to his place before the holy of holies and again worships and meditates. Then he leaves, perhaps smearing a bit of holy ash on his arms and forehead as he departs.

No entertainment is permitted at the Temple during festival time or at any other time. The *nathaswaram* (trumpet) is played in connection with the *pujas* and festivals.

Wedding parties sometimes come and stand in the outer courtyard to tie the *thalikodi* during the *puja.* This Temple has often been pointed out to me as the most efficiently operated in Jaffna. "Events begin there on time," is the impressive proof most commonly cited.

Sivan Kovil—The other most outstanding temple in Jaffna Town, Sivan Kovil, was built in the Dutch period by a businessman and it is well endowed. Scattered over the Jaffna Region are several dozen other large temples of impressive size and generally with extensive grounds. Between these very large temples and the small ones about to be mentioned are many temples of intermediate size.

Besides the big temples, Hindu temples of a twenty or thirty foot dimension are thickly scattered over the countryside. These are neighbourhood, or family temples in which no Priest is resident. Local residents come to these and worship without a Priest, particularly on Fridays. A worshipper may happen by at any time and pay his respects to the deity or deities within. Even in rural areas, these little temples may be as numerous as thirty in a circle of four miles diameter. The Parliamentary Committee on Hindu Temporalities, chaired by Mr. K. Kanagaratnam, M. P.from Vaddukoddai,in 1951, reported that there were 1196 temples in Jaffna District at that time.

There is, of course, much more going on in the larger temples. All of these have festivals, most for ten days, but a few for considerably longer times during which enormous crowds of people come. Whether in large temples or small, the gods who are worshipped are chiefly Siva and Vishnu, each under a number of different names. Siva has one thousand eight names and Vishnu one

thousand. Many of these are titles which describe one or another of their achievements on earth.[68]

Holy ash—As the worshipper leaves the temple after worship he usually dips his finger into a container of holy ash, as I mentioned. I had always assumed that this was a quiet way of telling people he had been to worship, but a friend explained the significance of holy ash as "a sign which shows the heart is pure because you obtain pure holy ash by burning the dirt and the heart is like that dirt. The heart must be purified by burning and then it will be pure; the holy ash is the symbol of this process." The ash is obtained by burning cowdung.

Domestic worship—A great many Hindus are personally pious and have in their home a worship room in which are arrayed pictures or idols of various deities. Flowers are offered to them regularly or they are decorated with permanent garlands and daily all or most of the family members pray to these images briefly or spend some time in meditation or worship. It is probably a waste of time to ask whether idol worshippers worship the idol itself. A generation ago a Hindu lad, not over fourteen, informed me, "The idol is not the god itself, but represents a god and the prayer we offer it is the same as a prayer to the god."

If the house has but one room, a picture or small idol will be given a place of honour within it. It should be noted that the shrine room is never a bedroom for adults. In a one-room house the parents will sleep on the veranda; their children, however, can sleep inside. A puritanical aspect of Hindus is revealed by the fact that they feel it

[68] Although most of this chapter is based on general knowledge and conversation with Hindu friends, I have drawn on Kanapathi Pillai, K., "Popular Religion among the Ceylon Tamils," *Tamil Culture,* vol. 8, 1969, Madras, pp. 26-31; DeSilva, K. M., "Hinduism and Islam in Post Independence Sri Lanka," *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies,* Jan.-Dec., 1974, Colombo; Navaratnam, C. S., *A Short History of Hinduism in Ceylon and Three Essays on the Tamils,* Jaffna, 1964; Cartman, J., *Hinduism in Ceylon,* 1957, Colombo; and the manuscript of Bishop S. Kulandran's book on Transcendence in the various world religions.

would be inappropriate or impious if a married couple were to have intercourse in the shrine room.

Prayer—Some Hindus claim to enjoy mystical experiences in their worship. When they close their eyes in prayer and repeat the name of a deity, they "lock on" to him or her and the rest of the world and reality fade away. Prayer is an intimate, direct communion with their god. I heard of a pious Hindu gentleman near Vaddukoddai who was a devotee of Krishna. He claimed that because he had worshipped Krishna for a long time, Krishna loved him. He never made a move without consulting Krishna, asking his permission before doing anything. The permission was given by means of the ringing of a bell which hung over the man's bed in front of the picture of Krishna which the man worshipped. When the bell rang, the man believed that Krishna had given him permission to do the thing asked for.

Flower oracle—Believers in other religions sometimes make rather similar claims. In Jaffna today, the equivalent of a Christian's "putting out a fleece" is that the Hindu prays to his or her household deity and puts one or more flowers above the deity's picture. The worshipper then prays in such a way as to require a yes or no answer or the granting of permission. If the flower falls off the frame of the picture, it is regarded as an affirmative reply.

Pilgrimage—Another indication of interest in religion is the predilection to pilgrimage. An age-old tradition, the going on pilgrimage to holy places far and near, remains a strong Hindu tradition. For Jaffna Hindus, the longest pilgrimage possible in Sri Lanka is to go to Kataragama near the southern tip of the island, about 300 miles distant. This pilgrimage, however, has lost much of its appeal at the present time because of the strained relations with the Sinhalese; the Tamils feel apprehensive about making the trip.

We shall next look at the annual ceremonies and festivals and then at some of the other activities of the great temples of Jaffna.

Deepavali—When the rainy season is well begun, in late October or early November in each year, then comes *Deepavali* (Festival of Lights)—a big festival in the villages and cities of India; a quiet, modest time of festivity in Ceylon. The lights signify the

triumph of the forces of good over the forces of evil and darkness. On that day, and for weeks afterward, the visitor can observe that many people seem to be well dressed; almost everybody gets new clothes at *Deepavali*. Everyone's home will have been given a thorough housecleaning (the "fall" housecleaning) and of course the day begins with a bath. For the faithful, this must be an oil bath. Even the poor will contrive to obtain some oil. All Hindus worship at the temple and the children have a lot of fun. After the *puja* they return home for morning tea at which some of the food will be a little fancier than usual. It is the first day of the new business year for merchants and shopkeepers who participate in a little worship service as they open a new set of account books. There is a great deal of visiting by relatives and neighbours. Sweets and cakes are sent to them as gifts.

Virlakkidu—In Jaffna, the lights which were not so prominent at *Deepavali* appear in great numbers at *Virlakkidu*, a festival which comes about midway between *Deepavali* and *Pongal* around the first of December.

Thai Pongal—In the order of time, the next festival is *Thai Pongal* (Festival of Milk Rice). This is a harvest festival but it comes at the beginning of harvest rather than at its end. It is also in honour of the sun's turning northward toward summer. *Pongal* falls in January about the time that the earliest rice has begun to be cut and gathered. After the family's usual morning baths, some recently harvested rice is cooked in a new clay pot out in front of the house, in the open, to serve as an offering to the sun. The rice is cooked with milk and sweetened with brown sugar (jaggery), so it is called "milk rice" or "sweet rice." The family prays for a good harvest in the coming year.

The day after *Thai Pongal* is the *Madu* (Cow) *Pongal*. Cows are not only respected and venerated in Tamil culture, they are at times worshipped.[69] *Madu Pongal* is the chief of such times. As the home of the worshipper has been carefully cleansed for *Thai Pongal*, the cows' shed is cleaned and decorated and so are the cows and bulls.

[69] Kanapathi Pillai, K., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

The father of the household makes a little hearth near the cowshed and, with some ceremony, prepares some milk rice on this new fireplace. The cattle are garlanded, their horns may be painted and holy ash smeared on their foreheads with sandalwood paste, perhaps. The rice is now put on plantain leaves on the floor with plantains, oil cakes and other nice things to eat and the family has another holiday breakfast after which the head of the house lights camphor cakes and leads the family in brief worship of the cattle. Then the cows and bullocks are fed milk rice and other fodder, untied and given some unusual freedom for the day. Especially they are not worked on that day.

The holy cow—Hindus normally say that the cow is worshipped because "it is our mother." From the most ancient times cows have been venerated in India and therefore in Jaffna, because they did so much for the people. The good reputation of the cow seems to reach out and include even those cows which give no milk, draw no carts and are not only totally useless but counterproductively consume precious, scarce fodder. On the other hand, though the water buffalo produces far more milk than the average cow, it is not given the esteem which the cow receives. Farmers who have this high regard for cows will not send an old cow to be slaughtered. Such kindness is less often practiced today.

New Years—The next festival falls on either April 13 or 14, the Tamil New Year. This is the time for feasting and merry-making and for family reunions for several days before the new year, avoiding Thursdays and Sundays which are adjudged inauspicious.[70] This is the time of "spring" housecleaning of home and compound, and in the neat surroundings relatives make themselves at home. On New Years day the family members have their ceremonial baths, put on new clothes and perform *puja* in the local temple. Then the morning meal occurs, brightened up with "sweet rice," cakes and fruit. The father of the household gives presents to his children and to other dependents. The men may meet together and play cards. The boys will play *thatchi* and *kiddy* .Only vegetarian meals are taken on New Years.

Temple festivals—While the Vishnu temples and some of the largest Saivite temples, including Nallur, hold their festivals in July-August or later, most Saivite temples' festivals are in the first half of the year. All the larger and more important temples have a festival annually. The two great temples, Nallur Kandasamy and Maviddapuram, each have festivals of twenty-five days' duration. Very recently, a second large temple in Nallur, the Vira Mahal Ammal Temple, is reported to have increased its festival time to twenty-five days also. There are rows of refreshment stands and little shops selling bangles, toys, curios, pots and pans, silverware, mats and baskets, ice cream, cool drinks, tea, coffee, plantains, gram (like cowpeas and soybeans) and, of course, the items used in the temple offerings and ceremonies such as fruit, vegetables, incense, camphor and other substances.

Among the crowds of people who are attending the festival , all sorts of social and business events are taking place. Relatives meet and discuss marriage arrangements , prospective brides and grooms have the opportunity to view each other discreetly, business deals are discussed, land is bought and sold; an air of relaxation and festivity prevails, the children are permitted some liberties and, most importantly, ceremonies of worship are regularly conducted by one or another of the Priests throughout the day and part of the night. There may be more than one service going on at the same time. On rare occasions a fire walking ceremony may be held. This is particularly the custom at the great temple at Kataragama. The latter temple's festival has until very recent years been a true national event. It begins at the time of the new moon in June and continues for fifteen days.

Thirtham—Near the end of the festival, the chief deity in the temple is taken for a short outing, a ride in the giant "car" which, of ponderous timber construction and a height of 30-40 feet, has been standing adjacent to the temple for a year since the last ride. The deity is placed in the car and this juggernaut is hauled by the faithful on many ropes in a single circuit of the temple. Later the same day, or the next day, the deity is carried by the Priest, surrounded by a

[70] But not always, apparently; New Years 1980 is Sunday, April 13.

crowd of worshippers, to the bank of the local bathing place—a tank, a river or the sea. The idol is left on the bank and his weapon or some other symbol is carried as a substitute and bathed. The Priest and the people also bathe along with this symbol. The ceremony is called the *thirtham* and it is a climactic event, usually performed on the last day of the festival.[71]

Dress—In some religions, people dress up to go to worship. Hindus believe that worshippers should be soberly and modestly attired; the ladies in less than their most elegant saris, the men bare-bodied from the waist up and everyone barefooted. But the bright coloured saris which enliven the appearance of the crowd at a festival indicate that many have succumbed to the temptations of fashion. A student of mine years ago wrote, "It is necessary to see that religious activities are conducted in a humble way."

Vows and *kavadi*—In addition to frivolity, fellowship, family matters and formal *pujas,* devout Hindus may come to the festival for private and personal worship as well. And this may include, for men, rolling around the temple in the dust one or more times to pay a vow. The female devotee will not roll but instead measures her length on the ground by prostrating herself; then standing and putting her feet where her head had been, she again measures her length, thus laboriously circling the temple or some portion of it. Others repay a vow by performing a *kavadi.* The point to the repayment is that the worshipper has vowed, for example, to circle the temple a certain number of times if the god prayed to will answer his or her prayer for a good harvest, a marriage arranged, recovery from serious illness, safety in a perilous undertaking, birth of a child after a long period of sterility, profits or promotion in

[71] In the area of the village where the artisans live, the temple frequented by them generally belongs to one artisan caste and at the annual festival other artisan groups will come and pay for certain ceremonies to be performed . For example, at a certain Pillaiyar temple owned by the Oilmongers caste, a Goldsmith, a group of Potters and a wealthy Blacksmith had paid for ceremonies. David, K., "Spatial Organization and Normative Schemes in Jaffna," *Modern Ceylon Studies,* vol. 4, Jan-July, 1973, page 29.

business, relief from debts or worries,[72] success in an examination or interview or some other boon.

The *kavadi* is a small arch, fancily decorated, often with peacock feathers, and worn on the shoulders of the devotee. *Kavadis* are obtained from proprietors who own several which they have made by a Carpenter. They hire it out to anyone and they also have the metal hooks and ropes which are ordinarily used on such occasions. The small hooks and barbs are made by Goldsmiths. The person carrying the *kavadi* sometimes has metal hooks put into the muscles on each side of his spine, cords tied to the hooks, and the cords attached to a light cart or held in the hands of a friend. Such devotees will often have numerous metal barbs, somewhat like fishhooks, introduced under the skin on their chests and perhaps a long, thin knife piercing their cheeks. Metal hooks for such purposes are sometimes corroded; a doctor years ago informed me that he had seen such hooks which were of iron and rusty. Tetanus is a common disease in Sri Lanka but no one ever heard of a devotee dying of tetanus. This is regarded by the Hindu faithful as a sign that God takes care of his own and no one can deny it! Some doctors affirm, however, that tetanus germs are harboured in the soil and not in the air or on the walls or rafters of temples. While the larger hooks are of iron or copper, the small hooks and barbs are generally of silver which is regarded as a repellant of tetanus.

When the worshipper gets to the temple of his destination, he circles the outer courtyard and then the inner courtyard and comes to the holy of holies before the deity Kandasamy (Murugan).There he offers the *kavadi* to the god and the *kavadi* is put aside for the proprietor to reclaim. Tied to it are two small brass pots containing milk. These are presented as offerings and the Priest uses this milk for subsequent anointings of the deity in services later in the day. After making his offerings, the worshipper departs to bathe and to put on clean clothes.

[72] Somanader, S. V. O., "Penances in Hindu Temples," *Ceylon Today,* vol. 7, no. 7, July, 1958, Colombo, p. 8.

Vows may be paid at other times of the year also, not just at festival time. Also, they can be in various forms different from the one just described. One may meet a worshipper fulfilling his vow by rolling along the road for a mile or several miles with his destination a well known temple dedicated to the god to whom he had directed his prayer and vow. This is a very literal example of holy rolling. The devotee is accompanied by a happy group of his friends, attired for *puja* at the temple, who walk beside him and cheer him on his way as well as protect him from the danger of passing traffic. Among these may be his wife although women themselves do not take a *kavadi*. Sometimes children perform this vow, however, with a *kavadi.* Although the devotee whose friends gave me permission to photograph him as he lay on the road had his elbows, hips, knees and shoulders wrapped in cloth to prevent the wearing away of the skin, I am told that the usual worshipper who performs his vow by rolling down the highway does not so protect himself.

Cobra worship—A few years ago (1969) Dr. K. KanapathiPillai, Professor of Tamil at the University of Ceylon, described a number of lesser known worship practices of his fellow Hindus in Ceylon and I quote him at length concerning these interesting observances:[73]

Like (the cows) the cobra is also an object of worship.[74] The worship is a very ancient one among the Dravidians. The cobra forms an intimate part of the Siva cult also. It is considered as an ornament of Siva.

There are several types of cobras; the best of them is the King cobra. This is white[75] in colour and will never attack anyone unless it is provoked. This type is considered divine and is worshipped by people, especially in Malabar. In Ceylon also there are several temples dedicated to cobras. Even in parts of Ceylon where

[73] *Op. cit.,* pp. 27-30.

[74] Although, in exact opposition to the cow, the snake has no material use whatsoever and, in addition, is potentially dangerous.

[75] The white is greyish. Some cobras have a metallic blue hue combined with their light colour.

Sinhalese live, the cobra is held in veneration. A Sinhalese man will never injure or kill a cobra. He thinks that one of his ancestors might have been born in this birth as a cobra.

In these cobra temples, annual festivals are held and are well attended. "The *puja* is offered to the image of the cobra."[76] In the temple grounds, but to one side, frequently associated with an anthill, the family of cobras lives. These snakes do no harm to the worshippers and are often fed milk by them.[77] Professor KanapathiPillai continues:

If by any chance some poisonous insect bites somebody who lives in the neighbourhood of the village where the Nagas temple is, he makes vows to the deity; and when the effect of the poison is healed, he goes to the temple and makes offerings in fulfillment of the vow. In one village in North Ceylon where a Naga temple exists it is said that no one has died so far of snake poisoning. If by chance a person is bitten by a snake he immediately goes to the temple, takes a lump of earth from the anthill there, mixes it with water taken from the sacred tank there and drinks it. He rests in the temple premises for a couple of days praying to the deity. He gets well and goes home.

[76] In Jaffna, temples devoted to *Naga* worship are located on Nainative, at Nagarcoil on the Peninsula and near Kilinochchi in the Wanni. The last mentioned is where the snakebite immunity is said to exist.

[77] Most foreigners take a dim view of snakes in general and certainly of cobras, since these are poisonous. The snake is the villain—a form of the Devil—in the Bible, in great contrast to its revered position in Hinduism. The way Hindus feel about cobras is well expressed by the younger sister of the great Jawaharlal Nehru in her autobiography (Hutheesing, K., *With No Regrets: An Autobiography,* 1944, Bombay, pp. 22-23). "We have many [sheds] behind our house where coal, wood and other things used to be stored up. A huge cobra used to live in one where the wood was kept. Ever since I could remember, it had been there. It molested no one and the servants went there unhesitatingly even late at night. Often the cobra could be seen gliding along the garden. No one was scared or bothered about it. The popular superstition was that so long as it was there guarding the interest of the family, no harm could come to the house."

Mother Goddess—Another important worship among the Ceylon Tamils is the worship of the Mother Goddess...in the form of Kali, Durga, Camunda, etc. The most popular is the Kali form of worship. There are big temples as well as small temples dedicated to this goddess. She is also a house goddess to whom offerings are made in a sacred corner of the house on auspicious days. She is also propitiated on occasions when important events take place in the family. She is looked upon as the guardian of the house who protects the members of the house from every evil that might befall them. Of the big temples dedicated to her, some are officiated by professional Brahman priests according to Agamic rituals; others are officiated by *pujaris* in the old Tamil way.[78]

Pongal—In these temples annual *pongal* feasts are held to the accompaniment of the martial drum which was used by the ancient Tamils in their wars. Here when the *puja* is being performed by the *pujari,* the devotee becomes possessed of the Goddess. In frenzy he runs in front of the drummers and dances to the beat of the drum. To the onlooker this will remind him of the war dances of ancient Tamilnad. While he dances, people pour pots full of water on his head to appease his frenzy. In this condition he utters oracles and prophecies. When the *puja* is over the man falls down on the ground and the ceremony is over.

Velvi—The annual *puja* in these temples is called *velvi* and it takes place usually in the morning of an appointed day of the year. (The use of the word *velvi* implies that goats and/or fowls will be sacrificed, a practice said to be dying out in Jaffna.) The previous night is a festive occasion. The village folk will assemble in the temple premises in large numbers and boil pots of milk-rice ceremoniously. *Kavadis* come in large numbers throughout the night to the temple to the accompaniment of music and tom-tom. Some people make vows to take *karakam* in the temple.

[78] There are temples to Kali at Sangarathai (Vaddukoddai), Chulipuram and Nallur where the Vira Mahali Ammal Tample is dedicated to Kali. There is a Durga Temple at Tellipelloi.

While Professor KanapathiPillai says *karakam* is an interesting event , this kind of village or folk religious rite is rare in Jaffna if, indeed, it has not entirely disappeared. One of the last places it could be found was at Alaveddy where a few persons of the Pandari caste, Vira Saivites, were able to perform this ceremony.

A village temple's celebration—Under a nearly full moon that seemed to shine as brightly as any Poya moon, we attended the celebration of Asura's Defeat (Suran por) which commemorates the defeat of the evil forces of Asura, the devil, by Ammal, the goddess mother of Murugan and Ganesh,.two of Jaffna's most popular deities. About 8:00 p.m. on an early October night, families and groups of neighbours began passing the front gate of our friend at whose house we were waiting. Most of the passersby were hurrying as if they feared to miss part of the show, yet it was all behind them still. In a quarter of an hour Asura came along, an idol about five feet high, made of wood and mounted on a wooden base which, though heavy, would revolve like a potter's wheel. The image was garishly decorated with brightly coloured enamels. Asura's head was disguised with an elephant's head. The evil one was wearing a helmet and carrying a war bow with an arrow ready to shoot. This interesting construction was carried on a platform of sorts, supported by two heavy wooden poles about five inches in diameter and perhaps sixteen feet long. Six muscular young men were carrying each of the two poles, their connecting timbers, the revolving platform on which the idol was mounted and carrying also a man who, for the past forty years has annually enthusiastically and energetically stood behind the idol and manipulated it in the stylized battle about to take place.

After passing our compound, this party came to the main road in front of a local college and waited for the forces of good which, as everywhere, seem to move more slowly than the forces of evil. In half an hour, while neighbours came in greater abundance along the lane, the land-barge of the goddess slowly approached, accompanied by two Nadduvar musicians, one playing an oboe and the other the drum called *thavil.* Nearly a dozen young men with bare torsos, were supporting each of the two poles which held Ammal aloft. Only a Kipling could describe the intricate decorations surrounding the small dark figure of the goddess, almost hidden by the colourful

mass of finery in which she appeared. A concealed battery-powered light shone point blank upon her image, illuminating the decorations all around her.

Coming to the main thoroughfare, the party of the goddess took a position in the middle of the road, facing down it and there, at some distance, were Asura and his minions. Three horse-like figures, each supported by a man and accompanied by the oboe and the drum, danced in the street for ten to fifteen minutes. A couple of small boys danced at the edge of their circle with remarkable skill and alacrity. Then the dancers withdrew and the attack began.

Asura's party now made the first of twenty to thirty charges at the beleaguered goddess whose party remained stationary except for a time or two when they moved to one side of the road or the other against the opposition. In the main the party of the goddess practiced non-violence. Asura and company would retreat from her for thirty, sixty or even an hundred feet, then come at a fast walk or trot up to the goddess, closely intimidating and threatening her with the bow and arrow. These weapons were replaced by a short sword and later with a battle axe and shield, from time to time.

As the strong young men rushed their burden up and down the road, sweat soon broke out upon them but their enthusiasm never flagged. The long, narrow contraption which they carried rocked from side to side or was caused to pitch up and down from front to back. The man behind the figure of Asura had a tough ride but he was skilled and experienced and was never surprised by any move.

A few thousand people were lining the road, adjoining lanes and looking over compound walls by the time the attack got under way. A cool wind of eighty degrees or so caressed us all and the tropical moon kept all the surroundings from obscurity.

At last came the finale of the first act. Without moving a finger, Ammal's force ("looks can kill") deprived Asura of his head which flipped over backward and hung on its hinges. There were excitement and cheers and quickly the crowd moved up the road a few hundred yards for Act Two. Since Asura has nine heads the performance is repeated eight more times as the entourage wends its way back to the temple less than a mile away. The ninth and final

decapitation takes place at the temple, in the small hours of the morning. There will be a fair amount of absenteeism next day at work in the locality!

The temple from which this colourful ceremony sets out and to which it returns is dedicated to Siva. It belongs to Thimilar caste people who in the past were associated mainly with fishing. Some of the group worked as ayurvedic physicians, magicians and their assistants. And today few of them fish any longer. Education and oil riches have changed this village greatly. Many workers have turned to masonry, bus driving, security guards work and other modern occupations while sending their children to the neighbouring schools. Now many of their children have government jobs, or clerical work in private business and a good many have gone to the Middle East. The Thimilar community has come up in the world a bit, economically and socially.

Their annual celebration of good over evil coincides with the similar festival of Dassehra in India. The forty-foot figures of evil on the open maidan lying between Old Delhi and New Delhi would be destroyed about the same time that Asura was losing one of his heads in Sitthankerny. However, the Hindus of Jaffna do not pay attention to the festival of Dassehra and the great story of the Ram Lila, preferring the Navaratri (nine nights) Festival with three nights of worship and celebration in honour of each of the three most important goddesses worshipped in Jaffna: Durga, wife of Siva, Laxmi, goddess of wealth and the final three nights for Saraswathi, the goddess of learning and education. The final night of the Saraswathi *puja* is the climax and it is on this night that the worshippers at the Siva Temple, Sitthankerny, put on their Suranpor pageant each year .It is a purely lay or congregational event: no Priest participated.

This Suranpor celebrated early is connected with the honour and triumph of a goddess, and appears to be a tradition peculiar to this locality. Seven days after *Deepavali* the usual celebration of Suranpor takes place in many temples of the Jaffna Region. This is a triumph of a male deity, the god Murugan. On the *Deepavali* day itself , Suranpor is celebrated in a Vaishnavite temple at Vallipuram, near Pt. Pedro.

Religion in agriculture—All aspects of the process of ploughing, sowing and harvesting paddy are fully permeated with religious procedures although there have been some changes since J. P. Lewis described them in 1883![79] Paddy cultivation must, of course, begin on an auspicious day. The rule is, "Sowing should not be done on Tuesday, nor reaping on Wednesday." Failure to pay attention to the proper times means that mischievous fairies or elves called *kulis* will take off part of the harvest. Manuring the field is the first step and it should begin on an auspicious day after worship of Pillaiyar.

Sometimes, however, the field is ploughed very promptly after harvest and the manuring done later. But whenever the field is to be ploughed, most farmers are careful to bring a team of oxen, sometimes decorated with flowers and coloured powders, and split a coconut to Pillaiyar in the field before yoking the oxen to the plough. The bulls should be facing north and east when this happens. They may then proceed to plough the field, or if there is not time to complete the task just then, the farmer and his bulls plough three curving furrows and finish the task later. If the field is to be ploughed by tractor, worship remains just as essential; the mechanization does not affect the necessity of the ceremony.

Breaking coconuts—In many Hindu rites, and especially in these agricultural ceremonies, a coconut is broken at the beginning of the performing of the worship. This is an offering to Ganesh or Pillaiyar in his capacity as lord of obstacles (Vigneswara). The dashing of the coconut is regarded as a prayer for the deity to remove the obstacles associated with beginning the new activity. Hence, Ganesh is thought of as lord of beginnings.

Sowing takes place in August and September. Avoiding Tuesday, on an auspicious day, the owner prepares a *pongal* offering at his temple: rice, milk, young coconuts, betel and camphor. At the astrologically determined hour, a little seed paddy and a mamoty are

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[79] "Tamil Customs and Ceremonies connected with paddy Cultivation in the Jaffna District," *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,* vol. 8., pp. 305-320.

taken to the field. Facing north, the owner offers a young coconut, then sows his handful of paddy and hoes it in with the mamoty. After that, the sowing of the field can proceed, or be delayed for some time.

The paddy is reaped in January, February or even up into March. It must not begin on a Wednesday. At the lucky hour, the owner fashions a rough image of Pillaiyar out of cowdung, decorates it and worships it. Leaving his house, he passes by lucky objects set up for his departure and, if he passes a temple on his way to the field, he worships there. Arriving at the field he once more splits a coconut, reaps a few heads of rice and takes them home and threshes some, while hanging a few other stalks up in his house, unthreshed.

But the peasant cultivator feels he has to be the most careful about the proprieties of beginning to thresh the grain. It is, of course, begun auspiciously after a circular threshing floor—the ground—has been cleared off in a suitable part of the field. The boundary of this circle is strewn with certain kinds of leaves to keep off the *kulis*. Another cowdung image of Pillaiyar is worshipped. A hardwood stake is fixed in the center of the circle with a few ears of paddy and some margosa leaves tied to it.

The ground is sprinkled with water and cowdung to purify it and a coconut offered. Then a man ceremonially puts a few stalks of paddy around the stake, followed by the servants and the threshers until a threshable quantity is accumulated. Shouting "good luck,"[80] they bring in the buffaloes or the bulls and start driving them around the stake to which they are tethered, which is the way most threshing is done, although in 1980 some is done by tractor. (The tractor is driven round and round on the paddy.)

When the threshing is finished, careful ceremonial procedures are followed in handling the straw and the grain. Pillaiyar is worshipped yet again and a cord put around the paddy to protect it. Many lucky customs need to be employed all around the threshing process and the winnowing out of the chaff is treated as solemnly as what went before it.

Evil spirits—Sometimes scarecrows are observed out in a field. These may be there, indeed, to ward off birds, but they are also used to ward off the evil eye.[81] From what was said in Chapter Two on superstitions it is apparent that there exists in Jaffna a vigourous and widespread belief in, and fear of, evil spirits or devils. Such a belief is not based on the Vedas or the Agamas; it seems to be folk religion. The person who may be regarded as the highest non-Brahman religious professional in Jaffna Region, if not all Ceylon, told me, "Evil spirits have no place in our *puja*." Fear of devils, incidentally, is even more prevalent among Sinhalese Buddhist villagers as Wirz showed in his book on varieties of healing among the Sinhalese.

Evil spirits are very real in Jaffna; devil possession is recognized as one species of illness quite different from physical ailments and equally to be coped with. Not only Hindus but many Christians believe in the existence of evil spirits although the details of the belief differ between the two religions. While a parish priest and before he became a bishop, the present Anglican Bishop of Colombo was well known for his effectiveness in conducting services of exorcism. Among Hindus, the rite of exorcism is performed occasionally.

At Hindu weddings and funerals the evil spirits are kept at bay by firecrackers. All the people present know that the firecrackers are harmless but they feel confident that the evil spirits are not that wise. Sometimes a light is left burning in an empty house at night, to keep the spirits from taking over the house. All the neighbours know the house is empty; the evil spirits do not. It is difficult to understand why anyone should be afraid of evil spirits of such infantile intellects. Apparently the spirits are regarded as superhuman in power but subhuman in intelligence.[82]

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[80] The shout, in Tamil, is *poli, poli,* "may it multiply."

[81] Lewis, J. P. , *ibid.*, pp. 313-320.

[82] An observation of the late Rev. Dr. Sydney K. Bunker, president of Jaffna College.

Hindu Temporalities—The biggest stirring in the Hindu community in Jaffna and throughout Ceylon occurred in 1950 when Parliament appointed a number of Hindu Members of Parliament to examine three practices of Hindus on which there was a difference of opinion among the faithful. The general subject was referred to as "Hindu Temporalities" and the committee was chaired by Mr. K. Kanagaratnam from Vaddukoddai. A lucid account of the hearings was published as the *Report of the Special Committee on Hindu Temporalities,* Sessional Paper V—1951, Parts 1 and 2, by the Ceylon Government Press. Although it occurred nearly thirty years ago, its effect on Hinduism in Jaffna today is perceptible and many of the views presented to the Committee continue to be held by Hindus today. Some attention, then, should be given here to views expressed at the hearings to which many representatives of all shades of Hindu opinion were invited, both persons speaking for themselves and those representing organizations.

The Special Committee was requested to consider whether the management of Hindu temples should be reformed, all castes admitted to temples and animal sacrifices abolished.

Those in favour of regulation of temple management generally agreed that the management should not be in the hands of the State but vested in a local committee for each temple. But others preferred a board of control for a larger area.

In the evidence submitted, there was a continual citing of Hindu practices in Mother India in support of the witnesses' viewpoint. For example, it was pointed out in favour of opening temples to all comers; that in India, Barbers are allowed in Hindu temples, in Jaffna they are not; while Dhobies are admitted in Jaffna but not in India. As generally happens in religious discussions, some who gave their views against any changes cited scriptures and some who were for the changes cited other scriptures. Arumuga Navalar, who led the revival of Hinduism in the period after 1850, was frequently quoted as favouring temple entry for all.

The following is a summary of the numbers of the witnesses heard and their views:

	Regulation of temple management	Ending animal sacrifice	Open temple to all castes
ASSOCIATION			
Favored	50	58	51
Opposed	13	7	26
TEMPLE AUTHORITIES			
Favored	11	18	11
Opposed	61	44	67
INDIVIDUALS			
Favored	139	86	127
Opposed	35	26	58

One of the most dramatic presentations of the views and feelings of Jaffna Hindus was voiced by a delegation from the association of two hundred untouchables, the Saiva Viruththi Sangam of Erlalai South, a village near Tellipallai:

> We are treated as depressed classes, but no one has defined who is a depressed class person. Many of us are fairly clean, vegetarian, well-conducted and even rich, but all of these are of no avail because the caste Hindus harbour a sense of superiority and prevent by all means in their power our becoming their equals. We protest against being kept out of temples on the mere accident of our being born in a particular caste. Where is the logic of the Agamas in allowing Dhobies and fishermen to enter into temples and keeping us out? Even though we are vegetarians and are engaged in occupations which by no stretch of the imagination can be called unclean, we are not allowed to enter temples. But Dhobies who wash the dirty clothes of everybody and fishermen who engage themselves in the

occupation of killing and eating fish, are freely admitted. Don't you think we have reason to be dissatisfied?

An interesting observation on animal sacrifice was made by representatives of the Society for the Propagation of Hindu Religion, Chankanai:

> It is said that animal sacrifice is made on account of one's religious faith. This faith is based on the belief that favours can be received from the deity if animal sacrifice is offered. When a man suffers from a disease, he makes a vow to donate a goat to the deity if that deity helps him to cure the disease. After the man is cured of the disease the said goat is taken to the temple and slaughtered on the appointed day. There the man who made the vow and received the favour from the deity, after killing the goat, pays a rupee or half a rupee to the temple authorities, but takes away the donated goat himself. This is the case of every animal or bird sacrificed. Here you will see that the man has cheated the deity after receiving a favour. We say that this cheating should be stopped by man or by law. If a man makes an honest vow, he must give the goat or bird he promised in full without claiming it back. Why not to the manager of the temple?

The Committee made the following interesting comments regarding the temple Priests:

> A great many of the evils prevalent in the Hindu temples today are the direct result of the ignorance of the priests. As a class they have fallen from the very high position they once occupied in Hindu society. Their knowledge of the religion and the relevant scriptures is poor. With few exceptions they have ceased to be looked upon as the teachers of our religion or to be respected as the spiritual "gurus" of the Hindus. Many of them are at the mercy of the managers or trustees of temples. No doubt the responsibility for this sad state of affairs rightly rests on the Hindu community as a whole. We have for generations neglected the priestly classes and assigned them a position as mendicants and temple servants. If the Hindu religion is going to regain its glory, the priestly classes should be raised to their old status as religious leaders. To achieve this end, the one and only thing that matters is the provision of adequate facilities and opportunities for the education and training of the priests. Faith in temple worship is waning among the educated classes because of their lack of faith in the competence and the character of the temple priests. Managers and trustees of temples will agree with us that in the interests of the temples, as well as of the religious life of the people as a whole, the officiating priests should be persons of very high character, erudition and spirituality. We earnestly feel that early steps should be taken to establish a first grade college exclusively for the education of the children of the priestly classes in Tamil and Sanscrit, so that a young man who selects the priesthood as his vocation in life may be able to get out of the College after a full course of training, with a competent knowledge of the religious shastras, temple ceremonies and other religious rites and their significance. We expect the Hindu Temporalities Board to pay urgent attention to this need.[83]

The reference in the previous sentence is to the fact that on the basis of the Committee's interviews which were strongly in favour of the reforms, the Commission recommended a Commissioner of Hindu Temporalities and a Hindu Temporalities Board with power to regulate the management of temples be established.

With regard to animal sacrifice the Committee stated, "A large majority of Hindus of all sects abhor this practice." "We were surprised that the many islands of Jaffna Peninsula, ordinarily considered as comparatively backward...are completely free from this evil."[84] The Committee concluded with regard to animal sacrifice that the practice is a social ill which holds back the progress of the Hindu community, and recommended that the government help the religious community to remove the custom.

The Committee found that in the previous year, 9,679 goats and 16,781 fowls (cockerels) had been sacrificed on the Peninsula in 184 temples; no sacrifices had been performed in any of the temples

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[83] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 135.

on the islands. This meant that less than 16% of the temples had reported having sacrifices. Since that time the practice of sacrificing has further declined. The *Ceylon Daily News* of January 22, 1980 reported that the Department of Hindu and Tamil Affairs of the Ministry of Regional Development had banned the sacrifice of goats and cockerels as of January 15 (*Thai Pongal),* one week earlier. The explanation given was the practice had virtually ceased and the Department was satisfied that opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of the prohibition. However, it noted that there were at least three temples where animal sacrifice still continues: one temple at Chilaw, one in Batticaloa and one in Jaffna at Urumpirai.

The Committee report affirmed that with regard to the opening of temples to all castes, the opposition to such an action came almost entirely from Jaffna, but at the same time, the most advanced views favouring the proposal also came from Jaffna. The Committee concluded that it was "inevitable" that there should be legislation to insure that every Hindu who met certain minimum conditions of cleanliness and conduct should be admitted to all public Hindu temples.

One worshipper who wanted the temples removed from the ownership of hereditary managers argued that the income of the temples should be used for socially acceptable purposes such as education in religion and in cultural subjects, including the improving of the education of the temple Priests, thus increasing the quality of their services to the worshippers. Or the income could be used to help orphans or the sick. He concluded that "If the religious life of the Hindus is to be improved, the work should be first started in the temples."[85] But others just as seriously and earnestly asserted that the State had no right to interfere in this private matter.

A Justice of the Supreme Court testified before the Committee urging that Brahmans be given better treatment. "What we are trying to do now is to starve the Brahman completely but get him to

[85] Navaratnam, K., "Hindu Temple Reform," 1950 (pamph.), p. 13

give us the highest possible service." The Justice favoured animal sacrifice. "To please my god I offer a fowl or goat."[86]

The immediate result of these hearings was that a great deal of discussion was stirred up but Parliament preferred not to legislate on so private and personal a subject. Even today there is no board of commissioners for Hindu Temporalities; the time-honoured principle of complete non-regulation and utter congregationalism/individualism continues in vogue. A Department of Hindu and Tamil Affairs was just alluded to but it is not a regulator of Hinduism, so much as a reflector of Hindu public opinion. Mr. K. Kanagaratnam lost his seat in the next election (1952). In the course of the next sixteen years or so about twenty temples opened their doors to Harijans (Untouchables), including the two leading temples of Jaffna, Nallur Kandasamy and Sivan Kovil. For the purposes of this book, however, the hearings afforded an excellent opportunity to receive the views of all shades of Hindu opinion about a number of elements of their faith.

Although the temples opened their doors, there was still opposition to this course of events and the views of the opposition continued to be championed by several organizations. As an example, the All-Ceylon Saiva (Hindu) Practices and Observances Protection Society published a tract in early 1968 clearly setting forth their objectives:[87]

1. No Brahmin or Saiva Priest who does not wear a lock of hair in accordance with our Saiva Scriptures, should be allowed to officiate in any Saiva Temple.

2. No Saiva wedding ceremony should be conducted in any part of the Inner Temple, but such weddings may take place in the outer mandapam (hall).

3. Transfers of Brahmin or Saiva teachers who officiate in Saiva Temples as priests as a service to our religion will be

[86] *Report of the Special Committee,* pp. 563, 566.

[87] Published Jan., 1968 in Chunnakam, the tract was entitled "Temple Entry Movement in the North." The points are quoted verbatim.

detrimental to the interests of the Saivites and the Saiva religion particularly because there is a scarcity of priests.

4. All Hindus in public service should be granted two hours leave every Friday either in the morning or in the afternoon for purposes of religious worship.

5. For the preservation and advancement of the Hindu culture and religion, a Hindu University is essential, and that the Government be requested to establish such a University in Jaffna for which Hindu endowments and funds are available.

6. To prevent cow slaughter in Saiva areas, as a first step, processions of cows should be conducted by the Saivites in all such areas in the Jaffna Peninsula.

In the same tract a spokesman for the same point of view made these points supporting conservative opinion:[88]

1. Mr. Kanagaratnam's defeat for M. P. showed that the public did not approve of his commission's efforts for reform.

2. Nevertheless some reform-minded people had got the two largest temples in Jaffna to admit Harijans and although this annoyed many Hindus, they accepted the change. "Their restraint is praiseworthy and it reveals the noble characteristics of the high caste Saivites." (No indication of the source of the quotation.)

3. The agitation for these reforms come from non-Hindu elements in the population.

4. Before the low castes request reforms in their favour, they should cease the caste distinctions among themselves.

5. The main argument is that the scriptures, the revelation of Lord Siva, oppose the admission of Harijans to the temples.

[88] *Ibid.*, pp. 4-16. The seven points paraphrased.

6. Caste "was not created by man. We laymen should consider it an act of impertinence on our part to violate such doctrines of God. The caste of a person depends on his past karma."

7. The spokesman wanted to make it clear that he had no ill-will for the members of the excluded castes. As a matter of fact, he was very glad to note the great improvement in their social and economic conditions over the last fifty years. He strongly believed that they should have "unfettered liberty and equality in all walks of life, except private house entry and temple entry which are private matters."

On the other side of the subject, at a conference called by the Government Agent in 1967, a speaker said that those Saivites who barred untouchables from the temple would go to hell. Although it is hard to reconcile a reference to hell with ideas of reincarnation, it is not unusual to hear statements of this sort made in Jaffna today.

Maviddapuram—In July 1968, a crowd of five hundred Harijans settled down at the front gate of the great Hindu temple at Maviddapuram in a *satyagraha* aimed at gaining entry to the temple. Although the Harijans continually spoke of non-violence, it was only by the narrowest of margins that bloodshed, at least, was averted—by the cooperation of the Harijans. As we have seen, a number of temples in Jaffna had granted admission to all worshippers in the years preceding this crisis. However, the refusal of the authorities there to grant entry was of great symbolic significance because a number of temple managers had said they would follow the lead of the Maviddapuram temple. It is also significant that since the Priest there was elderly, his place as leader of the struggle to keep the untouchables out was taken over by a University professor and former Member of Parliament, who succeeded very skilfully in outmanoeuvering his opposition. After a week of tense negotiations between this gentleman and the leaders of the depressed classes, conducted by the Government Agent and the police, the depressed class leaders agreed to withdraw upon the promise of the authorities to go to the Prime Minister and get stronger legislation on their behalf. The Government Agent's position was that temple entry could not be forced by the police on

the basis of the Social Disabilities Act prevailing at that time.[89] Since that crisis, the temple has opened its doors to all.

Devadasis—In the hearings before the Special Committee some of the Hindu witnesses spoke indignantly of women brought over from India to serve as entertainers at temple festivals. They even denounced these women as prostitutes. In modern times this charge is regarded as incorrect by many Hindus. The women were entertainers (nautch dancers) but they also assisted the Priests in performing *puja* as *devadasis* (servants of the deity). And they were regarded by many of the faithful as women who had renounced marriage and dedicated their lives to the service of the temple. The last time in which *devadasis* came to a temple in Jaffna was probably in the sixties; I have seen some at a temple on Karainagar in the fifties.

In Conclusion

Personal devotion—I asked a devout Hindu friend to share with me some of the prayers which he uses in worship. Here are four prayers which he offers in the morning:

> Oh Lord, whatever I do through body, speech, mind, senses, intellect, soul or unconscious natural impulses—all these I dedicate as an offering unto Thee, the Supreme, All-pervading Spirit.
>
> *Mukundamala* 15

> Obeisance to Thee, Oh Lord of the Universe. Thou art the Soul and the Maker of the Universe. Thou art the Universal enjoyer as well as the Universal life. Thou verily art the Author of this Sport of the Universe.
>
> *Maitrayanyupanishad* IV,4

> Oh Lord, with my nature overpowered by weak commiseration, with my mind thrown into confusion about duty, I supplicate Thee, tell me decidedly what is good for me. I am Thy disciple. Instruct me who have taken refuge in Thee.
>
> *Bhagavad Gita* II, 7

> The self is tinier than the tiniest, bigger than the biggest, enshrined in the heart of each living being with mind rid of desire, made clear and still. The glory of that Self—that glory he perceives. Then all sorrow vanishes.
>
> *Kathopanishad* V,20

Four stages of man—As Shakespeare gave the world seven ages of man, Hinduism has for many centuries had four ages, or stages of man's life. (The life of the Hindu woman is simpler.) These are student, householder (after marriage), forest dweller (after his children have grown up) and ascetic (working out his salvation roaming the world or living in an ashram on the charity of others, who gain merit by supporting the ashram). However, the present state of the society and economy of Jaffna is such that a programme of this sort ill fits the life of modern Hindu families, even if very traditional in their life style. So the third and fourth stages have largely been given up in practice although they are still kept in mind as ideals. Evidently the Jaffna man agrees with the line in the *Tirukkural* which reads, "If a man goes through the householder's life along the way of Dharma, nothing is left for him to attain by becoming a recluse or going to the forest."

Human rights—In concluding this section on Hinduism in Jaffna it is appropriate, in these times when human rights are being enlarged in many places throughout the world, to commend the people of Jaffna for extending the rights of the depressed classes by means of temple entry. However, in some temples different courtyards are reserved for different castes and the right of entry is still reserved in some smaller temples. It is likely that some day there will be agitation for annihilating all barriers as the equalizing waves continue to wash away distinctions between man and man. In Jaffna today, public opinion is shifting toward better treatment for the lower castes, as we shall see in the next chapter.

It is evident that Hinduism emphasizes man's vertical relationship—his private and personal worship of God. Hinduism is not particularly concerned with the horizontal relationship—man's

[89] Fontgalland, G., "Barricades at the Temple," (1968) n.p., n.d. (Pamph.).

connections with his fellow man. Human relationships are taken up under education or government, rather than under religion.

The Protestant Churches

During the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese introduced Roman Catholic Christianity to Ceylon, then the Dutch brought their Calvinist state church; next the British brought the Church of England (also called Anglican). Under the relatively tolerant rule of the British, English Methodists sent their missionaries to Ceylon and American Congregational Church missionaries made their way to this island too. All three Protestant churches had churches and followers in Jaffna and in the case of the last mentioned, the American missionaries, they were nowhere else than in the Jaffna Region although one American mission church was established in Colombo eventually.

Today the Congrgationalists have become Ceylonized and appear as the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India, a denomination which brought together half a dozen Christian groups in India in 1947. They have 28 churches in the Jaffna Diocese, including the Colombo church, and a total of 5600 members. This is slightly more than ever before, despite the considerable number of their younger and middle-aged members who have gone abroad to work. The Anglican Church in Jaffna has seven churches and 1500 members and the Methodist Church ten and 1400 respectively. On the adjacent islands, only the Church of South India (CSI) is represented of the three Protestant denominations, with a church on Karainagar, Pungudutive, Velanai and Delft and a place of prayer, with a worker, on Nainative.

Each of the three denominations had formerly operated dozens of primary schools and several secondary schools for over a century when in 1960 virtually all were taken over by government. The Anglicans continue to maintain as private colleges St. John's and Chundikuli Girls College and the CSI operates Jaffna College and Uduvil Girls College. The Methodist Church operates Central College and Vembadi Girls College in Jaffna Town and Hartley College and Methodist Girls College in Pt. Pedro. The Anglicans have a school for the Deaf and Blind at Kaithady, the Methodists

have a small hospital at Puttur and the CSI has fairly large hospitals at Inuvil and Manipay and a "frontier mission," twenty-bed hospital near Paranthan as well as a farm at Varany. A Boys' Home is just getting under way at Manipay. The CSI also sponsors on the grounds of the Christa Seva Ashram a small Study Center and Library under whose auspices this book is being written. The Ashram and the Women's Center, both at Maruthanamadam, are supported by all three denominations.

The clergy for these churches are trained at Bangalore or Madurai in South India or at Pilamatalawa in Ceylon. The head of the CSI and the Anglican Church is in both cases a bishop; the Methodists are presided over by a president. The clergy normally have four years of theological training after completing high school or three years after completing a degree. For the first time, in 1978, a young woman was sent by the CSI for seminary training. The Synod of the Church of South India voted strongly in favour of the ordination of women. However, the Diocesan Councils of two-thirds of the Dioceses must ratify such a decision and so far the requisite number of Councils has not approved. However, women can be ordained as deaconesses or junior ministers; but the stricture applies to their being ordained full fledged ministers with the title of Presbyter.

The fact that each of these small denominations formerly possessed a good many schools means that nearly all their members were in the past, and continue to be, fairly well educated persons. As a result, an unusually high proportion of them have gone overseas to work. For example, the list of members of a small church congregation was examined with the minister and a knowledgable lay person and it was discovered that the eighty active members of the congregation had, among them, at least eighty relatives who were working or living overseas or who had very recently returned from overseas.

In addition to the three denominations just described, in Jaffna Town are two Pentecostal churches, one Seventh Day Adventist and one Jehovah's Witnesses congregation.

The Christians, like many people of other faiths in Jaffna, are personally devout. A morning prayer bell sounds at 5:30; at 6 p.m. the tolling of the Angelus brings another hush among the Christians of the neighbourhood. Each religion respects the worship rites and practices of others, taking it for granted that a great many people will be serious about their religion.

In the Protestant churches a Sunday morning service around 7:30 a.m. is customary. Sunday evening there may be another service of worship with, again, a sermon. Or the evening service may be for the youth of the congregation. Sometime during the day the children will have met in their Sunday School classes and have been given a lesson on their beliefs or studied a Bible story. Mid-weekly there will be a prayer meeting at the home of one of the members. There are occasional meetings or annual rallies of women and of youth or of the children in the church. Some effort is devoted to a project of assistance to some needy persons in the area or some other social service. Some churches attempt evangelistic efforts by telling their non-Christian neighbours about the Gospel.

The service of communion is a central rite in Christian worship. Jesus told his followers to take a little bread and wine as a way of remembering Him. In a society like Ceylon's where people are very careful whom they eat and drink with, this ceremony has had unusual significance. Christians who were caste conscious had to swallow their pride along with the elements of communion. In the Roman Catholic Church the communion is the climax of the Mass and most services consist simply of the Mass. The Anglican Church provides communion every Sunday morning; the Methodists and CSI have communion once a month. Special services are held at Christmas and at Easter to commemorate respectively the birth and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and these, like the other feast days of the Church, Whitsuntide, Ascension Day and Pentecost, include Communion as part of the service.

Inside the church building worshippers generally sit with women on one side of the central aisle and men on the other. This is particularly true in village churches. In the front of the Protestant churches a low altar rail, breached by a little gate, indicates the altar area. Behind the rail is the altar, a large table bearing ornamental

candlesticks, generally of brass. There may be tall brass lamps standing on each side of the altar. The lamps and candles are lighted for each service of worship but not usually for youth or Sunday School meetings. Sometimes an open Bible rests on a little stand on the altar or beside it and always there is a cross of brass or wood. There may be a larger cross on the wall behind the altar.

At the interdenominational Christa Seva Ashram, a chapel has been built in an Oriental style of architecture, with the sides and one end of the building open—different in appearance from the western styles of most Christian churches. A similar chapel can be found at Uduvil Girls College. The first parish church to be built in such a style is at North Erlalai, dedicated in 1978. In these chapels and in other churches, in panels on interior walls or in the stained glass windows can be found Christian motifs carved, sculpted, painted or engraved: grapes, anchor, dove, open Bible, many forms of the cross, sheep, shepherds and their staffs, grain, lamps, vines, shamrocks, stars and some motifs from the society which surrounds the church: the palmyra palm or the yarl or lotuses.

On the congregation's side of the altar rail are a reading stand, often with a large church Bible on it from which the Bible readings are selected which form a part of the worship service. Parallel to the lectern or reading stand is the pulpit, generally elevated three or four steps, from which the minister or a layman preaches the sermon.

A typical Protestant worship service consists of three hymns or lyrics, an introductory prayer and call to worship, a repeating together of the Lord's Prayer and the creed, a reading from the Old Testament and from the New, a longer or "pastoral" prayer, the taking of the offering during which two ushers pass around bags or plates in which those present put their cash offerings for paying for the costs of the church and its activities; the sermon and the benediction—a brief farewell blessing.

All but the smallest churches will have a choir—a group of persons who like to sing hymns and lyrics. This group leads in the singing of songs in the worship and sometimes sings a special number of its own as an addition to the regular service.

The most common aid to worship is the Lord's Prayer and the next most common is one of the 150 psalms which compose the Book of Psalms. The latter is in the Old Testament (which is the Jewish Bible, essentially) and the Lord's Prayer is in the New Testament. Perhaps the most beloved of the psalms is the twenty-third. The texts of these two pieces of worship literature are given here:

The Twenty-Third Psalm

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside the still waters; he restores my soul.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

For you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me. You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who is in heaven, holy be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done,on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

Christian weddings are held in the church and so are the funerals of the clergy and their wives and occasional other prominent Christians. Protestants are not opposed to cremation but burial is the usual practice.

Set in the interior walls of every church are memorial plaques in honour of departed members of that church. Some of them bear terse, poignant messages such as:

In memory of four children of
Rev. B. C. and Mrs. S. M. Meigs

HARRIET BENEDICT
born Nov. 28, 1816
died Aug. 22, 1831
Aged 15 years

SARAH MARIA
born Jan.6, 1818
died Mar. 9, 1823
Aged 5 years

———— † ————

TWO TWIN SISTERS

Born Aug.2, 1831
and died the same day

———— † ————

Sacred to the memory of
CYRUS T. MILLS
Popular medical practitioner and teacher
Born a Hindu in 1839
Baptized in 1857
And taken to rest in 1906
He was a fruit of the American Mission
Student of Dr. Green and an earnest Christian
Who hated injustice and lived in deeds of love
Well done, thou good and faithful servant
Erected by his beloved wife

The above epitaphs are for, first, an American missionary family and second, for a Tamil Christian who adopted a western name as was the custom for converts in the nineteenth century.

Members of the Protestant and Catholic Churches find a large part of their social life within the circle of the church. Nearly all of them will be married and buried within the church.

The Protestant and Catholic churches of Jaffna are, of course, self-supporting. If they receive any financial assistance from abroad, it is for special projects, often of a developmental nature.

Beside nearly every church is a primary or secondary school, formerly controlled by the denomination , now a government school. Some of the teachers of that school will probably be members of the congregation of the church next door.

Some of the larger churches used to have their morning service in Tamil, the evening service in English and a few continue this practice today, although for the past twenty years the use of English in the churches has declined.

The percentage of Christians in the population of Sri Lanka has slowly decreased since independence:

Census	Percentage
1946	9.1
1953	9.0
1963	8.3
1971	7.7

But the total number of Christians in Sri Lanka considerably *increased* during the twenty-five year period 1946-71, from 603,000 to almost a million, a gain of nearly 400,000. This total increase while the percentage was falling is explained, of course, by the fact that the population of the country grew faster in the Buddhist and Hindu communities than in the Christian portion of the society. About 390,000 of the 400,000 were Roman Catholics; the Protestants increased a mere 8,000 during the quarter century. The numbers of Protestants were certainly held down by their propensity for working overseas. The number of Protestants was also adversely affected by the emigration, after 1956, of a good many of the Burgher community which was English-speaking and became dissatisfied with the government's lack of arrangements for the

education of English-speaking children. The Burghers, whose ancestry was almost entirely Dutch, were mostly Christians and a good number were Protestants. However, it is believed that a much larger number of Burghers migrated from Ceylon than actually did. In the 1953 census, Burghers and Eurasians numbered 45,000; ten years later their numbers were 45,900 and by the Census of 1971 they had declined merely to 44,000. (Figures rounded off) Migration leveled off their numbers but caused them to decline very little.

In addition to the effect which the Burghers had on the number of Protestants, the repatriation of Indian Tamil workers on Ceylonese tea, rubber and coconut estates (mostly tea) has taken some Christians back to India, and continues to do so.

Since in many respects the population of the city and towns of Ceylon (as in most of the world) wields greater influence upon the government and life of the nation than do the rural areas, it should be noted that in 1971, while the Christians were 7.7 of the population of the nation, they constituted 17% of the population of Colombo, 12.4% of the population of Jaffna Region and 27% of Jaffna Town.[90]

The Roman Catholic Church

By far the larger number of the Christians in Jaffna and in all Ceylon are in the fold of the Catholic Church. In Jaffna, thirty-one parishes include at least 137 churches and well over 100,000 members ministered to by sixty clergy, over sixty brothers and oblates and three hundred seventy-five sisters. However, the services of the clergy and the other servants of the Church have to be shared with the remainder of the Diocese, which comprises the entire Northern Province. Fourteen of the Jaffna churches are on the islands with eight on Delft, five on Kayts and one on Mandaitive. It is common practice in Ceylon to refer to the Roman Catholic

[90] Caspersz, P., "The Role of Sri Lanka Christians in a Buddhist Majority System," 1974, p. 105 and Dept. of Census and Statistics, *The Population of Sri Lanka*, 1974, p. 62.

Church members as "Catholics" and to the non-Catholic or Protestant Churches' members as "Christians."

The greatest number of employed members of the Church are Fishermen; the next most numerous are farmers. A considerable number are in government offices, or other white collar jobs and a good many are in teaching, medicine and law. Two training schools for welders and mechanics have been established, one next to St. Patrick's College in Jaffna and one in Kilinochchi, named after Fr. Long, beloved Irish missionary rector of St. Patrick's a generation ago. Catholic youths, like the rest, are often leaving the island for jobs abroad. No industries are operated by the Church to furnish employment. But farms have been established for young men to learn agriculture. After some training they are given two acres of land and helped to get started as farmers.

While the most numerous caste in the Church is Karaiyar or Fishermen, there are plenty of other castes represented in addition. In the past, the Church permitted the various castes, whenever they became numerous enough to do so, to build a church for their caste members. This greatly reduced caste friction although it was not regarded by any means as ideal for it tended to perpetuate the traditional division. Today the Priests discourage such a procedure and urge their members to worship together in intercaste unity in the name of Christ. Caste manifestations are diminishing and less discrimination is being practiced. There are no particular caste groups who take the lead in becoming Catholics. Conversions are not very numerous and they are as likely to come from one group as another.

In a Jaffna church a decade ago, a Priest allowed a low caste bride and groom the privilege of being married while seated in the special wedding chairs previously reserved for high castes only. The resulting complaints of the high caste members of the church led to its being closed for eight years during which time the low caste community built a church for themselves. After they began worshipping in their new church, the other church was reopened, on the understanding that all castes would be admitted to worship. The Priests affirm that caste consciousness is greater in Jaffna than

outside but that everywhere in Sri Lanka the support of caste is noticeably weaker than a generation ago.

The youth culture and the attraction of modern gadgets are pulling many of the youth out of their Church upbringing and weakening the ancient strands that bound them to the discipline of parents and Priests. The Church has added various programmes for youth and particularly tries to challenge them to service jobs and to agriculture and other work of a development nature. Some of the youth become involved in politics and again are sometimes wooed away from the Church.

Since there are many Roman Catholics among the Fishermen, churches close to the seashore are common. In such localities it is a custom to erect a sturdy wooden cross upon the sands of the beach, which is visible for a long distance. As Catholic Fishermen head out to sea in their fishing boats they turn the prow toward the cross and pray before they begin another day of fishing. One of the residents of Taliaddy, who was fortunate enough to find a large amount of ambergris which washed up in that locality in the summer of 1979, sold it for a fortune and used a part of the proceeds to build a bell tower for his home church.

After the riots of August, 1977, when many Tamils fled from more southerly areas to the Vavuniya District, thousands of refugees were generated. The Church has devoted a great deal of time and money to helping these people obtain a little land and to resettle. The clergy have found that quite a few of the settlers thus helped wish to become Catholics. However, they do not feel that poverty, as such, has much to do with people deciding to change their faith. They think that poor Hindus rarely become Catholic because they think they will be better off occupationally. Such an idea is frowned on by the Church which also often refuses to agree to a request for baptism with the order to think it over for a longer period before baptism. The Church does not want "economic Christians."

On the other hand, Priests in the villages of central Ceylon feel that even the most remote village shows some response to, and interest in, social change. The villagers are less dormant and quiescent than they used to be.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that it is in the world to minister to the needy of all classes and particularly to the poor. In Jaffna, in addition to the two technical training institutes mentioned above, they operate a home for the elderly, two creches (where small children are cared for while their mothers work), a children's home, a hostel for boys in school, a home for retarded children and a home science center for school leavers.

When the government took over most of the schools in 1960, the Catholic Church relinquished all but three or four and today only St. Patrick's College is a private institution supported by old students, neighbours and friends. Many of the schools which have been government schools for twenty years remain robustly Catholic with virtually all teachers, students and the principal Catholic. In other of their former schools, of course, the teachers and student body have become less homogeneous. The Church has relatively few regrets about the takeover of the schools.

Although the schools had always been convenient for imparting religious instruction to Catholic children, the Church has a new way of handling such instruction. Lay volunteers come to the catechetical center in Jaffna Town for three months training after which they receive a certificate for teaching catechism classes. They teach the classes of children on Sundays in the parishes, generally in the morning.

In the daily life of the believer, the services which are available for worshippers are : early morning Mass at 5:30 every day of the year; Sunday Masses at 6:30 and 7:30 in addition and Benediction at 5:00 p.m. every Sunday. The Confessional is open all day on Wednesdays and Saturdays. In Lent, the six weeks which precede Easter, there are special services, particularly in Holy Week—the week leading up to Easter.[91]

Some Catholics fast every Friday but many confine their fasting to the six Fridays of Lent. The Friday fast normally consists of no morning meal and vegetarian food for lunch and evening—no meat

[91] Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the twenty-first of March, so it is between about March 23 and April 18.

nor fish. Villagers tend to observe this more than do Catholics who live in town. To some extent Catholics are being encouraged to replace fasting with works of charity such as helping out a neighbour.

On All Saints Day, November 1, and All Souls Day, November 2, there are additional morning Masses. Catholics often visit the graves of departed relatives on All Souls Day. On Christmas eve there are midnight Masses. And on Pentecost Sunday additional services are conducted.

The Roman Catholic Church has two aids to worship which are not found in the Protestant Church: images and the rosary. As much as the congregation is able to afford, images are supplied to inspire the prayers of the faithful—images of the Holy Family and of favourite saints. The rosary is a string of beads which persons slide through their hands, reciting short prayers such as the Hail Mary or the Lord's Prayer at each bead.

In the past, the most common prayer of Roman Catholics was the Hail Mary, a salutation to the mother of Jesus. It was especially associated with the rosary. In recent years, the Lord's Prayer has begun to become more or less as common. For example, Catholic families used to say the Hail Mary as a grace before each meal. Now it is becoming more common to recite the Lord's Prayer. The words of the Hail Mary are:

> Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
> Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
> Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

These are the words that warm the hearts and stir the spirits of many of the 700 million Catholics in the world.

Other words that stir the spirit are those which have been set to music. The singing of psalms and hymns is a strong tradition of the Church from its beginning and music is an important part of the worship services of both Catholics and Protestants. Two kinds of religious songs are sung: *hymns,* which are Tamil words to the tunes

of western hymns and *lyrics,* which are both Tamil words and Tamil (Carnatic music) tunes

In the past decade a church at Urumpirai and a few other buildings of the Church have been constructed to reflect Oriental ideas of architecture. There is a new interest in making churches, especially, to appear less western and more indigenous in their design.

Muslims in Jaffna

At five o'clock in the morning, at more than twenty sites in Jaffna Peninsula and the islands,a call to prayer issues through a loud speaker and a little group of pious Muslims makes its way to the neighbouring mosque. In four large mosques and nine small ones in Jaffna Town, in five other locations in the Peninsula and on three island sites, there are sufficient Muslims to support a total of twenty-one mosques.[92] The call to prayer is issued by the caretaker of the mosque, the *muaddin.* An *imam* resides in the mosque with his family and conducts the prayer services while a *khateeb* preaches at the weekly service scheduled 12:15-1:15 on Fridays. To the latter service nearly all Muslims come, closing their shops or businesses for the weekly worship.

The 5:00 a.m. prayer service is the first of the five daily prayers for which Muslims are famous throughout the world. At the Jaffna Bazaar mosque about twenty to twenty-five people come to the early morning prayer but around a hundred come to the midday service. The congregation numbers around 150 families. The other prayer times are 12:30 p.m., 3:30, 6:30 and 7:45. These prayers are more physically demanding than those of other religions. The praying person stands up, kneels, prostrates himself and changes his body posture several times during the prayer.

Of the twenty-one mosques, all are for Sunni Muslims except for one of the Shia sect. (They differed originally on their views of

[92] At Nainative and at Kayts and Mankumban on the island of Velanai and on the mainland at Chavakachcheri, Kodkamam, Pt. Pedro, KKS and Chunnakam.

the four caliphs who claimed to succeed Mohammed. The Sunnis accept all four; the Shias but one.)

The three largest mosques (Mohideen, Grand and New), in Jaffna Town, have congregations of five hundred to six hundred families.

According to local authorities, there were 16,000 Muslims in the Region (1971) but their number eight years later is estimated to be around 18,000. However, if the 1971 Census is correct in saying the Muslims of Jaffna were only 1.5% of the population in Jaffna, then their numbers must have been nearer to 11,000 than to 16,000. There are almost a million Muslims in Sri Lanka altogether. They have come from the Middle East, central and western Asia, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan. Apparently at times in their migrations to Ceylon when the choice of a language was determined, those who came from South India must have been influential for the Muslims' language in Ceylon today is Tamil.

The greatest number of Muslims in Jaffna are tailors or shopkeepers. Some of the most prosperous are Goldsmiths. None do farming; the nearest Muslim farmers are at Kilinochchi, a few miles south of the Peninsula. Some own lorries or taxis, others are drivers, butchers, metal smiths, shoemakers, firewood dealers, bank clerks or teachers. There are several Muslim lawyers and engineers but doctors are rare.

Muslims are well known for the tenacity of their religious belief. This may be directly related to the considerable amount of preaching instruction and religious education to which they are exposed throughout life. For example, *tabliq* is a movement within Islam for preaching the faith, a movement for reinforcement of the regular preaching. Seven mosques, including all four of the largest ones, have been chosen for the *tabliq*, one night at one mosque and the next night at another so that every night of the week there is one such service being conducted in the time period 6:45-8:30, a teaching and preaching service which embraces the fifth and last daily prayer call. In the *tabliq* there is also instruction in practical matters such as how to conduct prayers and how to perform ablutions.

Whenever Muslims come to the mosque, they wash their hands, then their face, arms, the top of the head, the ears and finally the feet. A washing place called a *hawl* ("howl") stands near the entrance of each mosque. The smaller ones are five feet square and two and a half feet deep. The Bazaar Mosque has two pools, each nearly ten feet square with a walk-way between them to facilitate washing.

From time to time there are other special meetings but the regular services of the mosque are the prayers five times daily and the regular Friday service at 12:30. All Muslims who take their religion seriously are expected to attend this service. None of these services are attended by women. They pray at home. Only in the month of Ramadan are they permitted to come upstairs in the mosque (to the first floor hall) for a prayer service at 8:30 p.m. On this occasion the women perform ablutions as they enter the mosque. Men and boys ten years old and above attend the mosque. Hats are worn in the mosque; footware is not.

For his education the *imam* or Priest normally attends one of Ceylon's forty Arabic colleges called *madrasas*, to receive religious training and to study Islamic laws and doctrines and Koranic learning—an eight year course. The young man may begin when ten or twelve years of age at the *madrasa* but as a five or six year old he will usually have begun his schooling at a small children's *madrasa* conducted by an *imam* from 4-6 each evening and in the mornings during school vacations. At the end of the eight year course, the boy takes an examination and if he passes it, he is a *moulavi* and qualified to be an *imam.*

In Jaffna there is a high school for boys called Osmania College and Khadija College for Muslim girls. Each has around eight hundred students ranging from grades six through twelve.

Moulavis and *imams* and, indeed, all Muslim men, wear a neat, trim beard and a small hat. They regard this as dignified dress. The *imam* wears a robe and turban while conducting the services although he may not always wear such apparel for the daily prayers.

Various religious holidays are celebrated with religious services and distribution of food to the poor. The Prophet's Birthday, for

example, is celebrated with a teaching service and the cooking and giving out of food parcels.

Ramadan, the month of fasting, causes true Muslims to avoid food, drink and smoking from 4:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily for the month. Then each evening a meal is taken. The last day of Ramadan is Id, the day when Muslims put on new clothes. Public feeding is followed by a special service of prayer and preaching in mid-morning after which they go to visit their friends. In Ramadan also, the Muslim is supposed to assess his wealth and give two and a half percent of it to the poor.

Little Id or Hadj comes seventy days after Id. Hadj means "pilgrimage" and the proper way to celebrate it is to go to Mecca but of course a Muslim is fortunate if he gets to Mecca once in a lifetime. Except for the trip to Mecca Muslims do not have the passion for pilgrimage which characterizes Hindus. At the time of the Hadj, the *khateeh* preaches on the life of Abraham and the place of his pilgrimage in the ancient history of the Muslims.

Another religious holiday is Miraj, the time when Mohammed met Allah. There are special talks on the significance of Miraj.

And the last big holy day is Hijra, (Hejira) named for the journey of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina. Special talks underscore the significance of the migration to Medina which led to the spread of Islam.

Muslims like to remind themselves that their every action is in the providence of God so whenever they speak of any future or anticipated activity they say, *"Inshallah"*—God willing.

There is a saint or holy man among the Muslims of Jaffna whose name is Guru Baba. In 1979 he was overseas and may not be available for interview for inclusion here. The Arabic term for holy man is "Friend of Allah," in translation.

Unlike their Hindu neighbours, the Muslims take no formal or ceremonial notice of their daughters' coming of age. "It is a private matter." Their sons are circumcised at the age of five or six years or

sometimes as late as ten or twelve. To mark the occasion, relatives and friends are invited in and the *imam* is called on to offer a prayer.

Theravada Buddhism in Jaffna

About a mile from the Sinhalese school in Jaffna Town, on Palaly Road, is the chief Buddhist centre of all Jaffna other than the shrine on Nainative or Nagadipa. It is called the *Naga Vihara* (Cobra Temple) and the buildings include a shrine room in which is an image of Buddha with interesting scenes from his life painted on the walls, a *dagoba* with attached *devale* in which are the idols of the Hindu gods Vishnu and Kataragama and a preaching hall (*dharma sala*). Inside the *dagoba* (relic chamber) are some relics which include coins, gold and silver statues of Buddha and perhaps some jewellery given by the faithful.

The first Buddhist Priest to come to Jaffna to remain came in 1952. The present head Priest has been at this location for twenty years. Both he and the Sinhalese school principal say they have no fears about being in Jaffna and urge all Sinhalese inquirers to visit Jaffna and see for themselves how safe it is.

Across the street from the *Naga Vihara*, a large pilgrim Rest is under construction. It will be a three storey structure, able to accomodate up to 300 pilgrims at one time. There is also a small Pilgrim Rest managed by a lone Buddhist Priest at a house and compound barely 100 yards from the Jaffna Railway Station on Station Road.

Ordinarily only three or four bus loads of Buddhist pilgrims come to Jaffna in a month. But in May and June in Vesak and Poson time (great Buddhist holidays), a good many more busloads come. They are, of course, bound for the island of Nainative and the Buddhist temple and shrine there. Their numbers have greatly declined since 1955 when Dr. Jeyasingham could report two or three bus loads daily.[93]

[93] Jeyasingham, W. L., *The Urban Geography of Jaffna*, p. 231.

The pilgrimage to Nainative is almost the only activity which brings ordinary Sinhalese citizens to Jaffna. The people of Jaffna, by ignoring these pilgrims, have so far missed a great opportunity to show themselves hospitable and kindly disposed toward the Sinhalese.

At Kankesanturai, there is a Sinhala Junior School and also a *Vihara,* called the *Tissa Vihara.* It was established by the Cement Plant years ago for its Sinhalese workers; Sinhalese worshippers among the police and army in that area also worship there as do the local bakers. (For many years there was a tradition for bakers in Jaffna very commonly to be Sinhalese; it is less true today.)

I was informed that in all of Jaffna Region there are nine or ten Buddhist priests, some of whom are students priests.

Funerals

Hindu funeral—When there is a death in a Hindu family, word is immediately sent to the Priest, to the drummers, and to the family Dhobi and Barber, and family members fan out through the neighbourhood informing friends and relatives and telling them when the funeral will take place. Some telegrams will summon more distant relations. Other persons are dispatched to Jaffna Town to purchase a coffin and the various ingredients used by the Priest in his dual activities of preparing and anointing the body for the ceremony and of conducting the funeral rites.

These ingredients and supplies would take a very long time to collect individually but certain shops exist where they are already gathered and wrapped in a single parcel or two. For Rs. 120 and upward, these materials can be purchased in one transaction, a much appreciated service in time of stress. These supplies are a very interesting collection of the natural products of Ceylon and India—very few are processed materials—and readers who are not familiar with Hindu funeral rites will find them of interest:

saffron	betel leaf	holy ash
turmeric	plantain leaves	gingelly oil
rice flour	plantain fruit	mango leaves

camphor	limes	coconut
sandalwood	mangoes	garland of flowers
powdered sandalwood	pomegranate	loose flowers
wood tablets	oranges	ghee
incense sticks	perfume	honey
thread	eau de cologne	milk and buttermilk
arecanut	olive powder	parched rice
rose water	brown sugar	pot for fire (unbaked)
pot for water		

a mixture called *sambal kooddu*

special mixture for washing the body

dry sticks of mango wood, *neli,* banyan, ebony, sandalwood and several other woods for the funeral fire

The traditional tasks soon begin to be performed. The Priest, a Saiva Kurukkal, (no Brahman will defile himself with the dead except another Brahman) appears soon and takes up the preparation of the body. First the eldest son purifies the area by taking burning camphor about the compound where the activity is concentrated. Many of the items just purchased are put into the nine pots of water which have been placed before the Priest under the *pandal* which is rapidly being constructed and decorated with coconut leaf fronds and mango leaves. If the deceased is male, the male relatives wash the body with the contents of one pot after the other and then it is wrapped in clean cloth and laid out under the *pandal.* If the deceased is female, then women relations perform the same tasks. The body is washed with the same kind of substances as are used in anointing the deity in the temple worship.

The Dhobi is busy with the framework which will surround the body on its journey to the cremation ground. He formerly used to decorate this frame in a highly ornate fashion with crepe paper but such paper has become so expensive that he normally uses cloth at present. Both the Barber and the Dhobi may bring a male relative or two to help them in their work. If the family is poor, there will be no Priest, Dhobi, Barber, coffin or decorations but the friends and

relatives will carry the corpse to the cremation site after simple rites have been performed by the eldest son or other relative. Soon after the death of a poor person, camphor is carried about the areas of the compound most associated with the death ceremonies, and after the washing and the clothing of the body (not necessarily in new cloth), again camphor is burned. Prayers and songs are sung and then the body, on a simple frame, is taken away. Six hours or more later, or on the following day, a relative will come to take some ashes directly to the sea, preferably at Keerimalai. The poor generally do not observe the formal rites at Keerimalai. But on the thirty-first day after the death, a Brahman will come and perform the appropriate ceremonies. If the family is too poor to pay him, neighbours and friends of the deceased will give something to the Priest.

Returning to the description of the funeral of a more prosperous person, the Barber's responsibilities include the weaving of a "cadjan" out of a fresh green[94] coconut leaf. The Barber also gives a shave and a haircut to the eldest son or chief male relative if there is no son. This person assists the Priest in his duties. The son or other male relative has a function to perform at the cremation which is regarded by Hindus as of great importance. Part of the joy which a Hindu father feels at the birth of his first son is the knowledge that the all-important person for lighting his pyre is now in the world.

No body which has been mutilated by an accident, autopsy or murder or which died a suicide will be given funeral rites. The body is cremated and, several months later, a few rites are performed in its behalf.

The Saiva Kurukkal performs the ceremony according to Agamic rites. If the family has a traditional relationship with a Brahman Priest, the latter will conduct a service in an adjoining compound (if invited to do so), according to Vedic rites.

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[94] Cadjans are woven out of brown, dry coconut leaves for if the green leaf is used the cadjan will break up. The green form is called *pannangti* and it is made by weaving both halves of the leaf together so there is a rib on each side of the panel, which prevents it from breaking up. On this panel, prepared by the Barber, the body is laid either in a coffin or on the stretcher or frame.

One of the objectives of the Priest in the ceremonies he performs is to produce a small fire in a pot. This fire will be made out of the collection of nine different kinds of wood which were included in the packet of materials given to the Priest on his arrival. This firepot is carried by the eldest son to the funeral pyre and used to ignite it.

When the rites are finished at the home, the women's wailing and gentle beating of the breasts quickens for the final parting has come. All women mourners remain at the funeral house. The bier is hoisted aloft to the shoulders of the first six pall bearers and the all-male procession heads down the lane to the road and on to the cremation grounds, a walk of anywhere from 200 yards to two miles or even further. However, each "community" has access to a hand-drawn hearse in which the coffin can ride, if desired. One shows his sympathy by walking in the procession; he does not ride in a car to the cremation ground. However, bicycles are acceptable and in a procession there are likely to be a few of them, some being ridden slowly, others being pushed while the owner walks and talks with his friends. Mantras are recited or sung on the way. Professional singers may be hired. Firecrackers are thrown along the way to ward off the powers of evil. Crackers are prohibited by the Agamas but they continue as a popular practice. The drummers generally accompany the procession unless the family cannot afford their services. At road junctions, particularly, there is a loud and prolonged beating of drums.

The body is put to rest on the pyre with the head pointed south. The son, still carrying the firepot, places a pot of water on his shoulders and circles the pyre three times. Before he begins the first circumambulation, the Barber punches a small hole in the bottom of the pot of water and water begins to trickle down the body of the bearer. At the beginning of the second and third encirclements, a second and third hole are added. The Barber sprinkles a little of this water on the corpse. After the third walk around the pyre, the man puts the punctured pot on the ground below the head of the deceased.

Then the son lights the pyre with a stick of sandalwood from the firepot. The crowd of mourners waits until the fire has burned for

some time and then departs, leaving one or two watchers behind to tend the fire. When the body is consumed, the watchers leave. In a day or so, relatives gather up a pot of ashes from the cremation site.

A modernization note on cremation is the fact that the fires stand out on the horizon more today than formerly for they burn with a greater volume of fairly dense black smoke. The cause is the practice of putting a few old automobile tires in with the firewood to make the fire hotter. This is done only during the rainy season when the firewood burns with greater difficulty.

After the funeral ceremony all the relatives and friends, to whom invitations would have gone earlier, are given lunch in the name of the deceased person. The family will not have eaten any food since the death occurred. For several days their food and drink will be supplied by their neighbors. However, if the funeral is delayed for several days to allow a relative to come from a distant land, family members will partake inconspicuously of food supplied to them by others, as indicated.

Each person who attended the funeral is careful to bathe immediately either before joining at the meal at the funeral house or before taking his food at his own home. After returning from a funeral it is not unusual for a man to wait at his gate until a family member or neighbor brings a pail of water and pours it over his head. The bath removes some of the ceremonial uncleanness which death brings. Part of the pollution remains, however, for all the relatives on the male side of the family are not permitted to enter a temple until after the ceremony of the 31st day.

First, however, between the 16th, and the 30th days, the ashes are committed to the ocean, generally at the sacred shrine of Keerimalai but other ocean sites are acceptable and for Hindus who live far from the ocean, a river will do. The Ganges, of course, is best of all. Sometimes a bit of the ashes is kept and given to the next traveller to Rameswaran or even Banaras who will commit them to the water at these holier places. Returning to Keerimalai, on this occasion, normally led by a Brahman or the Saiva Kurukkal, there is a re-enactment of the funeral with a bundle of reeds and grass, shaped in a slightly human form, serving as the substitute for the

corpse. When this bundle is burned, in imitation of the cremation, some of the ashes are gathered by the chief male relative and mingled with the genuine cremation ashes before all are cast into the sea. This service is performed, Hindus believe, for the purpose of purifying the soul of the departed and freeing it from the necessity to wander. Their feeling is that the departed soul stays around his or her home and is restless unless calmed by the various ceremonies. One year after the funeral it is particularly important to have a ceremony (the *Thivasam*) for the final repose of the soul for, some believe, the soul will then be reborn (only after the expiration of a year). Rebirth will be in a higher caste if the life of the deceased had been one of good character; otherwise in a lower caste or even in a lower form of life. Yet some Hindus speak of heaven or of reaching the abode of Siva, apparently having a different view of what happens after death, or simply speaking in a popular fashion.

On the 31st day after the death, the Brahman comes to the house of the deceased. The Priest who would have received little payment after the previous ceremonies is now given cloth, vegetables, fruits, rice and coconut. The Saiva Kurukkal does not appear at the 31st day ceremony. The family obligations to him for his services are met at the time of the committal of the ashes to the water.

At the time the anniversary ceremony *Thivasam* is performed, families able to do so feed the poor just as they will have done after the original funeral itself. Some Hindus condemn such feeding on the grounds that it represents no true sacrifice but is simply a giving of leftovers to the poor

In 1978, a poor man whose monthly salary was Rs. 70, really below subsistence level, came to a Hindu friend of mine beseeching him for Rs. 2,000 (two and a half years' salary for the one asking.) as the poor man's sister had died and he needed this sum for the final rites. (It is said that funerals are one more reason why the poor are poor.) My friend managed to find him one-third that amount which proved sufficient. What the Rs. 700 went for will be of interest:

250	to the Priest for *verti*, shawl, rice, coconuts and funeral supplies

25	gift to the Priest
80	coffin
60	cigars
65	six Drummers
60	firewood for the pyre
20	services of two Barbers
30	services of three Dhobies
30	three labourers to tend the fire
150	hearse (My friend said, "We could have carried the coffin." Another commented, "A man without money cannot afford to be cheap.")

Since the total exceeds Rs. 700, apparently other friends also contributed.

Even twenty years ago it was common to have separate cremation grounds for the different castes but today most grounds are public and open to all castes. This concession was not always made gladly, however, and sometimes is a privilege which had to be won by rather vigourous and courageous action on the part of the lower caste group.

Protestant Christian funeral—A death in a Tamil family, whatever the religion of that family, is treated very seriously, as a calamity of the first order. Immediate and not so immediate relatives leave their place of employment, some for as long as a week. The owner of a shop, when bereaved, will close the shop for a day or two. Relations of so distant a connection as to be, to the western mind, unrelated ("my grandfather's sister's relation") are instantly granted leave from school, office or business and head for the funeral. Christian funerals especially are apt to be delayed a day or two to permit relatives to come from even so far away as Europe, America or Australia.

Funerals of Christians, like those of Hindus, are normally conducted in the home of the deceased but pastors, their wives and occasionally distinguished laymen are accorded the honour of a church funeral. Shortly after the death occurs, relatives rush into town to purchase a wooden coffin. It is getting more common in

these days to arrange for the services of an undertaker who makes arrangements and provides a hearse—something unheard of twenty years ago. But it is also quite common to meet a taxi with a coffin tied on the top or protruding from the boot or trunk of the car. The cost of a funeral managed by an undertaker varies from a few hundred rupees upward.

The local pastor is immediately informed if he was not present at the time of death. He may be asked to have a leaflet printed bearing the name and dates of the deceased as well as the words of the hymns to be sung at the service. The church keeper is instructed to toll the church bell occasionally for the day or so until the funeral takes place. Friends of the family soon begin to drop in to show their sympathy for the bereaved family. The front portion of the compound of the funeral house and the adjoining lane are decorated with coconut palm fronds and perhaps a canopy is created to shade mourners from the sun.

The local pastor, assisted by one or more other pastors called in by the family, conducts the funeral service which consists of hymns, reading from the Bible, prayers and a sermon in which direct references are made to the deceased. The body lies in an open coffin on a sheet-covered bed on the front veranda or in the front room of the home. In some Protestant denominations at the end of the service, the members of the congregation rise and march around the coffin for a farewell glimpse of the dead person. The coffin is then closed and placed in the hearse or borne on the shoulders of male friends to the cemetery where a brief burial service is conducted. At the end of the service in the cemetery the minister drops a few handsful of earth upon the coffin and so do some of the relatives and close friends—a practice still in vogue among British Christians as well. Occasionally, however, a Christian is cremated. When the body of Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayagam, the Tamils' best known and longest enduring political leader, was cremated in 1977, some Christians said this was a compromise with Hinduism; others said it was a cultural trait common to all Ceylon religions except Islam.

As soon as a death occurs in a Christian home, it is customary for relatives and neighbours to send in food and containers of tea and coffee. People in the funeral house are not expected to cook

until they resume a few days after the funeral. The family will announce, "We will begin to cook on the fourth day." Or whenever they resume normal life again. A generation ago the food would have been supplied for a full month.

On the thirty-first day after the death, Christians customarily gather for a prayer service at home and then give a meal to all who have helped the bereaved family.

Roman Catholic funeral—Among the Roman Catholics, when a death occurs the sacristan (a layman with certain responsibilities among the congregation, under the guidance of the Priest) comes to the home and conducts prayers. The body, after being prepared for burial, is put into a coffin and people come to the home to give their sympathy and take a last look at their departed friend or relative. The next day the coffin is closed and taken to the church where it is placed inside the back of the church and covered with a cloth. Normally it is not opened again.

The funeral service, conducted by the Priest, consists of hymns, prayers and sacred readings. If desired, a Mass is incorporated into the service.

At the time of death, responsible relatives feel it is an appropriate time to pay up any arrears which the deceased person and his family might have in relation to their giving to the church. They may even get a loan from a friend or relative in order to "settle their account" by the time of the funeral. This was more the custom in the past than presently. For their part, the clergy feel a time of mourning is an inappropriate time to speak of offerings and tithes but that wedding times offer a satisfactory opportunity if there are arrears.

After the funeral the sacristan accompanies the mourners to the graveyard, leads in prayer and throws a little earth on the coffin as do others present. The Priest does not come to the graveyard. The Catholic Church forbids cremation.

On the anniversary of the death, some Hindus, Catholics and Protestants will feed the poor, an ancient Tamil custom. A prominent friend of mine has done this in honour of his father for

over half a century. The Catholic Church encourages its members to channel such a giving of food to homes for the aged or for children.

Muslim funeral—In keeping with the saying of Mohammed, the chief characteristic of a Muslim funeral is speed. Seldom does a relative in Colombo have time to attend a funeral in Jaffna although now and then a funeral is delayed to make such attendance possible. When a person dies, his body is washed by a relative, ten or twelve yards of inexpensive cloth are purchased and the *imam* cuts this cloth to make a shroud. The body is washed a second time and covered with the cloth; the second washing is a replica of the ablutions performed when one goes to the mosque. Only the closest female relatives are permitted to see a dead man; only the closest males can view a deceased woman The body is laid on a stretcher or open carrier mounted on poles.

Prayers are recited at the home and the body is removed to the mosque. It is placed near the door, at the rear of the prayer hall of the mosque. More prayers are conducted and the body is then carried by the friends and relatives to the burial ground. Only men go to the cemetery. After the burial, the *imam* has further prayers and gives a sermon on the afterlife. In the case of a woman's death, female members of the household and female neighbours prepare the body and put it in a shroud. After prayers at the home, male relatives carry the corpse to the mosque (and later to the cemetery), leaving all womenfolk behind at the home.

On the third day after the funeral, the *imam* conducts prayers at the home and relatives and friends join the family in a meal. This is also done on the seventh and fortieth days after the death. On the seventh and fortieth days, the poor are fed also.

CHAPTER FIVE

Caste

The opposite house is the Washerman's, the adjoining house is the Goldsmith's and next to mine is that of the Barber.

Tamil Proverb

The classical, original division of Hindu society into the four classes, or varnas, has little applicability in Jaffna. These divisions were Brahman (priests), Kshatriya (rulers and warriors), Vaisya (traders) and Sudra (workers). In India these subdivided into hundreds of castes; in Jaffna, into scores or a few hundred. Originally each of these castes was associated with an occupation. The Brahmans are in Jaffna today as Priests, mostly, a slight trace of Aryans in a sea of Dravidians, quite in contrast to the numerous Brahmans of India. It is estimated that there are only 600-800 families of Brahmans in the Jaffna Region. One hears few references to the other three varnas. Unfortunately, a good sized portion of the population of Jaffna is outside the caste system—the outcastes, untouchables or depressed classes as the euphemism has it.[95]

Reasons for caste—The caste system is centuries old; portions of it are many centuries old. In order to have endured for so long, it must have met the need of the higher castes for respect, security and subordination, or other personal or social desires. For most of its

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[95] This chapter draws upon Banks, M., "Caste in Jaffna," in *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and Northwest Pakistan*, Leach, E. R., ed., 1960; David, K., "Spatial Organization and Normative Schemes in Jaffna, Northern Sri Lanka," *Modern Ceylon Studies*, vol. 4, Jan.-July, 1973 (publ. Dec. 1975); Cartman, J., *Hinduism in Jaffna*, 1957, Gunasena, Colombo; and Skjonsberg, E., Caste and Sex: *A Village Study from Sri Lanka*, an unpublished research paper, 1974, cited as *A Village Study*. This chapter has been checked with educated members of several castes and particular care has been exercised to insure that generalizations made some years ago have been updated if necessary. It is apparent that the caste system has changed more in the last two decades than has the arranged marriage system.

extraordinarily long life the system existed in an era and an area in which liberal ideas or alternatives were almost unknown. The caste system gave security to the top castes, especially those who owned the land, so the rich and the powerful liked it. For the rest of society it answered in considerable detail the questions as to the identity of persons and what their place and duties in society were. Since it was fortified with the potent twin forces of dharma and karma, a great many centuries passed before any cracks began to appear in it. With each caste an occupational group, supplying its services to the society, it bore a superficial resemblance to the manorial system of medieval Europe. The caste system brought an almost eternal order to the society of India and Ceylon.

One who has studied the society of Ceylon, including Jaffna, and has written numerous articles on the subject, Mr. M. D. Raghavan, says this about the value of the caste system:

Interdependence is the keynote of the Jaffna social system; an interdependence based on rights and privileges between the higher and lower strata of society. Held together by bonds of mutual services and privileges, it made for a balanced social well-being, in which every unit of society, the high and the low were partners, in the interests of the society as a whole, a system which, to the lower social orders afforded a sense of social security. It fulfilled the needs of a traditional society of the time, oriented to agriculture.[96]

Obviously Jaffna is by no means a free society, nor is Sri Lanka. An Indian sociologist who studied Ceylon's society a few years ago affirmed that an equalitarian system of social relations (which may approximate the idea of a free society) could not emerge in the prevailing environment in which caste was so important a part.[97]

Caste essential—It is sometimes stated by Hindus that if caste disappeared, it would be the end of Hinduism. Personally, I have never been able to understand this opinion of some of my Hindu

[96] *Tamil Culture in Ceylon,* p. 166.

[97] Sharma, K. L., "Social Change in Modern Ceylon: Some Reflections," *South Asian Studies* (Jaipur), Jan., 1971, pp. 40-48.

friends. With its amazing ability to adapt and to adopt, the religion of Hinduism would surely very strongly survive the disappearance of caste. After all, caste was but one of the seven commonly recognized beliefs or practices of Hinduism. Anyhow, it is a very theoretical question for the foreseeable future, even though caste is under attack and is certainly changing.

Not a nice word—Foreigners use the word "caste" a great deal more than does the local Jaffna resident. It is not exactly a nice or polite word. The person born into the caste system finds that it is "closer to him than breathing, nearer than hands and feet" as indicated by the slight hesitation and lowering of the voice which take place as the average educated person prepares to use the word "caste" or to speak about it. English-speaking Tamils very much prefer the word "community," and in Tamil "*kulam*" (lineage) is the most common substitute for caste (*jati*).

A person's caste, though socially generally all-important, is no longer an accurate guide to his actual work At least half the people must be engaged in work different from what their caste occupation was originally. For example, no one does the work of a palanquin-bearer today and not many do hand-weaving either because of the superiority of power looms. If a man enters an occupation different from his caste's traditional one, he rarely takes up the work of another caste but goes into a new or miscellaneous occupation. There is some aversion to doing the work of another caste, unless the work can be mechanized. This aversion is being overcome, however, because so many craftsmen (Carpenters, Blacksmiths and Masons) are going overseas that lower caste persons are moving into the vacancy. No one but a Dhobi would dream of doing laundry but if washing machines are introduced, others could then take up the job. Mechanization cancels caste; no caste occupation, of course, was anything other than manual until very modern times.

Dr. Daniel Poor, writing in Jaffna in 1840 about the high caste men he had just seen working in the Mission Press in Manipay, confirms the view that mechanization affected caste even then, though he puts more emphasis on the different nature of the work, "If we had formerly put such tools in their hands as they now use, they would have been alarmed lest it was our intention to degrade

them to the carpenter's or the shoe-maker's caste. But as no one had ever heard of losing caste by attending to the *printing* business, young men of education and good standing in society are quite ready to enlist in the service."[98]

In Professor Banks' clear and concise account of caste in Jaffna he says that caste has four main characteristics here:

1. There are a number of castes and each is not to be married out of by those within it (endogamous).
2. There is an idea of pollution connected with caste.
3. Nevertheless, castes are formally interdependent in economic, political and religious areas (so pollution is not absolute.)
4. These castes are ranked from high to low and "various forms of customary behaviour.symbolize the rank differences in caste."[99]

Class—Banks says that "class" in a western sense is to be found in the society of Jaffna Town but not in the villages, "since economic and educational differentiation corresponds so very closely to differences in caste."[100]

Landlords—The chief reason why the caste system works so smoothly in Jaffna is that the majority of the population is of the landlord caste—right at the top of the system, except for the handful of Brahmans in Jaffna. The landlord (Vellala) caste is estimated at least 50% and these are estimated to own well over half of the agricultural land. With the other half of the society divided into two dozen major castes, the most numerous of which constitute perhaps 15% of the population, and the great majority possessing a belief in the doctrine of karma which affirms that their status in the society

[98] Piyaratne, C. H., *The American Education in Ceylon.1816-1855,* unpublished Ph. D. thesis, U. Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1968.

[99] Banks, *op. cit.,* page 63, (both citations).

[100] *Ibid.*

has been justly determined by fate, it is not surprising that the society is little rent by civil strife. Although the Vellalas traditionally own most of the land there is no law or custom preventing other castes from owning land. However, low caste people are not often able to buy land as they are regarded as undesirable neighbours who cause the value of the land to deteriorate.

Of course, all the members of the landlord caste are by no means farmers. Rather, they compose the great majority of the "respectable" people of the society which means those who are educated and of a high or good caste. Most school teachers, government workers, clerks and students are of the Vellala caste.[101]

"Our people"—Each caste is also divided into unnamed units referred to as "our people," (*engarludeya akkarl*) which are units of society made up of several local residence groups scattered in different villages. Banks calls these groups "wards," but streets or strips or pockets might be better terms since "wards" smack of urban politics. When a Jaffna Tamil mentions his caste he may be referring to the generic term, the age-old occupational group, that is; or he may mean his *akkarl* group among whose members he lives and moves and has his being. He will normally marry among these latter. We will have more to say about the "strips" mentioned above after we have briefly noted how many castes there may be said to be in Jaffna today.

Number of castes—Banks counted the castes rather loosely and he listed 48 in Jaffna in 1956, at the time of his study. A Dutch governor two hundred years earlier had listed almost as many—41. In the early nineteenth century, Simon Casie Chitty listed 150,

[101] In view of the great pride which families in Jaffna take in their ancestry and the pains to which they go to prove that their family (especially at the time of marriage arrangements) is slightly above the other house of the same caste, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that the Vellalas of Jaffna are divided into ten divisions, all labelled "Vellala" with one of these terms preceding the word "Vellala:" Thera Kula, Solia, Pandi, Kongu, Karala, Kondai, Karkatha, Kalla, Maran and Shampodi Vellala, Raghavan, M. D., *Tamil Culture in Ceylon,* 1971, p. 132.

counting all sorts of small divisions. But David and Jeyasingham[102] in their respective studies, preferred to combine some of the castes and they both come up with 24 although Jeyasingham is somewhat less specific than David. The number would run into the low hundreds if each subdivision of caste were counted separately—indeed, "the Tamils have fissiparous tendencies!" Cartman, in his 1957 book, *Hinduism in Ceylon,* lists 23 castes. So, two dozen seems to be an acceptable round number in 1980.

"Strips"—Each village of Jaffna Peninsula normally contains several castes and each caste is represented by one or more groups which we will call "pockets" or "strips." Those in a strip are all members of one caste. The typical village contains several strips of each caste and a number of castes. Banks found no village with more than seventeen castes but he found eighteen villages which consisted of a single caste. The people in the different strips in the same village have few or no social relations with one another unless the village is large enough to have several strips of the same caste, in which case any given strip will perhaps claim one or two other strips as "their people." For one group of a caste to have nothing to do with members of the same caste who live quite near them seems surprising. But the people in each strip in each village are related to each other and its members are anxious to maintain its social rank in competition with all other pockets of that village, even of the same caste. Since each group is competing for status, those strips of the same caste in any village do not eat with each other or have any social relations except very minor economic dealings. To some extent also, they will attend each other's temple festivals.

To make up for this lack of friendliness with their neighbours, as it were, the members of a strip maintain the closest social relations with their relatives in other strips of nearby villages. With them they interdine and intermarry. Still, the rivalry remains; the members of each strip of a caste group normally assert that their strip has a higher status than any other strip of the same caste name. It seems likely that the intensely competitive spirit of the Jaffna man,

[102] Jeyasingham, W. L., *The Urban Geography of Jaffna,* passim.

mentioned in Chapter One, derives from this competition between the strips in which he is reared.

The traditional relationship between the Vellalas and the castes that serve them is somewhat complicated by the fact that the strip groups, even of the same caste, have little to do with one another in the same village. This means that the Vellalas in a given village may be served by Washermen from their own village and by Toddy Tappers or Barbers from another village. Thus the village in Jaffna is not such a self-contained, interdependent whole as the medieval European village was, or as foreign observers at first imagine. The Jaffna village is no integrated little entity but rather quite the opposite. To address the residents as "members of the community," as in the West, would have little meaning. But the village—except the newest ones—has a history and most Jaffna residents name a specific village with a trace of pride as their "native place."

Landlords' "retainers"—The Vellala view of the village is that the village is centered on them. They regard the other castes as their retainers or dependents or servants. In the case of Fishers or some artisans who no longer have any feudal relationship with any Vellalas, the latter act pretty much as if the others did not exist.

Servant (Koviyar), Barber and Washerman strips, which by their traditional tasks are the most closely associated with the Vellalas, do not as a rule serve more than one strip of Vellalas, or if they do, it will be the relatives of the Vellalas whom they are already serving. This fact, however, does not necessarily prevent the Washerman from participating part time in a commercial laundry in a nearby urban area.

Landlords and day labourers—The day labourers in the society come chiefly from the Navalar and Pallar castes (both Toddy Tappers). Since there are so many more of them than tapping requires, they have traditionally been available for all kinds of day labour tasks. Any one labourer may be employed by any of several Vellalas; but normally he works for a restricted number with whom he has inherited a traditional relationsip.

Traditional Payment

In the past ten years the landlords have had reason to take a careful look at this traditional work and wages system. For generations it had been more or less satisfactory for the landless labourer squatting on the landlords' land to do the latter's agricultural labour for him and to be paid in paddy at harvest time. But by 1973 inflation had doubled or tripled the price of things. The landlords began to realize that the price of the paddy they gave as the traditional payment was much higher (in rupees but not always in purchasing power) than it used to be and some of them took advantage of their all-powerful position to revise the contract unilaterally. They gave only as much paddy for a day's wages as equalled in cash value one day's wages. The labourers, of course, had no protection against this revolutionary act. Landlords are generally opposed to revolution but in this case they found that a forcible overthrow of the traditional set-up was desirable. If a labourer objected, he was apt to find that his services were no longer needed. The traditional relationship ended and day labourers were brought in to replace the worker who "made trouble."

By no means were all landlords guilty of this practice, most stood by the tradition. The rapacious landlords give the fair landlords a diminished reputation. But there seems to be reason to believe that the landlords themselves eventually are going to destroy the traditional system because it is financially better for them to shift from a feudalistic services system to a cash basis, just as the English landlords "commuted" their serfs' age-old rights to the land for payments of rent in cash in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Commutation was wholly engineered by the landlords for their own economic benefit and was generally exploitative, and often very destructive, to the serfs.

As we have seen, some Vellalas have parcels of land to rent and particularly to bestow on some of the castes who depend upon them, especially Koviyar who receive better land and Nalavar who receive palmyra land to live on. Each Koviyar family typically receives enough land for a house plus approximately 1/4 acre—the area required for 1000 tobacco plants—to support themselves. *Maniam* is the Tamil word for enough land for subsistence, the amount of land

just described. Tradionally, the Nalavar got enough palmyra land to subsist. Barbers and Dhobies were given house land but no *maniam.*

In contrast, the landless Vellala often owns enough land for himself and family but has none to give out to his dependents. Therefore, such Vellalas have to hire the services of Koviyar, Nalavar, Barbers and Dhobies.

The ways in which Vellala often compensate members of their dependent castes are varied. Brahmans are paid a salary from temple funds but if they assist at family rites of death or at weddings they may be given uncooked food and sometimes new clothing. Barbers formerly received their payment in paddy; it is much more commonly made in cash or in fruits and vegetables today. Washermen receive an annual allotment of paddy from each household they serve and additional paddy for ceremonies; again, cash and kind other than paddy are common means of payment. Incidentally, the family washes most of its own clothes; the Washerman, the minor share. If he were asked to wash all the clothes he would be paid some cash, in addition.

Both Barbers and Washermen regard their relationship with the Vellala families as hereditary rights rather than as duties because their status within their own castes is derived in part from the caste rank of the Vellalas they serve.

Koviyar caste labourers are paid in cash and paddy but not with any annual payment; their services must have been commuted long ago. Sweepers are paid in paddy, cash and sometimes drink—toddy—and they receive an annual paddy payment. With the artisan castes the Vellalas are on pretty much of a cash basis.

Village violence—Turning to the subject of violence within the village, Banks found that in Jaffna, fights do not occur between villages nor between two strips of the same caste within a single village. The fights occur between two factions of the same strip or because a Vellala disciplines a low caste labourer who is not one of his own dependents. This can lead to a fight between two Vellalas who lead rival factions of various castes dependent upon them.

So local solidarity in Jaffna does not focus upon the village as a whole but upon the strip. Evidently the ties which cut across the Jaffna village reduce the tensions between villages and between castes but this seems to increase the tension within the strip.[103] However, most of the time the caste system is so much taken for granted that relationships between various castes proceed naturally with no evidence that either the high caste person or the low caste is concerned about it. If there were a variation or breach of caste etiquette, both would be embarrassed. Fights are exceedingly rare.

A stable society—Although the Jaffna village is made up of non-adhesive layers and has a heterogeneous composition, it has a great stability. Banks thinks it is rather remarkable that Jaffna has remained so conservative despite the high level of education of its citizens and the fact that so many of them have lived abroad for extended periods. On the subject of their remarkable endurance with little change, he observes, "At the village level the Jaffna social system has persisted with little change over a long period, despite the most sweeping alterations at high political levels and the continuous impositions of European colonial rule since early in the seventeenth century."[104] This is certainly a remarkable phenomenon.

A Vellala "will *require* the Brahmin and Barber to support his faction; the Brahman and Barber *petition* the Vellala to intervene for them in time of trouble. The Brahmin gives cooked food to the Vellala and the Barber; the Brahmin will not accept cooked food from either. Similarly, the Vellala gives cooked food to the Barber but will not accept cooked food from him. The Vellala receives and pays for the services of the Brahmin and Barber, but he will neither work for nor accept pay from either caste."[105] So the relationship is asymetrical and not a free one.

A family which was not high caste but some of whose members were educated and "respectably employed," had built a house and wished to invite their friends and those they worked with to the

[103] Banks, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[105] David., *op. cit.*, p. 33.

customary housewarming meal. However, they were faced with the dilemma that some of their colleagues were Vellalas who would not eat in their new home. They solved the problem by having the meal at their place of work. Since it was viewed as neutral territory, and not polluting as a lower caste home would be, all came and joined in the meal freely. This incident occurred in 1979.

Buyer-seller—A freer relationship is that of buyer and seller, in which they meet at the market—neutral territory—and sell whatever they have to anyone. Here the caste system does not permit the higher caste person to order the seller to sell him anything. "Bargaining," says David, "is antithetical to hierarchy."[106] The paved roads in the town are ideal for ready access for they are caste-free, status-free, neutral territory where all can meet and buy and sell. So in addition to the vegetable, fruit and fish bazaar, there are dozens of shops located in or near the market area selling cloth, books, paper, oil, tea, buttermilk and curd; and a Dhobi or two may have a stall there.

When people of a different culture hear about the caste system it seems almost automatic that their reaction is to imagine it is a system neatly arranged so that at the top is the highest caste and at the bottom the lowest. The truth is, however, that it is not possible to make such a list because so many castes overlap with others or are in groups which are approximately equal. So a list of castes in hierarchical order is only an approximate list. Here is such a list for the twenty-four castes which Dr. Jeyasingham and Dr. David feel are the most commonly agreed on:

Brahman	Temple Priest	
Saiva Kurukkal	Temple Priest	
Vellala	Landowner	
Chettiyar	Merchant	High Caste
Koviyar	Domestic servant of Vellala	
Acari	Temple Carver	

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Thattar	Goldsmith	
Kaikular	Silk Weaver	
Cheniar	Cotton Weaver	
Karaiyar	Traders, Fishers, Landowners	
Thachchar	Carpenter	
Kollar	Blacksmith	
Kusayar	Potter	
Chantar	Oil Presser	
Mukkiyar	Fisher	
Thimilar	Fisher	
Pantaram	Temple Cook and assistant to Priest	
Nattuvar	Musician	Middle Range Caste
Vannar	Dhobi, Washerman	
Ampattar	Barber	
Pallar	Tapper, day labourer	
Nalavar	Tapper, day labourer	
Paraiyar	Sweeper, Weaver, funeral Drummer	
Thurumpar	Washerman for Pallar and Nalavar	Low Caste

Dr. David has classified these castes in the interesting manner here;[107] (For Middle Range Castes he uses "Good Caste," but "Good" and "High" are used interchangeably in Jaffna.)

[107] David, K., *op. cit.*, p. 36. He calls those castes "local" which are largely involved in landowner traditional relationships. Those castes who sell their products to all comers, he calls a-local.

Priests And Castes of Agricultural Sector Bound in Traditional Relationships

Caste Name	Level	Traditional Occupation
Brahmin	High	Temple Priest
Saiva Kurukkal	High	Temple Priest
Vellala	High	Landowner
Koviyar	High	Domestic servant, Herder
Vannar	Low	Washerman
Ampattar	Low	Barber
Pallar	Low	Agricultural labourer
Nalavar	Low	Tapper, labourer
Paraiyar	Low	Funeral Drummer, Weaver, Sweeper
Thurumpar	Low	Washerman for Pallar and Nalavar

Merchants, A-Local Artisans and Fishermen Not Bound in Traditional Relationships

Caste Name	Level	Traditional Occupation
Chettiyar	High	Merchant
Acari	Good	Temple Carver
Thattar	Good	Goldsmith
Kaikular	Good	Silk Weaver
Cheniar	Good	Cotton Weaver
Chantar	Good	Oil Presser
Mukkiyar	Good	Fisher
Thimilar	Good	Fisher

Mixed Castes, Primarily Bound

Caste Name	Level	Traditional Occupation
Pantaram	Good	Temple Cook and assistant to Priest
Nattuvar	Good	Musician

Mixed Castes, Primarily Not Bound

Caste Name	Level	Traditional Occupation
Karaiyar	Good	Traders, Fishers, Landowners
Thachchar	Good	Carpenter
Kollar	Good	Blacksmith
Kusavar	Good	Potter

Priests—It is almost universally assumed that Brahmans are at the top of the caste system. But a few exceptions have been found in India and some also have been found in Jaffna. The Brahmans get no credit in Jaffna for being Aryans; no one has any doubt that the best people are Dravidians! In Jaffna also there is a very low status group of Brahmans called *kaka* (crow) Brahmans who act as Priests for untouchables. But they are very few. About the more numerous Brahmans there is a debate as to whether they are above Vellalas or not. There are only a few Brahmans in Jaffna and the great majority of them function as Priests in Hindu temples. But the owners and managers of the temples are usually Vellalas. Many of these managers have the recognized, traditional right to interfere in the temple ceremonies if occasion arises. The few Brahmans who do own temples in Jaffna are recent immigrants from India and are always to be found either in large towns or at pilgrimage sites.[108]

In several cases Brahmans in Jaffna have tried to claim a temple in which they and their ancestors have performed the worship for several generations. Usually the court has maintained the ownership rights of the Vellala manager and popular opinion supports this view.

So while performing their religious duties, Brahmans rank higher than Vellalas "on the grounds of greater purity,"[109] but in the secular world the Brahmans are below the Vellalas. (From time immemorial, incidentally, Brahmans and Vellalas and Kariyar have had the privilege of shaving the hair off the front part of the scalp;

[108] Banks, *op. cit.*, 67.

[109] *Ibid.*, pp. 66-69.

Koviyar do not have this privilege.) Vellalas are polite and differential to Brahmans in speech, offering them a seat, etc. However, this is merely manners. The Vellalas do not permit Brahmans to manifest attitudes of superiority towards them. The Vellalas seem to be pretty clear about a code of behavior for Brahmans. For example, Brahmans are not expected to use any but the polite form of speech when addressing a Vellala. The acceptable view of Brahmans is that they are "simple, unpretentious men, mild and unassuming, given to the conscientious performance of their duties."[110] The few Brahmans who are not Priests are treated like other high caste people which makes it obvious that any unusual respect shown to a Brahman by a Vellala is to the office of the Priest rather than to his person or his caste. It is also true that a Brahman who does not behave acceptably will be called to order by Vellalas. But this emphasis is much too negative—the two castes normally get along very well and there certainly is little of that general hostility toward the caste of Brahmans in Jaffna which prevails in South India.

In some cases a Brahman family is not attached to one temple only but the same family may conduct worship at two or more temples located in different areas of the village.

High caste victims—Although the Vellalas are at the top of the caste system for virtually all practical purposes, as the decade of the seventies draws to a close, a small but pitiable minority of the Vellalas are suffering very severe economic hardship. The fact that they are even worse off then the low caste labourers who live near rhem indicates that they are prisoners of the caste system. While the low caste people find work as casual labourers and "back yard" workers, most of the Vellalas are too proud to take such jobs for they feel such work lowers their caste status. So they are proudly and painfully suffering. Occasionally there is a suicide among them.

Widow remarriage—It is only among Brahmans that the remarriage of widows is prohibited. This is regarded by the rest of Jaffna society as a Brahman peculiarity rather than as a virtue or

[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 66-69.

evidence of unusual piety on the part of the Brahmans. Also the Brahmans, and Pandarams and Nattuvars observe less than 31 days for ritual impurity because of a death in the family. Again, their doing so is not regarded as meritorious and neither is the wearing of the sacred thread which actually is also worn by some members of artisan castes such as Temple Carpenters and Goldsmiths.

Koviyar—The Koviyar caste has a peculiar relationship with the Vellalas. Originally they were their slaves; since the abolition of slavery the Koviyar have been their household servants. Living so close to the Vellalas meant that the Koviyar had to be close to them in status also. Ritually, the two castes are equal. If Vellalas intermarry with any other caste, as happens once in awhile, the Koviyar is the most likely; but this is true among Christians; it is exceedingly rare among Hindus.

Vellalas will eat from Koviyar's cooking; Koviyars may be employed as Vellala servants, and always cook at Vellala weddings. Formerly Vellalas often took Koviyar women as concubines; many of the children of such unions are today accepted as Vellalas, while others remain Koviyars. Vellalas attend Koviyar weddings as guests and eat there. At Vellala funerals Koviyars carry the bier to the burning-ground and at Koviyar funerals the Vellala who has been served by the dead Koviyar must touch the bier of the Koviyar before the procession may start. This illustrates very well the distinction between the ritual equality and the secular inferiority of Koviyars. By touching the bier the Vellalas assert or admit their ritual equality with Koviyars; by not carrying it they assert their secular superiority.

Today Koviyars rank immediately after Vellalas if one places Brahmans above Vellalas, or immediately after Brahmans if Brahmans are placed below Vellalas.[111]

Today there seem to be no longer enough Koviyar to supply the Vellala need for household servants. Koviyar are certainly entering other kinds of employment whenever possible; that is, usually, when they manage to get their children educated and able to get a job with

[111] Banks, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

more status than a servant. So the strict taboo concerning who handles the food of high castes has crumbled in the past twenty years. A good many have been willing, under this duress, to employ members of the Tapper community, for example. When untouchables are hired to handle high castes' food, some of the power has gone out of the caste system.

Smiths—The Temple Carver, Blacksmith and Carpenter castes generally have their places of work in the compound under a cadjan shed, or corrugated iron sheets. This is true for Goldsmiths too except for those located on Thattar Street in Jaffna Town but since Goldsmiths need less room than the other smiths, they are more often working in a room within their own or a relative's home. Since the 1950's larger establishments have been set up by more successful Carpenters with large lumber yards attached and by those Blacksmiths who have become specialists in automobile and lorry repair. Neither of these occupations, says David, are followed exclusively on caste lines any more; Vellalas may send their sons to follow mechanics training. And surely this is because new tools are used and thus, to some extent, the craft has been mechanized so the caste stigma has been removed. The stigma is less also when the establishment has become sufficiently large to look like a commercial operation, especially if it is blessed with power tools.

Oil Pressers—Another middle level caste is the Chantar or Oil Presser. The largest number of Chantar live at Pirampatthai, near Pandaterruppu. Smaller groups live on Karainagar and at Anaicottai and Vaddukoddai. At Vaddukoddai there appear to be only five or six *chekkus* (oil presses) left. These are said to be operated on a fairly casual basis from a few times a year to several times a month although this statement by a proprietor in Vaddukoddai hardly accords with the need to replace an expensive *chekku* every two or three years.

When in operation the *chekku* makes a loud groaning, creaking sound which takes a bit of getting used to. The mill itself is crude but effective and is not too easy to describe briefly and clearly. Mr. S. Katiresu did it very well 75 years ago: "It consists of a large granite stone or the trunk of a tamarind tree hollowed like a mortar, in which a heavy upright pestle (made of satinwood or of Ceylon

teak) is worked round by bullocks yoked to a transverse beam deep and firm so as to be able to stand the resulting pressure."[112]

The economics of the gingelly oil extraction business will be taken up in Chapter Nine.

Fishermen—There are three distinct castes of Fishermen in the Jaffna social system: all three, Karaiyar, Mukkuvar and Thimilar are in the middle or "good" range of castes but the first is distinctly above the other two. Intermarriage among these castes is rare, Dr. David was informed, but a few years later Karaiyar-Mukkuvar intermarriage was pointed out to me by Professor Sivathamby as sufficiently on the increase to suggest a megacaste. The Karaiyar caste is divided between wealthier Tevar ("Seafarers") and the ordinary Karaiyar ("Fishermen"). Because men of the Tevar subcaste were allowed to shave the front part of their head like the Brahmans and Vellalas, they claimed to be equal with Vellalas, a claim which the Vellalas reject.

Karaiyar of Myliddy—A well-known Karaiyar community is the village of Myliddy, on the north coast juat east of KKS.[113] Its structure is not identical to that of an agricultural village for there are several strips for each of the two groups (Tevar and ordinary) in Myliddy and some strips are shared. Interstrip marriage is permitted, again in contrast to the agricultural villages. "Since all Tevars are equivalent in blood purity and honour, they intermarry irrespective of ward (strip) residence."[114] This is true of the common Karaiyar also, among their subcastes. Barbers, Dhobies and day labourers work for the people of several Tevar strips, rather than only one. Common Karaiyars have to hire such services.

Most of the fisherfolk live in tiny plots on the beach sand on which almost nothing will grow. The lucky ones have larger compounds on the land side of the coastal road and have gardens there. Two-thirds of the marriages, a few years ago, were within the

[112] *A Handbook to the Jaffna Peninsula*, 1905, p. 44.

[113] David, "Spatial Organization...," pp. 26-27

[114] *Ibid.*

strip; most of the rest were within the village and only ten percent were not local alliances. Dr. Kenneth David carefully studied Myliddy for a year and a half about 1972-1973 and he has this to say about the social organization:[115]

> As usual in peasant societies, the kinship relation is multi-stranded; kinsmen form economic partnerships with other kinsmen and fight together to protect their interests. Of the total number of partnerships (co-owners of boats, contributors of pieces of net to the huge gill-net used with launches) 80% were from the same ward. Fishing boats of the same ward are moored together, distinctly separate from the boats of the next ward. Finally, each ward has a shrine within its borders cared for by one of its members. Large temples are also identified with wards. As in the agricultural village, temple support is the only corporate function of the ward; but the ward is the center of kinship, economic, factional and religious networks.

While some temples in South India have excluded Fishermen because they kill fish, they are allowed to enter temples freely in Ceylon "because their services as labourers are needed and the festivities are not complete without them."[116]

Thimilar—The Thimilar are named after *"thimil"* a Tamil word for "boat" so they are literally "Boatmen." The Thimilar and Mukkuvar (also spelled "Mukkiyar") are fairly small castes, being considerably less in number than the Karaiyar. Although they are few in number, Thimilar are the most numerous caste in a certain northern island village studied by a Norwegian sociologist whose research report makes it possible to give more details on this caste than I can on most.[117]

In this village of T. the Thimilar were Boatmen indeed for they had prospered for generations because they owned the lighters or barges which took the goods unloaded at Kayts by larger ocean-

[115] *Ibid.*

[116] Statement of S. Nallathamby to Hindu Temporalities Commision, *Report*, p. 484.

[117] Skjonsberg, E., *A Village Study*, 1974.

going sailing ships from India and ferried them to the port of Jaffna. This was a relatively good business and the Thimilar prospered until the 1950's. Then larger ships unloaded at Colombo, whose goods were brought to Jaffna by rail and lorry, began to take over the business of the lighters which began to decline. From a high of perhaps 40, the number of lighters owned by Thimilar dropped to sixteen by 1974 and five years later there were only two or three left. The Thimilar who prospered in those days are people who lived in the cement block houses roofed with colourful red tiles and surrounded by a good concrete wall. However, those were the lucky few; most Thimilar live in mud walled houses with thatched roofs and mud floors elevated above the floods of the rainy season. The decline of the lighter business threatened the Thimilar with dire poverty.

What poverty means is shown by the fact that in 1974, in 117 Thimilar houses, (the homes of 640 persons) while 92 houses had a storage chest and the same number were surrounded by a fence or wall, only seven had latrines; 26 houses were one-room structures, 61 had two rooms and 30 were three or more rooms in size. And by 1974 much of their lost livelihood had been made up by several years of employment at Cey-Nor Project. Thirty-seven homes contained one or more beds (most people sleep on the floor) and just about half the houses contained a table and one or more chairs. The emphasis is strongly on simple living which the warm and generally sunny climate greatly facilitates.

Perhaps it was after the lighter business declined that some of the Thimilar turned to crafts such as brick-laying and motor mechanics with which they have supplemented their traditional skills of boat building and carpentry. It was these skills which enabled them to get good jobs at Cey-Nor. For in the nick of time the Cey-Nor Development Project came to T. to build a boat and net factory and the Thimilar began to prosper once more. Today they are fully employed at Cey-Nor. As many of their wives as wish to work are employed there also, most of them in the prawn and fish processing department.

Taking a brief look at their marriage customs, we find that for those who do not have the resources to provide a wedding feast, the

ceremony is simple and cheap. There are few guests, no Priest, no *thali* and simple eats. "Poverty is a great equalizer."[118] However, most Thimilar weddings are registered publicly and therefore are a legal contract while their low caste neighbours mostly do not bother with the registration.

While the poorest Thimilar have no dowry to give, the wealthiest dower their daughters in the Rs. 10-20,000 range (1974) and a house or a share of a house. Of 99 Thimilar marriages surveyed, 39 had received dowry and 39 had not with 21 not replying. Love marriages are uncommon among the Thimilar but now and then they have occurred. In one case, the families no longer speak to their children because of the insult of their getting married without parental permission. In another case, the marriage failed and when the son returned home, he was sent away by his parents. In 1979 the number of love marriages is said to be increasing only very slightly. Parental approval remains of primary importance in getting married.

Bigamy is prohibited in Ceylon except for Muslims. However, three Thimilar men in 1974 had a second wife. In two of the three cases, the second wife was a sister of the first and in all cases the first wife was childless. Because the wives had no children, the community accepted the bigamous unions as reasonable.

It is interesting to note that none of the Thimilar men got married before they reached twenty-one unless they had seven or more years of schooling. But quite a few of their low caste neighbours married before twenty-one even though they had little or no education. The explanation for this divergence, according to Miss Skjonsberg, is that Thimilar men are expected to support their wives, most of whom stay at home and raise the family, whereas the people of lower caste depend upon the additional work of the wife or the family will not be able to make ends meet.

In the paddy fields some of the poorest Thimilar women labour alongside low caste women, as agricultural labourers. Eighteen percent of the Thimilar women work outside the home for cash;

[118] *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 83.

75% of the Pallar women do. All the prawn and fish processing at Cey-Nor is done by these two groups of women. In June, 1979 forty employees were added to the fish processing division; all were Pallar, however.

In the village one barbershop receives all castes; the other is restricted to Thimilar only.

Caste strife—In its earliest days, the Cey-Nor Company hired numbers of Thimilar and Pallar women to work in their prawn processing department. Caste rivalry in various forms, including fighting, broke out from time to time between the two castes. The basic objection was from the Thimilar women who complained that the untouchable Pallar got too close to them and sometimes touched them or their packed lunches. The Thimilar threatened to call in their brothers to make the Pallar behave properly. In an attempt to be neutral in this fracas, the Company decided to employ equal numbers of each caste. Such equality pleased the Pallar more than it did the Thimilar, naturally since it seemed to concede the equal status which was the issue. Most of these working women were unmarried girls of marriageable age and very conscious of their status. Since they were all doing the same work, for the same pay, about the only factor which distinguished the Thimilar from the Pallar was their caste. Therefore the Thimilar were determined to see to it that untouchability and their own caste superiority were maintained.

The fact that now, in 1980, the two different groups of women get along and no longer quarrel violently is a sign of some amelioration of the low estate of the Pallar community. Likewise, throughout the plant, with Pallar and Thimilar working with people of several other castes in a harmonious industrial and social situation, it is clear that it weakens the ties of caste to remove the occupational groups from their traditional setting and transplant them into a new occupational environment.

Pallar—The Pallar are one of the two low castes who are always connected with toddy tapping. The Nalavar are more numerous and are primarily Tappers; the Pallar are essentially agricultural labourers but they often climb palm trees and tap them.

At present the Pallar are entering trade and service businesses and are steadily giving up agriculture and tapping, leaving the latter more and more to the Nalavar. In the village surveyed (T.), the Pallar numbered 458 persons in 92 households in 1974. Compared to the few thousands who compose the small Thimilar caste, the Pallar are quite numerous even though second to the Nalavar. Nearly two out of three of the Pallar people in the village of T. did not own the land on which they lived.[119]

In 1974 many of the working Pallar men in the village of T. were earning Rs. 180 per month; the working women about half of that. A great many Pallar women work for the reason given earlier. In some cases a Pallar woman earns more than her husband if he is only irregularly employed. Since women are paid only about half as much as a man (Rs. 3-5 v. Rs. 8, 1974 wage level), but presumably do more than half a man's work, they are more in demand for casual labour of many sorts. Not many Pallar work for landlords on the traditional basis; most are hired casually.[120]

The Pallar are sufficiently poor that dowry is rarely paid. When dowry was paid in 1974 it varied from Rs. 200 to Rs. 2000.[121] Of 99 marriages surveyed, 56 had given no dowry, 27 had given dowry and 16 gave no information.

Of the 92 Pallar households only six were prosperous enough to own good cement houses with permanent (tiled) roofs. These home-owners got their money in most cases from selling a good deal mo toddy than the law allows and possibly from bootlegging arrack as well.

By 1974 only two Pallar men had been employed at the Cey-Nor Development Project. These joined the other non-Thimilar workers and formed a labour union as a rival of the Thimilar-dominated union. In the early years of Cey-Nor the company had hired mostly Thimilar and these latter had kept the Pallar out of the company for

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[119] *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 71 and 50.

[120] *Ibid.*

[121] *Ibid.*

some years by giving company officials the false information that the Pallar were much more prosperous than they appeared and were actually not interested in working there![122]

The Tamil language has several levels on which people can be addressed and the Pallar people, as untouchables, were addressed in the lowest level. If asked their name by a high caste person they were expected to say, "I think I am Nadarajah"—implying it is up to the questioner to decide whether this be true or not.[123] This practice is dying out.

In May, 1973, a group of Pallar youth marched on an exclusive Hindu temple nearby and tried to enter it. They were beaten up, several of their houses were set on fire and some Pallar wells were polluted. The owners of that temple closed it. By 1979, the temple had been re-opened.

In 1979 there are just over one hundred people of the Pallar community employed at the Cey-Nor plant as workers on fiber glass or ferro-cement boats, as maintenance men or general labourers and as drivers. Three work in the office. The women working at the Company average Rs. 300 per month approximately and the men between Rs. 400 and 500. With the hiring of practically all the Pallar people who want to work, it might be expected that their economic status would change slowly but steadily, triggering many other changes over the years.

Already it is noticeable that Pallar families are dressing less shabbily, living on a somewhat improved diet and the parents are beginning to show a definite interest in their children's education which formerly they largely ignored. More of them now have money for the dowry of their daughters.[124]

Of course, as so commonly happens in the civilized countries of the world, caste discrimination has been eliminated in Sri Lanka by

[122] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

[123] Cartman, *op. cit.*, p. 142. A high caste Hindu might use this same form of address if talking to a holy man.

[124] Skjonsberg, *op. cit.*, 145.

the government, on paper. The Social Disabilities Act of 1956 proclaimed an end to caste but very little machinery has been set up to enforce it. This act was passed in Sri Lanka in the era when American blacks were achieving equality of treatment in nearly all respects—100 years after they had been freed as slaves and given equal rights, on paper.

Status of Dhobi and Barber—Virtually all the large temples of Jaffna admit all castes but a great many small temples still exclude the low castes. In this exclusion there has been an anomaly: Washermen who are a fairly numerous caste have been permitted in temples as if they were not low caste and Barbers, who are of virtually indistinguishable difference from them have been excluded. The Hindus of Jaffna are quite familiar with the fact that in South India the reverse is true: Barbers are admitted to all temples and Washermen are excluded from some—or were until recent times. The excuse in Jaffna is that Dhobies are required to decorate portions of the temples with their cloths occasionally. But this is not convincing for generally the feeling is that laundering is more polluting than barbering. In fact, the subject of pollution, as applied to Dhobies, seems confused, or its application inconsistent. (All social systems have their inconsistencies!) The Dhobi comes into the homes of most of his patrons fairly freely and his advice is sought in checking on the families of mates proposed for the patrons' children. If the Dhobi is, then, as polluting as his inclusion in the low caste group implies, his patrons would seem to require a bath every time the Dhobi paid them a visit.

It would seem as if anything so vital to the welfare, self-respect and peace of mind of individuals as whether those individuals were classified by their society as untouchable or not, would be a matter on which the society was very clear and the lines hard and fast. I was astonished to find the opposite to be true, however, with regard to whether the Dhobi and Barber were untouchable although I found no reference to any debate on the subject anywhere in print. From several unimpeachable sources it is affirmed that the Dhobi and the Barber who serve the Vellalas are untouchable—the Dhobi because he handles very dirty clothes at times and the Barber because he deals with a species of human waste. (High caste people are supposed to bathe after a haircut.) My sources include good high

caste Hindus, a Christian untouchable and a Christian Priest who has associated closely with untouchables. From other sources, high caste Hindu friends, come strong assertions that they have never regarded their Dhobies and Barbers as untouchable. But Dr. David includes both in his untouchable classification. Mr. Cartman in his 1957 book, *Hinduism in Ceylon* says the Dhobi is clean, the Barber is clean. Dr. Banks, in his article on caste in Jaffna, omits the Dhobi and Barber from his untouchable classification. Professor Sanders says he regards both as clean castes, agreeing with Banks. Professor Sivathamby of Jaffna University agrees with Mr. Cartman that the Dhobi is above the line and the Barber below it. The Barber's status, obviously, is in transition.

Is untouchability, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder? Is untouchability not a universally recognized status but in the case of these two castes, a relative matter?

There is no doubt that the Dhobi and Barber castes have been classified as low and untouchable in the past and within the lifetime of persons alive today. Since the Barber is still excluded from those temples which continue to practice discrimination in Jaffna, it must be acknowledged that his caste is low, even though many of his customers and friends have long since stopped thinking of him in such unflattering terms and are quite prepared to grant him higher status. But his continued exclusion speaks clearly. Arumuga Navalar, the Hindu reformer and revivalist of the 1870's, criticised the exclusion of Barbers from the temples while Fishermen were admitted, though they took life and were non-vegetarian. But he did not succeed in getting the Barbers admitted to the temples of Jaffna in his lifetime.

The Dhobi's case is somewhat harder to decide but his original low caste must be acknowledged as proven. From the distant past comes the term Panchamas—the fifth class in a four class system! The classification of Hindu society into four classes or varnas omitted the bottom layer which was referred to as outcaste, untouchable, the fifth class or the Panchamas. This included the Nalavar, Pallar, Parayar—and the Dhobi and the Barber who were regarded as above these three but still untouchable.

Another fact about the Dhobi which corroborates his original low caste status is that caste-conscious customers in Jaffna, perhaps even yet, upon receipt of the stack of clean clothes which the Dhobi had just brought, would sprinkle clean water on the sheet in which the clothes were wrapped, ritually removing their uncleanness. The clothes were unclean because the Dhobi was of a polluting caste.

Arumuga Navalar said that the good Hindu appears at the temple wearing a *verti* washed and dried by the wearer—and so unpolluted, by not having been washed by the Dhobi.

The Hindu Temporalities hearings, referred to in the previous chapter, considered three subjects one of which was a caste question: Should all castes be admitted to Hindu temples? A careful examination of the 650 pages of hearings, documents submitted and summaries makes it clear that Nalavar, Pallar and Paraiyar castes are untouchable which is well known. But whether the Dhobi and Barber are untouchable, the Social Committee did not happen to consider. They took up the question of whether or not to admit all castes and left the precise status of these two particular castes unexamined, although the admissibility of the Dhobi and the non-admissibility of the Barber were mentioned repeatedly.

A University professor with whom I discussed the subject said (in paraphrase), "Both the Dhobi and Barber are polluting castes. But for certain temple rites Dhobies furnish the cloth for the ceiling in an area of the temple and also supply the cloth for wicks for innumerable coconut oil lamps which burn throughout the temple. Therefore, the Dhobi is admitted to the temple, his untouchable status is forgotten or forgiven or cancelled by his religious service, and we must count him as no longer an untouchable. The Barber is not so lucky and the line between touchable and untouchable caste must be drawn between these two castes."

That caste is relative and subject to change rather than immutable was an often expressed opinion by those who appeared in 1949-1950 before the Hindu Temporalities Special Committee. For example, the Kataragama Pilgrims Thondar Society view was, "Caste is merely a question of custom and Hindu society having

undergone vast and radical changes, the time has come to recognize the changes and accommodate ourselves to them."[125]

The Dhobi is threatened with untouchability because he handles dirty clothes of his customers,. particularly menstrual cloths. The Barber's pollution comes from the trimming of human hairs. The Hindu view of pollution rests upon a very negative feeling toward any and all bodily excretions, even hair.

In the matter of untouchability, the boundaries extend a very long way indeed; it depends on how far back in time one goes as to whether one group or another is included. In fact, it is argued by some who appeared before Special Committee that the entire Jaffna society is untouchable. Although the Hindu authorities are divided in their views on this, at least some accept the notion that their ancestors in India were of the Sudra varna and therefore, untouchable. Such authorities generally affirm that even the Vellalas' ancestors were Sudras and so in their ancestry had been debarred from the main temples. This is very much a minority view.

"The irony of fate is that Brahmins are now employed for money in Saiva temples managed by the 'untouchable' Sudras. A Brahmin who sells his services for money automatically becomes a Sudra according to the Smirthis."[126]

It was also pointed out in Mr. Navaratnam's memorandum just quoted that an untouchable who goes to a temple in the next district or province where he is unknown can enter without being detected. "This state of affairs has been in existence all through the years. Therefore, strictly speaking, all the temples have been in a continual state of pollution."[127] Since all temples are polluted, not only by unknown untouchables but by meat eating or liquor drinking high caste persons, or by other kinds of polluting practices, there is really no ground on which any caste could be excluded, the argument ran.

[125] *Report,* p. 16.

[126] Navaratnam, K., "A Memorandum on Hindu Temporalities, etc.," submitted to the Special Committee, Dec. 3, 1949, *Report,* pp. 414, 420.

[127] *Ibid.*

"Untouchability can only be said to have existed all these years in our country in theory and not in actual practice."[128]

The Brahmans and Vellalas are now the top castes and much of the rest of the society is above the low caste level although there is considerable evidence that it was not always so. Caste is thus found to be not forever fixed but relative and changing.

Washerman and Barber—But to return to the work of the Dhobi and the Barber, a little known service performed by the Dhobi is called "providing the change." One of his poorer customers, lacking clean clothes, might ask the Dhobi for a change. This meant he would be lent the clean clothes of some other customer for a few days. If by chance the clothes belonged to a person of higher caste than the borrower, and if by chance the higher caste person recognized his garment on a lower caste person, the Dhobi would receive a beating. The custom of "the change," however, is passing away in all but the most distant villages.

Both the Dhobi and the Barber have an unusual "privilege" in the society in that they are permitted to speak vulgarly even in the presence of high caste people. For example, if a customer angrily comes to the Dhobi's house demanding his clean clothes immediately, the Dhobi may blame his own wife for the delay and lightheartedly refer to her as a prostitute or some other vulgarity.

If one wishes to speak politely to the Dhobi (a fairly rare impulse in Tamil society!), he is addressed as "magician" (*kattadiyan)* an honourable title which pleases him by its reference to an art sometimes practiced by Dhobies in the past. The magic referred to is Black Magic. Likewise the Barber is pleased with the title of "Physician" (*pariyari*) for as in the West, as the barber pole continues to attest, the barber was often trusted for physical remedies and treatment.

As the Dhobi moves from family washerman to public laundryman and his participation in traditional family rituals

[128] Navaratnam, *ibid.,,* p. 420. Cartman, p. 132, classifies the Sudras as among the clean castes.

declines, the elders in the family take on the performance of these rituals.

One of the duties of the Washerman at any function to which his Vellala patron has invited guests is to make sure that only people of equal purity are eating together for theTamil belief is that the purity level of those one eats with is a part of what one eats.

It is not surprising from the foregoing that there is a continuing rivalry between the Barbers and the Washermen as to which is above the other in social status. Both are bolstered in their claims of importance by the traditional relationship which each has with the Vellalas. Both castes are asked by their patrons for help in arranging marriages and both may be legal witnesses to weddings in their patrons' families. At present, the Barber is definitely on the defensive. Not only is he no longer needed in many urban households, thanks to the safety razor, but neither is he needed in many marriage arrangements. Not so many Barbers as Dhobis have been able to set up shops in the towns and larger villages. As long as Washermen continue to prosper, they will overshadow and outclass the Barbers; and Washermen have never been so well off as at present. Increasing numbers of the latter no longer visit the homes of customers where the sanctions of caste can be directed to them. Economic independence increases social independence by removing the need for paying homage.

Things seem to have been rough on Barbers for a long time. Mr. K. Arumainayagam wrote in the Ceylon Admistration Reports for 1883 concerning Barbers in Jaffna, "Their calling is one that does not admit of much improvement towards bettering their condition, the tendency of modern civilization being rather to discourage the Barbers, several educated Tamils having amongst other things adopted the European habit of shaving themselves, or of growing their beards and moustaches, so as altogether to dispense with the Barber."[129]

Toddy Tappers—Most of what I want to say about the Palm Tree Climbers or Toddy Tappers is in the chapter on agriculture.

[129] *Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1979.

The Tappers, like all the landlord-related castes, illustrate the fact that the principle of *noblesse oblige* operates in the caste system. That is, the Vellala has his reponsibilities as well as the dependent castes having theirs. The Tappers live by permission on the land of the Vellala, without paying rent, but are expected to do certain tasks for the landlord. On his part, the latter is expected to respect their traditional rights to the land, to give them some paddy at harvest time, and to help them with some money at times of their weddings, funerals and financial stringency.

Parayars or Sweepers—In the caste system the most menial tasks in the society were regarded as disposing of dead animals, human sewage and rubbish. The question may be asked whether the people relegated to these tasks, from which the word "pariah" comes, were made untouchable because they did these tasks or whether they did these tasks because they were untouchable. But the fact remains that the Parayar are so low in the society as to be out of the system. With the exception of "Sweeper" and "Depressed Class," the terms applied to them in English are painfully explicit about the indignity of their place: untouchable, pariah, scavenger and outcaste. Mahatma Gandhi's attempt to give them some dignity by calling them *Harijans* (Children of God) has not caught on in Jaffna at all. Naipaul's brilliant observation is that the special curse of the caste system is that "It is unclean to clean."[130] "The outcaste is assigned 'polluting' work and is considered 'polluted.'"[131]

The Parayar's traditional task is sweeping the compound of his employers or patrons. Daily or less often he or she appears with the broom which is the Sweeper's symbol. Waste paper and other rubbish from the home, classroom or workshop have been thrown out messily in anticipation of his services. When he sweeps up the papers and leaves from the compound or other open spaces such as along the roadside, he frequently stirs up a big cloud of dust through which the neighbours have to walk as they go their ways. I have always suspected that the Sweeper took pleasure in stirring up dust

[130] *India, A Wounded Civilization*, p. 67.

[131] Skjonsberg, p. 112.

for his neighbours of higher caste to breathe—such a dust cloud may be known as the "Sweeper's revenge."

Thitty—While the main interest of this book is with the majority of the population who are not at the rock bottom of poverty by any means, it is relevant to include a description of some of the worst housed people in Jaffna Town, who live in a 4-5 acre plot between the Jaffna Town cemetery and the St. Patrick's College wall, a neighbourhood known as Thitty. The subject is relevant because they are Sweepers. 174 families totalling 829 persons live in Thitty; twenty families own their own land; fifty-five live rent free on land belonging to the Town; the remainder on land belonging to two landlords who are said to receive Rs. 8, 10 and 15 per month per family as rent. An organization calling itself the Man Movement surveyed Thitty during the last week of June 1978, interviewing every family. They reported that thirty-five houses are of stone; the others of thatch and they average 10 x 12 feet per hut. They usually have one door and one window; there is not much room between huts; four taps provide water for the village. There are also four wells but their water is brackish. The nearest fresh water well which they are allowed to use is a mile away and a pond in which they are permitted to bathe is also a mile away. The village is littered with refuse. Three small shops sell bread and sweetmeats and aerated water. The chief source of their food supplies is somewhat more distant shops or the Little Bazaar somewhat over a half mile away.

Much of the residents' time is spent out of doors because the climate generally permits it. But when it rains, much of the ground is flooded with a few inches of water, for the area is low.

Thitty has never received very good treatment because it was originally the home of untouchables, the fifteen to twenty families who cleaned latrines for the Jaffna municipality. That many families living in Thitty today would make it look very much better than it does with 174 families living there, making it a dreadful slum. Of the 299 people in Thitty who have employment, 146 are cleaners, 20 work as labourers for government departments or private persons, 14 are pensioners and 19 are casual day labourers.

For most practical purposes, Thitty is an insoluble problem. The surveyors, incidentally, found thirty-four transistor radios in the village.[132]

Thurumbar, Unseeables—The bottom caste, the Thurumbar, who are Washermen for untouchable castes, were not only untouchable themselves but they were also unseeable. By tradition they were supposed to go around only at dusk or later and, in order to avoid polluting anyone by accidental contact in the dark, each Thurumbar was supposed to drag a palmyra leaf behind him. Its rustling would warn others of his presence. Because they mostly went about in dark or semi-darkness, some high caste people did not even know of their existence. It is difficult to imagine how they could have made a living laundering the clothes of other, very poor untouchables. And after dark there was seldom any day labour job available. At any rate they were not ever very numerous and few of them wash clothes for a living today. One Thurumbar man is an industrialist in Jaffna today employing perhaps twenty-five people. Members of this caste were also reputed to be sorcerers able to dispense evil to one's enemy, for a fee. In this capacity, they met on a professional basis with some members of the higher castes now and then. Today, Thurumbar no longer drag the palmyra leaf with them, but I talked to an old gentleman who recalled seeing the practice in his youth.

According to Fr. Gnanapragasam, all the Thurumbar had become Roman Catholics years ago. Cartman's comment on this is, "This claim may be true but it does not in anyway alter their status in the eyes of the Hindus."[133] A professor friend says that there are a few Hindu Thurumbar in Jaffna Peninsula today. Fr. Gnanapragassm wrote two generations ago.

Discrimination today and yesterday—In the lifetime of most Jaffna Tamils alive today the low caste people have suffered from a variety of demeaning, discriminatory and oppressive practices directed at them by the other castes in order to keep them in their

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[132] Man Movement, *Thitty,* 1978, (pamphlet), Jaffna.

[133] *Hinduism in Ceylon,* p. 138.

lowly estate. I have talked to a well educated low caste man who said that when he was small, his mother dared to wear a blouse to a neighbouring village and had the misfortune to meet a caste-conscious person who ripped it from her. Even today, low caste women in many Jaffna villages do not feel free to wear blouses, although most do. A Jaffna Tamil friend, commenting on this situation, said, "The first woman to wear a blouse in a community where it had not been the custom had a rough time of it."

Other practices included:

Preventing low caste people from living near a temple. Burning fences and houses of low castes who became Christians. Not permitting them to draw water from a "clean" well.

Requiring the low caste person to come to the high caste person's home and doing some chores for the latter before the high caste person would draw water for him.

Reserving laundries, barber shops, cafes and taxis for high caste people.

Preventing low caste persons from sitting on the bus seats.

Polluting the well of a low caste family with oil or a dead dog or faecal matter as punishment for challenging some caste oppression.

Entering their names in the register of the Registrar of births, Deaths and Marriages falsely so the low caste person would have trouble getting a birth certificate; or entering the name with a typical ending which would betray the low caste.

Excluding low caste children from school, or preventing their wearing any footwear or shorts or trousers (native costume only) or restricting them to separate areas to eat or live if they had finally gained admission to a boarding school.

Even today low caste labourers are not viewed with favour by a traditional employer if they presume to dress in any other than traditional clothes. A change of garb is interpreted by some as a putting on of airs, i.e., a violation of a caste sanction. In the Christian churches, low caste persons had to sit on seats on the side or in the rear of the sanctuary or to sit on the floor; and to take communion separately from the other castes. Some pastors would not eat or drink in a low caste home. Low caste students were not accepted for the ministry. Low caste people were reluctantly tolerated as teachers but not as principals.

Today they are not allowed inside some Hindu temples, nor can they come on the veranda of a high caste home. They are given tea in an evaporated milk tin, a bottle or a broken glass or cup. Low caste people could not own a bicycle or a car, but today this ownership is accepted.

Many ponds (tanks) were ruled closed to low caste people and so were cremation grounds and cemeteries except their own.

When a customer in a cafe was unknown to the proprietor, the latter customarily asked, "Are you an insider or an outsider?" Outsiders (low castes) had to go outside or sit on the floor and receive their tea in a bottle or a tin.

Leftover food at a feast was given to the low caste people.

Most of these practices continue in vogue today, although fewer high caste people are particular about enforcing them. There are less of these repressive customs in Jaffna Town; they are strongest in the villages. They are declining but they still exist. To them should be added the fact that high caste people are in a position to prevent low caste people from getting work, another means of eliciting and insuring cooperation from the latter.

In Jaffna, in 1945, two Navalar were shot and killed by Vellalas who were outraged when Navalar people attempted to make use of the Vellalas' cremation ground. Near Jaffna Town in 1947, a low caste man picked up a cigarette tin in order to receive tea in a tea

shop. The owner of the tea shop also owned the tin and shot and killed the man for polluting it.[134] No doubt there was some history behind each of these incidents and fortunately they were a generation ago. But in 1977, some high caste village people in Jaffna Peninsula cut down a palmyra tree while a Tapper was in it, causing his death. In November, 1979, they were acquitted of charges of murder on a technicality.

Caste: a two-edged sword—I have emphasized that caste restricts the freedom of the lower caste people in numerous, demeaning ways. It also restricts the freedom of high caste people but in less important ways. George Orwell pointed out a generation ago that the masters are not entirely free to live as they like but must conform in various respects to what their underlings expect of them if they, the masters, are not to let their side down. Likewise, high caste people find their liberty circumscribed in various ways. This shows up clearly in the case of children who are unable to enjoy fishing and water sports because of slurring references to Fisher castes, nor to climb trees as boys are wont to do because of comparison to Tappers, nor to beat drums which is the occupation of Parayar people.

Polluting—Certainly one of the most painful oppressions suffered by depressed class people is to be regarded by the majority of the population as unclean, polluting, not to be touched by people of good caste—a permanent, life-long humiliation. Only a strong belief in the goodness and wisdom of karma could make this bearable. Similarly high caste people do not want low castes using the wells from which they draw their water. This means that the low castes have to use brackish water or go considerable distances one or more times a day to obtain this fundamental necessity. Thitty illustrates this enormous inconvenience.

The responsibility of the high caste person is sometimes seen in the context of the forbidden well. A low caste person needing a drink of water will occasionally wait beside a clean water well and the first high caste person coming along is under obligation

[134] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

(noblesse oblige) to go and draw some water and pour it into the other's hands while he drinks.

Caste oppression—A deplorable side of caste is also seen—and heard—in the manner in which high caste people normally speak to low castes who come to their veranda (or even sometimes to artisans who are not low caste). The visitor does not presume to come up on the veranda but waits humbly just beyond it. He is often addressed harshly and always replies softly. Caste is reinforced even by Tamil grammar. A superior is addressed *Ningarl;* an equal as *Nir;* and an inferior as *Ni*—three forms of the word for "you." None of the polite forms of the language are ordinarily directed to the low caste person.

When we examine the oppression which exists in a caste-dominated society we discover that it is different from the oppression which exists in a class-dominated society. In the latter, the dominance is impersonal; in a caste- dominated society the dominance is much more personal, which increases its force and makes it more oppressive. The interaction is face-to-face; the appropriation of the lower caste person's goods and services is generally direct and visible.[135]

According to a Scandinavian sociologist, there are three conditions necessary if a social system of conflicting interests, such as the caste system, is to endure:[136]

1. The material resources must continue to be shared in such a way that the group which would benefit the most from a change are excluded from getting any additional resources.

2. The social relations between the different castes must continue to be minimal and formal and the more oppressive the relationship the more true this must be.

3. Any attempts, even the smallest, to change the system in favour of the oppressed must be immediately and effectively resisted.

[135] Skjonsberg, 111, 114.

[136] *Ibid.*

If these are indeed the conditions for retaining the caste system then it is at once apparent that the system is on the decline. The gradually increasing employment of middle caste and low caste persons in more remunerative work than they have been able to enjoy previously is occurring and this means the first condition above is not being met.

The second condition is weakening because the laws against caste, the forces for human rights of liberty, equality and fraternity, the pressure of idealistic youth, the belief in reforms by liberal Hindus and the presence of free, public education where youthful ideals are discussed are all working for more interaction between the castes rather than less. The very fact that many different castes work together five or six days per week means that their social relations cannot be minimal and cannot be formal.

The third condition for the stabilizing of the caste system is also under attack for here and there the position of the oppressors is being challenged and they are not able in the long run to make one or another oppressive practice stick. The single argument of the political leaders, for example, that if Tamils are to criticise the Sinhalese for oppressing them, the Tamils must stop oppressing the lower caste Tamils is going to make its weight felt against this third condition. It led, for example, to the Members of Parliament of TULF in July, 1979, associating publicly with people of the lower castes and all dining at the home of an untouchable.

Megacastes—Professor Sivathamby of Jaffna University uses the term "megacaste" to describe an additional development in the comparatively rapidly changing picture of caste. Although there are ten or more subcastes of Vellalas there is sufficient intermarriage among them, and more all the time, plus intermarriage with the Koviyar caste, so that one homogeneous Vellala caste—a megacaste — appears as a distinct possibility for the future. The same kind of large size caste is developing through intermarriage among two of the Fishers: Kariyar and Mukkuvar. And among the Smiths—those who work in gold, iron, bronze,wood or clay—there has been intermarriage to some extent for a good many years.

The development of megacastes occurs at the expense of old caste barriers and traditions. The social factor which, more than any other, causes the higher caste parent to marry his child to someone of a lower caste, is wealth. The low caste person with wealth has some opportunity to "marry up."

But an important factor in support of caste is that the main bulk of the society is still in the hands of high caste educated people who control most of the wealth of the society. All of the people in the low castes are poor, with few exceptions, which means that virtually every cent they earn goes to the shopkeepers who are often high caste persons.

Inertia is on the side of caste. If someone wants to challenge that system he meets a lot more unfriendly faces than welcoming ones. The police and the administrative officers to whom he might go for assistance will be on the other side, not necessarily because they are cruel, hard-hearted men but as a matter of tradition and convenience. The officials in charge of law and order are not normally on the side of the challenger or the complainant. Even the best man is not given to speaking up for the poor. Change requires effort; no change requires less effort.

Another important factor *for* the preservation of caste is the fact that the constant emigration of educated and skilled workers from the Peninsula removes the more active, energetic, imaginative and flexible persons from society. These are the people who in the main would promote, or at least not resist, the decline of caste. Some of them will return to Jaffna and take their place as agents of change in the society but many will not and their absence means that the society remaining will be less open to change than it might otherwise be.

Caste under Attack—At 9:00 a.m. on Monday, June 18, 1979, a crowd of 150 men and women students trooped out of the gate of the University of Jaffna, carrying placards and shouting slogans against caste discrimination. Two hours later they were still marching, in the centre of Jaffna Town. Each wore a small black badge. The students had the week before demonstrated their interest in stopping the caste oppression which was occurring at Kaithady, a

village a few miles east of Jaffna Town, where some low caste people had attempted to enter a Hindu temple and had been violently repelled.

The marchers had a handbill printed in Tamil to proclaim their views on caste. The gist of their argument was:

Caste discrimination is a cancer eating into the society. It must be stopped immediately. We will root out this evil in this generation. Our bold endeavour will entirely destroy it. Otherwise we'll have a very low place in history. The universities have a major share in the freedom battles of the world. Untouchability prohibits a high caste person from touching a person of the lowest castes. It is rather strange that a man does not incur sin by touching animals but only when he touches certain of his fellow human beings. Tamils who perpetrate the atrocity of caste distinction have forfeited the right to protest against Viet Nam and Rhodesia and should not complain that the Sinhalese are oppressing them, if they themselves are oppressing *their* fellow Tamils.

In the same week in which this procession took place an old gentleman visited his birthplace about twenty miles from Jaffna Town, as he had done in the summer every year for the past 52 years. His father had died in 1927, leaving the request in his will that the anniversary of his death should be remembered by providing food for the poor of his neighborhood. The poor were understood to be of the lower castes, not the poor of the old gentleman's high caste. In 1979 there was a difference. The candidates for the food distribution, when invited once again to come, announced that this kind of charity was demeaning, a mark of low caste status, and they were not going to participate!

Human rights are rarely shared without a struggle and without complaints from the aggrieved. M. D. Raghavan, a man friendly with all castes, has noted that while most caste groups do not speak up for their own welfare, the Nalavar and Parayar castes are "the two

groups who have not hesitated to speak out their minds."[137] Slowly they have begun to be heard.

These changes have been a long time coming. The way was prepared by universal suffrage which gave voting power to all castes. Free education enabled an occasional bright boy from a low caste to break free of some of the bonds which had constrained all his ancestors. Midday meals in government schools were often served in caste-segregated groups, but not always.

One high caste Jaffna man who in his youth was radical enough to get other youths to sit and socialize with low caste people in a deliberate attempt to reduce caste discrimination, is still, long after retirement, striking blows for equality. When low caste people come to his veranda edge he tells them he will not talk to them unless they come up onto the veranda and sit down—something which embarrasses depressed class people and which artisans have only recently got somewhat used to. He gives them tea in a china cup and thus, as one determined individual, resists the customs of caste.

Progressive Writers—In 1954 a Progressive Writers Movement began which was centered in Jaffna but all-Ceylon in scope. A substantial number of these writers came from lower castes of the society but the movement is considered a part of the literary establishment of Sri Lanka today. Their writings, which were in Tamil, were focused on social disabilities, and are credited with raising the social consciousness and awareness of human rights of some of the citizenry.[138]

Power to the Youth—Nowhere in Jaffna is social change more clearly presaged than in the growing influence of youth and the decline in the authority of the elders. For years the teachers in the universities of the island have quaked before the students, fearful at being embarrassed by any student impudence or threat of force. The society is used to this form of youth power but no one was prepared for the revolutionary effects of the Cey-Nor Project upon the youth

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[137] *Tamil Culture in Ceylon*, p. 218.

[138] Professor K. Sivathamby.

of a portion of Karainagar. The liberating results of employing these youths, of both good and low castes, was eye-opening.

The men hired at Cey-Nor were comparatively young. For persons who have worked for day wages, or had a seasonal job and thus lived more or less hand to mouth, obtaining a regular salary at Cey-Nor, or anywhere, must be one of the most satisfying experiences of their lives. Their employment generally meant that they became the chief breadwinner of the family, even if not yet married. This employment enabled the young, in a few years, to challenge the village elders. Age had been the prerequisite for local political power but Cey-Nor ignored both age and family background. In 1971 the younger men nominated a slate of candidates for the Village Committee election and won a few seats. A low caste member was elected. By 1976 there were three Pallar members and one Thimilar member of the council out of a total of twelve.

The elders are not consulted by the Company and so are deprived of a base for power. The local men and women who work in the Company mingle with employees from Jaffna Town and many other villages and towns. They are no longer the notoriously withdrawn and provincial "islanders" which they were before Cey-Nor came. The decline in importance of the elders means that past traditions will be less successfully maintained and once again, a support of the caste system has been weakened.

When occupational changes lead people into non-traditional kinds of jobs, it means they have, to a slight extent moved out of their caste so to speak and the system is thereby weakened. When a lower caste man is fortunate enough to get a job on a managerial level and employs Vellalas to work for him, the system is literally turned upside down.

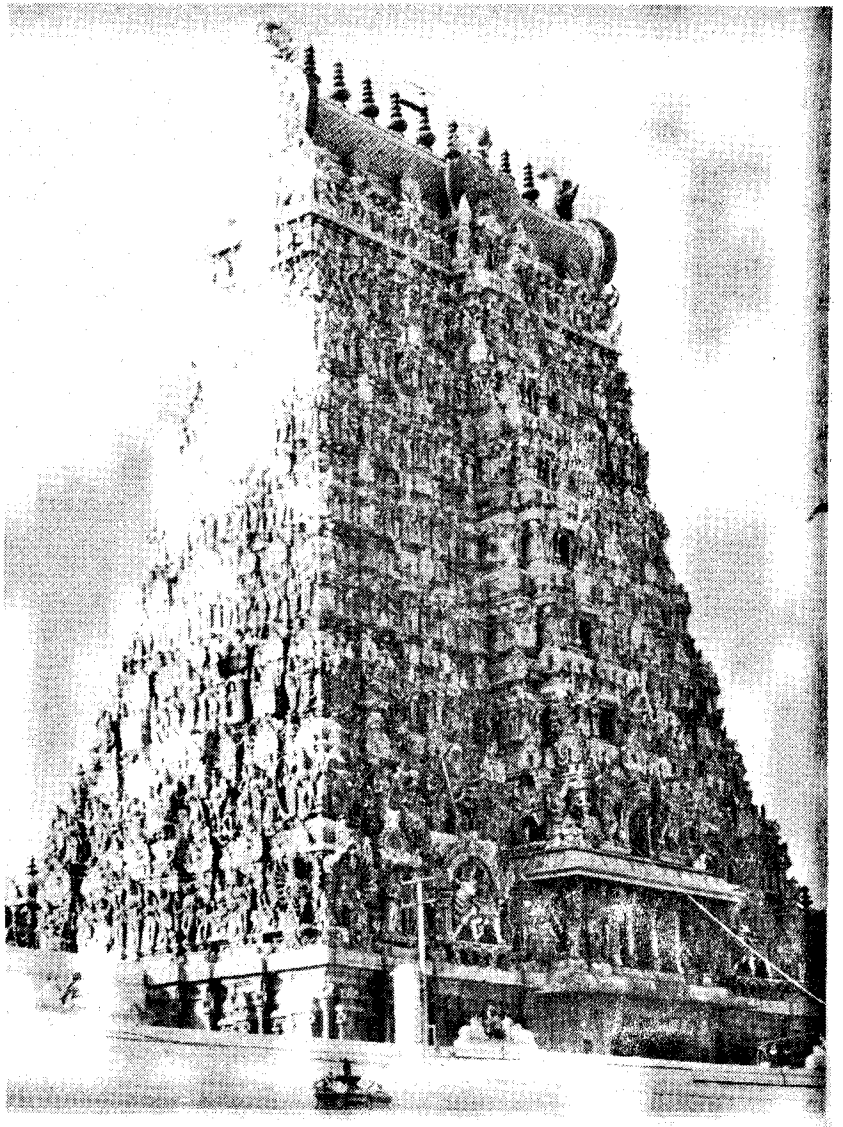
Any organization for temple entry or any other caste associations are signs of change for their intention, in associating, is to gain some benefit, normally at the expense of the caste system's integrity and traditional state.

An effect of education—There is an additional way in which Jaffna youth are putting pressure on the caste system which was

pointed out to me by Dr. Selvarajah Sanders of the University of Hawaii. He said that when he made a survey of a hundred homes in a village not far from Tellipallai fifteen years ago, he found numerous young men who were educated but of a low caste. They complained that although their education entitled them to a little more respect than if they were illiterate, their high caste neighbours rejected them even more emphatically in order to try to keep them in their place. Both sides saw that education erodes caste.

Is the caste system breaking up? Will this century see a virtual end to it?

The large number of changes which have come about in the caste system is clearly illustrated by the number of times, in any serious discussion of the subject, that the resident of Jaffna says, "But this is no longer done," or "However this is dying out," an oft reiterated announcement of social change.



GOPURAM
A TOWER THAT GRACES THE ENTRANCE OF TEMPLES IN JAFFNA. RELIGIOUS THEMES ADORN THESE TOWERS (GOPURAM)

CHAPTER SIX

Education and Youth

Acquire a sound knowledge of things that should be learned and then act accordingly. *Tirukkural*

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe the educational system operating in Jaffna Region today and to make observations about the youth who are involved in that system as participants, beneficiaries or victims as the case may be. Statistics are cited in the text when necessary but whenever possible they are confined to footnotes. In the process of describing present day education in Jaffna I shall make comparisons with the rest of Sri Lanka at the present time and with Jaffna a generation ago.

Summary figures—In 1979 in the schools of Sri Lanka there were nearly three million students, 100,000 teachers and over 20,000 employees on the staffs of schools and of the Education Department. Included in the school systems of the nation were the six universities. Shifting to our Region, there are more schools per square mile in the Jaffna Region than in any other area of comparable size in Sri Lanka except Colombo.

Twenty years ago there were 53 high schools in Jaffna; today there are 88 which call themselves *Maha Vidyalayas*. While this translates to "high schools" in English, such schools invariably refer to themselves as "colleges." In Ceylon a college is an institution which prepares students for entrance to the Universities by providing them with twelve years of education. In the Jaffna Region there are 167,000 students, 7,276 teachers, including 469 in training colleges, and 641 employees on the staffs of schools and of the Education Department. As for Jaffna University, which is not included in the above statistics, its budget totalled Rs. 7 million for 1979. The Ministry of Education's total budget for the year came to a little over one billion (thousand million) rupees.

National values—The importance which Sri Lanka assigns to education must be, to a large extent, measured in rupees. Her

national expenditure budget for 1979 totalled around Rs. 19,000 millions. and of that, Rs. 1,019 million or approximately five percent, were devoted to education. Out of that approximately one billion rupees, Jaffna Region exclusive of the University, received about Rs. 90 million for 1979.

Literacy—Sri Lanka's record in the field of literacy is one to be proud of:[139]

Census Year	Percent of Literates (both sexes)	Males	Females
1881	17.4	29.8	3.1
1891	21.7	36.1	5.3
1901	26.4	42.0	8.5
1911	31.0	47.2	12.5
1921	39.9	56.4	21.2
1946	57.8	70.1	43.8
1953	65.4	75.9	53.6
1963	71.6	79.3	63.2
1971	78.1	85.2	70.7

Among the nations of the world, Sri Lanka ranks forty-sixth in literacy; among the developing nations, she ranks second; and in Asia she also ranks second.

The poor and literacy—The poor usually do not attend school for very long and there is plenty of poverty in Jaffna. It is hard to keep some of the children in school for the basic five primary years thought to be necessary for literacy. Living close to the soil, many small children are of use around the house or on the family farm from a very early age. Or even if the parent prefers that his child be in school, he may not have a cent either for the barest minimum in

[139] Department of Census and Statistics, *The Population of Sri Lanka*, 1974, Colombo, p. 51. Unfortunately, literacy in Sri Lanka means, "presumed literate," that is, based on five years of schooling rather than "functionally literate."

the way of a new garment or two nor for school supplies. So the achievement of so high a literacy rate is the more commendable.

Coeducation—A former student wrote us on our return to Jaffna that we would find the buildings shabbier, the youth in Jaffna a little more militant and the women more assertive. Yes, the buildings in many places are a little shabbier (but there are many new ones) and the youth more militant but the only gains in the area of feminine freedom visible at first have been an occasional girl on a bicycle—virtually unheard of in 1960. In that year, however, there were more coeducational colleges in Jaffna than in Colombo for single-sex high schools were even more popular there than in Jaffna. Today, Colombo has eighty-seven coeducational high schools while sixty-six of Jaffna's eighty-eight high schools are coeducational. Colombo has twenty girls colleges and nineteen for boys only, out of a total of a hundred and twenty-six in the sixty square miles of the metropolitan area.

Girl students—However, of the high schools in Jaffna, twelve are exclusively girls schools and boys-only are ten. From the standpoint of the boys, girls are making alarming inroads into the classes entering medical college and law college as well as in accounting and secretarial subjects. Increasing numbers of girls go abroad for study also. Women made up 65 % of the students admitted to Jaffna University in 1979. The girls have come a long way since the missionary lady who founded Uduvil Girls College wrote discouragedly 150 years ago, "The girls attend the common schools because they receive two cloths a year, and not because they have any desire to learn; for it is still the general opinion that in proportion as they know anything more than the way to the bazaar, and how to sweep the yard and boil rice, they will be the less valuable as wives."[140]

[140] Winslow, M., *A Memoir of Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow,* 1835, New York, p. 269.

The school system—In addition to the eighty-eight high schools,[141] already mentioned, in the Jaffna Region there are one hundred forty junior secondary schools which offer ten grades and two hundred fifty-two primary schools which supply the first five years of a child's schooling. The first grade is kindergarten, for five year olds. There are many nursery schools for children younger than five but these are all private, not part of the national system. There are even a number of privately operated centres for training pre-school teachers.

Free schools—almost—All the above schools are government schools which charge no fees or at most only a small facilities fee which cannot exceed Rs. 5 per month but can be collected twelve months of the year (even when school is out). The village headman or an Assistant Government Agent often gives a certificate of inability to pay the facilities fee to poor students who request it. In some schools only a minority of the students pay the fee. While all the costs of education are borne by the tax-payers, textbooks were not provided free until 1979, when the government on short notice suddenly took on this responsibility as of January 1980.

Boarding schools—The I A government schools are boarding schools with a small percentage of their students living on the school compound. All the five non-fee-levying private schools to be described shortly, also operate boarding establishments for a portion of their students.

Largest schools—The seven largest schools in Jaffna as of 1979 are: Mahajana, 2600; Chavakachcheri Hindu, 2300; and Vembadi Girls, 2128; Methodist Girls, Sri Somaskandan, Jaffna Central and Jaffna Hindu all have about 1900 students.

Private schools—There are five private schools in Jaffna. Chundikuli Girls College and St. John's college are sister-brother colleges of the Anglican Church, both in Jaffna Town. St. Patrick's in Jaffna Town is the only Roman Catholic college and the Church of South India (CSI) is represented by Uduvil Girls College and "in spirit" by Jaffna College in Vaddukoddai. Though Jaffna College is closely associated in various ways with the CSI, it is actually governed by an independent board of directors.

Non-fee-levying—All five colleges are classified as non-fee-levying, that is, at the time of the 1960 take-over of private schools, these five, plus three other Roman Catholic colleges in Jaffna and a few dozen more schools elsewhere in Sri Lanka, chose to remain private even under the punitive provision that if they did so they would not be permitted to collect fees from the students other than an activities fee. The schools were to be supported by friends, well wishers and parents on a gift and contribution basis, plus any endowments the schools might have.[142]

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[141] The schools of Ceylon are presently classified in terms of the facilities available in each. There are also four schools in Jaffna called *Madya Maha Vidyalayas,* or central schools which cover twelve grades like the *Maha Vidyalayas.* This is a term left over from a previous system of nomenclature. These four and thirteen other of the best *Maha Vidyalayas* in the Region are now being converted into "I A" schools:

Jaffna Central	Mahajana	Karaveddy M. M. V.
Vembadi Girls	Union	Ramanathan
Canagaratnam M. M. V.	Velanai M. M. V.	Manipay Hindu
Jaffna Hindu	Pandaterruppu Girls	Skandavararodya
Jaffna Hindu Ladies	Methodist Girls	Hartley
Vasavilan M. M. V.	Vadamaradchy Hindu Girls	

Three more I A schools are proposed: Chavakachcheri Hindu, Udupiddy Girls and Chulipuram Victoria College. Both I A and I B schools have both science and arts classes.

[142] This financial arrangement was the more strange since the government permits another type of private school in Sri Lanka which is allowed to charge fees. These latter schools had also remained out of the government scheme in 1960 but were allowed to continue to charge fees because they had never been a part of any government supported programme while the eight private colleges in Jaffna had entered the "free education" scheme of the 1940's by which they gave up fees (except activities fees) while receiving government support. Why such an entry should have been penalized rather than rewarded has never been explained. These eight colleges now discovered how free the free education scheme had been. It was now found to have a long delayed effect: for all those colleges in the country which had switched back to private status in 1960 were forbidden to levy fees. There were those who alleged that the real reason for the government's permitting

The 3-tier system of government schools, fee-levying private schools and non-fee-levying schools prevails today. A newspaper article in October, 1978, claimed there were forty private colleges in Sri Lanka, but thirteen months later a "complete" list of twenty-six was published. The latter are listed in the footnote.[143]

Private schools—It is interesting that the government has always allowed some private schools to remain in operation in Ceylon even when the philosophy of that government was not much in favour of them. There are apparently sufficient persons in the top levels of government who wish to continue the private schools. Perhaps they have misgivings about how healthy it would be for Sri Lanka if all schools were government schools. It is commonly said in Jaffna that private schools are necessary to maintain standards which government schools all too often fail to do. It has probably not escaped the attention of supporters of private schools that democracies generally have some private schools while totalitarian

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the old fee-levying schools to continue to charge fees was that the latter included most of the elite colleges of the land, e.g., St. Thomas and Ladies College in Colombo and Trinity in Kandy, many of whose alumni were in the higher echelons of government.

[143] *Ceylon Daily News,* October 17, 1978. The 26 private colleges:

St. Peter's College, Bambalapitiya	Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya
Methodist College, Kollupitiya	St. Joseph's College, Maradana
Zahira College, Maradana	St. Benedict's College, Kotahena
Good Shepherd Convent, Kotahena	Wesley College, Colombo
St. Sebastian's College, Moratuwa	Ave Maria Convent, Negombo
Moratuwa Convent, Moratuwa	Kandy Convent, Kandy
Saiva Mangayar Vidyalayam, Colombo	St. John's College, Jaffna
Chundikuli Girls School, Jaffna	De Mazenod, Kandana
Holy Cross College, Gampaha	Holy Cross College, Kalutara
Holy Family Convent, Kalutara	Maris Stella College, Negombo
St. Mary's Convent, Matara	St. Thomas' Girls School, Matale
Jaffna College, Vaddukoddai	Uduvil Girls College, Uduvil
St. Patrick's College, Talawakelle	St. Patrick's College, Jaffna

nations never do. A nation with all government schools will be tempted to "brainwash" its citizens. Private schools are often among the schools most sought after for admission.

Since it is so much the custom for private schools to claim that they help the government schools to maintain standards, it is only fair to point out that there is a relentless pressure upon the administration and teaching faculty of private schools to give up, let things slide and not make the effort to uphold standards. The twin principles of "sleepy and sloppy" have an irresistible charm for a certain proportion of most human organizations. It is by no means automatic or guaranteed that the private school will furnish an example to other schools; the other schools may furnish the more appealing example which is then followed by the private school! As far as Jaffna is concerned, there are a number of government schools which are doing very well in the upholding of good educational standards. Outstanding are Mahajana, Jaffna Hindu and Jaffna Hindu Ladies colleges, for example. In fact, all the schools in the I A category might be mentioned.

Special school—One more educational institution in Jaffna should be mentioned for it is in a unique category: the government Academy of Fine Arts which is located at Ramanathan College, Chunnakam. It will be described in Chapter Eleven.

O.L. and A.L.—The one hundred forty junior secondary schools end at grade ten with the Ordinary Level (O. L.) school leaving certificate. The *Maha Vidyalaya* or college leaving certificate is awarded to those who pass the Advanced Level (A. L.) examination at the end of twelve years of schooling. Those students who do best on the A.L. examination are admitted to the University on a regional basis described below.

It should be understood that a junior secondary school normally has only grades 6-10 but a good number are comprehensive and include the five primary grades as well. Likewise, most of the high schools offer grades 1-12 and not just the higher grades alone.

Metric system—In view of the trouble which some countries of the western world have had in shifting to the metric system, Sri Lanka and India are to be congratulated on their successful switch-

over. In 1978 the government of Sri Lanka became sufficiently exercised upon the subject to pass a law prohibiting the buying or selling of cloth except by the meter. In 1979 some Colombo merchants were fined for selling cloth by the yard.[144]

Significant Developments in Education

Free education—Ceylon shocked or surprised the nations of the world about 1950 by boldly setting up a free education system from kindergarten through the University. The first arts classes began at the University in October, 1952. Many questions were raised as to whether public funds should be used to pay all the schooling of students completely through the University but the system is quite popular and there is no possibility of its being changed to a fee system at any level.

Language of instruction—After the introduction of free education, the next big change came in 1956 with the legislation which established that instruction should be in the language of the father of the student (though it is referred to as the "mother tongue!") which meant in most cases either Sinhalese or the Tamil medium. A good many families whose children had been educated in English soon found it necessary to shift to where an English "stream" was available or to learn one or the other local language. The availability of English education declined sharply. Some families indignantly migrated to English-speaking countries because of the injustice done to their children. But there is no doubt that the new emphasis on vernacular education had strong popular support. At the same time it was often pointed out that the children of top government officials were sometimes sent abroad to obtain an English education.

Since 1956, then, parents have not had the right to choose the language in which their child should be educated. Strangely, only the Muslim citizens are free to have their children educated in any one of the three streams. Only they have the right of freedom of choice of the medium of instruction. The question of medium of

[144] *Sunday Observer*, September 16, 1979.

instruction is the minor portion of the language problem, albeit an important issue. The major portion is discussed in Chapter 7.

"Take-over"—Throughout the decade of the fifties, there was a great deal of talk about the government's possibly taking all the schools of the island into one system of education. These rumours increased from 1956 as the Bandaranaike government's political philosophy was friendly to the idea of such a take-over. Planning became impossible in the private schools as each school official coming from Colombo had a new rumour to report concerning the imminence of take-over. Finally the event occurred in August, 1960, not long after Mrs. Bandaranaike became the first woman Prime Minister in history as the head of the SLFP, more or less in succession to her husband.

This take-over of schools was quite a big operation in Jaffna because there were only nine government schools (secondary level) at the time. Nearly all the schools in Jaffna were private schools run with financial assistance from the government but with private management. The management was either Hindu Board or one or another of various Christian boards or a few private foundations. There is no doubt that the take-over of denominational schools (Hindu, Catholic or Protestant) was regarded by the majority of Sinhalese "as part of the struggle of a hitherto underprivileged majority against a privileged minority."[145]

Standardization of marks—The next major change in educational policy came in the early 1970's, again under the auspices of the SLFP. The "standardization of marks" referred to the marks or grade given on the Advanced Level examinations used to determine the fortunate entrants to the University.[146] Since the beginning of the University in 1945, as the "University Arts College" in Colombo, a disproportionately high number of Tamil students were admitted annually to the University. The SLFP view was that it was necessary to readjust the entrance examination (GCE

[145] "Social Change in Ceylon," Christian Workers Fellowship, 1968, Colombo, p. 64.

[146] I sometimes refer to the University in the singular even though there are several.

AL) marks in order to help greater numbers of Sinhalese students into the University. The Tamils were very unhappy with this, saying that merit should be the sole basis for admission. Such an arrangement was no longer acceptable to the Sinhalese who insisted that admissions should more accurately reflect the proportion of Sinhalese people in the population. "We want our share," was their cry.

As a justification for standardization it was claimed by some that the higher scores attained by Tamil students were sometimes due to the bias of the graders. When looked into, these charges were found to be not based on fact. Tamils, on the other hand, believed the marks reflected the greater determination and self-discipline of their students. Certainly for generations there were strong traditions among the Tamils helpful to the student, putting him under strong family pressure to study and to pass examinations.

The UNP came back to power in 1977, this time with a platform or election manifesto which included the promise to do away with "standardization" and the new Prime Minister fulfilled that promise. However, so many of his party members complained with sufficient bitterness about the abolition that he felt compelled to compromise. A different system of standardization has now been adopted which is somewhat complicated,[147] but which works out to reduce the number of University admissions from both Jaffna and Colombo. At the time of writing it is widely predicted that when a lesser number of students, both Sinhalese and Tamil, are admitted from Colombo there will be an outcry which will force the government to make still another revision of its system. It is possible that a quota system, based on population proportions, will be the next experiment.

Crisis—A crisis in education is developing from the fact that 70,000 students are taking the Advanced Level examinations in April and another 30-40,000 in August, 1979. A mere 5,400 of these

[147] The 1978 standardization scheme allotted 30% of admissions on the basis of merit, 55% taking into consideration the numbers of the population in each of the 24 districts of the country and 15% to be given to the educationally least developed areas of the country.

will be admitted to the various Universities of the land, leaving behind tens of thousands who must be regarded as reasonably good students. The Open University, a programme largely based on self-instruction, can serve some of these but it is discouraging to a student to know that after all his study, his chances for getting into the University are very slight unless he is really outstanding. Furthermore, after the Open University had been held up as a real option for students who had not been admitted to the University of Sri Lanka after passing the Advanced Level examination, in August, 1979, the government was unfortunately forced to postpone the beginning of the Open University for one year for lack of sufficient finances.

Not only was the Open University shelved for a year but at about the same time (August, 1979) the British government announced that it was ending in 1981 the granting of subsidies to overseas post-graduate students enrolling from 1981 onwards. At present 12,000 of the 85,000 foreign students receive financial aid which frequently amounts to a reduction of 60 % of the charges. The cost of education has grown meanwhile so that post-graduate costs now come to £3075 per year; undergraduate, £2350; and £1300 for students below degree level. These enhanced costs will make it much more difficult for Ceylonese students to get an education in England although evidently the overwhelming majority of foreign students are meeting all their costs at present.

Nevertheless, it is still better for the young people to have passed the Advanced Level examination than not to have done so for it opens doors in India or further abroad as well as meriting more respect in their homeland than if they do not possess the certificate. Most young people fourteen to seventeen years of age, in no matter what country, have no better use for their time than to prepare to pass a secondary school examination. In Sri Lanka when a student obtains four passes in the G.C.E. Advanced Level and does not obtain admission to the University, he may go on to courses in accountancy, or law (although admission is by no means automatic) or to some technical course.

Trained teachers—Since only a small percent of those who take the Advanced Level examination gain admission to the

University, it is not surprising that relatively few school teachers in Ceylon have a University degree. Those who do are put on a higher salary scale but the great majority of teachers in Ceylon are "trained teachers." That is, after completing high school—many times at the Ordinary Level with ten years of schooling—the young person gains admission to a teacher training institution and undergoes three years of training. The time is divided evenly between classroom work and practice teaching. With so slight an education themselves they then conduct the classes for the new generation.

With thousands of students who have passed the Advanced Level examination remaining unemployed, it may well be asked why all candidates for teacher training from now on should not be Advanced Level rather than Ordinary Level passed students. The answer appears to be that very few of those who pass the A.L. wish to become teachers. Their first choice after passing the A.L. is to go to India or to England for their further education, once they learn that they have not gained admission to the University of Sri Lanka.

The Teacher and the Students

Despite the chronic complaints which many members of the teaching fraternity have, there is a pleasant side to being a teacher in Sri Lanka. One of the nicest aspects is that traditionally the *guru*, or teacher, is held in considerable esteem. Present day society continues to honour him or her, generally, although the teaching profession is no longer as popular as it used to be as is indicated by the small numbers going into it. The male teacher is called "Master" by all the students and may enjoy this honour for life. The lady teacher is called Miss/Mrs. Blank or is called "Teacher." Whenever the teacher walks into the classroom the students all rise. Any student is expected to carry out any personal request which the teacher may make of him in the area of running errands. The magic wears off, however, when the students reach the University. At this point, their teachers begin to refer to them as students; all through school they are usually called children. While the students generally show respect and obedience and continue to use the term "Master," when in the University some of them will participate in strikes and close it down if so inclined. They are aware of their power.

The administration avoids quarrels with the students as much as possible and rarely confronts them on any strike issue for it does not want to be embarrassed, insulted or challenged and upset by a group of students. The students also have their ways of bringing pressure on unpopular instructors. In addition, the teaching faculty and/or administration will rarely or never unite on an issue and stand against the students because one or more of the staff will invariably side with the students. It is to the students' advantage that there are generally several political parties or viewpoints represented among the staff. The dissenter who stands with the students claims he is doing so as a matter of principle; according to his colleagues, he is indulging in a shameless currying of favour of the students.

Identity problem—Shortly after my return to Jaffna after an absence of nearly twenty years, I was warned with great earnestness by a friend and former colleague that the college student of 1979 is a completely different kind of person from that of 1959. I have observed that, whatever their problems, the youth of Jaffna are spared one problem which torments some of the youth in the West: their identity problem. The Jaffna young person has no identity problem; he knows who he is because he accepts the assumptions of the society about him that he is a child, then a son, in his family, obedient to his parents. People who "know their place" have no identity problem.

Most students in Ceylon and elsewhere are dormant and not interested in political action. They merely want to get on with their studies or with whatever they do in place of their studies, and to avoid anything that might complicate their lives. But there are a great number of students and among them, in Sri Lanka, have been sufficient activists to make trouble, to strike, to postpone examinations.

The Jaffna man is generally mild and passive. It takes a great deal of provocation to get him to react violently. His natural reaction is non-violent, though more from habit and inertia than from any Gandhian convictions. If he declares his independence of the

predominantly Sinhalese government by supporting *Eelam,* he specifies that the struggle for independence shall be non-violent.[148]

This is not necessarily true of his son whom he has sent off to school for an education and of whom he now learns to his dismay that the boy has learned more than was in the syllabus. The lad has been educated in Tamil, not in English. He does not have the love for, and faith in, democracy which his father imbibed from his English education. Limited dictatorship does not bother the young man as long as his side plans to do the dictating. Gandhi is no patron saint of his. He more or less accepts the idea that violence may be necessary to defend his rights. The young man's ethical standards are less certain than his father's. He would devalue the Ten Commandments and settle for perhaps half as many.

Yet in all this he is in the main still obedient to his parents. There are exceptions but mostly he neither runs away from home nor challenges parental authority. But the parents feel the slippage. Some parents claim that they have to give in to their child because he has hinted that if he were too much repressed he might solace himself with Folidol (the insecticide most favoured for the past twenty-five years as the painless method of suicide). The parents know that he is hearing other voices than theirs, and listening to them. His tastes are more expensive than theirs are. Many youths and their sisters sport expensive wrist watches and use all sorts of toiletries, soaps, deodorants, lip stick, or nail polish, as appropriate to their sex. It is true that these are often gifts from relatives abroad representing no financial drain on their parents. Persons returning to the island from abroad are now permitted to bring in generous amounts of things duty free.

Many parents have given up insisting on their standards of dress. They give their son money for clothes—westernized, non-indigenous clothes, inspired by the movies and Colombo fashions pictured in the newspapers. He remains in the family but he has

[148] Tamil United Liberation Front, election manifesto, 1977. Since the population is about 80% Sinhalese, the government will always be predominantly Sinhalese, of course.

ideas, they know, which are very different from theirs. An open confrontation can generally be avoided; it is to the best interests of both parties.

Youth and Culture—The hours which today's students are willing to put into "tuition," which takes up much or all of their free time before or after school, or both, indicates some seriousness about their studies. The keenness of their desire to get into the University is reflected by the number of tutories located near each school or college.

In the 1950's and well into the 60's the Tamil students were aware of their race, religion and language and accepted them. Each student seemed to have some ideas about these elements of his background, some convictions about the worth of Tamil culture. Everyone around him said Tamil culture was great and he saw no reason to doubt it. He liked South Indian (Carnatic) music and paid less attention to the words of the love songs in the film music he listened to. The themes of his Tamil music were religious, mythological or cultural and he liked that. He was fairly well educated in English and through English had a door open to the world and immense amounts of information if he cared to acquire it.

Now these windows of English are shut, for most. And at the same time that the student is fully educated in the medium of his own language he has lost some of his taste for it. Classical literature and music are being replaced by the stories and music of the cinema. He is freer of the ties of his heritage and less loyal to them because he sees that they may well be an economic liability—certainly they are in Sri Lanka where, for employment purposes, it is better to be Sinhalese than Tamil. These feelings and realizations will not make him any less assertive of the rights of his language and other political claims. Because his roots have begun to lose their value for him to some extent, he has begun to acquire the well known trait of urban society: rootlessness. As long as he remains in Ceylon, however, he will not go far in the direction of rootlessness because the family system is much too strong. His hair and clothes and musical taste, however, are those of his peers, of the pop culture. The guitar is more often played than any Tamil instrument these

days; that is, the guitar has replaced the violin which used to be the most commonly played instrument.

No patriotism—But I may have left the impression earlier that the parents are impractical idealists. They do have some democratic and Gandhian ideals; they particularly admire persons who go to a needy area and do social work. At the same time, Jaffna parents are pretty realistic, even cynical, about much of life. The situation is that their son is dubious, if not cynical, about some or all of the small hoard of idea or ideals which they cherished: democracy, religion, right and wrong. There is no question of patriotism or love of country—hardly any Tamil person can summon up such a feeling—there have been too many riots for that. When Ceylon became independent in February, 1948 there was little enough love of the country in Jaffna, even then. Since 1957, in fact, the Tamils have "honoured" Independence Day as a day of mourning for their lost liberties. Those who had patriotic impulses feel that they have had them cauterized since the inauguration of "Sinhalese Only" in 1956. Independence Day has not been helped by the fact that the SLFP essentially changed the date to May 22. Even people who would honour one independence day are put off by a change of date. The UNP has, since 1977, restored February 4 to its place of honour.

The older generation was cynical about all politicians because of their basic doubt that anyone does anything selflessly. A possible exception was Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayagam, leader of the Federal Party. People were also cynical about many other of the finer things of life. But their children in high school or University are different. Their list of things to be suspected is even longer; their list of cherishables is different.

The parents share some of the negative feelings of the student. They know he or she will not have a fair chance to gain admission to the University or to obtain a job afterward. So it is apt to be agreed by both generations that, most likely, the only way out is OUT—of the country and overseas where the cards stacked against them will be a shorter stack.

Some students are turning to technical subjects in order to fit themselves to go abroad. But all too many of them take less practical subjects with little hope for the future. The complacent youths are lethargic and frustrated. The more energetic ones are frustrated and feel more desperate about it.

These latter are the youth who, a few years ago when they became unemployed, found plenty of time on their hands and gradually began to participate in politics, particularly from 1972 after the majority Tamil party (the Federal Party) had joined with the Tamil Congress and other Tamil groups to form the Tamil United Front. The TUF youth organization became increasingly active and the youth are given considerable credit (or blame) for moving the Tamil leaders from federalism to separation or Tamil *Eelam.*[149]

There is a further explanation for the entrance of youth into Tamil politics. As the unemployment of youth, the preparations for the Insurgency and its consequences radicalized many of the Sinhalese students and other Sinhalese youth in 1970, so the standardization of marks radicalized the Tamil youth. Until that time the leaders of Tamil students tended to be older youth who were employed, relatively pacific and steady, reliable citizens. Standardization brought home to the students what they felt was a grave injustice which would exclude some deserving students from admission to the prized University classes. From then on, at least some of them were interested in radical, even violent, opposition politics.[150]

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[149] In 1976 the initials were changed to TULF and the Tamil United Liberation Front continues to be the main party of the Tamils.

[150] A University administrator observed that there is a difference between Tamil and Sinhalese students when they decide to challenge authority. Whether or not it is because they came from village areas where they had been conditioned to violence by the Insurgency, the Sinhalese youth are more apt to start breaking material objects and their speeches are more abrasive and violent. Rather than smashing furniture, however, the Tamil students would complain, boycott or strike peacefully. The Sinhalese students tended to ask for more physical things such as amenities in the canteen or in the hostels while the Tamil students were more interested in the language issue.

Radicals—Jaffna may be radically transformed in the near future by those youths who remain behind with no hope of going overseas or of getting work in their homeland either. These unskilled but educated youths could follow the example of the youth of Kerala and West Bengal in their radical politics. So far, however, the numbers of those youths who have adopted radical action policies, the Tigers, are apparently a very small group. If their numbers were to increase significantly, there is no telling what they might do since the activities of the Tigers so far have been violent. However, since the main body of Jaffna citizens wants an end put to violent robberies and killings and the central government has proclaimed an Emergency to that end, it is possible the terrorist activities are on the decline.

Girls—These observations concerning youth have dealt only with the males. As mentioned earlier, except for the willingness of some girls to learn to ride bicycles, the young women of Jaffna are as quiet and accepting of their place in the society as ever. Their capability and careful attendance to small details are often in evidence in girls schools, but they do not assert themselves and seem most willing to remain under the orders of parents and teachers, studying faithfully or working until their marriage is arranged, then fulfilling the responsibilities of a good wife (Ceylon style). For two generations young women have been entering medical college and numbers are now becoming lawyers and occasionally engineers. Those who take up shorthand and typing are in great demand as secretaries. Many are handicapped, however, by an insufficient knowledge of English. They are often required to be able to type in Sinhalese or Tamil also, which may not be their native tongue or which they have not prepared themselves in, in typing or shorthand.

Jaffna University—While in Jaffna the name of former Prime Minister, Mrs. Srimavo Bandaranaike, is often connected with governmental policies disliked by the Tamils, it was during her tenure of office in the seventies that a University Campus was established in Jaffna and none other than the Prime Minister herself came to Jaffna and inaugurated it on October 6, 1974. It became a full fledged University January 1, 1979. The Jaffna Campus was at first quite decentralized for the science classes and two hostels were located in Vaddukoddai where the government seized the

undergraduate department of Jaffna College, cordoned it off from the rest of the college and set up a portion of the University Campus. The main part of the institution was centered on the campus of the former Parameswara College which was unusually large for a higher secondary school, especially one located so conveniently at the edge of Jaffna Town in the village of Thirunelveli (commonly called Tinnevelly). At Ramanathan College, about three miles from there, was located the University Campus' College of Fine Arts and Oriental Music and Dance. After two or three years of operation of the Campus, the medical faculty was set up in Kaithadi about eight miles from the central campus. The science unit at Vaddukoddai was also eight miles from the central campus, necessitating a shuttle bus to take the students back and forth to classes.

As a part of the takeover of Jaffna College, its undergraduate students, faculty, administrators and staff were taken into the Jaffna Campus if they had University qualifications. Those of the Jaffna College undergraduate department which did not have such qualifications were found places at neighbouring colleges (Victoria, Vaddukoddai Hindu and Karainagar) or in government departments. Also the renowned library of Jaffna College was transferred to the library of the Jaffna Campus. Appropriate arrangements for compensation were set up but before they could be carried out, the distance from Vaddukoddai to Thirunelveli proved so expensive in time and money that this factor and other inconveniences of the divided campus prompted the decision to return the Vaddukoddai facilities to Jaffna College; and to consolidate the institution as much as possible at the center. By the time their former facilities were returned to the Jaffna College authorities in the fall of 1978, a science building, girls hostel and basketball court had been constructed at the Campus and a mathematics and physics building was under construction.

The Jaffna Campus was set up determinedly to promote national integration so its class instruction was available in both Tamil medium and Sinhalese medium. At the time of the assaults in August, 1977, no Sinhalese student was harmed in Jaffna but to the regret of their Tamil friends, all the Sinhalese students at the Jaffna Campus left the Peninsula as advised by the authorities. (Colombo bureaucrats are notorious for their ignorance of the state of safety

and the public peace of Jaffna.) Two years have passed and the Sinhalese students have not returned—a fact deplored by all who wish to promote friendly relations between the races. At present, then, only Tamil students attend Jaffna University. There are also Tamil students at the Peradeniya and Colombo Campuses.

University students—The students at Jaffna University are not much interested in sports nor in the opposite sex although there is much more of boy-girl conversations on the campus than at the co-educational colleges of Jaffna. There is much interest by a fair number of students in political issues. In February, 1979, they shut down the schools of Jaffna for a week as a protest against "standardization." In July of that year they formed a procession and marched in good humour and good order down through the heart of Jaffna Town in denunciation of caste discrimination in Jaffna.

Sex standards—Students are not promiscuous at Jaffna University because of the conservative customs of the society and of the fact that most of them are not far from home and their behaviour can be reported to their parents very promptly. The traditions of society are strictly opposed even to familiarity between unmarried persons, much less more intimate relations. And although boys are friendly with each other to the point where they will hold hands as they walk together, this is commonly regarded as good comradeship and not a sign of homosexuality. Universities authorities believe that whatever homosexuality is practiced is individual and private. No one would dare to speak of gay rights in this society where there is scarcely a recognition that homosexuality exists.

Enrollment—The six Universities of Sri Lanka are located at Colombo, Peradeniya, Moratuwa, Nugegoda, Kelaniya and Jaffna. Their enrollments, as of January 1, 1979, are given below. The figures are for all six Universities, including Jaffna, and for undergraduates only; no post-graduate students are included.

Fine Arts	217	Law	151
Arts	6,113	Engineering	1,296
Science	1,621	Agriculture	427
Applied Science	292	Medicine	1,424
Natural Science	543	Dentistry	196
Education	494	Veterinary Science	108
Commerce	1,806	Library Science	4

The Nation's Priorities—The above figures speak eloquently on the subject of priorities of a developing nation. The incongruous emphasis on the medical sciences and engineering, which produces a large number of professionals many of whom leave the country as soon as possible, is a response to the demands of the culture which attributes to these two professions preeminent status. The small enrollment in agriculture and education is regrettable. The emphasis in University admissions is not in harmony with the tremendous emphasis placed on development by the present government and its budget.

Other Aspects of Education in Jaffna

"Tuition"—"Tuition is all the rage now. It is a very popular fashion. All over the country children go home from school and then attend one or two hours of private tuition in subjects in which they are weak; and probably more on Saturday and Sunday." So a retired principal explained to me the new emphasis on the extra instruction a great many parents seek for their children in their anxiety to do absolutely everything possible to fit them for admission to the University.

The infatuation which parents and students have for tuition is so irrational in many cases as to amount to superstition. Since the object of the tuition is to equip the child not only to pass the Advanced Level but also to be admitted to the University, and since only about 5% of those who take the Advanced Level are admitted to the University, this means that more than three-quarters of those taking tuition have no reasonable chance of gaining admission and half of those taking tuition have no reasonable chance of passing the Advanced Level. So the parents of all those thousands of students in the lower 50-75 % of the group are wasting their money. Yet the students flock to the tutories as moths to a light. No doubt in many cases the students are required to go by their parents. But peer

pressure is also strong; parents who do not see the need for tuition are begged by their children to pay the fees—"everybody is going."

The other irrationality involved is that even students who are receiving adequate instruction because they are attending the best schools are also attending tuition classes. In such a context, tuition classes are an insult to the college and its teachers.

Just at present the madness does not seem curable. The condemnation of the tuition classes by educators only seems to increase its popularity. For the government to try to regulate tutories and private tutors would be to make a bad thing worse. Reform awaits a significant incident which will dramatize the folly of tuition or a change of attitude on the part of youth. The situation is ironical. Sri Lanka may be the only place on earth where its youth are criticised for too much study!

Who teaches these classes? Teachers, naturally, a great many of whom have just got home from regular, daytime, government-supported classes. But now comes privately arranged "bonus for overtime." A teacher who can attract 30 or more students into a class for an hour or two, and is paid a private tuition rate by each student, is finally able to make a decent salary—or more—although he may be doing it in an indecent manner. If the teacher has a heterogeneous group from a number of schools coming to him after hours or on weekends and if he teaches them competently, there can be no criticism—only regret that school children have so little time for play and recreation. After-school programmes of schools, including sports, suffer because of this. "As far as extracurricular activities are concerned, the dominant attraction is tuition," remarked one private school teacher.

But there are repeated stories of teachers in the evening with their extra class composed almost entirely of their daytime students who are taught less in the day and more at night; or who are taught things at night which are omitted from the daytime instruction, thus intolerably depriving the poorer students whose parents cannot afford private tuition fees, from their just share of state-supported education and, of course, forcing all possible students into the after-hours class of the teacher.

There is one tuition-giver in Jaffna who stands out above all others. By an efficient and business-like dedication to the tuition system, he has become wealthy, adding thousands of rupees per month to his original salary which is normally not likely to exceed a thousand rupees a month by very much. It takes hard work and a healthy body. But by collecting classes of forty students each and meeting them in a man-killing schedule, and doing a competent job, this talking machine has enormously increased his income.

A thoughtful comment on the tuition system was made by Professor K. D. Arudpiragasam of the University of Colombo:

> All over the country today, there exists parallel to the state education system, a system of "way-side boutiques " imparting education. This system does not have the colossal budgetary inputs of the state system. It is not run with the aid of thousands of administrators nor does it have buildings, equipment and hosts of teachers. Yet the tuition industry commands greater respect in the country and is in greater demand by students, parents and teachers and even by educational administrators than is the school. The growth, expansion and continued prosperity of this system is a measure of the failure of the official system.[151]

Sports—Games people play in Jaffna in 1980 are first, volleyball; second, football (soccer) and third, in just a few schools only, cricket. Volleyball is clearly the national sport, well adapted by its low cost and small field requirement to be played everywhere throughout the island. However, it appears to be played less now than twenty years ago. Football and cricket are played by both school teams and clubs nationally; in Jaffna today plenty of clubs play football but few if any take up cricket because of its cost.

Caroms and ping pong are popular indoor games and badminton is fairly popular also.

Smaller children are as interested as ever in *thatchi*, a somewhat complicated tag game. Rooms with corridors along their sides are

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[151] Address at Prize Giving of Jaffna College, Vaddukoddai, September 19, 1979.

drawn in the dust with well-calloused feet. One team guards the corridors and the other team tries to get from front to back. They can only be tagged in, or as they are leaping over, a corridor. Both boys and girls play *thatchi* and young men in their early twenties can still be found enjoying the game.

"Stick cricket" or "stick baseball" is another favourite with small boys and girls. Its Tamil name is *kitti*. A cup-sized hole is dug in the ground, a small stick is laid across it and the batsman approaches it with a stick about an inch in diameter and as long as his forearm and hand. Placing this bat under the stick, he flicks it as far as he can, out among the fielders. If it is caught, he is out. If not, the fielder tries to throw it to within a cubit of the original hole, a cubit being defined as the distance from elbow to fingertips as measured by the batsman. If the fielder, in throwing the stick at the cup gets it too high and the batsman has the opportunity to hit it out again, he accumulates further points by knocking it away. The batsman is out whenever the stick is thrown in within a cubit of the cup. As few as two children can play this game but usually there are several in the field and one at bat. If ten or more want to play, they may divide into two teams and all members of one team will bat and then take the field, similar to cricket.

There has been a definite decline in sports in Jaffna in the past two decades. Playing courts and fields much in demand years ago are overgrown with grass or otherwise neglected. Buildings have taken over the space in some cases. Private tuition and cost are the most common reasons given for the decline of games and sports after school. A third reason is that few private schools remain and they were traditionally the seedbeds of sports. When the government took over almost all schools, the transfer of principals and teachers became more common and loyalty to one's school and team weakened. It is alleged that in some cases, students who disliked sports left the school which required some participation and enrolled where games were neglected. Enrollment-conscious principals took notice.

Jaffna University sports—At Jaffna University a basketball court and football field exist but only football is played. A lack of competition is a problem as there is no equivalent institution for the

University students to play and they understandably would not want to risk defeat by a good high school team. It is also asserted that students are more interested in politics than in sports. At the University, tennis courts are noticeably lacking, even one for the faculty. There are also fewer tennis courts in Jaffna Town in 1980 than in 1960 and no doubt cost is a factor for both the constant need for care and for balls are a drain on the purse.

Cricket—Any game whose vocabulary has entered the warp and woof of one's own language deserves to be observed long enough to be understood, if not to be enjoyed. It is not hard to comprehend the game of cricket if one can grasp the principle that the primary aim is to defend the wicket rather than to score runs. (This is especially important for the viewer who is familiar with baseball.)

What is difficult to comprehend, however, is why a game that so pleasantly brings Englishmen out into the fresh air and occasional sunshine of Merrie England for days at a time, should have been brought to the Orient where the hot sun reddens the brown skin of a Ceylonese or Indian schoolboy after a day or two of over-exposure. For cricket is a game which suffers enormously from the lack of terminal facilities. Like an elephant running downhill, it is difficult to stop once it gets started. "Test matches" (international competitions of professional teams) normally last five days. Even then, after such a prodigious outlay of time and energy, the match often ends in a draw.

In the past decade an effort has been made to remedy the interminability of the game by reducing the number of innings from two to one and limiting each side to a maximum of forty overs (240 bowls or pitches to the batsmen.) However, the "forty over" matches are not particularly popular, so far.

Sportsmanship—One of the good things about cricket in Jaffna, although only a few schools play it, is that the old standards of sportsmanship remain pretty much unchanged. Every good play is cheered, no matter which team has made it. And this good sportsmanship applies generally to all sports.

In pleasant contrast to the ferocious drive to win which characterizes sport—particularly professional sport elsewhere in the world—the great traditions of sportsmanship and courteous conduct toward the opponent are still seen in Jaffna today. The author recalls with pleasure attending a Prize giving ceremony with which a school year often ends and hearing the Tamil principal of the college some years ago include in his report of the year's activities, his congratulations to a neighbouring college which had defeated his own college after it had been undefeated for three years!

Corporal punishment—The British are very properly given credit for instilling the admirable trait of sportsmanship into the culture of the island and the Ceylonese should be given much credit for continuing it. However, the British are also partly responsible for the tradition of corporal punishment in the educational system as well. Most of the boys' colleges in Jaffna have a collection of canes and these are applied regularly to those who are adjudged deserving of a few "cuts." Many of the infractions seem trivial to the outsider. This tradition is sometimes attributed to the British background of the Anglican Church or to the Irish background of the Roman Catholic Church. It might also be traced merely to the nineteenth century, the Victorian era, in which some of these colleges were founded. But since the schoolmaster or mistress, equipped with a ruler or small stick, is often seen hitting primary age children on the hands, the practice of physical punishment for school children may also be called a Tamil cultural trait as well.

Having read the above, a retired principal of a Hindu college wrote me:

> There is a Tamil proverb, "A son that is not caned will not study." There is another proverb: "Let tears be the water which nourishes the seed of education." I took a vow when I took up the teaching profession that I would not touch the cane. I am sorry to say that I had to give up the vow in four months time. I had to use the cane, not to teach but for bad conduct.

Sinhalese schools in Jaffna—Before 1956 a number of schools in Jaffna taught Sinhalese as a subject to their pupils but as soon as the "Sinhalese Only" bill was passed in Parliament, all instruction in

the language ceased in Jaffna. So the too-ardent proponents of their own language reduced the numbers of those who would study it. There is no doubt that many parents in Jaffna today would like for their children to learn as much Sinhalese as possible during their school career. It is apparent that such knowledge would be of assistance in obtaining employment later on. But principals fear to reintroduce Sinhalese into the curriculum lest they suffer reprisals from fanatical elements in the society.

In 1979, however, there were around 150 children of Tamil parents who studied Sinhalese in the middle of Jaffna Town! These were the Tamil children enrolled in the Sinhalese *Maha Vidyalaya* because they had been reared in Sinhalese areas and had previous education in the Sinhalese medium before they moved to Jaffna. The enrollment in the Sinhalese *Maha Vidyalaya* is 507 (1979). The parentage of the students is given in the footnote below.[152] This school came to Jaffna in 1929, permanent buildings were constructed in 1933 and 1955 and the *Sinhala Maha Vidyalaya* continues to cater to the needs of children in Jaffna whose medium of instruction is Sinhalese. Principal Goonawardene and 31 teachers conduct the twelve grades with an interesting mixture of students, as indicated by their parentage. The students can follow the Arts, Commerce or Science stream. The language of instruction is Sinhalese, the compulsory second language is English and the link language is, of course, Tamil.

The only other schools in Jaffna in which the medium of instruction is Sinhala, according to the brochure issued by the Office of Education, are five junior secondary schools located at Kankesanturai, Atchuvely, Puttur, Alvai and Karaveddy.

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[152] 154 childrenwith both Tamil parents.
233 childrenwith both Sinhalese parents.
51 childrenwith both Muslim parents.
55 childrenwith one Sinhalese and one Tamil parent.
14 children of Burgher parentage,

Problems

The description of the educational system so far given makes it clear that the central government spends considerable time, effort and money in frequent changes of the educational system. It is small consolation to know that such a tradition can be blamed on the colonial government of the British for an editorial of 1873 complained, "We are very sorry indeed to find that the Department of Public Instruction has been tinkering with its rules again. It is a great pity that the gentlemen in charge of this Department do not seem to know their own minds."[153]

Responsible persons, deeply involved in education today, say that the system suffers from a number of problems:

1. The shortage of teachers in the areas which need them most, the out-of-the-way places such as the islands and the east coast of the Peninsula. Teachers assigned to unpopular or hardship areas are often successful, with the aid of their Member of Parliament, in getting transferred to a more desirable post.

2. The interference of Members of Parliament as just illustrated, in putting the interest of persons ahead of the welfare of the school and its pupils.

3. Frequent transfer of school principals prevents their working for improvement of their schools as they would be more inclined to do if they were given longer tenure. The larger and more famous colleges of the land, it is charged, are not often subjected to such treatment and greatly benefit from the fact that their principals are allowed to remain for years.

4. Ordinary government schools are commonly blamed for having low standards with administrators unable to keep their teachers regularly and promptly meeting their classes.

5. All schools suffer from the inefficiency of the Department which among other things, occasionally abruptly changes

[153] *The Ceylon Friend*, 1873, Wesleyan Mission Press, vol. 4, p. 31.

dates for various school events or fails to notify the schools early of the date of examinations. One is shocked at how often, in answer to a question about some event in the future, one is told that the Principal has not been notified as to the date as yet.

6. "Tuition" is described above.

7. Preference for clerical positions, as referred to previously, concentrates an enormous number of students in the University entrance stream and too few in agricultural, technical and business-related subjects. Perhaps no more serious charge can be made against the educational policies of Sri Lanka than that the greater the number of students taken into the schools, the larger becomes the number of educated unemployed.[154]

8. Vandalism: Students used to be interested in learning what the laboratory equipment could do. Now they seem to be interested in harming the equipment as soon as opportunity offers. They also break furniture and windows from time to time which twenty years ago was almost never done. The only source of this predilection for mindless destruction would seem to be the movies. It is a characteristic of youth in many lands today, especially affluent countries. From now on in this country there will be a tendency to blame television but the government of Sri Lanka is aware of this fear and attempts to avoid movies which emphasize violence.

9. Quality: Vernacular education has heightened the racial consciousness of both Sinhalese and Tamils and this has unfortunately conspired to narrow further their horizons. The tuition system is one more indication of the excessive examination bias which has always had too large a part in the system of education, lowering its quality. The Jaffna man's lack of interest in books and reading is a national ailment, true of all too many of the well educated in the land. And,

[154] Karunairajan, V., "Education for Development," a paper prepared for Xavier University in the Philippines, 1979.

sadly, this is particularly noticeable among the teaching profession many of whose members cannot be accused of harbouring an interest in any field of knowledge, certainly not the one in which they are instructing the young. The lack of preparation by the teacher, the absence of lesson plans, the emphasis on marking attendance as the primary, and sometimes the only, accomplishment of the day, the beginning late and leaving early, the lack of academic enterprise until the hot breath of the impending examination begins to make itself felt and the deadening effect on the student and the class of a number of failed students who are apathetically repeating a whole year of "work" preparatory to taking the exam again—these are the marks of all too many schools in Jaffna and beyond. They are, of course, the soundest argument for the tuition system. At the same time it means that the good, the faithful and the conscientious teacher tends to stand out.

Language—Despite the above problems, most of which are chronic, Sri Lanka seems a fairly well educated land, with a great many interesting, intelligent and alert citizens, so the system cannot be all bad! The English-speaking tourist, particularly, gets a very favourable impression of the standard of education because he judges it by the proportion of the citizenry with which he can communicate. The visitor can get around the island much more easily than in many other countries. In even the smallest village he will find a school and one or more government officials who can communicate more or less in English. And in the cities he feels himself surrounded by a large number of moderate to well educated people among whom he soon discovers numerous friends and a few who have studied in his native land, perhaps. Certainly these generalizations are true of the towns and larger villages of Jaffna.

English—"You left Ceylon; you have returned to Sri Lanka," said a professor at Jaffna University as he explained that there was no point in my attending a discussion I had professed an interest in, because the lecture and discussion would be in Tamil. Though there is much English around, it is much less in use than a generation ago when the English medium for education existed in many schools in Jaffna.

A well-educated friend writes: (slightly edited)

The importance of English is frequently stressed. It is all too human to react against English by insisting that it is not necessary, that it places rural students at a disadvantage and that it contributes to elitist attitudes, which while true is not going to help those who make these observations. But in other and easier ways they have acquired the more superficial features of western influence—long hair, mod clothes, pop music, etc. which come through the media—because little effort is necessary to acquire these. There is therefore a certain hypocrisy (or ambivalence), perhaps unconscious, in their attitude toward English.

English is the *lingua franca* which so greatly assists Sri Lanka in her dealings with the rest of the world. The western, native speaker of English is surprised to find that living in Sri Lanka expands his vocabulary a bit in his native tongue. A handsome postage stamp, with an intricately bedecked and ornamented elephant pictured on it, is entitled "Caparisoned Elephant" A letter from a friend in Ceylon referred to "comestibles;" "post-prandial" for "after dinner" is not unheard of here. "Blackguard" is used for "scold," and paddy land which has been prepared for irrigation is called "asweddumized." So, one's vocabulary grows.

Tamil English—The English spoken in Sri Lanka has its own slight peculiarities as it shows the signs of being affected by Tamil grammar and usage. Since Tamil has no relative pronouns and relies on participles to take their place ("the yesterday coming man") it is not surprising that the "ing" ending on verbs is unusually frequent in Tamil English. "How are you keeping?" "I am keeping well" are very common greetings.

Tamil English has a tendency to use the past perfect in place of the present perfect tense. A report I am reading says, "Colonisation had been going on in the North and East." "The Tamils had not got the share their numbers warranted." The sense of the report calls for "has" and "have" rather than for "had." A number of other usages are given below:

Current Tamil Usage	Current American Usage
Cope up	Cope with
I have been landed with this job.	I have been saddled with this job.
From A to Zed	From A to Z.
My native place	My home town.
This meeting would make me plan ahead.	This meeting will make me plan ahead.
He is going in for a fever.	He has come down with a fever.
The casting vote.	The deciding vote.
She does not know much of English.	She does not know much English.
Once in a way	Once in a while.
He put a spoke in the wheel.	He put a monkey wrench in the machinery.
He put a spanner in the machinery.	He put a monkey wrench in the machinery.
Many houses have wells and as such can irrigate.	Many houses have wells and therefore can irrigate.
We have been having a good blowing.	There's been a good breeze.
They switched on to that programme.	They switched over to that programme.
My mother pressed me to buy a land.	Mother urged me to buy some land.
Coming to a grinding halt.	Grinding to a halt.
Dog seizer.	Dog catcher.
Petrol bowser.	Gasoline truck.
Cubby hole.	Glove compartment.

"Hello" is an exclamation in Jaffna rather than a greeting. "Hello! What is this?" is the typical use of "Hello" in Jaffna.

Contractions—"Hello! What is this?" also illustrates the fact that in Jaffna English, contractions are not favoured. "What is this?"

will be used by nearly all English speakers, except the most fluent, rather than "What's this?" Especially, the school child or student learning English avoids contractions completely. Perhaps to the beginner it is confusing that so many contractions involve the apostrophes which is also the sign of possession.

Future of English—After more than twenty years of emphasis on Sinhalese or Tamil as the medium of instruction, the UNP government in 1979-80 shows signs of interest in a greater emphasis on English, though certainly not at the expense of the local languages. "There is an unmistakable revival of interest in English," observed the American Ambassador, Dr. Howard Wriggins, upon his return after an absence of about twenty years.[155] Almost weekly some official, from President Jayewardene down, is quoted in the newspaper along such lines as "The government has decided that Sinhala students should be made to learn Tamil (!) as a national language and Tamil students Sinhala as a national language."[156] Programmes for improving the equality of instruction in English are described or announced as about to begin. It is stated for the thousandth time that a knowledge of English is essential for getting a job overseas.

For the past 23 years or so the standard of English in the schools and the country as a whole has been in decline. It would appear that the present government intends to arrest that decline.

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[155] "Why Bureaucracies Fall Short," *Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1979, p. 28.

[156] *Ceylon Daily News*, October 5, 1978.



PADDY FIELD IN FULL BLOOM

CHAPTER SEVEN

Government and Politics

Popular agitation leads to justice. *Tamil Proverb*

Rule will last but half an hour where discipline and authority do not exist. *Tamil Proverb*

Independence—My wife and I are proud of the fact that we arrived in Ceylon for the first time when it was still a colony of Great Britain. Our pride is not in the colonial status of this nation but in the fact that our arrival was so long ago. Three months later, Ceylon became independent. We are sorry that we can take no credit for this significant achievement! At independence, Ceylon became a dominion in the British Commonwealth of Nations. In 1972, in conjunction with the promulgation of the new constitution, Ceylon became the Republic of Sri Lanka and a fully independent nation, bound to England by ties of sentiment, migration, commercial interests and many traditions, but legally not at all.

Since that time (February 4, 1948) dozens of countries have become independent. Few of them have enjoyed so stable a government and so steady an economy as Ceylon although this statement may surprise some who read it. And few other countries have enjoyed a tradition of free elections such as those in Ceylon in which, usually, the party in power has been voted out and turned back into the opposition. As in India, despite occasional crises, and numerous predictions of its demise, democracy is alive and well. It is rather too bad to have to confess that during the decade of the seventies Sri Lankan democracy has been least satisfying to the citizens of Jaffna of all the citizens of the island.

"Direct" democracy—In a small country the government is near at hand. Here in Ceylon, the citizens can go by train, by bus or car to the seat of government in Colombo in minutes, or a few hours at most. Tamils expect little from the central government these days and are not likely to make the trip to Colombo but merely to the local kachcheri or to Town or Village Council headquarters. In

Jaffna a stream of goods and services, partly paid for by the citizens' taxes (more indirect than direct), flows past him every day, beginning with the arrival of the Ceylon Government Railway's morning train and the delivery of the morning mail. The Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) sends a bus from time to time in his direction; quarterly he receives food stamps for each member of the family to the value of Rs. 15 per month (if the family income does not exceed Rs. 355 per month).[157]

Member of Parliament—The citizen's Member of Parliament is not more than just a few miles away and "at the mercy" of those who voted for him, or against him, for that matter. The M. P. is expected to do all sorts of small, personal favours for his constituents; the quantity and quality of the M.P.'s performance in this regard is an important reason for success at the polls. The Member of Parliament at home finds his compound rather frequently visited by constituents; it may resemble a doctor's office as people come to consult him and to ask for help. Some see as many as 200-300 persons in a day; while at his office in Colombo the harried man may have several dozen visitors daily.[158]

What the constituents are asking for are to get a person transferred from a teaching post or other government job to a more desirable location (or to a less desirable one if the person is an enemy), or help with problems of "housing, rent, employment, exploitation by slum landlords, harassment by the police or other government authorities, schools, sanitation, shortages of essential articles at cooperative stores and experiences of delays and other vexations at the hands of Government and local government bureaucrats."[159]

The Member of Parliament is quite aware of the primary importance of getting jobs, ration books, application forms,

[157] Children below 12 receive stamps valued at Rs. 20 - 25. Each family also receives a small kerosene allowance.

[158] Kearney, R., *The Politics of Ceylon*, p. 52.

[159] Perera, B., *Pieter Keuneman—A Profile*, 1967, p. 131,quoted in Kearney, op. cit., p. 53

supporting letters and pensions for as many as possible of his supporters. The fact that these activities seriously interfere with the M.P.'s ability to work as a legislator and also leads him to incredible interference in the administration of many government departments, especially the schools, does not concern the constituent, or indeed may be exactly what the constituent is expecting from his Member of Parliament.

In Jaffna Region, the Members of Parliament in 1979 are:

Chavakachcheri	V. N. Navaratnam
Jaffna	V. Yogeswaran
Kankesanturai	A. Amirthalingam
Kayts	K. P. Ratnam
Kopay	S. Kathiravetpillai
Nallur	M. Sivasithamparam
Point Pedro	T. Thurairatnam
Udupiddy	V. Rasalingam
Uduvil	V. Dharmalingam
Vaddukoddai	T. Thirunavakarasu

Government Agent—The top administrative officer of the government in each District is the Government Agent. This officer lives in a large official residence passed down from British days and located in a spacious area well filled with a stand of noble old mahogany trees and appropriately entitled "The Old Park."[160] The GA's office is in one of several buildings containing government offices which comprise the Jaffna Secretariat (commonly called the Kachcheri). He is assisted by a tremendous group of officials who staff the numerous offices (see list below) beginning with one Additional and three Assistant Government Agents (AGA's) with offices in the Jaffna Kachcheri itself and Divisional AGA's (D/AGA's) in Chankanai, Chavakachcheri, Delft, Kankesanturai,

[160] In one of those trees is the giant nest of a great sea eagle which may be the symbol of all the empires which have at one time or another governed Jaffna!

Karaveddy, Kayts, Kopay, Nallur, Pallai, Pt. Pedro, Sandilipay, Tellipallai, Uduvil and Velanai.

D/AGA—Formerly, each of the areas now assigned to a D/AGA was the area of a revenue officer who was called the DRO (Divisional Revenue Officer). So, in terms of government, the Jaffna Region of 436 square miles is divided into fifteen revenue districts (the fifteenth is Jaffna Town), each now under a Divisional Assistant Government Agent, and into ten electorates from each of which comes a Member of Parliament.

Departments Overseen By the Government Agent

Additional District Registrar
Agrarian Services
Agriculture
Cooperative Development
Customs
Elections
Excise
Fisheries
Food Control
Forests
Land
Local Government
Marketing
Motor Traffic
National Housing
Planning and Plan Implementation
Price Control
Registration of Persons
Rural Development
Small Industries
Social Services
Survey
Valuation

With the exception of Forests and National Housing, the Government Agent bears the title of Deputy in each of the departments above, so he is officially second in command of each. If any problem arises which he cannot solve, he refers it to the appropriate central office in Colombo.

District Minister— In 1979 there was a considerable revision in government at the district level. In an attempt to bring the central government closer to the grass roots, the UNP government decided to give life to the "District Councils" proposal of earlier years, in keeping with the UNP's election promises in 1977. President Jayewardene modified the District Councils concept into a plan to

have a District Minister in each of the 24 districts of the country. The discordant relations between a major section of the Tamils and the central government have minimised the results of the District Minister system in Jaffna, so far, and, in fact, caused a temporary variation in it.

The establishment of the District Minister scheme changed to some extent the status of the Government Agents throughout the country. The G. A. serves as the Secretary to the District Ministry, and exercises his powers through this agency. However, the G. A. and the Secretary can be two different persons as was soon demonstrated by the appointment of a Secretary. In Jaffna, in June, 1979, the G. A. was removed but after a hiatus of a month a new Government Agent was appointed and Jaffna's administrative hierarchy was restored to normal.[161] At the same time that this restoration occurred, in mid-July, an Emergency was proclaimed in Jaffna and a Brigadier was put in charge of the military forces occupying Jaffna.

Licensing—Returning to the powers of the Government Agent, he has the oversight of the licensing of tractors, boats and taverns

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[161] For each registration of birth, up to 20 per year, the State pays the Registrar three rupees. After 20 births he is paid Rs. 1-50 each.

The State pays him two rupees for each death registration. up to 20 per year.

After 20 deaths, the Registrar receives one rupee per registration.

For giving notice of marriage, each couple pays one rupee if both are from the same registrar's division; otherwise two rupees.

For registration of marriage two weeks or more in advance, the fee is Rs. 2-00.

For late registration down to the very day of the wedding, the fee is Rs. 30-00.

For the presence of the Registrar at the wedding house or temple, to complete the registration on the spot, the fee is Rs. 30 to the government, plus Rs. 20 to the Registrar. The marriage party must provide or pay for the transportation of the Registrar.

Citizens who need an additional copy of a birth certificate or registration of marriage or death are required to pay two rupees per copy, one of which goes to the government and the other to the Registrar.

In addition to the fees, the Registrar receives no salary.

and the registration of businesses (an annual fee), motor vehicles, pawn broking and opium. (Ayurvedic physicians buy a license to allow them to use the drug in the prescriptions.)

Within the Government Agent's purview also come the Registrars of Births, Marriages and Deaths who number 47 in Jaffna District (including the Wanni area). The schedule of fees of the Registrars is somewhat unusual and interesting. It is given in the footnote below. [162]

Record keeping—An unusual form of aid to Sri Lanka from a private source deals directly with the subject of birth, marriage and death certificates. These have not always received the careful attention which they deserve and they are often subject to the attacks of weather, insects and small rodents. In September of 1979, the Genealogical Society of Utah, one of the western states of the United States, informed the government of Sri Lanka that an arrangement had been made through the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the United States by which the Society would undertake to microfilm all the records of birth, marriage and death presently in the kachcheries of Sri Lanka. This will save the government about Rs. 15 million as it will be done free of charge. The Society has already performed this service for twenty other countries. The Society will provide its own equipment and personnel for the task. The Genealogical Society of Utah is made up of Mormons, a denomination of Christians which has a strong religious interest in genealogy.

Land distribution—One of the largest tasks of the Government Agent is the alienation of land; that is, the parcelling out of the crown land (public domain) of the country to its citizens. There is no crown land in Jaffna Region but in Jaffna District, the portion south of Elephant Pass, crown land still exists. Colonization and young farmers schemes are the more common ways by which land is turned over to the citizens. For example, with its emphasis on development, the government is currently placing 100 young men on two acres apiece near Pooneryn, at the end of 1979.

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[162] Ibid.

Crown land can also be leased for 40 or 50 year periods.

Putting a law into effect—The way in which the government in Colombo proceeds to carry out a cabinet decision concerning any of its operations anywhere in the country is that the appropriate Cabinet Minister sends word to the District Minister to build some houses, for example. From the GA's office now labelled the office of the Secretary of the District Ministry, goes the order to one or more D/AGA's to procure the land. If available, crown land will generally be taken for it is simpler to do so. When the land has been obtained there will be a meeting at the Kachcheri, Jaffna, of all officials concerned, such as representatives of the National Housing Department, Water Supply and Drainage, the Building, Highways and Health Departments, the Electricity Board and others, to map out a plan for placing the houses. (There is a standard architectural model of the house and this must be followed.) Then the funds will be released and their payment handled by the National Housing Department which keeps an eye on the project.

While some Ministers of the government deal quite a bit with the GA, others do not. For example, the Minister of Education works through the Regional Director of Education and has little to do with the Kachcheri. The Minister of Health likewise deals with the Superintendent of Health Services in each district rather than the Government Agent.

Local government—The GA is concerned with local administration between the ministerial level in Colombo and the Village, Town, Urban or Municipal level in his district. The only town in Jaffna Region large enough to merit municipal status is Jaffna Town. Three large towns are governed by Urban Councils: Chavakachcheri, Point Pedro and Valvettithurai. Eight towns of smaller size are governed by Town Councils: Chankanai, Chunnakam. Kankesanturai, Kayts, Manipay, Nelliadi, Pandaterruppu and Urumpirai.

Village Council—Theoretically, and to a large extent in actuality, the Village Council looked after the needs of the residents of each village or group of villages united in one Council. The

revised Village Council Ordinance of 1960 empowered the hundreds of Village Councils of Ceylon to:

- Establish and maintain public services, such as water supply, street lighting, markets, latrines, houses for the poor, schools, cremation grounds and ferries, where needed.
- Support agricultural efforts.
- See to it that ordinances are kept and summon violators of the law before the Rural Court
- Collect taxes and duties.

Special Commissioner—In 1979, however, all Village and Town Councils were at a standstill, having been dissolved by the SLFP government in 1972 and a Special Commissioner appointed for each individual Council. This gentleman in each Council area directs the work of the secretaries, clerks, tax collectors and any other salaried employees of the Village or Town as if he were the Chairman of that unit. The Government has promised to have Town and Village elections in 1979 or early 1980 but the word as the decade closed was that in place of individual Village and Town Councils the latter might be combined into somewhat larger Rural Councils while the District Development Council acts overall as the decentralized governmental authority at the District level.

Kachcheri—In pursuing the powers of the Government Agent into the area of local government we have strayed rather far from the Kachcheri. But it should be noted that in the judgment of Professor Kearney, a student of Ceylon government for many years, "The kachcheri system has come to symbolize highly centralized, paternalistic rule from Colombo, often accompanied by disinterest in the opinions or the preferences of the people of the locality."[163] Others call the Kachcheri system a relic of colonial rule. However, if it is replaced, I suspect that there will be more than a passing resemblance to the old by the new. What would bring increased satisfaction to the citizens of Jaffna, however, would be sustained

[163] Kearney, R., op. cit., p. 88

evidence that the new Development Councils will be responsive to local input and that the various offices of the Kachcheri will respond directly to the Development Council in many areas of local concern.

Jaffna Town—In the Jaffna (Town) Municipal Council the mayor is the chairman of the Council. He has a staff to carry out decisions of the Council: a Municipal Engineer, a Medical Officer of Health, revenue officers and a Municipal Commissioner who carries out many of the Council's administrative tasks.

Taxes—For these services of the welfare state most citizens pay no income tax because they are too poor. To have the honour of paying income tax, one must have a salary of at least Rs. 750 per month. In addition, all government workers are exempt from income tax. Persons eligible to pay sometimes maintain two sets of books in order to avoid payment, a practice not unheard of elsewhere. It is commonly said that no one who gets income from agricultural pursuits pays income taxes as he can easily conceal his earnings. There is a strong tradition against payment of taxes whenever it is possible to avoid them.

To the Village Council, for local services, one pays a tax based on the square footage of his home and another for the fruitfulness of his compound. For a barren compound, nothing is charged in the second category of tax. What these taxes help to pay for is shown on the following chart:

Services of Local Government Nation-wide, 1970

Type of Council	Municipal	Urban	Town	Village
No. of Councils	12	34	85	540
Est. 1969 Population	1,250,000	668,000	777,000	9,587,000
Dispensaries	7	22	30	182
Cemeteries	12	33	55	391
Piped Water Supply	12	22	18	68
Electricity Supply	12	34	54	71

Type of Council	Municipal	Urban	Town	Village
Sewage Disposal	12	34	79	217
Parks and Playgrounds	12	34	38	59
Libraries	12	34	59	270

Welfare state—The presence of government is everywhere yet it stands for delay or inaction much more often than for prompt action. But slowly many things get done. The citizen may well feel married to government "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, till death do us part." Historically, government has been the Tamils' friend, providing them with employment for their working years and retirement benefits thereafter, but for twenty years now the jobs have been going elsewhere and the atmosphere is much changed. The Jaffna man has had two decades in which to conclude that the central government, at least as perceived by his representatives in Parliament, and also by him personally, is not friendly to him nor to the "North." We shall take up the reasons for this feeling in the next section of this chapter.

Class conflict—"Jaffna has no capitalist class or working class strong enough to make the conflict between capital and labour in Jaffna an important issue," observed a study group some years ago.[164] This is no doubt due to caste stratifying the labourers so thoroughly and also to the fact that there is no single industrial enterprise in Jaffna which employs more than 1500 persons. The only friction in the society is that between higher castes and the low castes who want to move in the direction of equality, that is, "to gain self-respect and social recognition."

The high caste, educated Tamil society of Jaffna Region has on top of a fairly solid Hindu base an intellectual veneer composed of a generally salubrious mixture of Gandhian views of untouchability, Christian views of classlessness and equality, English traditions of

[164]Quotations are from "Social Change in Ceylon," (1968?), Christian Workers Fellowship, Colombo.

liberty and human rights, American and French ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity, the Communist slogan of peace, land and bread, plus the commonsense of many Jaffna Tamils who are wise enough to bend in order not to break. An example of that commonsense is that after considering for over twenty years extending the right of admission of low caste Hindus to all Hindu temples, and very narrowly avoiding a bloody riot at Maviddapuram Temple, most of the temples have in recent years voluntarily opened their doors to all castes.

Children's and Juveniles' Courts—In order to emphasize the concern of the government of Sri Lanka for the home, the family, children and youths, I am describing the operations of the Children's Court and other agencies dealing with the problems of families before I describe the Court System. To include so many Children's Court details within my description of the System as a whole would overbalance that section.

The laws of the government of Sri Lanka which govern the situation when children or youths get into trouble with the law are very humane and show, as do the regulations concerning adoption described in Chapter Three, that the society is attempting to handle these social problems in a modern and enlightened fashion. All Magistrates Courts of each division are also Children's or Juveniles' Courts of that division except in Colombo where there is a Juvenile Court which deals only with such cases. The recent introduction of Family Courts is described below.

Children are persons under fourteen; youthful offenders are from sixteen to twenty-one. Children and young persons between fourteen and sixteen are given special care and attention by the Courts in the following ways:

> Attendance at Juvenile Court[165] is restricted; only those immediately concerned with the case may be present. The Court is to be cleared of others. (This would scarcely be possible in Jaffna as the quarters are so crowded that the

[165] Or Children's Court.

Court has very little room in which to meet and other offices are close by.)

- The charge against the young person must be explained in simple language.
- The child has the right to question each witness in the case. (Due to the status of child and adult in the culture, it would be a rare child who would have the courage or maturity to take advantage of this right.)
- The proceedings of Juvenile Court cases shall not be published in newspapers or magazines, with certain small exceptions.
- While children are detained in any police station, they are not allowed to associate with adults who are charged with any offence.
- No child is to be present (other than a babe in arms) at any other trial than his own.
- Parents or guardians must be summoned to attend the hearing, or trial.
- No child is to be imprisoned in lieu of a fine unless he is incorrigible.
- A child of any age can be committed to the care of a probation officer. Smaller children can be put into a children's home or left with the father, after counseling; hard cases may be sent to a certified school.
- A child or a young person who is male and should be given physical punishment shall receive no more than six strokes with a light cane or rattan, in the presence of the Court and the child's parents if the parent desires. However, this punishment is only very rarely given any more.

So much for the provisions which the law makes for the special care of children and young persons.

Roman Catholic children are sent to St. Vincent's School, near Colombo, which is the only private approved certified school. All Tamil-speaking, non-Roman Catholic children, including Muslims, are sent to a certified school in Jaffna of which the government has eight: six for boys and two for girls. All other children, presumably Sinhalese-speaking, who are eligible for certified schools, are sent to one or another of the other seven schools. Twelve to sixteen year old offenders are either put on probation or sent to one of the certified schools also. Or the child may be beyond the control of the parent for any one of several reasons but not have committed an offence. Such a child can also be committed either to a probation officer or to a certified school.

Over sixteen and under twenty-one year olds may be put on probation or sent to a Training School for Youthful Offenders, of which there are two in the country, run by the Prisons Department. Only males who have had one conviction already can be sent to the Training School.

Any boarding school can be approved as a place of training, of detention, or as an approved home. There are no schools exactly in this category in Jaffna at present. Jaffna College was so approved some years ago but the children involved, being limited to the Christian community, were so few that the College withdrew. However, there are several orphanages in Jaffna which have had schools attached to them or already in existence close by them which is regarded as the same thing as an approved boarding school.

An approved home can be not only any boarding school but also a garage or workshop or any other place of training, approved by the Department of Probation and Child Care Services.

No child under twelve can be employed.

No child can be employed before he has completed his fourteenth year, in such manner as to interfere with his attending school. From fourteen and upward he can be employed with no provision for schooling. Throughout Sri Lanka there is widespread violation of these provisions against child labour and in favor of servant education. Nearly all the children employed in Jaffna, and some are certainly less than twelve, are not permitted to go to

school. Only the rare and exceptional child is given time for school or taught to read and write.

I asked an experienced social worker who is much involved in cases of family and child welfare if he agreed that some children were better off as servants than living in a very poor home which is unable to support them. His reply was that it is better for the child to be put into an orphanage, or into an approved school rather than to work as a servant where he gets no chance for an education.

Court System

The courts of Sri Lanka, from the High Court downwards, are represented in Jaffna. The system may be diagrammed thus:

SUPREME COURT
(Civil, Criminal and Constitutional)

COURT OF APPEAL
(Civil and Criminal)

HIGH COURT
(Criminal and Court of Admiralty)

DISTRICT COURTS (Civil)	FAMILY COURTS (Civil)
MAGISTRATE COURTS (Criminal)	PRIMARY COURTS (Civil and Criminal)

Primary Courts—The Primary Courts were formerly known as Rural Courts but they have slightly greater powers than the Rural Courts had. They receive both civil and criminal cases of a minor sort. The purpose of these courts is conciliation, to attempt to settle disputes without going to trial. The most common cases to come to the Primary Courts are land disputes including boundary questions. The judge will visit the site and try to persuade the two parties to settle. Petty crimes like insult, intimidation, simple hurt and mischief can be heard here also. If the value of property is more than Rs. 500, the case must be taken to the Magistrates Court if it is to be tried. Five hundred rupees is the determining amount in criminal cases; Rs. 1500 in civil cases. No jury is associated with these courts.

Magistrates Courts—To the Magistrates Court come graver crimes: assault, stabbing, grievous hurt, thefts, house-breaking, criminal breach of trust in relation to property (most commonly cash or jewellery), bad cheques and abduction. More serious crimes such as murder, attempted murder or rape come to this court not for trial but for preliminary hearings. The magistrate examines the evidence submitted and if in his opinion there is a basis for making a charge he forwards all materials to the Attorney General's office.

High Courts—The Attorney General studies the depositions of witnesses and all related information which have been submitted and prepares the indictment which the state prosecutor takes up as a suit in the High Court. Only criminal cases come to this court. These most commonly deal with murder, attempted murder or culpable homicide not amounting to murder. They are generally decided by jury but the Attorney General has the right to request a trial by judge.

District Courts—In civil law, parallel to the Magistrates Courts are the District Courts of the twenty-four districts of Sri Lanka. Most civil cases have to do with land or matrimony--related topics, frequently, because of the dowry system.

Family Courts—In 1978, eight District Court judges were sent to Australia for a two weeks study of that country's Family Court system. Up till then all divorce cases were heard in the District Courts and maintenance cases were heard in Magistrates Courts. Now every Province has one separate Family Court, except the Eastern Province where no building is available due to the cyclone. In the approximately sixteen districts where no Family Court exists, the District Court also serves as the Family Court. The Family Court has been given jurisdiction over divorce cases formerly handled by the District Court; maintenance cases from the Magistrates Courts and certain habeas corpus cases from the Court of Appeals.

Jury—One of the many human rights of which the people of Sri Lanka have a right to be proud is the right of jury trial, for more serious crimes. To obtain a jury, the names of fourteen eligible persons are sent by the Government Agent to the court (only men are eligible; while women can be Prime Minister, they are for some

reason debarred from jury service). Seven of these will be empanelled. As they are being selected, the prosecutor can object to any number of them without giving a reason. The attorney can object without reason to two candidates for juror; after those, he must state his objection. Although guided by the judge in their interpretation, the jury is the sole judge of the facts. These are what the jury finally says they are. Jurors receive Rs. 17.50 per day for their services. This is called *batta.*[166]

Appeals Court—The Court of Appeals can receive cases from all of the above courts. In most cases, one judge hears the appeal but in a complex case three or more judges may be assigned.

Supreme Court—This is the final court of appeals. It also has an interesting parliamentary-constitutional task among its duties. The Speaker of Parliament can refer to the Supreme Court any bill being considered by Parliament and ask for a ruling as to its constitutionality. In October, 1979 the Emergency Services Bill was so referred. The Court indicated certain changes which would have to be made in it if the Bill was to be in harmony with the Constitution and these were immediately made by Parliament. The power of judicial review is thus demonstrated to be a part of the latest constitution as it also was of the Constitution of 1972.

Appeals--The main occupation of the Supreme Court is with appeals cases. If the Appeals Court has not given satisfaction to a legal client, the Court files a request with the Supreme Court for permission to appeal. The basis must be a question of law; the Supreme Court does not consider the facts of the case. If the Supreme Court believes the Appeals Court has correctly interpreted

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[166] I have always supposed "batta" was a Tamil word. My Tamil lawyer friend had assumed it was an English word. My dictionary had no trace of it. An unabridged dictionary reported that it may come from a Canarese word for "rice." Also, "batta" is not dissimilar to the Sinhalese word for "rice." Hobson and Jobson, Being a Glossary of Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases (London 1886), pp. 54-55 must be presumed to settle the matter. They affirm that "batta" is a Hindi word meaning money paid for extra services. My thanks are due to Prof. Indrapala for introducing me to Hobson and Jobson.

the law it will not grant the permission; otherwise the final appeal is permitted.

Murder—The High Courts hear murder cases. Most of the murder cases in Sri Lanka are unpremeditated. This does not prevent their being punished by death if the accused is found guilty. The only escape, if found guilty, is if the defense can establish that the murderer was greatly provoked, in which case the judge may change the charge to culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

The work of judges—The judges of the various courts are under pressure to get cases adjudicated swiftly or dismissed since, as in most countries, the load of cases causes trials to be delayed for months and appeals to be delayed for years. Judges have to report the number of cases dealt with each week. Because of the pressure from above, judges actively urge litigants to settle without a trial. Examples:

One man has beaten up another The latter is anxious for judicial revenge. The judge counsels the accused's lawyer to pay a certain amount of damages saying, "After all, the injured man spent seven days in the hospital." After he gets agreement there, he will urge the plaintiff's lawyer to accept these damages, arguing, "If you win this case you will not get more than the amount of these damages," and if the plaintiff continues to refuse, the judge may say in the court, "The plaintiff insists on this trial," implying that it is an unwise decision and making the plaintiff wonder if he will get a fair trial. This may be called judicial gamesmanship but it certainly facilitates the work of the courts which otherwise would simply bog down with too many cases.

Or similarly, in a rent case where the landlord wants to evict a tenant of long standing, the judge says to the tenant, "You'd better take a year and find another place to live. If you stand trial, I shall have to order your eviction with a year's notice." To the landlord he will say, "Give him a year to leave. If you sue the case, and he appeals it, he can gain several years before the final appeal is heard."

Delay—The courts seem to waste the time and travel money of the citizens who are summoned to court on a certain day. For usually when they arrive they find that several other groups of witnesses

have been summoned also. Among these are generally several police officers and a medical officer who has to testify to the physical condition of the victim. While the waste of time and money is regretted, it appears to be unavoidable; a good many more cases must be booked for the day than can be brought to trial since some cases will be postponed because a key person is sick or otherwise unavailable. In order to be sure that a case is brought to trial, several cases have to be booked.[167]

A lawyer for one of the cases scheduled may bring to the court's attention a fact or set of circumstances which may cause the judge to agree that a lesser plea than murder should be accepted, in which case a trial may be avoided altogether. If no other cases had been assigned to that day, the court would have drawn a blank for the day.

Crime

Statistics on the amount and type of crime in Jaffna, particularly for the past two years, are in the main not available. The murder of a police inspector who was in charge of statistics on crime seems to have stopped the methodical accumulation of the statistics.

The most common crime in Jaffna Town is bicycle thefts, followed by other thefts and housebreaking. Only these statistics are immediately available from the office of the Superintendent of Police, Jaffna. (They apply to the Region.)

January through October, 1979

Bicycle thefts	300	
Thefts of goods over Rs. 100	267	(77)
House breaking	242	(73)
Robbery	81	(34)

[167] That there are no more complaints by private citizens about these wasteful demands upon their time may be explained by the fact that the summons to court is an exciting event in the life of many a citizen and he does not mind too much if it is repeated a time or two.

The figures in parentheses indicate the number of cases in each category which involved the taking of gold jewellery. The value of the gold taken was estimated at between six and ten lakhs of rupees.

The crimes listed above came as a surprise to most of the populace for they had not read in the newspapers many reports of crimes in Jaffna since the Emergency began in mid-July of 1979. The public had been misled into thinking there had been few crimes since the Emergency commenced because it had been the policy to keep reports of crimes out of the papers on the grounds that such published reports annoyed the residents of the North. The lack of such reports then misled the same residents.

Two to five crimes of the level of seriousness of the thefts and robberies listed above, or more serious crimes, such as causing hurt or murder, occur daily in Jaffna Town. In the whole Jaffna District the daily average is from five to seven.

Law enforcement—When a citizen reports to the police station that he has been harmed or distressed in some manner, his complaint is recorded and also the statements of any witnesses. If it is a grave crime, the officer in charge will accompany the complainant to the scene of the trouble, make his observations and arrest any suspects who he thinks may have broken the law. For lesser crimes he sends a subordinate to make inquiry. For crimes as serious as theft and robbery he can arrest without warrant. And if the crime is of that gravity, the accused may be lodged in the police lock-up for up to twenty-four hours. Within that time he must be taken to a magistrate who will set bail or remand the accused to prison. If the day is a holiday or a Sunday, even then he will be brought to the magistrate at his residence.

Gun control—Under the current and previous Emergency proclamations, all guns which could be found in Jaffna were confiscated by the authorities. The guns are regarded as still the property of their owners, on deposit with the state and so no compensation has been given.

Justice in Jaffna

Newspaper accounts and the views of the citizenry confirm that what is true of the state of justice in Jaffna is normal for the rest of the island. However, for the last half of 1979, the picture was somewhat different in Jaffna because of the Emergency.

The person of low caste or low income who lives near a person of higher status when the latter is robbed is always in serious danger of being pointed out as the suspect whether there is any evidence or not. This is another misery of the poor. If he flees from his home this will be taken as confirming forever his guilt. But if he remains at home he is likely to be picked up by the police and usually this means he will be given a beating to try to force him to confess. In the main there is no satisfactory answer to the dilemma of the poor neighbour when a crime is committed next door. Though no one wants to state it, and certainly not in these blunt terms, the respectable people of the community try to stay out of such problems, tacitly accepting that the poor and the weak will be beaten by the police because they are not able to defend themselves. Since the educated, the influential and the powerful do not wish to get involved with the police procedures of their society, it must be said that they have the police system which they deserve.

If the suspect flees, the police may take one or more members of the family as hostages. Complaints of a family's rice ration books being seized by the police in order to force the family to surrender the suspect are sometimes made in open court even today.

Third degree methods are almost automatic for most suspects. The high caste and those with connections, as is true in a great many places besides Sri Lanka, are not apt to be manhandled.

The case presented in the court as reported by the police is commonly recognized to be the police version of the facts as doctored more or less by the police. The newspapers report from time to time the scolding administered by a frustrated judge to the police for bringing such fabrications into court.

It seems to be assumed by attorneys and the general public that bribes are accepted by the police at all levels below the upper echelons, that is, that a good deal of what goes on at a local police station is in response to other stimuli than law, order or justice.

POLITICS

The Politics of Language[168]

Although it is anything but centrally located in Sri Lanka, Jaffna Region is the heart of the area in which Tamil is spoken and about half the Ceylon Tamils live in Jaffna. There is a high proportion of Tamil-speaking inhabitants in the Eastern Province as well. Since 1956, when S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was elected Prime Minister with the slogan "Sinhalese only," language has been a focal point for political conflict in Sri Lanka. It is a highly emotional subject for few things are more deeply personal than one's language. While a man and his language cannot be separated, in Sri Lanka the issue is not only a cultural one but is economic as well, for language is closely tied to employment particularly employment in government jobs which are preferred by most of the population. In this emotional debate both sides make stirring appeals to history.

Use of history—The way in which history is cited by the citizens of Sri Lanka both Sinhalese and Tamils, is confused and controversial but certain dominant themes keep emerging in the public press and speeches of politicians. One of the most anti-social themes which is repeated all too often is clearly described and given the condemnation it so richly deserves by Mr. Nadesan Satyendra in

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[168] There are a number of excellent accounts of the history of the present tension between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. While in English the best account of the entire field of Ceylon politics is, in my opinion, that of Professor Robert Kearney, previously referred to; perhaps the best presentation of the subject of the conflict alone is by K. M. DeSilva, "Discrimination in Sri Lanka," a piece of research done for the Foundation for the Study of Plural Societies, located at the Hague. It is published as an offprint from *Case Studies on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, vol. 3, 1977. The Marga Institute study of nationalism edited by M. Roberts is also excellent.

a brief article in the *Tribune*.[169] Citing the habit of Tamil and Sinhalese leaders to lay claims based on what the Portuguese did in the sixteenth century or the Tamil kings of the thirteenth century or the Sinhalese kings two millennia ago or Prince Vijaya even earlier, Satyendra wrote:

> One may be left with the impression that the whole minority problem in this country can be resolved simply by a determination of the question as to which of the two communities was the first to arrive in Sri Lanka. What does it matter who arrived first? Or is the position that those who arrived later should be dumped into the sea? Are the late arrivals to be discriminated against on the ground that they are late arrivals? Does it matter that some are regarded as invaders and some others as settlers? Are we to visit the sins of the so-called invaders on the descendants born centuries later and on generations yet unborn? Is that the path to a united Sri Lanka?

History in Sri Lanka seems to have become forensic if not, militant!

Nationalism—Such a use of history illustrates quite well that Tamil-Sinhalese ethnic identification is very vigorous and, because of repeated challenges is evidently becoming more so. Census reports and other official documents refer to the ethnic groups as "races" and this term makes clear how the people feel about it. The fact that the ethnic communities have so much in common and are bound together in a host of ways naturally heightens the desire of some to emphasize the differences. Certainly since Sri Lanka became independent in 1948, there has been an increasing surge of Sinhalese nationalism which finally burst into national prominence in the election of 1956. Since the majority of the population was, and is, Sinhalese it was to be expected that, with independence, they would assert their cultural characteristics more emphatically than they had done under the British.

Although nationalism is a term which is freely used in Sri Lanka, especially in the phrase "Sinhalese nationalism," Dr. A. J. Wilson, formerly head of the department of economics and political science at the University of Sri Lanka, now at the University of New Brunswick in Canada, has this pertinent observation to make on Sri Lankan nationalism, "The phenomenon of 'nationalism' is concentrated separately in the different segments of Sri Lanka's fragmented plural society and is therefore not an overall phenomenon that cuts across race, religion, caste or class, (so) we use the term 'subnationalism.' There are today strong indigenous-oriented subnationalisms more in the style of communal defence mechanisms."[170]

These sentences were written by Dr. Wilson about 1976 though published only in 1979. By the latter year Dr. Wilson had been appointed by President J. R. Jeyawardene to the Presidential Commission which was to make recommendations for decentralized administration and, it was hoped, reduce the tensions between the two races. While in Sri Lanka in that connection, Dr. Wilson stated his new position. He said that two nationalisms exist in Sri Lanka, not only Sinhalese nationalism but also Tamil nationalism.[171] He added that the feelings of the Tamils should be no longer regarded as subnationalism or as communalism; rather than subnationalism he would call it ultranationalism.

It is significant that a person of the standing of Professor Wilson should have changed his mind over the past few years with regard to the nature of Tamil nationalism. In the absence of an election to give an idea of numbers, it is impossible to guess what proportion of the Tamils agree with his views.

British Colonial rule, 1795-1948, had naturally given a favoured place to the English language and as late as 1953 almost ten percent of the population were literate in English, a situation pleasing to those who spoke English but certainly potentially or actually frustrating to those who did not. A considerable number of Tamils

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[169] "The Presidential Commission," *Tribune*, October 13, 1979, p.9

[170] "Race, Religion, Language and Caste in the Subnationalism of Sri Lanka," Ch. 14 in *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, M. Roberts, editor, 1979, Marga Institute, Colombo.

[171] Prize Giving Address, Jaffna Central College, Jaffna, October 18, 1979.

had learned English and used this means of obtaining jobs in the government service. I recall reading a newspaper report in the early fifties which stated that the native language of the majority of the residents of Colombo, in government service, was Tamil, a striking reflection of the extent to which Tamils were to be found in the most sought after jobs in the nation. Many of course, were in commercial positions, also because of their English education. The superiority in English was commonly attributed to the considerable number of schools in Jaffna and to the emphasis put on English by English, Irish and especially by American missionaries. "The fact was," states Professor Wilson, himself a Ceylon Tamil, "that the Ceylon Tamils had overplayed their hand in the political, administrative and professional spheres. In the latter two especially they obtained positions disproportionate to their numbers and became a readily identifiable target."[172]

Election of 1956—It was in this state of affairs, so satisfying to the Tamils, so unsatisfactory to the Sinhalese, that the election of Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike occurred in 1956. In accordance with his campaign promises, Bandaranaike promptly declared Sinhala the sole official language.[173] The Tamils have never been the same since

[172] "Race, Religion, Language and Caste in the Subnationalism of Sri Lanka," p. 468.

[173] Note on "Sinhalese Only": Dr. DeSilva, himself a Sinhalese scholar, makes these observations on Sinhalese and Tamil reaction to the 1956 legislation on language:

> Bandaranaike . . . found the pressures of the Sinhala-educated intelligentsia were well nigh irresistible. They had seldom in the past been able to exert influence on a national scale and they felt that they had been excluded from a share of power commensurate with their numbers. The more prestigious and rewarding careers in the professions and the administration had been practically closed to them by the fact that English was still the language of administration. By extension they also felt that the Tamil community had taken an unfair share of power by virtue of their superior educational opportunities. What they demanded was the demolition of the language settlement arrived at in 1944-45 (under the British government) that Sinhala and Tamil should eventually replace English as the national language. They insisted on "Sinhalese Only."
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> For the Tamils the implications of Bandaranaike's language policy were starkly clear. It amounted to a betrayal of the promises held out to them at the (time of) the transfer of power (at independence which continued the 1944-45 settlement).

that event. Twenty years of refining and defining "official language" have exacerbated the issue and upset the life of the nation since that dramatic beginning. In 1979, the position of Tamil as a national language as recognized in the Constitution of 1978, is a somewhat better status for the Tamil language than it has enjoyed for some time.

By the end of 1979, the language problem was not discussed much in Jaffna, implying that the current policy was roughly satisfactory, or at least tolerable, to the Tamils. If the government offices in Colombo and even in Jaffna would abide by the instructions given them by the President, and reply to Tamil or English communications in Tamil or English, the language problem might subside to a minor position as an issue between the races.

The judgment just expressed is disputed by one scholar and explained and confirmed by another. The first informed me that the apparent lack of concern for language is due simply to the greater concern just now with other issues: autonomy and territory. Compared to these, language is third in priority. He says that as soon as possible, language will become a central concern of political agitation and effort. My other friend says the reason for the de-emphasis on language is that when the youth had nothing else to do they joined any sort of protest and took a firm stand for language equality. Now a good many of the youth have gone to West Asia and a larger number than formerly are admitted each year to the University. If one person gets abroad he helps to reduce the frustration of most of his brothers and sisters by improving the family finances and by working with one or more of his brothers to get them to join him. In addition, a fair number of the youth who formerly agitated are busy now obtaining a passport and actively

> But more important, once language became the determinant of national consciousness, there was in addition the threat to the integrity of the indigenous Tamils and to their identity as a distinct ethnic group, with the bleak prospect of assimilation as the price of survival in Sri Lanka.
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> The fact is that the Sinhalese, though an overwhelming majority nevertheless had a minority complex vis-a-vis the Tamils; they felt encircled by the more than fifty million Tamil-speaking people in Tamilnadu and in Sri Lanka.

seeking an overseas job. So the pressure for language amelioration is less because fewer people are concerning themselves with it.

For a number of years the rule has prevailed that many classes of government servants will not have their appointments made permanent until they demonstrate proficiency in Sinhala. The Sinhalese job holder labours under no such disability. This rule was revoked in June, 1979, and the Tamils thought they might be going to be treated like Sinhalese office holders and not suffer any disabilities for failure to learn the other language. Six months later, however, the revocation of the rule had been applied to office peons and bus drivers but higher grades of government employees in Jaffna District continued to be excluded from promotions and from salary increments.

Colonization—Particularly since the 1960's, the Tamils have found themselves threatened by another innovation in government policy--the settling of almost entirely Sinhalese colonists in the thinly populated lands of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, which the Tamils refer to as "Tamil homelands." These areas, traditionally overwhelmingly Tamil, are now being rapidly intermixed with Sinhalese settlers. The Tamils feel this is a deliberate effort to deprive them of geographical areas traditionally regarded as theirs. Such colonization, if long continued, could result in the defeat of Tamil M.P.'s in future elections in those constituencies.

The Tamils of Jaffna feel that they are members of an abused minority, persecuted by the central government in Colombo with its immense majority in Parliament. They have suffered from the tyranny of the majority and they fear it. They complain bitterly and naturally of the lives which have been lost in riots in which lawless elements among the Sinhalese took matters into their own hands, killing people and destroying much property of the Tamils sometimes in the presence of police or army personnel who did nothing to stop the violence nor protect the law-abiding citizen

Sinhalese homeland—The extreme Sinhalese view is that Sri Lanka is the homeland of the Sinhalese and of Theravada Buddhism and it would really be better if the Tamils simply went back to India, no matter how many centuries ago their ancestors might have come

therefrom. They feel that any violence suffered by the Tamils was provoked by their cultural arrogance, clannishness and by the employment advantages carried over from British days; the punishment was therefore deserved. The Sinhalese feel that they themselves were formerly treated as a minority in their own land where they were, and are, a distinct majority and, since 1956, they have determined to balance up the inequities of the past.

Between these positions are plenty of possible intermediate positions, but the burning question in Jaffna these days is, what kind of relationship, if any, is possible between the two? It is imperative that a way of operating be found as the present state, which may be described as tense and confused, is dangerous and volatile.

Election of 1977—Things reached their present crisis proportions in the election campaign of July, 1977, when candidates sponsored by the Tamil United Liberation Front, the chief party of the Tamils, ran for election to Parliament on a platform which included a call for independence. The Northern and Eastern Provinces, as traditionally Tamil areas, were to become the state of Tamil *Eelam*—an independent nation.

Tamil Eelam—It would, of course, have been difficult for the Tamils to have hit on a policy which would be more profoundly opposed by the Sinhalese than independence. Nor is there any doubt that were they to be offered for their guidance the contrasting policies of two great statesmen faced with somewhat similar threats of a national split, Abraham Lincoln in the United States of America facing the secession of the South and Mahatma Gandhi facing the desire of Indian Muslims to create the state of Pakistan, the Sinhalese would overwhelmingly follow the example, not of *ahimsa* (non-violence) nor of the way of the Mahatma and the wisdom of the East but would follow Lincoln in fighting "for Union, now and forever." But such military terminology is inappropriate since Jaffna is unarmed and the TULF has said their goal of independence should be supported non-violently.

A sage observed, "When all is said and done, generally more is said than done." In an election campaign very much too much is said. In the heat of the campaign of July, 1977, the Sinhalese

believed they heard the Tamils not only threatening to divide the country but hinting of outside support (presumably India). They also believed they heard of the Tamils giving their lives for the sacred cause and of spilling of Sinhalese blood. No matter if speakers blamed for such provocations denied it or gave other interpretations to the reported remarks. The Sinhalese were alarmed and the alarm soon erupted (August 19, 1977) in the second most bloody outbreak against the Tamils in Ceylon's brief history as an independent nation.[174] Since then, a precarious peace has existed with the Tamils feeling another riot could occur at any time.

Two years after the "Tamil *Eelam*" campaign there were plenty of people in Jaffna who said they meant "regional autonomy" when they said "*Eelam.*" One group that still supported complete independence for the Tamils was some of the youth who also insisted that military resistance was the only way to achieve it. When asked if they expected help from India they said they did not; they looked to radical socialist countries for help. So far, no trace of such help has been reported. Support for *Eelam* in the original sense as an independent homeland for the Tamils has declined. In early 1979, the head of the TULF announced the willingness of his party to consider proposals for regional autonomy.

There are Jaffna Tamils who say bluntly that if they had to choose between being dominated by South Indian Tamils of by Sinhalese, they would choose the latter. But others in Jaffna at the end of 1979 claim that eventually India will come to their rescue and free them from domination by the Sinhalese. There has, of course, been no encouragement of the idea of Indian intervention from the government of India. So, there is a considerable variety of views in Jaffna at the end of the decade. Among the non-Jaffna Tamils there is little support for independence except in the Batticaloa District, but some interest in regional autonomy. With the variety of views, it is not surprising if some of the citizenry are simply confused or take an ambiguous position like the Jaffna schoolboys who refused to

[174] Ceylon became independent Feb. 4, 1948. The worst violence suffered by the Tamils [up to 1983] was "Emergency '58." See Glossary.

include a "toast to Sri Lanka" in the programme of their literary society dinner. However, they approved a "toast to the nation!"

Ties that bind—As the months wear on, at least some voices are heard calling across the chasm. Actually thousands of cords bind the two communities together: commercial, educational, cultural, religious, social and personal. There are some Tamil-Sinhalese marriages. A good many of each community have friends in the other community. While the policy of education in the national languages (and not in English) has regrettably separated the school children from each other, at least the brightest students of both races meet at the University and other citizens meet in the Rotary and Lions clubs, churches, and other organizations, particularly political parties. While the common people live largely with their own cultural and linguistic group, there are often a few of the other race working and living close by.

News media—However, in Jaffna it has been sad to observe that the old ties between the races have been slowly and steadily snapping while few new ties are being made. The drift seems to be toward less understanding rather than more. The English-language daily newspapers support the government but do so in such a way as not to be for the best interests of the nation, that is, unobjectively and uncritically. The English-language dailies emphasize those speeches by one side which are provocative rather than statesmanlike or of a healing nature. Sinhalese newspapers support the government and Tamil papers mostly support the TULF. The English dailies regularly put headlines on their stories which put the Tamil cause in a bad light. They omit stories which would put the Tamil side in a better light. For example, when the mother of the Sinhalese Government Agent died in Jaffna, an enormous crowd (virtually all Tamil) turned out for the funeral. I found no mention of the fact in the English papers.

Jaffna a safe place—Since I live in Jaffna I can state that the English-language papers represent Jaffna to be a place which is somewhat lawless and unsafe. The gossip which goes about the country is that Sinhalese persons would be doing something risky if they came to Jaffna. A few brave Buddhists summon the courage each month to come on pilgrimage to Nainative but occasionally

people in the south refuse to come to Jaffna; meetings are cancelled and examinations shifted to Colombo. There is no reason for people in Colombo and upcountry to avoid coming to Jaffna for business, pilgrimage, sight-seeing or to visit friends. Occasional Sinhalese visitors are always pleased at the warmth of Jaffna hospitality I have asked both the principal of the Sinhalese school lands the Priest of the Buddhist Temple in Jaffna who have been here three and twenty years respectively, and they affirm that they have no fears and that they urge all inquirers from the south to visit Jaffna.

Intolerance—Moderates deplore the fact that political discussion has become more serious and less friendly. In the good old days, in the faculty room of schools, colleges and universities, in clubs, in offices or canteens and wherever people gathered to talk, it was possible for supporters of the UNP and of leftist parties to engage in discussion, even argument, but still remain friends. During the seventies, political discussion gradually ceased to be academic in many circles and became more personal, more serious and even dangerous. While this is true among the Tamils it is even more true among the Sinhalese. And discussions between those individuals and groups of Sinhalese and Tamils which formerly maintained some threads of national unity have seriously declined, particularly since the violence of 1977.

Presidential Commission—In July, 1979, the President of the country appointed a Commission with the former Chief Justice presiding, which is charged with the task of finding formulae for political harmony by early October, later extended for one month. In the letters which he addressed to the members of the Commission, the President clearly gave encouragement to hopes for the development of regional autonomy: "Appreciating the advantages of democratic decentralization for accelerating development and promoting participatory democracy, the government has decided to constitute a Presidential Commission to make recommendations regarding a scheme of devolution and decentralized administration."

Muslims—The discussion in this chapter so far has been entirely in terms of Sinhalese and Tamils and clearly indicates the Tamils are becoming less integrated into the life of the nation rather than more. But the Muslims, who make up two to three percent of

the population of Jaffna and about double that percentage in the country as a whole, are well integrated into the society. The Muslims are certainly better integrated into the national life than is the Tamil minority, yet their culture is secure and they do not feel threatened by assimilation. I do not know why they seem to feel less disturbed by the language issue. Muslim resistance to assimilation, of course, is well known. An informed Tamil friend observed, "The Tamils and Sinhalese seem to get along better in social relations when they have occasion to meet; the Tamils and the Muslims get along better in political relationships."

The Moderate View

In the present unsatisfactory state of affairs between the TULF and the UNP, some Tamils hold a moderate view based on the central idea that independence would not work; it is impracticable, they feel. The moderates believe that President Jayewardene, head of the UNP, is sincere in his desire for national unity (why wouldn't he be?). It holds that the President has made rather more concessions of substantive matters desired by the TULF than TULF leaders have a right to expect in view of their extreme position in calling for independence. Independence is an impossible position for the United National Party to consider unless it is going to change its name, aim, and outlook drastically. The President has made much more liberal concessions than a great many of his own party approve and the moderates remind us that the UNP has traditionally been the party of moderation in communal affairs, not the party of anti-Tamil extremism.

The moderate view favours some measure of autonomy for the North but regards Tamil *Eelam* as suicidal. It argues that since Jaffna has no port and all electricity as well as all supplies not grown locally obviously come from outside Jaffna, *Eelam* would mean Jaffna residents would be threatened with starvation soon after the central government shut off all the power and stopped all transport and communications from the South. Jaffna grows a surplus only of mangoes, plantains, chillies, red onions, grapes and palmyra products. An independent Tamil state would very likely find its

supply of fresh water would soon delimit its ability to expand its agriculture, its industry and its population.

Supporters of Tamil *Eelam* seem to take it for granted that their domain would include both the Northern and Eastern Provinces whereas it is inconceivable that—if the unthinkable occurred and independence were granted—the area would be more than the Northern Province or a portion of it.

The moderates feel that the District Minister arrangement, with elected Tamil District Ministers in the North, is all the autonomy which is politically feasible and that Tamil is recognized as a national language is as much acceptance of the Tamil language as a predominantly Sinhalese government is going to give at present and the Tamils must content themselves with the President's repeated assurances that communications sent to the government in Tamil will be answered in Tamil or with a Tamil translation even though there are annoying errors in this procedure at present. A friend with moderate views suggests that the development of Tamil language and culture is largely for the Tamils. "No amount of government antagonism can kill it, no amount of government support can make it flower. Its development depends supremely upon the will of the Tamil people."

Public examinations are given in Tamil as well as in Sinhalese and the language of the courts in the northern and eastern Provinces is Tamil or, for most practical purposes, English. While these provisions on paper meet most of the demands of the Tamils for "the reasonable use of Tamil," the moderates deplore the fact that the Tamils continue to be greatly discriminated against in government appointments and university admissions. While the moderates have no reply to this lop-sided apportionment of tax-supported positions in government, they point out that under *Eelam*, there would be no positions at all.

Some of the moderates have reluctantly come to the conclusion that with the Tamils receiving only one or two percent of the government posts in 1979 perhaps the closest approach to a just and fair distribution would be a quota based on percentage of the population. And they would for the same reason put admissions to

the University on a quota basis since the present system of admission is worse than the much hated standardization method abolished in 1977. Not only the Tamils oppose the present system but also the Colombo Sinhalese oppose it for it benefits the outlying regions at the expense of the urban.

The moderates also deplore the fact that since August, 1977 elections there has been no offer of any kind from the Tamil side, ensnared as it is in the politics of Tamil *Eelam*, which is the end of national unity. They feel that in view of the considerable risk that President Jayewardene ran to get his supporters reluctantly to accept his modification of standardization of marks on university entrance examinations, the Tamil side should be making some response to his overtures. Minorities will never get all they ask for but there must always be give and take in politics.

The moderates disagree with the official TULF position as hopelessly inflexible and unrealistic. So long as *Eelam* remains in the forefront, few improvements will be made in Jaffna by the government. Fundamentally, the moderate position is that there is more wisdom and prosperity for the Tamils in cooperation with the present government than in a continuation of the current policy of vague talk about an independent Tamil state.

The present TULF stand has not produced much improvement in the position of Tamils in Ceylon but it has definitely produced a deterioration in Tamil society in the North by making Jaffna into a haven of bank robbers and murderers. This development of the criminal element in the North—in such startling contrast to the sober and disciplined habits for which Tamils are famous—is a heritage which will take a long time to correct and from which Jaffna society is apt to suffer for the remainder of the century.

A Tamil friend who has for a score of years lived near the centre of the country, surrounded by many Sinhalese neighbours and a few Tamil neighbours, writes in mid-1979, "The Tamils in Batticaloa, Trinco, Mannar and in the hill country don't wish to come under the umbrella term 'Tamil' because of the P. L. O. tactics of the Tigers. So now we have about five or six different types of Tamils." His words emphasize the divided state of the Ceylon Tamils as well as

the fact that the terrorist activities in the North have alarmed and offended many Tamils.

A keen observer of the current scene, whose views are occasionally printed in the newspapers, remarked in early 1979, "The Jaffna man is confused and upset by the oppression and discrimination of the government. He does not know how to react to it for he has not been reared or educated to deal with it. He is not built for a hate reaction to oppression." I agree strongly with this observation.

Tigers—Let us hope that the mass of Tamils remain of that outlook. However, a very limited number of the new generation seem to have adopted the hate reaction quite thoroughly. These are the Tigers, of which almost nothing is known for certain but about which a vast amount has been speculated. Blamed for all sorts of crimes in 1977 and 1978, especially the assassination of police officers and witnesses who helped the police, the Tigers in 1979 were also blamed for the death of further policemen and witnesses. The Tigers were credited with enforcing a belief in the absolute desirability of Tamil *Eelam* in 1977 and 1978 but faith in *Eelam* certainly waned in 1979 in favour of local autonomy.

The Emergency

President Jayewardene proclaimed an emergency in Jaffna, by appropriate legislative action in Parliament, in mid-July, 1979. As he did so, he charged the police and the military with the responsibility of ending terrorism in Jaffna by the end of the current year. A Brigadier was put in charge of the military forces in Jaffna.

A few days before the Emergency began, on the night of Friday, July 13, unidentified persons came in the night, took out six men who had been among the suspects earlier held by the police for terrorist activities, and murdered them. Assuming the unidentified persons were police, the Tamil populace speculated that the solution to ending terrorism was to be killing without trial of most of the men previously held as suspects, a substitution of one kind of terror for another.

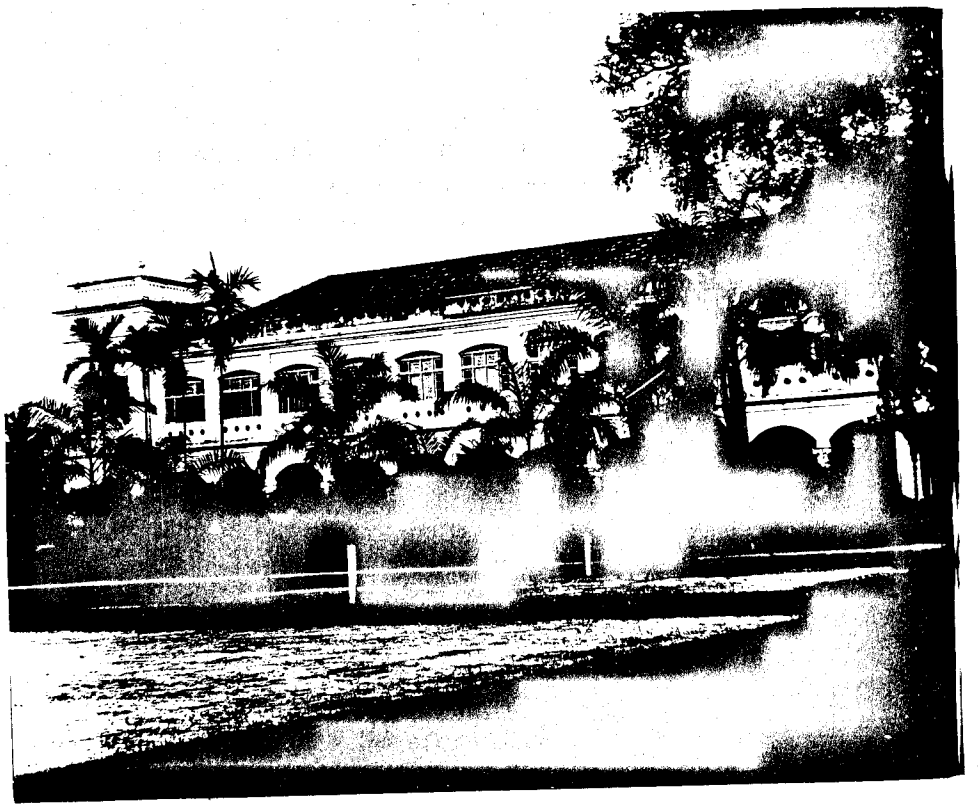
Immediately after this shocking event, Mr. Amirthalingam, leader of the TULF, went to President Jayewardene with a report of what happened. The President acted promptly, and responsibly by cancelling the provision in the Emergency legislation which said dead bodies in the hands of the police or army did not have to be returned to relatives but could be burned without an inquest. At the same time the President promised that a select committee of Parliament would be appointed to inquire into the alleged murders of July 13. The inquiry was presumed to be continuing in February, 1980. So the matter was well publicized and not buried in the censorship which the Emergency makes possible. In November a man was shot by the army at VVT reportedly for running away when challenged but the magistrate's inquiry was not satisfied with this story and ruled that the killer must be found.

The first month of the Emergency went very quietly after the initial atrocity and much credit for the calm and peace prevailing was given to Brigadier Weeratunga and the low-key and courteous manner in which the armed forces performed under his command. While parents and relatives of young men who were in prison or were missing remained distraught and apprehensive, on a political plane, a calm descended upon Jaffna soon after the Emergency began as all awaited the results of the Presidential Commission.

The calm was disturbed in November, 1979, by statements of Tamil members of Parliament, made in Parliament and appearing in Hansard (where the proceedings of Parliament are officially published), complaining of the detention of scores of youth and some cases of harassment and torture. So in December, an uneasy peace prevailed, amid rumours that the Emergency was about to end. On the night of December fifth a foreign broadcast announced that the government of Sri Lanka had announced that the Emergency in the North was being continued for another month. Neither the *Sun* nor the *Ceylon Daily News* of December 6 had any word of the subject. The month referred to was assumed to be December. However, the newspapers on December 29 announced that the government had allowed the Emergency to lapse at midnight on December 27 although the troops would be allowed to stay on in Jaffna "for a little while." So the Emergency came and went in less

than six months. The government announced that its purpose had been accomplished: the ending of terrorist activities in Jaffna.

As this book goes to press, February 1, 1980, a "January thaw" has occurred in UNP-TULF relations. During the month TULF leaders made a number of conciliatory moves and issued friendly statements. The rumour is that they believe regional autonomy is the intention of the Jayewardene government and that it offers the Tamils a viable way of carrying on. Although we cannot be sure what the real solution is, the appearance is that of conciliation and peace, an encouraging note on which to close this chapter.



JAFFNA COLLEGE

CHAPTER EIGHT

Health

Four elements go to make effective treatment: the patient, the doctor, the remedy and the attendant. *Tirukkural*

The state of one's health is a serious matter in Jaffna. The standard greeting of Tamil people is, "How's your health?" Unlike the British, and Americans who use a fairly similar greeting, the Tamil person who asks the question is interested in the reply. Jaffna is a fine place for hypochondriacs to dwell. A ready and sympathetic audience is available at all times for a recitation of one's ailments. In this regard, the Tamil people seem to be more sympathetic and concerned about the health of others than are the citizens of western lands.

The government takes its health responsibilities fairly seriously, spending Rs. 900 million (1979) on the Ministry of Health under which all the free medical services are supplied to the citizenry. (Medicines are not free.) There is in addition, of course, a large and flourishing private practice of western medicine and of indigenous medicine.

Quarantine—The introduction of my wife and me to the subject of health in Ceylon was positive and favourable. In the years of our first service in Ceylon, 1947-1960, we were impressed with the thorough and efficient manner in which the health services of the island attempted to protect their own citizens and tourists from serious contagious diseases brought in from abroad. The attempt at quarantine had begun in the era (1914) when tea, rubber and coconut planters in Ceylon were importing comparatively large numbers of South Indians to work on their estates. In harmony with the system set up primarily for estate labourers and like all travellers coming to Ceylon in 1947, we had to report to the local dispensary with our health card almost daily for a period of two weeks to make sure that we were not coming down with smallpox, cholera or plague—diseases which were in those days claiming lives daily in India.

In 1978 all of this had changed—perhaps because of the well advertised extermination of smallpox throughout the world. Not only was our yellow, international health card ignored in England and Europe as usual but in Bombay it was acknowledged without examination and so also in Colombo. Entrants to Sri Lanka have not been required to report to the local apothecaries since September 1977.

Standards of cleanliness—There are such things as national characteristics. The streets of Vienna are as neat as the paths of Germany's Black Forest. The Chinese and Japanese also like things clean and neat. These are not characteristics of residents of Arab or Indian or of Ceylonese populations. While there are numerous personal exceptions, most of the citizens of the country are not bothered by litter, rubbish, garbage or open drains, all of which abound on roadsides and vacant lots. "Everyone litters," reports a highly placed health officer.

It is not inconsistent with the national character, therefore that the standards of cleanliness in Jaffna's hospitals tend to be low. Although medicine is the profession favoured beyond all others ten to one, the perception of germs and concern for cleanliness in hospitals are not strong points. [175] While the doctors and some of the nurses may be presumed to desire sanitary conditions, they bow to the rest of the hospital which seems largely unconcerned. The few who are concerned are badly outnumbered. The simple routine of giving a cholera shot is marked by careless handling of the needle, re-use of the needle and other forbidden procedures. The fact is that the people are very health conscious but not germ conscious. Of course, some doctors and some hospitals are more careful than others.

The typical patient is not afraid of what he cannot see, so far as microbes are concerned. In many hospitals there is no food provided for the patients. (Jaffna Civil is an exception.) One or more relatives, definitely not surgically scrubbed, are with the patient nearly all the

[175] "Most people shy at being warded in a government hospital because of the unclean—to put it mildly—toilets." Ceylon Daily News, February 6, 1980.

time, supply the patient with food and other services and act as intermediaries between the patient and the germy world outside. At times great crowds of people, relatives and visitors, throng the hospital corridors. The Jaffna patient, once recovered, will scold any of his friends who might reasonably have made the trip and who failed to visit him in his illness. Fortunately, the tropical sun kills a great many germs, the tender loving care of family members is no doubt salubrious and patients in large numbers survive the exposure to contagion.

Life expectancy—In fact, the life expectancy of Ceylon citizens has advanced steadily in the present century, certainly a tribute to increased health services:

	1920-22	1946	1953	1962	1967	1971
Males	32.7	43.9	58.8	61.9	64.8	64.2
Females	30.7	41.6	57.5	61.4	66.9	67.1

More up-to-date figures will apparently have to wait for the Census of 1981.

Hospitals—In Jaffna Region there are thirteen government hospitals and seventeen dispensaries, defining a hospital as an institution which provides for treatment of both in-and out-patients; and a dispensary as for out-patients only. In an intermediate position are fourteen more medical institutions which provide treatment for both out-patients and in-patients. These are five Rural Hospitals[176] and nine Central Dispensaries and Maternity Homes.[177]

The latter provide separate facilities for maternity patients (which Rural Hospitals do not at present although they may before long) and are staffed by an apothecary (Assistant or Registered Medical Practitioner), midwives and minor employees. The Rural Hospitals boast a doctor in addition to an RMP, two male and two

[176] Located at Kotikadu (Vaddukoddai), Pandaterruppu, Karainagar, Chempianpattu and Atchuvely.

[177] Located at Alaveddy, Amban, Karaveddy, Karaiyoor, Kodikamam, Mandaitive, Manipay, Varanai and Velanai.

female attendants, a dispenser, a midwife and several labourers as the staff of each Rural Hospital. An apothecary is called Assistant Medical Practitioner (AMP) until he has achieved twenty years of experience; thereafter he is known as a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP). Following the British practice, apothecaries are sufficiently educated and trained to be permitted to diagnose and prescribe.

Central Dispensaries—The Central Dispensaries and Maternity Homes have an RMP or AMP plus a dispenser, orderly and labourer, on the staff. A doctor from a nearby hospital comes every day or two in case his services are needed and he can be summoned at other times if necessary.

Large hospitals—The thirteen large government hospitals are located at:

Jaffna	Pallai	Kayts
Kopay	Tellipallai	Pungudutive
Chavakachcheri	Chankanai	Analaitive
Pt. Pedro	Nainative	Delft
Valvetithurai		

Medical Officers of Health—In seven towns (Chavakachcheri, Jaffna, KKS, Kayts, Kopay, Manipay and Pt. Pedro) there are Medical Officers of Health, invariably known as MOH's who are responsible for preventive medical programmes.[178] Each MOH is in charge of a corps of Public Health Inspectors varying from five to twenty in number. Perhaps because curative medicine is more urgent and personal and is sometimes an immediately life and death matter, preventive medicine seems to lack challenge and excitement.

Public Health Inspectors—Throughout the nation, according to stories in newspapers, PHI's are notorious for shirking their duties. At their feet is to be laid the blame for much of the filth and rubbish lying about the bazaars and boutiques of Jaffna and the fetid drains

[4]The MOH, Jaffna, is paid by the municipality; the others are paid by the Ministry of Health.

as well as the fly-covered meat stalls. They have the power to inspect the kitchens and public rooms of all food dispensing establishments of Jaffna and the entire island. Very few such places could pass inspection at present.

A well informed officer in health service said that he had never seen a Public Health Inspector (PHI) in uniform in Jaffna Town in the past three years. But the plight of Public Health Inspectors must be considered with understanding and care for they are undoubtedly blamed for more than they are responsible for. My purpose in mentioning this important cadre of workers is sympathetically to underscore their importance as they fulfill a vital role in keeping the society healthy. The PHI's are not sufficient in number and perhaps in training, to do all the tasks which have been assigned to them but even if they inspected places once a month instead of weekly, they might begin, even then, to establish higher standards of public health in Jaffna. Yet, if they did their duty, it must be confessed they would be unpopular and they might even be subjected to violence.

There is a branch of preventive medicine which seems to be working somewhat better and this is related to the schools. There is one School Medical Officer for the schools of Jaffna Town. This doctor and his staff go from school to school giving physical examinations and leaving the favourable impression of some concern about preventing illnesses among school children. Outside Jaffna Town the MOH's in each of the areas of Jaffna are responsible for the schools of their area. They attempt to give a quick checkup to each school child every year and any children who have a deficiency are referred to the local hospital or dispensary for treatment and follow-up.

Cooperative and Private Hospitals—Well-known cooperative hospitals are at Moolai, Vallai, Kayts and Tellipallai; and private Christian mission hospitals are situated at Puttur, Inuvil and Manipay. Green Memorial Hospital at Manipay was the first hospital in Jaffna, founded in 1848. The first practice of western medicine, apart from the military, was established at Pandaterruppu by Dr. John Scudder in 1820.

Jaffna Civil Hospital—The chief guardian of the health of Jaffna is the Jaffna Civil Hospital with 25 doctors, 15 specialists and over 300 nurses and attendants all of whom are part of a total staff of about 700 persons. The hospital has 1015 beds; in 1978 a total of 6564 babies were born there. In 1978, 45,000 persons were treated there as in-patients; almost 500,000 received treatment at the out-patient clinic, a feat which boggles the mind.

Vacancies—If a staff of 700 seems large, it should be pointed out that places for 191 nurses were vacant in September, 1979 as were 53 other positions scattered through the cadres as well as 19 labourers and 58 casual labourers' positions—a total of 221 vacancies. This is due partly to the number of trained persons going abroad (and some unskilled labour as well) and to the low salaries especially for the labour force who do not value steady work as much as they do higher wages. About four nurses leave from the Hospital each month for the Middle East, to work in air conditioned comfort for more than twenty times their current salary, in some cases.

Every man his own doctor—One of my Tamil friends quoted the proverb: "By the time a man is forty he is his own doctor or a fool." (One wonders how many lives this saying has taken!) Although not everyone in Jaffna is aware of this proverb, nor subscribes to it, it certainly encapsulates the common Jaffna view of health, medication and doctors. This view is that, deep down, the Jaffna man and woman know what is wrong with them when they are ill and how best to treat it. So the sick person goes to the doctor and gets some medicine. He makes up his mind as to how long it should take for the remedy to be effective. This period of time will not necessarily coincide with what the doctor has told him. At the end of that time, if he has not recovered, he may go to an ayurvedic physician "to try his luck." Again, he will arbitrarily decide on how long the prescription has to bring healing. If it fails to live up to his expectations he may go to a different doctor and try once more. He may, of course, begin with the ayurvedic doctor and change later to a western doctor.

Ayurveda: Indigenous Medicine

Ayurveda, the traditional medical system of India and Sri Lanka, consists of three different schools. One is pure ayurveda, second is Siddha which is the most common in South India and Jaffna and the third is Unani which is popular with Muslims. A well educated practitioner of Siddha, schooled in western medicine as well as in ayurveda, Dr. R. E. W. Jehoratnam, has written a brief but comprehensive essay on ayurvedic medicine which he has kindly permitted me to publish at the end of this chapter. In conversations with him and another Siddha physician and from other sources as well, I derived further information on the subject which I include here.

It does not seem possible to get an estimate of the proportion of patients receiving ayurvedic treatment to those taking western treatment. However, it is claimed by some ayurvedic sources that 70-75% of the patients are theirs. Since Dr. Jehoratnam estimates that there are around twenty-five hundred ayurvedic physicians in the Jaffna Region while there are only about two hundred doctors of western medicine, it would seem that the majority of patients must be going for indigenous treatment. For all Ceylon, Muhandirma E. P. Rasiah, honorary secretary of the North Ceylon Siddha Ayurveda Physicians Congress, estimates there are eight thousand practitioners.[179]

Ayurveda does not practice surgery but makes use of natural products and intuition plus the experience and knowledge taught to the students, usually by their fathers. Some ayurvedic physicians in the past and present have developed a great reputation and demonstrated undoubted skill. The medicines used by these physicians are often made by themselves (sometimes with secret formulae), using herbs, nuts, bark and roots chiefly. Some of these ingredients are locally obtainable, some come from India or farther away.

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[179] "Ayurveda Past and Present," 1969, published by the North Ceylon Board of Indigenous Medicine, Jaffna.

Siddha Ayurveda practitioners base their diagnosis of human ailments on their analysis of symptoms in eight physical categories: tongue, urine, bowels, feeling the pulse, appearance and temperature of the body, bearing, colour of eyes and the blocking of the breathing of the nose. They distinguish between *feeling* the pulse which is a science of the fundamental principles of Ayurveda (like the leaping of a frog, the dance of a peacock, the step of a fowl, are the analogies used) which contributes important information to the doctor; and *taking* the pulse which is the mechanical determination of how many times the heart is beating per minute, of interest to western doctors. Ayurvedic physicians who are trained in western medical laboratory procedures do not hesitate to send their patients for physiological tests at medical technological laboratories. Traditional tests include, for example, watching to see if ants are attracted to urine (a sign of excess sugar) and putting a bit of white cloth in urine which would turn the cloth somewhat yellow if the patient was suffering from jaundice.

Ayurvedic treatment is said to be most satisfactory in dealing with mental ailments, paralysis (including polio), snakebite, hydrophobia, tuberculosis and venereal disease. Opium is a sedative commonly used in ayurveda. Minute quantities of cobra venom and of white arsenic are purified and used to treat snakebite and the venom is also used for certain diseases of the nervous system.

Surgery, obstetrics and dentistry are regarded by ayurvedics as more suited to western medicine.

India has given the lead to Sri Lanka in upgrading and professionalizing ayurveda by requiring medical students in both systems to take three years of university education in the basic science requirements before specializing in eastern or western medicine. Dr. Jehoratnam and the other directors of the North Ceylon Board of Indigeneous Medicine (N.C.B.I.M.) have attempted to follow the example of India in upgrading ayurveda in Sri Lanka.

In 1956, the Board of Indigenous Medicine of Sri Lanka through the instrumentality of its chairman, issued a pamphlet "Towards Progress of Ayurveda" which clearly showed that new currents of thought were coming into ayurveda through some of its leaders. Dr.

R.B. Lenora, Principal, College of Indigenous Medicine, Sri Lanka, contributed a brief article in this pamphlet. He gave several reasons why ayurveda should take up the use of many modern drugs, chiefly the antibiotics, and prescribed conditions under which this should be done.

His suggestions included the following:

1. The Ayurvedic Student spends at least five years in Colombo to study at the (Ayurveda) College and many have to spend six to seven years. It is desirable that they be taught something more useful than what is obtained by learning in a Physician's house.

2. A Student at any medical teaching institution has to be taught all kinds of diseases as well as all aspects of diagnosis and scientific approach in the treatment.

3. Patients with acute infections, such as Typhoid and Pneumonia, do not seek admission to the Ayurvedic Hospital as they have found that a case of Pneumonia recovers in two to three days and Typhoid in five to six days when they get admitted to General Hospital.

4. It is necessary to admit all types of patients for teaching purposes in any teaching institution, or else the student cannot be taught to be a general practitioner.

5. Once a patient is admitted, it is the sacred duty of the physician in charge to cure him by all means and methods at his command.

6. In a teaching institution there is no place for secret remedies. If any medicine is used at the institution in any section whether it is maternity, surgical or medical, the student who follows the teacher has a right to know every drug and how and when to use it; (in the maternity section, mostly Western Drugs are used) or else the use of these drugs should be prohibited in the Hospital.

7. It is common knowledge that Ayurvedic Physicians, in all walks, used modern drugs although it is improper to use any

drug, not knowing the applications, complications and therapeutics of the drug.

8. Nearly 75% of patients go to the ayurvedic physician first. If he is a better clinician, and if he can cure most of these easily curable diseases, the Hospitals need not be overflowing with ambulatory patients.

Among those whose views were published in this pamphlet there was agreement that "Authority to prescribe allopathic (western medical) drugs should be restricted to those who have been trained in the use of such drugs in recognized ayurvedic institutions."

There are at present two hundred students enrolled at the Siddha Ayurvedic Medical College in Jaffna, which has been run by the N. C. B. I. M. since 1925. The government recently built a new, ayurvedic medical college at Kaithadi but before the appropriate authorities could take possession of it, the western medical college of the University of Jaffna was moved into its buildings. The latter will be returned to the ayurvedic authorities when the buildings for the western medicine college are completed at the University. Meanwhile, the hospital at the new site in Kaithadi has remained for the use of ayurvedic patients.

It is estimated that women constitute forty percent of the physicians in ayurveda. All women ayurvedics receive training in techniques of Family Planning and maternal welfare in addition to their other medical education.

Dr. Luther Jeyasingham says this about ayurveda in his thesis of 1958:

> It is very popular with the poorer people. One reason for this may be that Ayurvedic treatment is less expensive. Many physicians do not stipulate a fee but would receive what is offered in cash or kind according to his means. This practice arises out of a belief that if monetary consideration enters the transaction the efficacy of the treatment may be jeopardized. This is understandable, because the popular belief about the system is that all knowledge connected with it was obtained by intuition or revelation received by the ancient sages in their meditations.[180]

In his booklet, "Ayurveda Past and Present," Muhandiram Rasiah says, "The tremendous advances of modern science are the results of laborious research by persons who had dedicated their lives to the task. In contrast, Ayurvedic medical science has remained static, just exactly where it was 2,000 years ago...largely attributable to the theory of divine origin which invested it with an aura of sanctity and demanded that its theories be accepted, for all times, on faith."[181]

By means of the Gupta Ayurvedic Commission of 1947 and the Ayurvedic Act of 1961, the government of Sri Lanka has undertaken to assist the profession of indigenous medical practitioners in its endeavour to improve its professional status.

In the main, Sinhalese indigenous physicians follow Ayurveda in preference to Siddha. While the Unani system is preferred by Muslims, the Muslim medical students study Ayurveda and Siddha because of the lack of Unani textbooks and because a knowledge of the other two systems enriches their practice of Unani. Muslim patients sometimes consult experienced ayurvedic or Siddha physicians.

Epidemics—A hundred years ago epidemics were common and life expectancy was not very great. Then cholera could wipe out a whole family in a single night. In December, 1978, there were twelve cases of cholera reported in Jaffna. All patients survived. The drug tetracyclin and intravenous fluid treatment have tamed the terrible killer.

Causes of death—The six most common causes of death in the Jaffna Civil Hospital in the year 1978 were:

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[180] *The Urban Geography of Jaffna*, p. 131.

[181] Pamphlet published by the N. C. B. I. M. in Jaffna in 1969.

Deaths		
Non-coronary forms of heart disease	35	(356 cases)
Cerebro-vascular disease (stroke)	30	(109 cases)
Tetanus among new-born in first month	9	
Other tetanus	26	(106 cases)
Enteritis and other diarrhoeal diseases	24	(1320 cases)
Ischaemic heart disease (coronary)	23	(295 cases)
Cirrhosis of the liver	21	(176 cases)

Tetanus—An explanation of the high number of infant deaths from tetanus is that they are caused by the application of gingelly oil, or some other home remedy which is not antiseptic, to the umbilical cord of the baby after it is brought home from the hospital. From other sources as well, in mud huts and other poor homes the new born receives contamination.

A well informed doctor in Jaffna reported that he had found tetanus germs on the rubber sheets on delivery tables. He believes these came from feet of the women, particularly the rural women, who had come for delivery. Special precautions are now taken by the hospital to avoid this contamination. In addition, the doctor attributes neonatal tetanus to the drying of baby clothes on the ground and to the fact that cattle manure is a breeding ground for tetanus. (See Tetanus, 172)

Cancer—Reporting further summaries of cases in 1978 at Jaffna Civil Hospital, of 290 cases of cancer from all causes, nine deaths occurred. Cancer is reported to be on the increase in Jaffna and all Ceylon and this may, paradoxically, be a sign of better health throughout the nation. That is, because the Ceylonese people are enjoying better health now than ever before, they are living longer. Instead of dying from some other disease at an earlier age, more people are living longer which gives time, so to speak, to contract cancer. White rice, sugar and bread which replace the healthier brown rice, brown sugar and jaggery and kurakkan are blamed for the increase in cancer as are also insecticides.

Hepatitis—Of 145 cases of infectious hepatitis there were three deaths. Eleven died among 453 cases of diabetes. Thirteen died out

of 340 cases of anemia. Of 132 cases of respiratory tuberculosis, there were seven fatalities. Of 120 cases of typhoid (generally called "enteric" in Jaffna), five were fatal.

Die at Home—There is a tradition in Jaffna, and in all Ceylon, however, which very much affects the accuracy of these summaries in presenting a fair picture of causes of death in Jaffna. For example, of eleven cases of rabies reported below in 1978, four are listed as having died in the hospital. But all eleven rabies victims died for no one recovers from advanced cases of rabies. The custom is that when family members learn that a patient is not going to recover they often take him home to die in the comfort and privacy of his own home. An additional reason for the tradition, which has strengthened it in the past few years, is that a sick man can be taken home in an ordinary taxi but a dead man's relatives have to pay six to ten times as much for the transportation of a dead body. Most taxis will not receive a corpse which not only Hindus regard as polluting. Those taxis which do carry dead bodies have rather to be used only for that purpose.

Water-borne illnesses—It is apparent that water-borne diseases are common in Jaffna: hepatitis, typhoid, cholera, diarrhoea and all dysenteries. This means that the incidence of these diseases would drop dramatically if the people of Jaffna would boil their drinking water. But this is a troublesome task. Jaffna Civil Hospital relies on the chlorination of city water; the task of providing boiled water in the Hospital would be daunting to say the least and chlorination should be adequate for the people of Jaffna Town. Another contributing factor to poor health is the lack of latrines, the non-use of existing toilet facilities and the poor construction of some latrines.

Poverty—Naturally the health of the people is adversely affected by the conditions of the homes of the poor. To boil water requires fuel and an extra vessel may be required to contain the boiled water. Fortunately most of the rural poor have sufficient firewood but few of them see any reason to use it for boiling water. During the cholera epidemic of 1973 which not only took lives in Jaffna but all over the island, quite a few persons began to boil the family drinking water. It was usually given up after a few days. One

of the excuses was that boiled water tasted different from the unboiled. Man likes to have a reason, however inadequate, to explain his actions.

Unemployment or only sporadic employment with the consequent inadequate income means that the effect of treatment, or of some medical service such as a neighbourhood visit by a doctor, is minimized.[182] The person who is poor economically is frequently poorly educated as well and may therefore see no sense in such hygienic measures as boiling water. If the germs were only the size of Thoreau's trout in the milk, it might be a different story.

Malaria—The chart below shows the dramatic story of the temporary conquest of malaria by the Ceylon anti-malarial campaign (using DDT)[183] and the subsequent recurrence of the disease.

Smallpox—The figures are also given for smallpox with the welcome message that smallpox has caused no deaths in Sri Lanka for twenty years. Now smallpox itself is officially deceased.

Malaria and Smallpox Mortality[184]

	Sri Lanka		Jaffna District	
	Malaria	Smallpox	Malaria	Smallpox
1946	12,578			
1947	4,557			
1948	3,349	1	134	
1949	2,403		115	
1950	1,903	1	103	
1951	1,599	43	63	3
1952	1,049	6	55	4
1953	722	4	46	
1954	447		26	
1955	268		17	
1956	144		3	
1957	177	9	5	
1958	105	1	4	1
1959	82		3	
1960	61		9	
1961	43	3	4	
1962	31	6		
1963	28		8	
1964	8			
1965	10		2	
1966	3			
1967	4	1	1	
1968	171		10	
1969	221		7	
1970	110		10	
1971	82		2	
1972	73		3	
1973	99		6	
1974	145		7	
1975	296		3	
1976	267		4	
1977	501		18	

[182] Skjonsberg, E., *A Preliminary Report*, 1974, p.9

[183] DDT spraying began in 1946

[184] Figures obtained from Registrar-General's Office, Colombo, November 6, 1979

Diabetes—It was previously mentioned that the Jaffna Civil Hospital in 1978 had 453 cases of diabetes which were treated as in-patients. However, the Medical Superintendent of that hospital, Dr. V. P. Amarasingham, after pointing out that diabetes can today

largely be controlled, stated that about 1500 diabetics in Jaffna come to the Civil Hospital every month for insulin and other medication. If they follow dietary precautions, they can live for a good many years. Although it is difficult to know what causes diabetes, overeating is still suspected of having something to do with it as was true in 1849 when Dr. Samuel Green, founder of the hospital in Manipay which now bears his name, wrote, "Many of the wealthy die of diabetes, the effect of their vegetarianism, license and luxurious indolence. The corpulence some of them attain is wonderful."[185] Today it is not likely that the eating of vegetables would be blamed for diabetes, however.

Oral cancer—In Dr. Green's day, he noted a good many cases of cancer of the mouth, frequently caused by incessant chewing of betel with its caustic charge of lime. I am informed that the combination of lime and tobacco is most to blame. Today the effect of betel on the mouth and throat has been decreased because less betel is being chewed, at least by women. Although the Jaffna man has been notorious throughout this century for ignoring hygiene and health education, some doctors claim that his wife has begun to listen. Women are concerned about cancer, a subject on which the newspapers carry articles and the radio issues warnings. Some doctors report a definite interest by patients in any symptom which could possibly be a warning of cancer. Since excessive betel chewing is carcinogenic, women are using it less. At the Jaffna Civil Hospital, a dental surgeon reported that he had observed in the previous year (mostly 1979) a dozen cases of ulcerated cheek which is the consequence of carrying a chew of betel or tobacco in the usual position over a long stretch of years. Persons with such complaints, which sometimes proved to be malignant cancers, were almost always in their fifties.

Leprosy—The prevalence of leprosy as of the end of 1979 was:

Sri Lanka	9,922 cases
Northern Province	438 cases
Jaffna District	359 cases

The leprosy Association of Sri Lanka, however, estimates that there are closer to 15,000 cases than 9,922, believing that a large number are unreported. Even the higher number means one in a thousand of the population. Jaffna and the Northern Province are well below that average.

"Every month about 50 to 60 new cases are detected and of these the majority are school-going children. We have just started a Relief Scheme at the Leprosy Clinic, Pungudutivu, where we pay the travelling expenses to patients to and from the Clinic—as an incentive to induce patients to attend the Clinic regularly for treatment."[186] This is the latest report on the leprosy treatment situation in Jaffna as well as the number of new cases monthly in Sri Lanka.

As for the incidence of leprosy at the Jaffna Civil Hospital, the nineteen cases were reported in 1978 but there is no way to tell if these were the same half dozen patients coming every few months for treatment.

Rabies—It was reported in 1979 that an average of 315 persons had died from rabies annually in recent years in Sri Lanka and that rabies had become a cause of death which had to be taken seriously, particularly since it is largely preventable.[187] It was claimed that Sri Lanka has the highest mortality rate from rabies in the world. Each year 8,000 to 12,000 people bitten by rabid or suspected rabid dogs, if they want to take no chances, are compelled to take the treatment, which is notorious for its rigour. However, the figures seem high.

The preventative, of course, is to eliminate stray dogs which abound in Sri Lanka. Occasionally there is a report of such a round-up in one town or another but whatever campaign the Health Department is alleged to be conducting against stray dogs in 1979, the dogs are clearly winning. The Jaffna Civil Hospital had eleven

[185] Cutler, E., *Life and Letters of Samuel Fisk Green, M. D.*, 1891, n. p., page 89

[186] Mr. Al-Haj S. M. A. Rashid, Chairman, Leprosy Association of Lanka, in a letter to the author in early 1979.

[187] *Sun*, March 1, 1979.

cases in 1978 and four were fatal (actually all were fatal, as explained above).

Elephantiasis—Driving on the roads of Jaffna one sees every few months a pedestrian (male) walking along with the swollen leg which is the usual sign of elephantiasis. Women patients cannot be detected in this manner because of the sari covering the legs.

Snakebite—While the rest of the island, in its jungle areas, has the threat and excitement of attacks by wild boar, elephant, leopard, bear or crocodile, as reported from time to time in the papers, Jaffna is devoid of all such natural perils larger than reptiles and insects. The only reptile which is a threat to humans is the snake, of which there is more than one species. However, snakes are rarely seen in Jaffna.

The *Ceylon Daily News* of December 11, 1978, carried a report that 500 Ceylonese die annually from snakebite. If this is true, Jaffna is remarkably free of the danger as in 1978 only three persons died of snakebite out of 110 cases which were brought to the Jaffna Civil Hospital. This low rate of occurrence is easily explained by the fact that since Jaffna is a highly populated area, most of the poisonous snakes have been killed off or driven away. Snakebite is much more common in the jungle areas of the country. Hospital statistics are low also because snakebite is a favourite kind of case to submit to an ayurvedic physician. One of my doctor friends suggested that if any Jaffna hospital installed a dialysing machine which is helpful in healing snakebite, the hospital might attract more patients.

Family Planning—Although almost every problem faced by the people of Ceylon would be less of a problem if there were fewer people, and is bound to become more threatening in the future because there will be more people, there is a remarkable, irrational and unaccountable nonchalance about family planning throughout the country. Even though Sri Lanka is the lucky beneficiary of a low birth rate, this is indeed a stroke of luck and makes all the more regrettable the government's and the citizens' irresponsibility in working toward the leveling off of the growth. It easily lies within the grasp of this generation to achieve Zero Population Growth.

Not only Sri Lanka but other Third World countries like the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea and probably China, have enjoyed a decline in their birthrates[188] (though not in their total population, of course). That population is part of the world population which moves inexorably and ever more speedily as the yearposts of the billions indicate:

The first billion of people:	1850
The second billion:	1930
The third billion:	1960
The fourth billion:	1975

As far as Jaffna is concerned, the contribution of Jaffna Civil Hospital to Family Planning in 1977 and 1978 was as follows:

	1977	**1978**
Hospital sterilization	518	872
Outside sterilization	257	—
Condoms	5920	6840
Oral tablet packets	1703	3257
Loop	99	76
Hospital vasectomy	2	6
Outside vasectomy	8	-

One reason for the slight slowing of the birthrate in Sri Lanka is the steadily increasing number of women who work which has caused the average marriage age of women to move from 23 to 24 years, according to one authority. There is a tendency for working women, especially if middle class, to have smaller families.

As far as family planning is concerned, the government is not working very hard on the problem. The leaders of the country do not talk about it very much. A responsible official in the Ministry of Plan Implementation that while the government regarded family planning as voluntary, it was not true that rural women opposed it.

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[188] ***Whittaker's Almanac***. Authorities differ, especially on the date of the first billion.

Rather they are clamouring for it, he said.[189] Such a clamour is not really audible in Jaffna.

A new plan—At the beginning of 1980, the government, through the Ministry of Plan Implementation, announced a new plan to encourage voluntary sterilization.[190] Its reasons for doing this were that the present population of 14.5 million gains one-quarter million each year and secondly, that sterilizations which had reached 42,000 in 1974 had declined to 20,000 by 1978. Details of the plan included:

1. Married persons who voluntarily undergo sterilization would receive Rs. 100. This payment is not to be regarded as an attempt to induce volunteers but to meet any expense of travel or loss of pay due to the operation. (It will, of course, be regarded by the average citizen as a reward or inducement.)

2. Married women employed in the public service or public corporation sectors who undergo sterilization will receive seven days full pay leave and males will receive three days.

In explaining the hundred rupee payment, it was stated that at present thirty-five state corporations give incentive payments varying from Rs. 500 for female employees of the Janatha Estates Development Board to Rs. 30 for males in the State Printing Corporation and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation. The payments average around Rs. 100.

Private employers in 56 organizations out of 202 groups with memberships in the Employers' Federation or the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce give incentive payments ranging from Rs. 100 to Rs. 25, averaging around Rs. 50.

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[189] Dr. Wickrema Weerasooria, Secretary Minister of Plan Implementation, addressing a seminar on Population as reported in the *Ceylon Daily News*, Nov. 20, 1978.

190 *Ceylon Daily News*, January 5, 1980.

Babies and the moon—A popular belief in Jaffna is that more babies are born at the time of the new moon and the full moon than on the other days of the month. Since this idea was one which could easily be checked statistically, I obtained the statistics of babies born in Jaffna Civil Hospital, Moolai Cooperative, McLeod at Inuvil and Green Memorial at Manipay, for the year 1955. My conclusion from that study was that in the year 1955 the moon had no effect on the daily rate of births of babies in these four hospitals. In 1979, I repeated this bit of research in these four hospitals, for births of 1978.

In the latter year, in those hospitals, a total of 8,107 babies were born or an average of 22.2 per day. Counting the births on the new moon and full moon days and on the day before and the day after each of these days revealed the following:

1. The number of births on and around the new moon days of 1978 (there were 13 new moons but 12 full moons in 1978) averaged slightly less than 22.2 per day (21.7).

2. The number of births on and around the full moon days of 1978 averaged slightly more than 22.2 per day, namely 22.7 per day, not a significant increase. Once again, the figures for most of the hospital births of Jaffna in 1978 did not support the common belief that more babies are born at these times.

3. Taking the figures month by month, of the thirteen new moon times of 1978, five months were above the average number of births and eight were below. Examining the full moon times in the same way, five full moon periods were above the average of 22.2 per day and seven full moons were below.

Village health—It is relevant in this chapter to include the comments and observations of Miss Skjonsberg who made her study of the village on Karainagar in the early seventies and reported her findings in the field of health. In the village she observed, the men seemed to be sick more often than the women and the higher or good caste people were somewhat healthier than the low caste people. In the case of the children, however, the girls were more often sick than the boys. The poor children were sick more than twice as often as the higher caste children. It is strange to learn that the men eat better

and live longer but claim to be sick more often. As for longevity, there were twice as many men over 65 as there were women, in that village. Miss Skjonsberg speculated that men complained about their health more because it did some good; a woman (wife or daughter) gave them sympathy or help or relief. Women may have complained less often because in many cases there was no one to help or to relieve them.[191] Women do men's work all the time; but men would lose face if they did women's work. This is a labour-saving proverb no doubt invented by a man! There may, however, be other factors affecting longevity which have not yet been observed.

Another reflection of the poor health conditions in that village was that one child in four died before its first birthday. The relatively poor health of the villagers is no doubt caused by the unhygienic conditions referred to earlier. Also, the beating of women by their husbands is in some cases severe and excessive even by local standards and adversely affects their health.

The researcher found in the area of family planning that fifteen women of the higher caste used contraceptives in 1974 although ten of them did so without their husbands' knowledge. None of the low caste women practiced family planning. And although they were poor and very hard working, the low caste women wanted more children than did any other group in the village. Of course, boys were desired more than girls and generally, much more, by those who wanted children. It is perhaps true that the less control people have over their environment and their future, the more anxious they are to have children who embody future help, a little more security and hope for the future.[192]

Accidents—The leading causes of accidents, judging from cases at the Jaffna Civil Hospital, are automotive vehicles and assaults. At the beginning of the rainy season there is an increase in accidents of Tree Climbers apparently because of wet and slippery working conditions. However, doctors in other parts of Jaffna report that burns and bicycle accidents are the most common in their areas.

[191] Skonsberg, E. *A Village Study*, pp. 100, 101.

[192] Skjonsberg, E. *A Village Study*, pp. 53, 95, 96.

Mental disorders—A psychiatric unit attached to the hospitals at Kankesanturai and Pt. Pedro was set up in 1966. Nine thousand patients came to these units in the next four and one-half years which were studied by T. Arulampalam.[193] The average was roughly two thousand a year. Thirty-six hundred were manic-depressive and thirty-three hundred were schizophrenic. The remaining twenty-four hundred were "all other diagnostic categories."

In 1978 at the Jaffna Civil Hospital, one hundred sixty- nine patients were hospitalized with functional psychoses, ninety-two with neuroses and personality disorders and eighty-four were suffering from drug dependency.

One encounters more "mad people" (as they are called) in Jaffna on the roads or about the village than one encounters in the United States. Whether this is because there actually are more mentally ill persons per thousand of the population or whether there is a greater willingness on the part of the Tamil families to care for the insane within their own homes instead of committing them to an institution it is not possible to say. In my estimation, it is the latter fact which explains the phenomenon.

Albinism—In a society of brown skins, an albino naturally is very obvious. Whether for that reason or not, there certainly seem to be more albinos in Jaffna than in a comparable area of the USA. Such a statement is based on impression rather than on figures. Anyhow, an albino is a rarer sight in the USA than in Jaffna.

Perhaps slightly more often than one sees an albino, one sees an old person bent over to the point that when he or she walks, the torso is parallel to the ground. Doctors say this is caused by thinning of the bones of the spine due to old age, for which the technical term is senile osteoporosis.

Private doctors—So far, a very important source of medical treatment in Jaffna and in all Ceylon has not even been mentioned. The private practitioners of western medicine in Jaffna are

[193] Arulampalam, T., "Psychiatry in Jaffna, Ceylon," *Jaffna Medical Journal*, vol. 11, no. 1, June, 1971, pp 1-3.

reasonably numerous and quite popular with patients. There are approximately fifty private physicians plus two visiting ophthalmic surgeons here today as compared with one hundred forty-one doctors and specialists and thirteen dental surgeons in government hospitals and dispensaries in Jaffna Peninsula and the islands.[194] There are no private medical practitioners on the islands where the population is small.

Most of the private doctors, like the government doctors, earned their medical degree (M.B., B.S.=Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Science) in the Medical College of the University of Sri Lanka, served the five years time required by the government to compensate for their training, and then entered private practice. Some have worked a lifetime in government service and have taken up private practice only upon retirement. Particularly in the last few years, government doctors on completing their government service requirement have been responding to the lure of big salaries in various Third or First World nations. I know of a man and wife, both doctors, he a specialist, who worked for an African nation for a few years and then went elsewhere, but who were wooed back by the same African nation offering each of them Rs. 25,000 per month plus many perquisites. In contrast, the total salary (basic, plus four allowances) of a new doctor beginning work in a government hospital today in Sri Lanka is Rs. 1180 per month. If the doctor goes overseas for two to four years of further study, and returns to Ceylon to take up his duties as a specialist, the starting salary with allowances will be close to two thousand rupees per month.

A good many doctors go as quickly as possible for further training, generally to England, and return as specialists.

So the Jaffna man has a considerable choice in medical treatment: (1) government dispensary or hospital where the service is free but generally time-consuming because of the crowd; (2) ayurvedic treatment which is low in cost or (3) a private practitioner

[194] Statistics obtained from President, Jaffna Medical Association, and Medical Superintendent, Jaffna Civil Hospital. The number of private western doctors has been slightly increased by me because of an influx noted in early 1980.

of western medicine who will charge more. This all adds up to the fact that the Ceylon citizens are served very well for the price they pay and they have responded by living longer, producing healthy children and building up the population to new problem-producing heights every year! They can be grateful that, for all the criticism of the government medical services, those services are as good as they are. And most of the population of Sri Lanka pays nothing in taxes, or in fees, for these services. A World Health Organization report, issued in October 1979, states that four-fifths of the world's population has no access to any organized form of health care. The fraction must have been inaccurately reported but at any rate, the citizens of Ceylon are in the fortunate fifth.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER EIGHT

The Ayurvedic System of Medicine by Dr. R.E.W. Jehoratnam, M.C.P.&S., Calcutta, ex-medical officer, Republic of Maldives and physician to the President of the Republic of the Maldives, member of the Presidential Committee to examine the synthesis of indigenous medical systems and the western medical system of Sri Lanka.

The principles of Ayurvedic Medicine are so fundamental and natural that everything is in its proper place and any new thing that may be discovered would only confirm or supplement its knowledge, but not alter its basic concepts. The system has a simple and perfect clinical method of diagnosis and treatment, that can be learnt by any educated person either to keep himself healthy or to help others.

The fullest advantage is taken to mobilise local material and labour in preparation of the medicines, so that the system is economical for the country though it may appear as costly or even costlier than scientific or western medicine, in some of its medications.

The medicine employed must be suitable to the climate, conditions of our country and customs of the people. The unqualified practitioners and their patent medicines should not be taken as the criterion to judge the science, for everywhere weeds

grow; the very "patent" methods are of western origin. Ayurvedic medicine should only be taken for investigation on its merit. There is nothing to prevent Ayurvedic practitioners from using modern methods for diagnosis and treatment. The gratitude we owe to our forefathers who have borne this torch of wisdom from time immemorial can be shown only by our studying the science carefully and putting it in practice, adding new knowledge and our own wisdom (if any) to it, and thereafter handing it over to posterity.

Under the term Ayurvedic Medicine, the three systems, viz., Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani, are included. Ayurveda is as old as the Vedas themselves, having Sanskrit as the language of expression. Siddha medicine is special to South India, Tamil being the language in which it is written. As for Unani, it is of Greek origin, introduced to India by Muslim conquerors of the medieval age, through the medium of Arabic literature.

The fundamental principles of Ayurveda and Siddha are almost identical, but the Siddha system has specialised in the method of diagnosis by the pulse and the use of mineral preparations. The Unani system, though akin to these two, differs in certain principles, having a leaning towards the system of "scientific" medicine. "Know thyself" is the motto of Ayurveda. The realisation of the individual self (*jiva*) with the universal spirit (*Purusha*) is the goal of every being in the Universe. Everything else including our body and mind (*Prakriti*) are only means to achieve this end.

Ayurveda consists of two words: *Ayur* meaning life and *veda* meaning knowledge or science. And so the "Science of Life" tells us of the way of keeping the human mind and body in a state of health so as to be able to follow the dictates of religion, the goal of existence, hence it is a *Veda. Veda* of A*yur* (Life). "Save humanity" has been the watchword of Hindu Medicine, not for self, nor for the fulfillment of any earthly desire of gain, but solely for the good of suffering humanity should a physician treat his patients.

Every science is based on some particular theory or theories. The fundamental principle underlying the Ayurvedic system of medicine is the Theory of *Tridosha.* It is not the purpose of this article to compare the Western and the Ayurvedic systems of

medicine; but to explain the *Tridosha* Theory as described in the standard works on Ayurveda. The three *Doshas,* viz., *Vayu, Pitta,* and *Kapha*, when in normal equilibrium keep the body sound; but when vitiated, either singly or in combination, bring about disease. The method of treatment would therefore be to bring the vitiated *Dosha* back to its normal state, so that the *Doshas* are again in equalibrium. The theory of *Vayu, Pitta* and *Kapha* was also a great discovery which unfortunately, has been misunderstood by Western Medical scholars judging by the wrong translations of terms "Wind, Bile and Phlegm."

The proper explanation of this theory will need a full treatise but let me try to be brief. The word *Vayu* does not imply "Wind" in Ayurveda but comprehends all the phenomenon of motion which comes under the functions of life, function of the central and sympathetic nervous system. *Pitta* does not essentially mean "Bile" but signifies the function of metabolism thermogenesis or heat production in its scope: the process of digestion, colouration of blood and formation of the various secretions and excretions which are the means or ends of tissue combustion. And *Kapha* does not mean "Phlegm" but is primarily to imply the functions of cooling and preservation (thermotaxis) or heat regulation; and secondarily the various preservative fluids, e.g., mucus, synovia, etc., which are the manifest forms of those functions

The therapeutic effects of drugs on the human body are in relation to the *Tridosha* bodily characteristics (*Sareera Prakurthi),* effect of the drugs, (*Rasa, Guna, Veerya, Vipaka, Prabha*)[195],and the treatment requires not only a knowledge of the drugs but also a detailed study of the patient. Microbes are not so much the cause of diseases; if the resistance were normal, they could not cause infection. Ayurveda realises that the therapeutic effect of a particular drug depends not only on the properties of the drug itself but on the characteristics of the patient as well. A true Ayurvedic physician will avoid using western drugs as much as possible and indeed will

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[195] These five terms are translated as "taste, qualities of the physiological effects, potency, chemical changes and curative action in diseases." "Ayurveda Past and Present," p. 24.

not find the need for them except perhaps for certain modern anti-bacterial drugs and analgesics which are believed to be superior to any known Ayurvedic drugs as bactericides and pain killers. Before Ayurvedic physicians are allowed to use these drugs it is essential that they be given training in the effect of these drugs. Ayurvedic institutions now teach Clinical Methods as a subject in their training, and integrations are slowly taking place which will create a National System of Medicine in Sri Lanka.

The use of antibiotics is not against the principles of Ayurvedic Medicine but as Ayurveda concentrates more on the constitution of the patient than on the disease, their use is justified only in those rare cases where the infection has so overpowered the constitution that it is incapable of developing the resistance to counteract it. Analgesics being pain-relieving drugs and not cures, their use does not conflict with any of the principles of Ayurvedic treatment.

There are two methods of treatment. One aims at curing the disease, the other at curing the patient; Ayurveda cures the disease, protecting the patient. As we find in practice, even a half-educated Ayurvedic physician who remembers the laws of Etiology and Therapeutics and Dietary hinging upon this theory fares pretty well by the bedside of the patient.

Finally, there can be only one system of medicine. In Sri Lanka, as in China, Western Medical Science should be integrated. By integration of the two systems of medicine is meant not the incorporation of drugs of one system into the pharmacopeia of the other but the building up of a single system of medical science based on the principles, theories and doctrines of the two systems as can be combined to form this synthesis. The scientific characteristics and methods adopted for the development of Western Medical Science should be applied to the examination of the doctrines of Ayurveda for without such an examination no progress can be made towards the object of ascertaining the truth. The question of integration must be left to scientific research.

CHAPTER NINE

Economic Life of the Region

Good men put forth industry and produce wealth, not for themselves but for the use of society. *Tirukkural*

The title of this chapter does not refer to the economical habits of the Jaffna man but to the economic life of the area in which he lives. If the economy of Jaffna were as strong as the economizing of its citizens, Jaffna would rival Taiwan in economic wealth!

Jaffna Peninsula and its adjoining islands are always referred to as a rural and agricultural region but, despite its rural appearance and ambiance, the majority of its workers are not employed in agriculture. The Census of 1971 showed 60,000 out of approximately 160,000 (round numbers) employed in Jaffna in farming and related occupations like paddy hulling, retailing vegetables and fruits and the manufacture of cigars. Even if forestry and related occupations, fishing, salt production and stone mining be added, the total comes to less than 73,000 employed in outdoor, nature-related occupations. Though the majority of the entire District's population is rural because it lives in villages, the majority of the inhabitants are engaged in non-agricultural pursuits.

Very much the most important town of the region, Jaffna, is characterized as being very short on manufacturing but strong on institutions[196]. Dr. Jeyasingham pointed out that Jaffna Town twenty years ago chiefly produced gold jewelry, tailored clothes, footwear and cigars and processed a good deal of rice but this was all very light manufacturing activity for so large a town. On the other hand, a good share of the population found employment in the Civil Hospital, the schools, the administrative offices at the Kachcheri and other government offices and in the religious institutions.

[196] Jeyasingham, W. L., *Urban Geography of Jaffna*. 241.

The chief occupations in Jaffna District are as follows, according to the Census of 1971, now almost a decade out of date:

Farming, fishing, forestry, etc	72,985
Manufacturing	11,787
Construction and electricity supply	7,750
Retailing, including import business	14,051
Food and room establishments	2,307
Transportation and communications	8,193
Banking, legal, pawn brooking, engineering, architecture	1,115
Public administration and defense	6,491
Educational services	8,210
Medical, dental, health services	3,648
Electrical, motor, bicycle, other repair	2,331
Domestic servants and other personal service	2,498
Laundry, cleaning, dyeing	2,135
Movie projection, distribution, photography	372
Religious organizations	1,090
Barber and beauty shops	924
Activities not adequately defined (Probably includes many landless labourers and other underemployed persons)	16,093
Total	161,980

It is worthy of note that the prestige jobs, founded on "Jaffna's only industry: education," which include government service, banking, education and the other professions, employed only 19,464, or one-eighth of those who were working. It must be remembered that very many of Jaffna's educated persons are working elsewhere in Ceylon and the world.

Population growth—For purposes of comparison it is worth noting here the growth of population of Jaffna District since the earliest census.

Date	Population (rounded)	% increase	Density/ sq. mile [197]
1871	246,000	-	246
1881	265,000	7.3	266
1891	279,000	4.9	280
1901	300,000	7.5	301
1911	326,000	7.9	327
1921	330,000	1.2	331
1931	355,000	7.6	356
1946	424,000	19.0	425
1953	491,000	15.8	493
1963	612,000	24.6	635
1971	701,000	14.5	728

The above paragraphs refer to the Jaffna District because the Census was set up by Districts. The remainder of this chapter, as much as possible, focuses on the Jaffna Region. If for any reason I refer to the District, I shall try to make that fact plain.

Jaffna Town—The capital of the Jaffna Region is Jaffna Town. Before we go further into the details of the economy of the Region, let us introduce our readers to Jaffna Town. The English writer, Leonard Wolff, worked in the British Civil Service in Ceylon during the first decade of the twentieth century and his first assignment was in Jaffna which he reached by bullock cart as the railroad was not yet completed. The locations of his work, in fact, seemed mechanically contrived to give him a balanced exposure to the country for he was first sent to Jaffna (1904-07), then to Kandy in the centre of the country (1907-08) and finally to Hambantota on the

[197] A density of 246 in 1871 and a population of 246,000 would indicate that Jaffna District was exactly a thousand square miles in area. It is intriguing to note that after the 1953 Census this area was reduced somewhat. Apparently 36 square miles were removed. The Jaffna District is now 964 square miles.

southern tip (August, 1908-May, 1911). In one of his short stories,[198] he says this about Jaffna Town:

> Yalpanam is a very large town in the north of Ceylon; but nobody who suddenly found himself in it would believe this. Only in two or three streets is there any bustle or stir of people. It is like a gigantic village that for centuries has slept and grown and sleeps and grows, under a forest of coconut trees and fierce sun. All the streets are the same, dazzling dusty roads between high fences made of the dried leaves of the coconut palms. Behind the fences, and completely hidden by them, are the compounds; and in the compounds still hidden under the palms and orange and lime trees are the huts and houses of the Tamils who live there.

Jaffna Town today is not vastly different from the sketch of 1904. Its eight square miles were estimated by Dr. Jeyasingham to contain 10,000 persons per square mile when he completed his research in 1958.[199] Even though the Jaffna Municipal Council area had a population of 107,000 in 1971, Jaffna Town can scarcely be called a city. Although that figure represents a 13% increase since the Census of 1963, still Jaffna does not look like a city; even more it does not feel like a city. A city is a place where the social organization of the village has weakened greatly and disappears and the atmosphere is urban—bustling, supplying amenities to the population which they are denied in the village, impersonal. Little of this is true of Jaffna Town. Whether one lives in Manipay, Chavakachcheri or smaller places, he feels quite at home when visiting in Jaffna. The atmosphere is very much the same. No speedy or frequent transportation dashes past the pedestrian at regularly stated intervals. Slow-moving buses are continually overtaken by Morris Minor taxis, like tortoises in a pool of water bugs. The better looking shopping area on Main Street is lightly patronized while the

[198] Stories from the East, reprinted in Ceylon Historical Journal, vol. 9, July, 1959-April, 1960, p. 280.

[199] *Urban Geography,* page 84. Technically, the area is 7 3/4 square miles according to the Census of 1963.

crowds rather literally swarm over the old and new bazaars in the true centre of the town.

Unfortunately for the fair name of Jaffna, the true centre of town is a disgrace. Stagnant water, breeding mosquitoes and bad odours, is penned up in various areas, including more than a dozen ponds which could be, and therefore should be, clean and beautiful, ornamented with lotuses. Jaffna Town could be known as a "land of lakes!" The streets are washed only by the rains and it does not rain very often. Piles of rubbish are inexcusably tolerated for far too long. Most buildings are allowed to go too long between paintings and colour washings. Excess lime from betel chews is wiped off on all available posts and corners. The basic problem is that neatness and good housekeeping are the virtue of occasional Jaffna residents but too many are in a cycle of cleaning things chiefly at *Deepavali, Thai Pongal* and New Years; and doing a colour wash when a daughter gets married.

Rank of Towns According to Population 1871-1971

1871	1881	1891	1901
Colombo	Colombo	Colombo	Colombo
Galle	Jaffna	Jaffna	Galle
Jaffna	Galle	Galle	Jaffna
Matara	Kandy	Kandy	Moratuwa
Kandy	Kalutara	Negombo	Kandy
1911	**1921**	**1931**	**1946**
Colombo	Colombo	Colombo	Colombo
Jaffna	Jaffna	Jaffna	Jaffna
Galle	Galle	Galle	Dehiwela/
Kandy	Kandy	Kandy	Mt. Lavinia
Moratuwa	Moratuwa	Dehiwela/ Mt. Lavinia	Kandy
			Moratuwa

1953	1963	1971
Colombo	Colombo	Colombo
Dehiwela-Mt.Lavinia	Dehiwela-Mt.Lavinia	Dehiwela-Mt.Lavinia
Jaffna	Jaffna	Jaffna
Moratuwa	Moratuwa	Moratuwa
Kandy	Kotte	Kotte and Kandy (virtually tied)

"Jaffna hardly impresses the casual observer that {many of its areas} are part of an urban habitat," wrote Dr. Jayasingham.[200] However he does refer to Jaffna as a city. And what is Jaffna Town if not a city? "An overgrown village," is the usual reply. It is a city in size but not in spirit. Jaffna used to be a central small town years ago with many little villages all about it, each inhabited by a single caste with a little space between the villages. Within the eight square miles of central Jaffna Town, residents can name at least 35 villages today (See list below). The original caste composition of the town is reflected in the well publicized name of one neighbourhood, Vannarponnai, which means Dhobi Quarter, and in streets named after Goldsmiths, Bronze workers, Weavers and Cobblers. The steadily growing population has long since melded these all together. Whereas a commodious compound once accommodated one house, a man with two daughters has built one more house, the population per square mile has risen steadily while land prices have become as much as Rs. 40,000 and more per lacham.

Villages and Neighbourhoods Within Jaffna Town

Anaipanthy	Kannathiddy	Pandyanthalava
Arialai	Koddaidy	Pannai
Arasady	Moor Street	Parangitheru
Athiady	Muthiraichanantai	Passayur
Chiviatheru	Nachimar Kovilady	Perumal Kovilady
Chundikuli	Nallur	Pungankulam
Columbuthurai	Nallur South	Thaddatheru
Echchamaddai	Narayankundu	Tharakulam
Fort	Narikundu	Thitty
Gurunagar	Navanthurai	Vannarponnai
Kalliankadu	Nayanmarkaddu	Vembadi
Kandanmadam	Oddumadam	

[200] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

Why is Jaffna not a city? Pedestrians can engulf the streets in a similar fashion both in Rome and in the Jaffna bazaar but Rome feels like a city while in Jaffna, bullock carts, men with push-carts, coolies carrying jute bags of flour and sugar and now and then a wandering cow or goat make one feel that he is in a giant village.

By providing unified services to its residents, a town qualifies to be called a city. These services are transportation, electricity, water and sewers. In Jaffna the bus services provide transportation while electricity comes from the centralized power supply of the whole island, located in the mountains of central Ceylon. As for water, a large water tank stands in the midst of Jaffna Town which suggests an urban water supply. But it supplies only one-third of the water required, so most residents are dependent upon their private wells or public taps which are also part of the town system. As for sewers, there are open ditches, sometimes covered with a cement block covering but in the usual sense of the word—large concrete or plastic pipes buried underground and hauling away the sewage—Jaffna has no sewers, only drains. It is a place of septic tanks, unfortunately, even in 1980, still supplemented by a corps of latrine coolies, untouchables in the caste system, who clean out the slowly diminishing number of outhouses and haul off the contents to the dumps of the town. A day is approaching in Jaffna when Sweepers will be employed only in cleaning the streets and disposing of rubbish and not one privy will remain.

From time to time the town fathers bestir themselves to brighten up the place. In the past twenty years, in addition to the water tower and connected partial water supply, an impressive Municipal Library has grown up on the central Esplanade,—a great open area around the magnificent Fort which Esplanade blesses Jaffna as Central Park

saves the soul of New York City. (In Jaffna's case, however, the salvation is much more potential than actual.) In that same area, but a considerable distance from the Library, nearer the sea, a stadium has been built with a seating capacity of 650 and room for twenty thousand standees. An 80-foot tower, five feet higher than the municipal water tower in height, was completed at the end of 1979 to honour the memory of Jaffna's greatest son of this generation, Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, leader of the Tamils' chief political party from independence until his death in 1977.

It must be confessed that these improvements are in the main the easiest type: structures. Neither political leaders nor citizens feel any strong impulse to tackle improvement of services, housekeeping or beautification of the town.

The enjoyment of walking anywhere in Jaffna is reduced by the absence of sidewalks (pavements) and the presence of cows. This is as true of the town as of the countryside.

Jaffna's water front, like that of all too many cities of the world, instead of being its most beautiful side and the area where people come to walk in the evening as on Colombo's Galle Face, is in part the town dump or refuse heap and for the rest, largely devoted to poor Fishermen's huts and other slums. It is also the destination of Sweepers and their carts.

Fortunately for the attractiveness of the town, most of Jaffna Town consists of shady compounds well filled with fruit trees, palms and flowering shrubs, as noted by Wolfe. Eighty percent of the town's land was used for residential purposes in the 1950's.[201] One catches pleasant glimpses of home-like, hospitable-looking compounds for mile after mile about the town.

So far I have barely mentioned Jaffna's two chief scenic or cultural attractions. These are the Fort and the Nallur Kandasamy Temple. The Temple was described in the fourth chapter. Unless he is unusually interested in Hindu temples, the average foreign visitor

[201] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

coming to Jaffna finds the Fort to be the most interesting single feature of the town; but Jaffna's nickname might well be "Temple Town" for it contains a great many of impressive size.

Fort—The Fort was built in 1632 by the Portuguese and remodeled extensively by the Dutch when they took over Jaffna in 1660. It is five-sided and four of the sides are protected by the moat which is connected with the lagoon which is just a few feet away from one side of the Fort. No fort in all Ceylon is in better condition; it is an impressive monument to colonial days. Within its walls are the jail, King's House where important government officials are put up, a tennis club and the residences of a number of government officers. From outside the walls, the upper part of the great, historic church can be seen. It was built by the Dutch on the site of the Portuguese church. Some of the stones from the earlier church are built into one wing of the present church. Under its floor lie a number of Dutch Christians, many born in the seventeenth century. The best types of Ceylon woods were used for the pulpits and the elaborate, raised seats of the government officials.[202] Tablets and markers are set in the walls memorializing Dutch and English officers and officials who died in Jaffna. The church is rarely used any more; only once in a while for large meetings of Christians. In the Fort at one point a gallows stands starkly, a reminder that capital punishment was sometimes carried out in public.

Bazaar—The Jaffna bazaar and the markets are "loud and gay with radios."[203] Even in small village boutiques the transistor blares all day long. It is rarely tuned more softly; generally there is only one volume: maximum! As one looks at the shops he sees all sorts of wares displayed, stalks of green-becoming-yellow bananas, a wire cage full of eggs, bunches of grapes tied together to form one giant bunch two feet long like those from the Promised Land in the Bible, balls of twine, every sort of pail and container: clay, plastic, aluminum and galvanized metal. Here a length of rope smoulders all

[202] Nichols, E., *About Jaffna,* American Ceylon Mission Press, 1923, pp. 20-21. In 1967 Bishop Kulandran published an 18 page booklet on the Fort Church, fully illustrated, entitled "The Kruys Kerk of Jaffnapatam," which is most informative.

[203] Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

day long. Smokers put it to their bidis and cigars for a light—virtually the only free service in Jaffna. Books and magazines almost all in Tamil, notebooks (exercise books), chalk, pencils, pens, and every sort of school supply await the school-going customers. Stacks or rows of betel, ready to chew, vie with large brass tea brewers and all sorts of "short eats" for the customer's palate. Brushes, brooms, mats and rope, all locally made, show the results of private enterprise, government projects and cottage industry.

Throughout the towns and villages of the Region and in all the streets and many of the lanes of Jaffna Town are the dusty, untidy little shops, operating on a shoestring and supplying the minimal dietary needs of the populace. For all their poverty-level status they are graced with the name of "boutiques." Their stock in trade consists of curry stuffs, coffee, tea, sugar, salt, rice and flour. Coconuts, plantains, soap and kerosene oil complete the list. The fact that such shops are often one stage short of bankruptcy is interestingly described by Dr. Jeyasingham:[204]

> A man who shuns casual or manual work easily succumbs to the temptation of running a store. With a little capital he can raise either by pawning the jewels of his wife or by mortgaging any immovable property he might own, he ventures on this business. Not keeping proper accounts and selling on credit he realises only too late that the business is a failure. Thus there are far more such stores in the city than are necessary. This type of existence is one way of living on the meagre capital assets a man possesses; the store provides his immediate meagre needs till he winds up the establishment.

It would be small comfort to know that annually in the United States of America about 200,000 business ventures fail.

Vegetables—The variety of vegetables in the Jaffna bazaar has increased dramatically and very satisfyingly in the past twenty years. Many of them come from "upcountry" but many also are locally grown. Good quality string beans have replaced the old ones which seemed to have been made of cardboard. In addition to the

[204] *Urban Geography*, p. 69.

carrots and beetroot which were about all the options of two decades ago, there are leeks, potatoes, tomatoes, and cabbage as well as many kinds of local vegetables. And the supply of home-grown and upcountry fruits is quite satisfactory almost all the time. The spottiness of delivery means, however, that pineapple, for example, will be abundant for a few days and then disappear from the market for a few days until another lorry load arrives. At any rate, the fruit and vegetable supply has definitely improved for the Jaffna man with access to the market in Jaffna Town and, from thence, a better variety filters out to the more distant places. Life on the islands, however, remains comparatively Spartan, particularly on those reached only by ferry, and prices are higher because of the added transportation cost.

Markets—It must be a source of satisfaction (and surprise) to the people of Jaffna to learn that they are distinctly better off than the rest of the island of Ceylon when it comes to fairs and markets. When Messrs. J.A.V.D. and A.D.N. Fernando prepared a report for the Non-Aligned Summit Conference in Colombo in 1976, "Towards Self-Reliance in Sri Lanka,"[205].they had these interesting observations to make on the subject:

> Sri Lanka's most prolific network {of village markets} is to be found in Jaffna. The number and frequency of markets, many of which meet at least for a few hours every day, reflect an intense trading activity far ahead of any of the 21 other districts of the country. It is easy to explain why this is so, though it would be difficult to emulate this example in other parts of the country.
>
> The district's industrious farming community has transformed a water-starved region into a veritable market garden from one end to the other. The produce not only meets the needs of the district, but also a large proportion of the needs of other areas {in chillies, red onions, plantains and mangoes.}
>
> The district is compact and well provided with transport. It has a relatively large population, which belongs to a

[205] *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

homogeneous racial community. Apart from its trading experience, its social cohesion has contributed to the proliferation of periodic markets to a very satisfactory ratio of one for every 9,000 persons.

Elsewhere in Sri Lanka, where the market gardens are overshadowed by cultivation of rice or by large-scale plantations devoted to export crops, the periodic market has a less dynamic role.

Except for Jaffna district, therefore, Sri Lanka's periodic markets do not seem to be an adequate network, either for social or for economic exchanges {for nationally} there is one periodic market for every 26,000 persons which is a very poor state of affairs.

The late Professor S. Selvanayagam's study[206] showed that the economic conditions of the farmers of Chunnakam and Kantarodai, two villages of western Jaffna, were somewhat above those of other villages of Jaffna. He believed this was due to the presence of the large and flourishing market located in Chunnakam and close to Kantarodai.

As an example of where and how often the markets are held in eight larger and even smaller places in Jaffna, the following are listed: (all these markets are open seven days a week except the two indicated) Chavakachcheri (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday), Chunnakam (Monday, Wednesday, Friday), Karaveddy, Kayts, Manipay, Pt. Pedro, Nelliadi and Thirunelveli. Among the other markets, which in some cases are not particularly smaller than some of those already listed are: Chankanai, Kodikamam, Maruthanamadam, Pallai, Pandaterruppu, Myliddy and Varany.

Meat Market—But we have so far omitted a market which we would be failing in our civic duty if we failed to include. One of the most ugly sights in Jaffna is the fish market and meat stalls of the city, located on Beach Road in the area known as Navanthurai. The

[206] "Intensive Farming and Agricultural Trends," *Journal of the Ag. Society of Ceylon,* vol. 3, no. 1, 1966, Peradeniya, p. 5.

meat stalls have haunches of beef hanging in the open air. Occasionally a crow lands on a piece and takes a peck or two before he is shooed away. However, the crow's action has had an infinitesimally good aspect: his visit momentarily frightened away the flies in that area, something the proprietors have no interest in doing. Each stall is filled with the most flies I have ever seen. In some seasons the table tops are solidly covered, edge to edge, with flies as with a cloth. Next door is the vegetable market along the back side of which is the fish market where all shapes and sizes of fish are offered for sale, mostly by the piece. Though I was reared as a child for some years on a farm and am familiar with scenes of butchering, the Navanthurai market is excessive. The conditions in which the fishwives work vary from poor to inhuman. A visit to this market would greatly increase the number of vegetarians in Jaffna!

One gets the impression that since vegetarianism is a sign of piety, slaughter houses and meat and fish markets are immoral places which should be kept out of sight and largely forgotten. Speeches by politicians, reported in the press, reflect such attitudes although it is true that the audience for such speeches is much more often Buddhist than Hindu. The establishments of Beach Road fully fit such a description. But since the majority of the Hindu community is non-vegetarian and all the rest of the population also, with few exceptions, it is time these markets were taken into civilized society. The Public Health Inspectors should enforce the law and meat and fish vendors should be provided with screened shops, perhaps partly at public expense.

Prices

As recently as early 1978 architects were quoting Rs. 50 per square foot as the round figure for estimating the cost of building an open building like a warehouse. This meant that for a structure like a home the estimate would be around Rs. 100. By mid 1979 the same architect was quoting Rs. 100-125 for the open type of building.

It used to be said that Tamils were so economical that after purchasing and receiving petrol they wrung out the hose. With the price of petrol at Rs. 13.30 going up to Rs. 20 on December 21,

1978, to Rs. 30 ($2 US) on June 15, 1979 and Rs. 38 in January, 1980, everyone wrings out the hose now.

From *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory* and from more current sources I have listed the prices of some commodities and other items:

	1975	1979	1980
Rice (unrationed), measure	3.31	3.80	4.75-5.00
Flour (controlled price), lb.	1.10	1.36	1.50
Bread (controlled), lb.	.98	1.25	2.05
Beef (with bones), lb.	3.30	5.00	5.00
Mutton (with bones), lb.	5.91	12.00	12.00
Green gram, measure	9.32	2.40-4.00	
Manioc, lb.	.35	.50-.75	
Coconut (medium, small)		.34 (Mktg. Dept. .60, .90, 1.25)	1.75-2.00
Coconut oil, bottle	1.64		7.50
Sugar (rationed), lb.	.72	Stamps	Stamps
Sugar (unrationed), lb.	7.00	3.00	4,50
Dried chillies, lb.	12.24		11-14.00
Salt, lb.	.20	.20	.20
Limes	.05	.25-1.50	.25-1.50
Saffron, lb.	13.37	16.00	
Milk (fresh),bottle	2.40	1.75	1.75
Onions, Bombay	3.65		3.50
Onions, Red	1.70		1.50-7.00
Egg, each	.50-.75	.50-1.20	.50[207]

[207] The price of eggs is highest at Christmas time.

	1975	1979	1980
Cheapest bicycle	1000.00	840.00	840.00
Costliest bicycle	1500.00	1500.00	
Petrol, gallon	13.30	30.50	38.00
III Class rail fare—Jaffna to Colombo	14,40	16.40	22.40
Cotton material, 36 inches wide, one metre	7.50 - 11.50	14.50	
Cheap cotton sari	28.00	28.00	
Nylex sari	60.00	125-300	80-300
Roofing tile	1.90	1.90	
Cigarette, one	.11-.17	.25-.35	.30-.40

In theory the above quoted price of petrol was justified as a way of subsidizing the poor man's fuel, kerosene. The 50-gallon drums, mounted on two-wheeled carts, which the kerosene vendor pushes up and down the streets and roads of Jaffna has had Rs. 3.74 painted on the end of the drum for years. There was a shocking change on September 1, 1979 when the 3.74 was replaced by Rs. 11.40, a tripling of the price, which went on up to Rs. 14.40 in early 1980.[208] By the use of the stamps which replaced the ration system on September 1, also those with an income below Rs. 355 per month were to receive 3/4 gallon per month per family at no cost. This is what a family requires for one week or ten days of a month if it burns a lamp until around 10 or 10:30 p.m. nightly.

Oil—Most of the world is battling inflation and oil shortages and in that struggle Sri Lanka is better off than many other nations because about 9/10 of its electricity is generated by hydroelectric installations and not by the use of oil as fuel, greatly reducing the national requirement for oil. Less than six months after the price of various forms of petroleum had been doubled or tripled in Sri Lanka, the government announced a 26% decline in their use.

[208] In 1970, three percent of Sri Lanka's total export earnings went for petroleum imports; in 1979 this figure had become 31%. *Sunday Observer*,Sept. 16, 1979.

Cost of living—And despite plenty of local grumbling about the steady increase in prices, again Sri Lanka is comparatively well off as revealed by a United Nations report given in the *Ceylon Daily News* on September 12, 1979. According to the United Nations survey of the capitals of 75 countries, Colombo was the least expensive of the entire group. Sample costs: The five highest: Tokyo ($199), Geneva ($163), Kampala, Uganda ($152), Brussels ($150) and Bonn ($148). London and Washington were in the middle group ($106 and $93) while the lowest five were Maputo, Mozambique ($73), Warsaw ($73), Lima, Peru ($72), Kingston, Jamaica ($61) and Colombo ($58). The budget of 1980, however, suggests that the government of Sri Lanka is prepared to increase inflation significantly.

Big government—Before we take up other industries of a more conventional kind, let us state the obvious: the biggest business in Ceylon, by several times, is government. As Professor Howard Wriggins says, "There are nearly four and a half times as many people on the state payroll in Sri Lanka now as compared to twenty years ago. Nearly one million people receive salaries from central and local government and state corporations. To induce these huge enterprises to function expeditiously and well is indispensable."[209]

Industries—It is time to take a look at what is going on in the big and little shops and industries of the Jaffna Region. The only large, heavy industry in the entire Peninsula is the government cement plant at KKS (Kankesanturai), employing 1500 persons. Next to that in size is the Cey-Nor plant for building boats, repairing nets and processing fish which employs about 900 persons at Karainagar and another 360 who make nets at a factory in Jaffna Town. The third largest employer is the Pandaterruppu Parish Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society (700 employees). More details of these three employers and their operation will be given below.

Leyden—Fourth in size is the Leyden Mill in Jaffna Town which employs 300 persons, mostly women, making banians[210], socks, shirts and other cloth articles. It is about to expand with an umbrella factory on its top (third) floor, with machinery imported from Japan. Although Leyden makes mostly synthetic articles it also makes a good many articles from mixtures of cloth such as 65% polyester and 35% cotton. It also has a blend which is 80%-20%. Although synthetics are hotter and costlier than cotton, they are immensely popular in Jaffna. Very few employees leave Leyden for overseas employment but the chief loss comes from the marriage of the young women workers. According to the Leyden managers, Hindu wives do not believe in working after marriage but are expected to settle down, keep the home and raise a family. This flies somewhat in the face of the customary generalization that the number of married women workers is steadily increasing.

I visited a number of factories including one employing 125 people in the tinning and bottling of fruits and juices, some of them for export. Blocks of camphor for temple sacrifice, toys and toffees were also manufactured by this company. A different manufacturer was producing margosa oil by extracting the oil from the dried yellow seeds of the margosa tree. The pulp was then used for fertilizer for grapes and some of it was burned on embers as a mosquito repellent. Another small company applied tie and dye and batik and other printing to saris on great tables, 96 feet long; and still another reconditioned car, lorry, boat and water-pump motors, making use of several metal-working machines. Still another made aluminium pots which is a product which has in the past two decades largely replaced the all too fragile clay pots. The latter are still used in traditional ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and *Pongal* but their domestic use has greatly declined. There are half a dozen aluminium processing plants in Jaffna Town today.

Clay tiles—Still, in the clay products field in the 1950's, ten different businessmen in Jaffna Town imported as many as 4 million total roofing tiles each year from India. Now there are a good many kilns close to Colombo and elsewhere in the island where tiles and bricks are made, and Sri Lanka is self-sufficient in these products.

According to the aforementioned Messrs. Fernando and Fernando, the management of small industry in Sri Lanka is typified by the harassed and hard working owner and his right hand man,

[209] "Why Bureaucracies Fall Short," *Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1979, p. 28.

[210] Banians are undershirts for men.

both skilled and knowledgeable from experience. "This hardy pair who worked out of thousands of workshops and backyard factories kept the small (industries) sector alive against all kinds of odds. Very often they shared between them the demanding roles of investor, technician, manager and sales representative. Neither the credit institutions, the marketing system nor the factory ordinance took any serious notice of them."[211]

Small industries—Since independence, governments of various political persuasions have tried to promote small industries but generally they simply did not know how. Or even if they knew how, their doctrinaire beliefs did not permit them to do what needed to be done. What the small businessman claimed he required and what the industrial developer said was available, or was required, were often diverse. But the little businessman went ahead, with or without help. "The small scale sector (excluding the handicrafts and handloom industry) has provided two-thirds of the jobs in industry. Its output amounts to 40% of total production and it does {this} with only 15% of the capital invested in industry."[212]

Since new jobs can be created in the small industry sector at a cost of about Rs. 2000 each, "this sector holds out the best prospects for solving the unemployment problem in a capital-scarce economy like Sri Lanka {for} it costs between Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 100,000 to create a new job in large-scale industrial projects."[213]

Milk White Soap—The Milk White Soap Factory, employing a hundred workers, is the largest of the dozen or so businesses in Jaffna engaged in making soap. It was begun in 1927 by the father of the present owner. The factory uses caustic soda from the Paranthan plant, coconut oil from Maravila, citronella oil from Matara and blue and yellow dyes from England. The citronella gives the soap a pleasant smell and the dyes, particularly the blue dye, gives it a colour the Jaffna housewife likes. Seventy percent of the

[211] Fernando and Fernando, *op. cit.*, p. 21, both citations.

[212] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[213] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

soap manufactured is blue. Daily, twenty hundredweights of coconut oil are used in production.

All the machines in the plant (except the boiler which was obtained in England), were made by hand by an automobile mechanic in Jaffna who used mostly materials available from old automobiles to produce the various soap cutters, slicers and stampers. Each bar of soap is stamped in Tamil on one side and Sinhalese on the other and is then wrapped by hand. One fancier brand of soap is made with the scent of margosa (Hindi: *neem*) in it and marketed as Neem soap. Regular bars of soap cost 90 cents; baby bars sell for 45 cents. Dried margosa seeds are bought by the soap factory and the oil pressed out at the factory. Half of all the Milk White soap produced is sold in Jaffna; the remainder goes to outlets all over the island.

The owner of the Milk White Soap Factory, Mr. K. Kanagarajah, strongly believes in the power of propaganda and education and is a philanthropically inclined person who promotes a number of causes for the good of the community. To support his campaign for the planting of more shade trees he has a nursery in the factory compound where a number of varieties of trees are available to his employees and others for planting. He has a supply of crutches for any who need them. Two rooms contain a large amount of printed materials, mostly in Tamil, which get across ideas which appeal to him. Many of these books, booklets and pamphlets are suitable for school children. Some are for adults. Once a month a company magazine is issued. Numerous signs, slogans and placards are in evidence about the factory, many of them for children, in honour of the International Year of the Child:

Boil water and filter it for drinking
Grow more trees for rain
Plant a tree every birthday
Cleanliness is health

Industry and speculation—The government has put a great deal of money into the promotion of small industries, most of which have failed, as small businesses do regularly in many parts of the world. In Sri Lanka the failure rate may be unusually high because on many occasions, in the name of a planned industry, a

businessman got a license to order a substantial amount of raw material. When the raw material arrived he sold it to customers who were anxious to buy it and forgot about the factory he claimed to have been about to build. In Sri Lanka we have a great many more speculators than manufacturers or processors; it is certainly less complicated to buy raw materials than to try to operate a successful factory. The government has put a great deal of the public's money into small businesses yet businessmen all over the world complain that the government, far from assisting them, is the largest problem, or one of the largest, which they face in achieving success.

Complaints—Among the small businesses, and middle-sized businesses which I visited, I found various complaints and while only one out of the first five complaints was about the government, that complaint was a serious one. The other complaints were that:

1. Few manufacturers were able to attract their sons to follow them in business.

2. Smugglers are able to get so much cloth into the country it was ruining the cloth printing business.

3. The irregularity of raw material supply from overseas was a threat to the business of those who process aluminium.

4. While one manufacturer who paid high wages had almost no one leave his employ, another manufacturer was much harmed by imported goods and his employees, whom he paid minimally, were continually leaving him for even slightly better paying jobs. His turnover record was amazing. He had begun the year with 27 employees, he had hired 37 replacements and at the end of the year he had only two among his current 27 who had been with him one year earlier. Several of those who had left him had gone overseas.

5. The man who made the fifth complaint said, "If you are a businessman and you know the work well and you try to get a permit to enlarge your business or to establish a branch in a new place, you will not get a permit because those in charge are not interested in whether you have skills and experience which incidentally are the true and vital requiremer

operation. But if you know someone who works in the permit office, or have money for bribes, you will get a permit." This is a serious, but by no means unusual, complaint and raises strong questions as to what those government agencies are doing which were established for the purpose of assisting small businessmen. We can be sure, however, that not every businessman is treating his employees fairly or abiding by socially responsible regulations; some government regulation is certainly necessary.

Funeral directors—In 1958, there were five undertaking establishments in Jaffna Town; today there are only four. There are no undertakers outside Jaffna Town; but coffins can be purchased in various other localities. Perhaps it is a sign of increased affluence, or simply of adopting new folkways but the use of hearses is no longer confined to the Christian community. Very occasionally a hearse is hired by a Muslim and it is growing a good deal more common for Hindus to obtain a hearse to transport the body from the home to the cremation grounds, particularly in the rainy season. The distance from the home to the cremation grounds is directly related to the hiring of the hearse although affluent Hindus sometimes hire a hearse even for a short distance.

An undertaker's services are required for embalming whenever the relatives wish to postpone the funeral for one or more days to enable a relation to come home from overseas to attend it.

In Jaffna, coffins are always made of wood and nearly all are of *sappu*, from the simplest box (Rs. 65) to quite elaborate coffins with shining white cloth linings for Rs. 450 to 550. The cheapest satinwood coffin is Rs. 1200, which includes the services of the undertaker and the hearse.

"Exotic" occupations—The occupation of undertaker, like that of aluminium processor or the making of cement or of fibre glass boats, is an example of a means of making a living by bringing in an idea, a material and a technique from outside. It is an occupation which did not exist in Jaffna earlier in this century. Foreigners coming to Sri Lanka, on the other hand, are always interested in exotic or non-western occupations—methods by which a man

supports his family, or at least himself, which are unheard of in the homeland of the observer. In Jaffna there are a number of such occupations of which the one employing the most people, probably is that of toddy tapping. Others include the wood chopper, rickshaw puller, lorry cleaner, peddlers of sweets or household utensils, tomtom beater, sweeper, oil presser, personal laundryman, onion weeder, *ola* leaf scribe, pearl fishery divers and the guard who closes the gates at the railway crossing. However, pearl fisheries occur only very occasionally in Mannar and it is probable that no one inscribes palm leaves any more.

Cooperatives—For nearly two generations, citizens of Jaffna have participated in cooperatives. The cooperative movement began in Ceylon in the early forties and there have been many cooperatives of various kinds in Jaffna for decades. The People's Bank surveyed the cooperatives of the entire island in early 1978 and published its findings in June of that year. While reporting the existence of over 8,000 cooperatives, it noted that one-quarter of them were dead or dying. Their findings showed that although the cooperatives suffered from various weaknesses and malfunctions, still the public believed in them and strongly desired them to continue. The major problem of the cooperatives is the shortage of consumer goods and close seconds to this problem are transport, irregularities (misappropriations), and political interference. Less important weaknesses reported were wastage and defaulting on loans. The survey concluded that "the dilemma of cooperatives in developing countries is basically that without government support they cannot develop and maintain themselves sufficiently to be of use either to their members or to the economy and with too much official control they lose their true spirit;"that is, they lose their voluntarism.[214]

No area of Sri Lanka has a stronger cooperative movement than Jaffna. There are multi-purpose cooperatives in many towns and villages of this Region. One of the most successful in the nation and the largest and most active in the Jaffna Region is the Pandaterruppu Parish Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society (PPMPCS). Situated in a fertile agricultural area, the village of Pandaterruppu appears to be

[214] *Economic Review,* May/June, 1978, Colombo, p. 15.

prosperous and surrounded by many green fields of vegetables. This is true even in the dry season when such crops are sustained by the careful irrigation practices commended in Chapter Ten. The Pandaterruppu Parish Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society serves an area of about fifteen square miles in which around 25,000 people live of whom over 8,500 belong to this flourishing cooperative.

One of the basic activities of the PPMPCS is the purchasing of onions, chillies and potatoes from some of its members. It does not buy from non-members. Many of its purchases are from farmers who had a few months earlier gotten a loan from the cooperative's rural bank toward the cost of labour and seeds for planting. After harvest, the borrower sells to the cooperative and repays the loan. Even though the cooperative pays a little less than the open market for onions, chillies and potatoes only about one-fourth of its borrowers sell in the open market and pay off the loan in cash. Bad loans comprise less than ten percent, I was told at the PPMPCS office, but this rate is unbelievably low. A local cooperative's rate of bad loans is over 60%, for example. Such borrowers are sued for payment and often brought to arbitration. They are cut off from further credit. The rumour is often heard in Sri Lanka that agricultural loans are gifts to the farmers, a notion which makes it difficult for cooperative societies to collect on their loans.

Twenty-six small village cooperative stores are the retail outlets for this PPMPCS which distributes through them rationed rice, curry stuffs, chemicals, fertilizer and building materials. Since people so often get their rationed rice at the cooperative, they speak of the coop. in Tamil as "the coupon shop" rather than "the coop." It is in the retail cooperative stores that most of the members meet the coop. in the community. But this particular MPCS has unusual features. It has been made great in size by its turning to the concept and practice of the industrial cooperative rather than merely confining its activities and interests to the consumer cooperative as the ordinary cooperative society does.

The PPMPCS has purchased sixteen power looms for weaving synthetic cloth and plans to purchase sixteen more. At present eighty-four persons are employed in three shifts on these looms. It has handlooms on which 28 persons are employed but they earn only

three or four rupees a day. Although the government continues to foster the handloom industry, there is little life in it. It is given artificial respiration partly out of sentimental loyalty to Gandhian ideals. Even if the idea of hand weaving was useful in India long ago it no longer seems so in either India or Sri Lanka today. The girls and women who can get no better job work seven hours a day for the wage just mentioned, that is, three to four American cents per hour. A great problem facing the industry is that so many modern consumers simply prefer machine-made material. A devout Gandhian who weaves his own cloth or wears the *khadi* woven by someone else is respected still, but rarely imitated.

The Pandaterruppu Parish Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society incorporates a number of other economic activities:

- A garment centre with 70 sewing machines employs seamstresses who make children's clothes and other articles of cloth.
- A bakery on the premises employs fifteen.
- Three wholesale units exist for large purchasers including the managers of the branch shops. The first wholesale unit is for rice flour and bulk food grains; the second is for bottled and tinned items plus soap and matches. The third is a textile unit where the output of the cooperative's own power looms, of the handlooms and materials purchased from the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment, are sold .
- Three rural banks which non-members can also patronize are located at Havalai, Mathagal and Pandaterruppu but temporarily are all housed at Pandaterruppu since most Jaffna banks were temporarily closed in December 1978.
- One of the retail shops is a hardware store where water pumps, iron goods, expanded metal and nails are sold, among other things.
- The cooperative runs a one-acre grape farm and nursery. It also has a small gingelly oil extraction and marketing operation at Pirampatthai.

- It operates its own canteen and snack bar (tuckshop).
- It has had a textile printing and dyeing section but this has been closed down, at least temporarily, because of the influx of imported goods.

It has further decentralized its operations by renting two factories in the Industrial Estate at Atchuvely in one of which matches are made by 200 apprentices—formerly unemployed young women of the Pandaterruppu-Chankanai area. Workers in the other factory make soap from coconut oil.

Altogether, the PPMPCS employs around 700 workers and is presumed to be the third largest industrial employer in the Peninsula—a magnificent achievement in the battle against unemployment—although not all the jobs are industrial.

Marketing practices—In practice, the multi-purpose cooperatives purchase only onions, chillies and potatoes; very rarely tobacco or garden crops. There is no law against their buying other crops but because of a shortage of funds or a shortage of storage space, or both, they are generally not able to purchase even all the onions available in most seasons. So a good share of such produce is sold by the growers in local bazaars or to private traders.

Traditional marketing methods have generally benefitted the trader (middleman or *mudalali*) at the expense of the farmer. Generally, the farmer could not afford to wait long after harvest but had to sell at once. Cooperatives have often been established to help the farmer get a better price but they have rarely been adequate. Sometimes they are set up in response to certain market conditions which then change, often by government fiat. Sometimes they have been mismanaged or the funds embezzled but the main problem in Sri Lanka is that the cooperatives are too small to cope with the supply, as just stated. It would help the cultivator immensely if prices could be guaranteed (as the price of paddy is) and this is what farmers throughout the world are always seeking; but such guarantees are beyond the budgets of many a nation, perhaps all. However, under the Jayewardene administration, the government has been purchasing dried chillies at Rs. 7.50 per lb. which has been effective in keeping the price at a level fairly, or perhaps only

nearly, satisfactory to the farmer. No such service is performed for the sale of onions, however.

The Marketing Department of the Sri Lanka government is supposed to help the farmer and the consumer but it is run inflexibly and unimaginatively so that it buys too little from the grower and sells too little to its customers. Unhappily, the Marketing Department outlets seem normally to be "out of stock" of most items, though they appear to be oversupplied with personnel. It is certainly true, however, that Department outlets are handicapped by a lack of sufficient cold storage facilities.

It would appear that the Pandaterruppu Parish Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society has mastered quite well various kinds of marketing techniques and operations. It evidently renders outstanding service to the community by supplying a number of vitally needed products to its members and to others. It contributes significantly to the economic health of the community as long as those in charge of its welfare are able to act responsibly and honestly.

Corruption—Such is the tradition for corruption in the cooperative movement in Sri Lanka that not even the remarkable success story just recited was able to protect the Pandaterruppu Cooperative from some of its own officials. In very recent years, this cooperative's managers became involved in activities which caused them to be interdicted and the entire organization was brought to a halt. The cooperative was soon restored to operation under strict supervision by the Food and Cooperatives Department. Why such supervision is not maintained at all times with all cooperatives in the country is not clear. The interdicted officials were dismissed from their posts for a few months after which, by order of the Minister of Food and Cooperatives, they were restored to their positions.

In August 1979, the *Ceylon Daily Mirror* reported that there had been over 600 cases of frauds in the cooperatives, mostly multi-purpose cooperatives, but did not say over how long a period. The following month the *Tribune* (Sept. 29, 1979) reported, "Police are taking steps to collect over Rs. 100 million from cooperative

directors and chairmen, the amount lost by cooperatives because of corruption, theft and malpractice."

The entire cooperative operation in the country suffers from the demoralization in the cooperatives which prevailed in the years just before 1977, which was described by one cooperative employee as a time when it was operated "free for all."

In November 1979, the *Ceylon Daily News* carried an editorial which presented the view of cooperatives held by the man in the street: "For the majority of consumers, the word 'cooperative' would conjure up dismal visions of apathy and corruption compounded with a good measure of rudeness and general confusion. The dull cloud of pessimism and distrust over the cooperative movement has obviously been of its own making." The Ministry of Food and Cooperatives did not help matters by announcing in October 1979, that members of Parliament could nominate persons to the Board of Directors of cooperatives. The public's confidence will not be increased by further politicising what should be a straightforward business operation.

Salt works—Having looked in detail at the varied economic activities of the cooperatives, we return now to examine in detail several more industries of Jaffna. One of the more picturesque is the salt making at Elephant Pass and at smaller salterns in other parts of the Peninsula. Elephant Pass, especially, has the requirements for salt making by solar evaporation: a hot, dry climate, accessibility to the sea, clayey soil for the salt pans and location on railroad and highway. Elephant Pass has about thirty rainy days per year; however, production has to cease for the rainy season although lorries are constantly hauling previously produced salt off to the markets in the off season as they do in the regular.

The sale and distribution of salt is a government monopoly. Private traders are not allowed to import salt but private persons can produce it under a government license. When Elephant Pass is in normal production, it employs around 500 men and women but around October 15 each year, production is stopped for about five months because of the rains. At that time about 2/3 of the workers,

the seasonal employees, withdraw and a gang of 150 permanent workers carries on.

The country required 50,000 tons a year up to around 1954. By 1964, consumption had risen to 70,000 tons because of increased industrial use and for curing of fish. Currently, the country uses 90,000 tons annually, of which 5,000 tons go to the Paranthan Chemicals Corporation, which is located almost next door to the salt works. Since Sri Lanka's climate is so ideal for producing salt, it should be a salt exporting nation but it has rarely been able to dispose of its surpluses abroad.

The original salterns at Elephant Pass covered almost a square mile: 505 acres. In the new extension, north of the Pass, constructed in 1971, at Kurinchativu, the facility has been more than doubled with an additional 600 acres. In 1975, the new facility alone produced 34,000 tons but the next year declined to 17,510-production had to be curtailed because of the surplus salt from the previous year.

A sign of the times at Elephant Pass Salterns is the plan to erect ten windmills for pumping the sea water into the retaining areas. A generation ago there were several windmills at Elephant Pass but the availability of relatively cheap power caused them to be abandoned. The price of oil is now bringing the windmills back. The unobstructed areas around Elephant Pass should guarantee maximum use of every wind that blows.

In 1964, a small saltern was created near the Araly bridge at Kallundai, due to the enterprise of the late Mr. A. T. Vethaparanam and the Chankanai Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society of which he was the chairman. After a few years, the operation became part of the National Salt Corporation. Production amounts to a thousand tons per year, with a permanent work force of ten and an additional fifteen seasonal workers.

A by-product of salt-making is gypsum, a vital component of cement. Virtually all gypsum made in Sri Lanka is bought up by the KKS Cement Plant or the plant at Puttalam.

Cement—Although the Salt Corporation produces surplus salt, somehow it has rarely been possible for the country to generate a little foreign exchange by exporting that surplus. With cement, the story is different—the country never has enough which makes it too bad that the Cement Plant cannot be run more efficiently and that an additional plant has not been built-the country requires it. In 1977, Professor N. Selvaratnam reported on the state of the operation of the KKS Cement Plant.[215] He stated that it ran from 1972-1977 at an average of 65% of capacity whereas it could be up to around 80% if it were run more carefully. The kilns are shut down for repairs a good many days of every month. He also believed that a considerable saving on fuel oil could be achieved by using the hot gases from the kiln, now wasted, to dry the wet clay before it is put into the kiln. Now the drying is done by machines which burn oil.

The Cement Plant was completed at KKS in 1950. In 1976, it produced 196,000 tons; in 1978 it produced 191,000 tons. There are also two other cement plants in the island but only the one at Puttalam, like that at KKS, performs the entire manufacturing process. As late as 1978, the controlled price of a bag of cement produced at KKS was about Rs. 30. By the end of 1979, it had risen to Rs. 58 while imported cement had been pegged at Rs. 83. In February 1980, the Ceylon cement price was raised to Rs. 83 also, virtually a tripling of the price in two years. The Mahaveli Ganga project uses large amounts of cement which greatly increases the difficulty in obtaining cement.

Cement Production at Kankesanturai

1969-70 (April - March)	188,000 tons
1970-71	188,000
1971 (9 months)	138,000
1972	177,000
1973	182,000
1974	186,000

[215] "Limiting Technical Factors at the Cement Industries in Sri Lanka," *Karmantha*, Sept.-Oct., 1977.

1975	163,000
1976	196,000
1977	159,000
1978	191,000
1979	262,000 (metric tons)

It should be noted that, beginning in 1976, the KKS plant began to send a considerable amount of clinker to Galle for final processing. Although no figures are available, the clinker sent to Galle should be included as part of the production at KKS.

Fifteen hundred employees work at the Cement Plant in three shifts. Casual labourers are paid Rs. 12.50 per day. Permanent labourers receive a salary of Rs. 375 per month plus Rs. 140 Cost of Living Allowance. They receive two cups of tea daily also. About three-fourths of the employees are in the General Cement Workers Union. About half the remainder belong to the UNP Union. The employees seem to be fairly well satisfied with the bonus system which adds as much as Rs. 350 per month to the labourer's salary in any month in which the production goals are reached.

The Cement Plant loses a good many workers yearly to overseas employment, especially burners, welders, fitters and engineers. The plant is thirty years old now and continually needs extra maintenance and repairs. The plant boasts a large foundry and machine shop where almost all necessary parts are made for repairs. There is enough limestone in the neighbourhood of the plant to keep it running for a long time and the quality of that limestone is excellent for the production of cement.

Cigar making—The cigar business in Jaffna is a beleaguered industry. Even the cigar rollers themselves smoke the cheap little bidis which are their own product's chief competition. There is also competition from cigarettes although they cost more than cigars which retail at fifteen to twenty cents each. The other threat to the industry is the Business Turnover Tax (BTT) of 15%. Since many cigar manufacturers do not clear fifteen percent, the tax threatens them with bankruptcy unless they radically change their manufacturing process. Most of the over 400 cigar manufacturers have made the change and no longer appear to run a factory. Some

carry on the factory illegally and avoid payment not only of the Business Turnover Tax but of the Provident Fund and minimum wages to those who work for them. Those who wish to avoid the tax legally can do so by changing to cottage industry. The manufacturer buys the tobacco supply and makes the *koda,* then gives out the tobacco to rollers who take it to their homes and make the cigars, bringing them back to the manufacturer for payment and more material from time to time. On this operation the owner is required to pay only a one percent B.T. Tax.

To make a cigar, Jaffna tobacco is shredded for filler and around it, after it is rolled a bit, is wrapped the flexible, cloth-like leaf of Batticaloa tobacco. The best rollers can produce 6,000-7,000 cigars per week for which they are paid Rs. 37.50 per thousand. Each pays six or seven rupees per day to his assistant who ties each cigar and puts them into bundles of ten. Such cigars look black and are respected for their potency. The *koda* commonly contains some palmyra toddy. "Lighter" cigars are made with a different wrapper and kept free of the *koda.* Regular black cigars sell for Rs. 125 per thousand to the distributor.

Some of the cigar rollers raise tobacco themselves and are busy as farmers when not working as rollers. So they do not roll cigars for much more than six months per year.

Koda—The production of *koda* poses a problem for cigar manufacturers. The pans in which *koda* is brewed have to be imported from England. The price has gotten to nearly Rs. 4000 for a single 60-gallon vessel which is so sturdily built, however, that it will last for twenty years. The larger manufacturers will have three such pans for making *koda* set into a mud-plastered furnace structure which holds it securely and gets maximum use out of the firewood.

It is very difficult to get an estimate of the number of cigars made annually in Jaffna. It is not even possible to say whether the total is several million or many million. But it is safe to say that a few thousand persons are employed in the cigar-making industry. According to the 1971 Census, over 5,000 persons were reported working in the cigar industry.

It should be pointed out that the making of cigars in Jaffna is a completely manual operation. It is labour-intensive; there is no mechanical equipment of any kind.

Cigar makers in other parts of the island use Jaffna tobacco, of course. At the Jaffna railway station bulky parcels of dried, cured tobacco leaves are shipped by rail to little groups of cigar makers around over the island. And much is also shipped by lorry.

Industrial Estate—Several years ago, 65 acres of rocky wasteland near Atchuvely were set aside for an Industrial Estate. Twenty acres were divided into large plots and a good sized room, suitable for a factory, was built on each of about 25 of these plots of land. In the years since, businessmen have rented one site or another for half a dozen factories which produce retreaded SLTB bus tyres, paint and printing ink, hydrated lime, a cannery of fruits and vegetables, matches and soap. There are, in fact, two soap factories. Still another factory makes such disparate products as plastic for wrapping and also wire nails. The latter factory was closed down for much of 1979 for lack of raw material for the plastic (petroleum products are required) and the nail-making machine was being repaired. In addition to the above, a glass factory is about to open up.

There is a plan to divide the remaining acreage of the Industrial Estate into half-acre plots to be leased to developers.

Fishing—According to the *Ceylon Daily News* (27.1.79), the amount of fish required for all of Sri Lanka is 240,000 tons per annum. In 1978, just 2/3 of that was caught: 161,000 tons. Nowadays, "fish" includes shrimp, crabs and lobster but no longer the sea turtles.

Sea turtles—In the 1950's, a turtle pen containing numerous giant sea turtles, many of which were nearly three feet in width, was located in the surf of the lagoon near the Jaffna Fort and the causeway to Mandaitive. Today it is no longer there for turtles are an endangered species and cannot legally be caught. In early 1979, to illustrate the point, a man found in possession of a sea turtle was hailed before a Magistrate in Jaffna who not only fined the man but

went along in the car personally to see the turtle returned to the protective shadows of the briny lagoon.

My first glimpse of the Bay of Bengal in 1978 after an absence of nearly two decades included in the distance a far off fishing boat but it was approaching at a speed I had never before witnessed. It was powered by a motor and it dramatically called to my attention the continued replacement of sails with motors which had been only beginning in 1960. At that time, the daily catch of Ceylon Fishermen was reported, on the average, to be an unbelievable half a pound per fisherman, in complete contrast to Nova Scotians, for example, who averaged 900 lbs per day per man. Appropriate international agencies began to sponsor fisheries experts and improved equipment from Canada and Scandinavia and it is now estimated that the daily catch in Sri Lanka has multiplied several times. In the fifties, when the catch was so low, the beach seines supplied 35-40% of Ceylon's total fish catch. This was a half mile long net taken off shore by boat and then pulled in by a line of Fishermen and their family members hauling on one end of the net—a fairly primitive form of fishing, yet it was the most important single method. Today the percentage of total catch supplied by beach seine is much less.[216]

Myliddy—Now let us make a short visit to a typical Jaffna fishing village, Myliddy, or that portion of it which is close to the beach. It seems reasonable that the nucleus of a fishing village would be the fish market! This nucleus is a fish market-harbour located on the beach between the sea and the house compounds of the fisher families. When there has been a good catch, as many as 300 customers may be on hand to haggle with the Fishermen. Over half of these purchasers will buy fish and take them elsewhere for sale. Some of these outside purchasers arrive by car; more are on bicycles with a Sunlight or Milk White soapbox, or similar box, firmly attached to the pillion or carrier of the cycle. A good number are fishwives on foot, each with a large basket ready to be filled and carried back to nearby neighbourhoods on the heads of the vendors.

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[216] Canagaratnam and Medcof, "Ceylon's Beach Seine Fishery," *Fisheries Research Station Bulletin*, No. 4, n. d., (1955), pp. 636-9.

It is a source of little satisfaction to note that the voices of fishwives in Sri Lanka compare very strongly with those around the world!

All along the Myliddy beach, nets are drying and catamarans, their logs unbound, have been dragged plank by plank up on the sand to dry before the next immersion. The large number of motorized boats, mostly from Cey-Nor, is impressive. Sheds made of cadjan are storehouses for the fishing gear (nets and floats) and for the materials used for salting, or icing, and for packing fish for transport. These Fishermen are of the Karaiyar caste, divided between the ordinary folk and the wealthier people called *Tevar* Karaiyar, though the term *Tevar* is passing. "High" and "low" are more common. Most of the High Karaiyar are using inboard motor launches 17 feet long, or larger, and the majority of their catch, eleven species of fish, is iced and sent to Colombo. Fifteen other species, edible but not attractive to Colombo customers, are sold to local vendors as above.

Ordinary Karaiyar people used to be merely seagoing labourers for the *Tevar* until 1950 when low-cost nylon nets began to become available. Now some of the former labourers have launches or large catamarans with motors and a good assortment of nets. For a day at sea (as much as 18 hours), a hired Fisherman makes around twenty rupees. Catamaran Fishermen, who are said to make a good living, rarely get enough fish of one variety to fill an ice-box so they also sell their catch at the market. There are three ice factories at or near Myliddy; lorries of iced fish leave Myliddy at dusk and are at Colombo for the next morning's market. As many as thirteen lorries make the trip, down one day and back the next.[217]

Dangerous work—Fishing is a dangerous occupation and one or more Fishermen somewhere in Ceylon fail to return almost every time there is a storm, as announced in the papers. In December 1964, an unusually severe cyclone struck northern and eastern

[217] In addition to personal observation, Dr. K. David's article, "Spatial Organization...," has been useful as it reports on Dr. David's lengthy research in Myliddy (see bibliography).

Ceylon and it was reported that 2,000 Fishermen disappeared, at least 55 of them from Myliddy.

Sailors—One of the important by-products of fishing is manpower which is acquainted with the sea. It was estimated in a newspaper article in 1979 that 150 men, especially from KKS and also from the neighbourhood of Valvettithurai on the northern tip of Jaffna Peninsula about five miles west of Pt. Pedro, are seafaring in ocean-going vessels all over the globe today.

Smuggling—The previous sentence is one of the few in today's newspapers in which anything good is said about the activities in and around Valvettithurai of which it is invariably affirmed, "VVT is the headquarters of the smuggling between India and Ceylon." However, according to an article in *India Today* (May 1-15, 1979) the smuggling formerly based at VVT has been shifted to other sites: Pesalai, Mannar, Delft, Nainative, Kurukaduvan, Kayts, Gurunagar and Karainagar. Most of these places are islands west of Jaffna Peninsula. The smuggling referred to is drug smuggling to a considerable extent. At one time, opium was transported to Ceylon by boat, sometimes in polyethylene bags which were submerged below the fishing boat. As long as islands are involved, so will boats be involved. The information in this paragraph was confirmed in general by law enforcement authorities in Jaffna.

Oil Pressers—Mention was made in Chapter Five of the Oil Pressers caste (Chantar) which traditionally makes a living by extracting oil from the gingelly (sesame) [218]seed grown in Jaffna and the Wanni. The Chantar community at Pirampatthai claims to have about 50 *chekkus* (oil presses). A *chekku* can receive one bushel of gingelly at a time and the oxen walk around it for an hour, turning the grinder, before all the oil is extracted, leaving a 28-pound cake of gingelly pulp (*poonac*). The active mills grind two sacks of seed per day, each sack containing three bushels. So the mill runs about six hours per day, producing 70-75 bottles of oil daily. The oil fetches Rs. 23-25 per bottle and each cake of *poonac* brings Rs. 30 for stock food (mainly cattle).

[218] All admirers of Aladdin are charmed to learn the English name for gingelly.

Most of the gingelly is grown in the Wanni. Jaffna traders buy it there, bring it to Jaffna, bag it and sell it at Rs. 800-900 per sack.

A double *chekku* (one on each end of a large log) costs over a thousand rupees; a single, a little less than a thousand. The double *chekku* must be replaced in 2 1/2 years.

Cey-Nor

A few pages above, reference was made to the friendly assistance in the fishing industry given by Scandinavian countries and others to Sri Lanka. It is time now to describe Cey-Nor.

The fishing industry in Jaffna has been greatly benefitted by Cey-Nor, the Ceylon-Norway Development Foundation. Two young men from Jaffna somehow made their way to Norway around 1967.[219] By accident, they met some members of the Good Templars, an organization dedicated to various good works including a genuine Brahmanical virtue: temperance in the consumption of alcohol. After a great deal of discussion and persuasion, the leaders of the Good Templars, who have branches in many countries of the world, decided that Jaffna Peninsula was a needy part of the world which deserved some help.

Mr. Arne Fjortoft is the head of the Good Templars in Norway. He is also a well known television newscaster in that country who had previously visited south Asia in connection with news stories. To get the project started in Sri Lanka, he came here to survey the situation. As a result it was decided to establish a small boat factory on the far side (the harbour side) of the island of Karainagar—the first island to the west of Jaffna Peninsula. An agreement was entered into between a representative from the Ministry of Fisheries (Sri Lanka), one representative from the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and three Good Templars. Mr. Fjortoft remained for over six months in Sri Lanka in order to get the project underway. Later

[219] Sri Lanka contains approximately 25,000 square miles; Norway, 125,000. Norway's population is 4 million; Sri Lanka's 14 million. The official beginning date of the Project is September 14, 1967.

he spent almost all of the year 1978 here. Before and after his visit to Sri Lanka, he raised money for the project. He also got Redd Barna (a Norwegian organization for the protection of children) and the Norwegian Housewives Organization interested in aiding the project. From time to time others also joined in, notably NORAD (Norwegian Aid) which agreed to pay for constructing six of Cey-Nor's largest boats (45 feet long). Money raised from the sale of Ceylon tea in Norway and Iceland has also helped the project. Profits derived from the tea money raised in Iceland covered the cost of Cey-Nor's first 42-foot boat.

After several years of struggle, Cey-Nor began to get the manufacture of boats and nets running smoothly and to generate the supporting personnel, materials and know-how to make the operation flourish. From 1975-76, the project began to make rather than to lose money. Profits, of course, go into Community Development or are put back into other phases of the project.

The aim of the Cey-Nor project is to develop a poor area of Karainagar by supplying employment to a large number of people who make boats and nets for use by fishermen, thus employing more fishermen. In turn, the fish they catch is good, nutritious food for the people. Not much machinery has been installed—the organization of the work is deliberately labour—intensive so as to keep the number of employees as large as possible. The labour policy is to hire people from the nearest villages first. The nearest are Thoppukadu, a Thimilar or Fisher caste village and two Pallar (Tree Climber) villages, Maddathuvalavu and Uri (3/4 miles away). All the youth of Thoppukadu are now employed, 90% of Maddathuvalavu and 40% of the youth of Uri. In view of the general unemployment picture in Ceylon (and many other places in the world) this is an economic miracle, made even more miraculous by the social status of the inhabitants of these three village. The Tapper or Pallar caste is a "depressed" (untouchable) class so the supplying of employment to them is highly developmental, bringing opportunity for many kinds of improvement to the lowest strata of the society. Cey-Nor policy is to encourage its employees to keep their children in school and this also helps in their development.

Another way of viewing the goals of the Cey-Nor Project is in terms of the Ceylon government's fisheries development plan of the late 1950's which set these goals:[220]

1. Introduction of inboard mechanized boats, outboard motors to be used on the native boats, nylon nets and new methods of fishing.

2. The construction of ice factories, harbours and boatyards.

3. Improved training for fishermen and research on the main fishing grounds.

4. Reorganization of the system of marketing fish.

It will be seen in this description of the Cey-Nor operation which follows that it has focused precisely on the varied phases of the first point and in order to accomplish the manufacture of boats and nets has had to introduce new fishing techniques as well as build an ice plant and boatyard. By managing their own fishing boats with much larger nets than had formerly been used locally, Cey-Nor has trained some Fishermen in new techniques and by developing a retail outlet in Colombo, some change has been introduced into the system of marketing the fish of Jaffna. Cey-Nor has also shipped some shrimp out of the country, an additional variation on marketing patterns.

A variety of skills is required in the operation of Cey-Nor and the three villages named above cannot supply the manpower for all the kinds of work needed. An increasing number of persons have been employed from other villages of the island of Karainagar and in Jaffna Peninsula, particularly Vaddukoddai, Manipay and Jaffna Town.

The Cey-Nor project includes six major operations: the boatyard where boats are manufactured and used boats are repaired, employing over 600 persons; the fishing fleet of several boats which bring their catches to Cey-Nor to be processed (nearly 100); the fish

[220] Bavinck, M. and van Dijk, F., *The Transformation of a Fishing Economy,* 1979, Amsterdam.

and prawn processing which involves 160 workers and 20 supervisors; the repair of nets (12) and operation of the ice works (10). In Jaffna Town at Gurunagar (Karaiyur), 360 people are employed in net manufacture for a grand total of over 1200 persons. Cey-Nor is Jaffna's largest "small industry." The only industry employing more people in Jaffna is the cement plant, a heavy industry.

A few facts and observations about the employment picture will be of interest. Women receive equal pay for equal work wherever they work in the same jobs. All the fish and prawn processors and supervisors are women except one! The processing workers receive Rs. 7.50 to 15.00 per day, being paid by volume. The supervisors have a starting salary of Rs.300. Most of the boat factory workers earn Rs. 450 and more. The most skilled workmen earn around Rs. 600 per month; if they are promoted to supervisor their salary range is Rs. 800-1000. The above salaries do not include increases ordered by the government in 1979.

In the boatyard, four different sizes of boats are produced:

- 17 1/2 footer with 6-12 H.P. motor, selling for Rs. 14,000 without motor.

- 28 footer with 30 H.P. motor, selling for Rs. 110,000 including motor.

- 32 footer with 65 H.P. motor, selling for Rs. 260,000 including motor.

- 45 footer with 185 H.P. motor, priced at Rs. 1,000,000 including motor.

All boats require a good deal of equipment in addition, particularly, of course, nets. Full equipment costs the largest boat's owner an additional Rs. 300,000. Twelve hundred of the smallest boats have been made in the past ten years: 50-60 of the 28-footers and 9 and 7 of the largest two sizes respectively. Many boats have been sold to fishing cooperatives with the government paying Cey-Nor and advancing the credit to the fishermen. A good many boats have been purchased by individual fishermen and businessmen.

A Norwegian Aid Organization mentioned above, NORAD, has supplied three-fourths of the money for six of the 45 foot boats under a scheme which requires Cey-Nor to find the remainder of the cost. The six boats, the last of which will soon be completed, are all part of the Cey-Nor fleet. The seventh 45-footer, now under construction, has been ordered by a Colombo fishing partnership.

The materials used in the construction of the boats is not all the same. The smaller two sizes of boats are made of fibreglass. The larger two sizes are of ferro-cement which means the entire boat is formed in wire mesh which is then plastered with cement by a team of masons for a total thickness of 3/4 inch. Along with the men, forty women work in the ferro-cement operation, earning Rs. 500 and upwards per month. When Cey-Nor first built fishing boats of fibreglass, and later on, of ferro-cement, no one wanted such boats. Very important in development is the demonstration of new materials and methods. When the new types of boats began to prove superior to catamarans and dugouts, as well as more profitable, they began to catch on; now they are popular. Profitability persuades—nothing else does.

While profitability is the essential for persuading people to try new methods and equipment, the other absolute necessity for successful development is creation of sufficient infrastructure, or basic supporting structure of an organization including buildings, services, equipment and trained personnel and ways of renewing all these. Most developing countries, certainly including Sri Lanka, are littered with abandoned projects which were begun without adequate infrastructure. Cey-Nor has carefully provided itself with an adequate supply of materials for not only new boats but also for the maintenance and repair of boats after they are sold, for the production and repair of nets and the maintenance of an ice plant and fish processing plant both of which are necessary for the ready marketing of the product. At the very end of the process, Cey-Nor, near the close of 1978, opened a retail fish shop in Colombo near the Fort Railway Station. Some fish are sold at the plant site in Karainagar and some at the Kachcheri in Jaffna Town also.

A crucial part of the infrastructure is people who can do the jobs. Development projects are sometimes ruined, after being well

begun, by the loss of the personnel trained on the job who then desert the job for higher paying positions elsewhere. Cey-Nor assumes that with over 1200 employees, there will be a fairly steady number of them leaving for one reason or another including going to more lucrative positions abroad, mostly to Arab countries (40 to 50 in 1978 alone) or elsewhere in the islands. Cey-Nor accepts as an important developmental task the continuous training of personnel. Vacancies are advertised internally first, to give opportunity for workers to move up in the organization. Recruiting of people in skilled trades (carpenters, electricians, masons, mechanics and plumbers chiefly) proceeds fairly regularly all the time within the plant and by outside advertisement. The management also realizes that as larger fishing boats are operated by local Ceylonese entrepreneurs they will attract skilled workers from Cey-Nor.

The employment psychosis of Jaffna and of all Ceylon is that any clerical work is better than almost any manual work no matter what the salary. Such a notion, which comes up in various connections in this book, is destructively opposed to the best interests of the nation and frequently, in times when employment is hard to find, is also opposed to the best interests of the individual. Cey-Nor attempts to combat the notion by paying clerical work less than skilled labour. So far, however, this policy has had no visible effect; when clerical vacancies occur, blue collar workers, if qualified, apply for the jobs.

To give further status to skilled workers, Cey-Nor is sending six motor mechanics to Singapore for higher training and plans to follow them with fibreglass workers and more mechanics.

Another aspect of development has to do with other parts of the island. After nearly ten years in Karainagar in the north, Cey-Nor was encouraged by the government of Sri Lanka to set up smaller branches in three other sites—east, west and south, in Kalkudah, Kalpitiya and Polgahamula respectively. Each of the three sites will have a small boatyard producing a few boats each month and repairing any boats which come. Nets will be produced and repaired in the other two sites but only repaired at Kalkudah.

The present government has emphasized profitability in government enterprises. It does not want government corporations to continue to lose money as in the past. In keeping with this policy, the Ceylon Fisheries Corporation turned over to Cey-Nor its small boatyard located on the north side of the port in Colombo on March 1, 1979. Its present capacity is eight 28-foot boats per month.

Weekends are not a slack time at Cey-Nor. All fishing fleets, the world over, work seven days a week due to the fact that the equipment breaks down so often, or the weather interferes (though rarely in Ceylon), so they "work when they can and rest when they can't." In one area of its operation, Cey-Nor is about to change this pattern by double-crewing the 45-foot fishing boats. That is, one crew will go out for two or three days and return; and the other crew will work the alternate shift as soon as they bring the boat back.

The last phase of Cey-Nor's development programme is to promote the welfare of the residents of the villages nearby. Its first project in the area of community welfare was the construction of a health centre adjacent to the boat factory. Cey-Nor put Rs. 100,000 into the building and equipment, then turned it over to Redd Barna which agreed to operate it for five years. At the end of that time, the Health Centre would be turned over to the government health services. The latter handing over was scheduled for October, 1979. The Health Centre employs six Tamil nurses and two Norwegian nurses. The Medical Officer at Kayts visits patients once a week at the Centre.

An important and much needed improvement of the village is a water supply scheme. Cey-Nor bought a little land and dug a well for the village of Uri whose citizens were greatly inconvenienced by the fact that some of their neighbours would not allow the low castes to use their well, being concerned about the purity of their own drinking water. This had forced the depressed class people to go quite a distance for water. Cey-Nor also performed the same sort of service by providing a well for a small group of prawn Fisher folk at Elephant Pass, sixty miles away, whose catch Cey-Nor regularly purchases and ices and adds to its lorry-load of fish, prawns, crabs and, occasionally, lobster which it takes daily to Colombo.

The third project for community development is housing. The government agreed to fund forty-five houses at Thoppukadu beginning June, 1978. The National Housing Department gave Rs. 10,000 per house for material, with Cey-Nor giving some help from its skilled carpenters and masons for the most demanding work. The completion date was April, 1979.

A similar project has been begun for Maddathuvalavu for fifty dwellings for Pallar families on land obtained in early 1979. A children's fund in Norway has given Rs. 40,000 to clear the land and build a wall when it is possible to do so.

Still another community development project is a handicraft centre in Thoppukadu and another at Maddathuvalavu. In these centres twenty-five girls have learned to make plastic shopping bags of a type very popular in Jaffna. They are also instructed in needlework where they make pillows, blouses and skirts. All the production is marketed by Cey-Nor. The girls who make the clothes buy some of them for themselves. Any profit made by the girls is matched by Cey-Nor and then divided among the girl employees. They receive Rs. 60-100 per month. As a result of their making their own clothes, their personal appearance has been altered. They look and dress more attractively. The three most skillful girls have been sent to Puttur to learn the making of palmyra products. Cey-Nor provides them lunch and transport daily for this training.

The Good Templars of Norway and Sweden and the Norwegian Housewives Organization contribute money for a nursery school at the Health Centre and another at Uri. Two nursery teachers are provided at the Health Centre and one at Uri, with foreign funds.

The local primary schools are also given a fillip. In Thoppukadu six government teachers try to cope with a little over 300 students. In Uri, there are two teachers for about 250 students so two volunteer teachers are paid by the Housewives Organization to reduce the load. Cey-Nor also supplied textbooks for the primary children.

Cey-Nor's Community Development Officer is working toward a day care centre. He promotes daily milk powder consumption in the primary schools, a monthly meeting of the Parent-Teachers

Association., tutoring for Ordinary Level high school students, extra classes in technical subjects and English for high school graduates and he urges mothers to send their children to school. He also trys to see to it that those who finish primary school—Grade Five—are admitted to the neighbourhood higher schools. These kinds of goals, with careful follow-up, are the essence of community development which a vital component of economic and social development such as the Ceylon-Norwegian Development Foundation project at Karainagar (and soon to be elsewhere) epitomizes very well. Let us hope that the new areas being opened east, west and south will some day rival the original site-all for the good of Sri Lanka.

Development and other Economic Factors

Development—As to what "development" means, it is a word for a great, positive idea-something a developing nation really needs and which perhaps some of is citizens want. Unfortunately, the results rarely justify the term or fulfill its promise. To develop people and projects calls for rare skills and a happy combination of factors such as leaders who know how, money, equipment, land, buildings, infrastructure and willing people at the end of the line. Most development officers do not develop. Most development projects (to judge by Ceylon and India newspaper accounts) are failures or much delayed or partial successes. This is true in most developing nations and all too often in old, developed ones as well. Yet, for the natural born developer, like Rev. A. C. Thambyrajah, who runs a kind of Boys Town on 200 acres of land a few miles south of Jaffna Peninsula, it is as easy and natural as breathing.

The Cey-Nor project may have its limitations, but by giving meaningful, remunerative employment to 1200 people it is achieving a prime goal of development.

Idealistic young people in the American Peace Corps in many a Third World country were sometimes disillusioned to find that their development project was benefitting the more prosperous farmers but could not help the poorest who needed the help the most. Developing agencies are sometimes by necessity, sometimes by accident, set up to help those who have enough resources to be able to help themselves. Those with nothing cannot get under way. Mr.

Dudley Fernando, in his very helpful brochure,[221] prepared for the Non-Aligned Summit which met in Colombo in 1976, refers to this situation:

> After the Green Revolution failed to produce the overall improvement in standards of living in many countries in Asia, it was realised that the miracle seeds and the technological sophistications that were introduced had benefited only the richer farmers. As long as problems of land reform, consolidation of land holdings, timely flow of credit and other inputs [are not solved] and finally storage and marketing for the small farmer are not insured, agricultural production would not increase in an appreciable way.

At any rate, for better or for worse, "There is far more serious talk about economic development than twenty years ago," observed Professor Howard Wriggins recently.[222] However, very little of the development interest and money apply to Jaffna Peninsula directly, although a great many Jaffna men and women are making a livelihood working in the bureaucracy supporting one or another development project or working on one of the projects directly.

State Corporations—"More than 60% of the economy is in State hands," wrote Nadesan Satyendra in an article in the *Tribune* (Oct. 13, 1979). He was referring to the 106 state boards and corporations which attempt to carry on many of the major enterprises of the country. Many are government agencies for the supply of services to various segments of the population. They include the nationalized tea, rubber and coconut industries, the nationalized banking and insurance industries and the much maligned Sri Lanka Transport Board which tries to keep the buses running. Some of these are government monopolies but many of them are actively competing with private companies. E.g., the People's Bank and the Bank of Ceylon are the government chains of banks which compete with the Commercial Bank and the Hatton National Bank. The State Plantation corporations are in competition

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[221] "Towards Self-Reliance in Sri Lanka," p. 15.

[222] "Why Bureaucracies Fall Short," *Tribune,* Sept. 22, 1979, p. 27.

with private growers. This system, like all economic systems, has advantages and disadvantages. The present government, while not planning to dismantle most of these corporations, has deliberately removed former restrictions on private business and at the same time threatened to turn over to private enterprise those government corporations which habitually lose money. By emphasizing that he is going to get rid of profitless enterprises, President Jayewardene is bringing pressure to bear on some of the less successful corporations. At the end of 1979, the Finance Minister stated in connection with his 1980 budget proposals that the government had decided to set up no further corporations. The list of the state boards and corporations is given at the end of this chapter.

Urgency—Development depends upon the average citizen much more than the average citizen realizes. Such workers do not seem to feel a part of development or responsible for it. For some reason or other, it is hard to find a worker who has a sense of urgency. The government servant, the employee in the shop, the school teacher, many a village priest, the hospital employee, the labourer in the field—all are rarely in a hurry on the job they are doing. Most of their concern about getting a task accomplished has to do with their private interests rather than the task for which they receive remuneration. There is a pervasive impression that today's quota can just as well be done tomorrow. Leave will be taken at any time by nearly anyone, with little or no notice. The term is "casual leave" and "casual" describes it utterly.

The urgency is found at the top level. The director, the chief, the boss, the principal, the top administrators have a sense of urgency in many cases. They are sick of the slackness, the dispirited performance (although all too often they must conceal the disapproval), the barely getting by, the lack of any increase or improvement over last year. The President, Prime Minister and other cabinet ministers are the cheer leaders of the nation. They go around the country a great deal, exhorting their listeners to shape up, meet the deadline or better, to exceed the quota. They boast of whatever past achievements can be claimed and earnestly request the citizens to keep up the good work. There is a real sense of urgency with them and one must admire their courage, endurance and optimism. But urgency is not as easy to create as Emergency.

The people at the top have the sense of urgency. Did they generate this sense only after their top level appointment? Or did they reach the top because they were one of the few underlings who worked with a sense of urgency at a lower level? It is a good question for it suggests that the employee who wants to better his position had better embody a sense of urgency and promptness (locally called "smartness") in carrying out his duties. This profound conclusion, however obvious it may appear, is frequently difficult and dangerous to try to put into action. For urgency alone is not enough; diplomacy and perhaps a little luck, are also required. Otherwise, an employee who shows a dangerous tendency toward urgency may find himself transferred to a suburb of Mullaitive.

Jaffna's way of life—Next we examine Jaffna's unique employment feature which the imaginative Scotsman of the East discovered a century and a half ago. For over 150 years, a considerable number of the people of Jaffna have been greatly assisted in making a living because of their knowledge of the English language although 150 years ago, of course, the numbers were small. As described earlier, Tamil dominance of government jobs was a prime cause for the discord between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. This is the reason why, when the Sinhalese voters finally elected a government in 1956 which was responsive to their wishes, English education was immediately withdrawn as an option for Tamil children and Sinhalese-speaking children as well.

Even under the British there had not always been positions for Tamils in Sri Lanka and they went abroad. These emigrants generally returned to Jaffna for a wife, if they had not taken one with them, and reared a family overseas but upon retirement, most returned to their homeland. Those who came back usually found the pension they had earned was substantially larger than that received by their counterparts who had worked all their lives in Ceylon. So going overseas to work came to be regarded in Jaffna as quite a desirable alternative if employment in Ceylon was not satisfactory. This was in spite of the Hindu belief about travelling over the ocean mentioned in Chapter Four. Rather they followed the adage, "cross the ocean and seek your treasure."

The volume of support of Jaffnese by pensions today is indicated by the fact that the post office in Vaddukoddai, a village of 5,000 persons, handles approximately Rs. 100,000 in pension cheques received from Malaysia and somewhat more than that amount from other countries each month.

I have omitted an important economic factor from the description. The Jaffna young man who went abroad returned a substantial portion of his salary to his family in Jaffna for the years in which he remained a bachelor. This subsidy helped his family educate his younger siblings and to accumulate money for the dowry of his sisters. After some years he would return to marry the bride selected for him by his family. Even then, if family circumstances required it, he continued to send some remittance regularly back to home and Jaffna.

Sri Lankans overseas—Although I have spoken of Jaffna, the above pattern was followed by Tamils who lived elsewhere in Sri Lanka and, of course, today numerous Sinhalese also go abroad for employment. As an illustration, the death notice inserted in a newspaper in late 1979, by a Sinhalese family in Colombo dramatically presented what overseas jobs mean to both Sinhalese and Tamil families in this country (all names changed):

> Gunewardene, David, son of Mrs. Rani and Col. Nissanka Gunewardene, brother of James, Joseph, Mary and Martha (Saudi), Abbie and Marie (Sweden), Henry (Fisheries), Dorothy (Denmark), cousin of Jennie, Tim (Abu Dhabi) and Nicholas (Hotel Lanka Uberoi).

In 1978, the International Monetary Fund reported 20,000 Sri Lankans, in Arab lands alone, returning in 1977 $12,000,000 (US) or Rs. 180 million to their homeland—an average of Rs. 750 ($50) per person per month, a very helpful sum for any Sri Lanka family. In August 1979, the Central Bank predicted that Rs. 600 million would be sent into Sri Lanka from citizens outside during 1979. So much does Jaffna depend on such cash receipts from abroad that it is often referred to as a "money order economy." But any exactitude with regard to the amount of money coming in seems impossible for by early November of the same year, the Minister of Trade and Shipping announced that nearly Rs. 70 million per month was being sent home by all overseas workers.

Once this money arrives here if not used for dowry or education, it may be saved by the recipient if he needs land for a home, until he can purchase a lot and start building. And onto that house, or the one he already has, will go additional rooms, a kerosene-burning cooker (stove); refrigerator and other home improvements. When the son returns on leave he will bring a stereo or as the Chinese refer to their electrical gadgets, other "things that go round."

Forty years ago, after a survey of families left behind by South Indians going to Ceylon to work on the plantations, the investigator concluded:

> "Emigration has certainly improved the economic condition of the family of the emigrant. Emigration takes the man rather than the woman, the young rather than the old, the bright and ambitious rather than the dull and lethargic. We see no reason why emigration should be discouraged."[223]

This is the conclusion that has been reached in Jaffna for the past nearly five generations.

Brain drain—While they help the country by reducing unemployment and by increasing foreign exchange coming into Sri Lanka, these emigrants possess education and skills and experience which would be very useful for the success of development programmes, or simply life in general, in Sri Lanka. It is apparent that those who have gone overseas are missed. Repeated references are made by those left behind concerning the difficulty in getting repair work done, for example, due to the shortage of carpenters, masons, plumbers and electricians—all gone to Arab countries." A small number of labourers and domestic workers who have some knowledge of English have also been able to go abroad; they have been referred to as "brain drain." The emigration is, of course, much

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[223] Subrahmanyam, M. V., "A Study of Emigration in Relation to the Life of the Tinnevelly Church," (*Research Studies by Christian Colleges* prepared for use by the Int'l. Missionary Council), Tambaram, 1938, pp. 15-16.

larger than the 20,000 reported above for many thousands are in countries other than the Arab world. Since it takes both time and money to train other people, it would be convenient if the government of Sri Lanka could devise some method of keeping within its boundaries an adequate supply of the personnel required but, short of setting up a police state, no ready method has been discovered.

I make no general condemnation of brain drain. In our experience, most brain drain cases turn out to be exceptions to the rule when the facts of the case are ascertained. Brain drain is condemned by those who believe the guilty person has stayed overseas "merely to make more money." But usually the professional accused of brain drain has decided to work where he is for reasons which you and I would, in most instances, agree with. Generally it is a choice between going home and letting one's talents, training and skills be wasted, or rewarded with a low salary, or of staying abroad and utilizing them more fully. Often the education of the emigrant's children becomes the deciding factor in determining him to stay in the First World. In a fair number of cases, the person is working abroad in a situation and in a professional field which are not yet present in his native land. It is also interesting to note that while reports of complaints and charges that the First World countries are imperialistic and exploitative are frequently carried in the papers, those who leave this country rarely go to Second World (Communist) lands but either to First or to Third World countries.

The problem which this steady emigration poses for the nation and therefore more or less for Jaffna, was graphically illustrated by a few sentences in the *Sun* newspaper, January 31, 1979:

> An exodus of skilled engineers from the Ceylon Electricity Board to countries like Zambia and Nigeria has posed a problem to the Board. Nearly 50 engineers left the CEB during the past three years while fourteen letters of resignation have even now been received. In addition, about 10-15% of the labour force too left for west Asian countries along with 10% of the foremen. Despite incentives including permits to import cars, young engineers were bent on seeking greener pastures in other countries.

The pastures are greener, no doubt, although it is true that the living conditions in their new land of migration are likely to be considerably more costly than those in Ceylon, but there is generally a considerable margin. In August, 1979, 225 doctors announced that, having completed their six-year[224] obligation of service in Ceylon, they wished to resign from their posts. Many of these will presumably go overseas. And it is not only professionals of their status; the Transport Board says that about fifty of its bus drivers per month are going overseas.

A sharp Tamil observer of the Ceylon scene wrote, "It is said that more than half the scientists in human history are alive today. We in Ceylon can say that almost all the scientists in our history are alive today (1966) but about half of them (including some of the best) have settled abroad."[225] This statement was made over a dozen years ago. From the standpoint of those remaining in Jaffna, however, the export of trained manpower which is the unique feature of the Jaffna way of life, has never been more successful. There is a sobering thought in that connection, nevertheless. It is possible that those who are left behind, unskilled but educated, who do not get work in Ceylon and become highly frustrated, may become the radicals who change the face of Jaffna significantly and soon.

Saudi Arabia and some other Arab nations have so strong an antipathy for the worshipping of images that they will not hire

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[224] Currently doctors are trying to get six reduced to five.

[225] Nesiah, K., "University and Society," a seminar paper at the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science, June 24, 1966.

Buddhists or Hindus but only Muslims and Christians. It is a fact, however, that Buddhists and Hindus have been going to these countries for years and continue to do so, armed with false certificates which reflect no credit on them nor upon those responsible for the certificates concerning the alleged religion of the holders.

Illegal immigrants—We have been focusing on emigrants; the decline in illegal *immigrants* from India into Ceylon is a development of the past twenty years. The favourable economic position Ceylon had occupied in the years before the sixties when various regulations restricted the entry of further Indian immigrants, was gradually eroded by Ceylon's declining economic vigour while India grew stronger. In the fifties, boatloads continued to risk their lives to enter Ceylon. No one will ever know how many died as they were left, neck-deep in the tide, in the dead of night by the unscrupulous boatmen who had apparently learned their business methods and ethics from captains of the slave ships of two centuries earlier. Many of the new arrivals were promptly caught by the Ceylon coastal patrol which then quickly sent them back to their homeland. Most of those who were not caught found their way to the estates upcountry; a few came to Jaffna and some of these, as newcomers with few skills, were hired as domestic servants. The decline of illegal immigrants is one more reason for the servant shortage in Jaffna.

The gradual loss of enthusiasm for this forbidden passage was a silent and economically sound testimonial to the fact that the Indian economy was steadily strengthening.[226] Today the traffic in illegal immigrants has almost ceased although goods continue to be smuggled from India to Ceylon and parts of Jaffna continue to be involved in this illegal business.

[226] What the power of India would be today if she had controlled her population and shared her increasing industrial strength and economic gains among 400 million instead of 600 million is beyond calculation. Her virtually uncontrolled population growth is one of the great losses of the free world.

Tourism—Tourism has become big business in Ceylon. As an earner of foreign exchange it is fourth, ranking behind tea, rubber and petroleum bunkering (supplying ships which call at Colombo harbour). The industry lends itself to being labour-intensive and that is good for employment in a developing nation.[227]

While it is fun for the tourist, tourism looks different to the Ceylonese citizen who may or may not realize he is part of the scenery and of the local colour or that he may be regarded as some sort of freakish specimen for the uncultured tourist to photograph. While most tourists are a pleasure for the Ceylonese resident to get acquainted with and leave the island feeling happy about how nice and friendly the people of Ceylon are, some tourists leave a very unfavourable impression. Because of irresponsible tourists taking liberties in the past with carved figures of the Buddha, some of the most popular depictions of the Buddha cannot be photographed—a painful penalizing of everyone for the folly of the few. These latter are guilty of behaviour which strikes the Ceylonese (or Indian or Thai, etc.) as crude or rude or lewd and, at the beaches and tanks, occasionally nude. So the Tourist Department of Sri Lanka has drawn up a code of behaviour for tourists, which it promulgated on October 5, 1978:

> Do not sea-bathe or sun-bathe in the nude.
>
> Do not use drugs.
>
> Do not encourage beggars, stray cats or dogs wherever you may go.
>
> Do not behave in a wild or over-exuberant manner when visiting our national parks as it disturbs the wild life.
>
> Remove all headgear and footwear when entering any Buddhist temple.
>
> Behave in a manner befitting a place of religious worship.

[227] Fernando and Fernando, *op. cit.*, p. 38. By some indices, the gem business is fourth among the businesses of the nation.

Do not take any objects of art, ola leaf manuscripts or images of antique value.

Do not pose for photographs with statues of the Buddha or other statues.

While Sri Lanka is still in the exotic category for most tourists, it is obvious that travel is so popular now that many tourists have run out of "regular" places to go and are increasingly trying the exotic. Many of them are in for a happy surprise. The libraries of Ceylon contain numerous books by foreigners each of whom once came to Ceylon to try it out. The books' titles are such as, "My Two Years in Ceylon;" "My Five Years. . . Eight . . . Ten . . . Fifty Years in Ceylon." Only persons who enjoyed their stay would write such books.

Retire in Sri Lanka—Some tourists are in a position to live here for years as expatriates. The Ceylon government has a programme to encourage foreigners, particularly retired foreigners, to live on this beautiful island for as long as they like. There is a feeling that retired people will be less apt to violate Ceylonese standards of desirable behaviour. The programme is always tied up with the name of Arthur Clarke, the British science fiction author who has lived here since 1956 and who evidently encouraged the government to think along these lines. It was reported in late 1978 that there were 70 persons residing in Ceylon under the programme and applications—or perhaps inquiries—numbering 200 or more had been received.

The idea is to allow people who will spend at least $400 (U.S.) or its equivalent in other hard currencies per month to live here without income tax and without duty on practically anything they bring in, including a car and a motor boat. One incongruity threatens the scheme, however: each person must deposit $7000 in a bank in Ceylon and the depositor receives the interest generated. But since the average citizen is even more apprehensive about trustworthiness of all foreign governments than he is about his own, this requirement of a fairly large deposit seems to endanger the success of the programme.

Number of Tourists Coming to Sri Lanka[228]

1967	23,666
1968	28,272
1969	40,204
1970	46,247
1971	39,654
1972	56,047
1973	77,888
1974	85,011
1975	103,204
1976	118,971
1977	153,665
1978	192,592
1979	250,000 (est.)

As to where the tourists come from, of the first 121,000 tourists in 1979, about 73% were from western Europe, 23% from Asia, mainly Japan, and about 5% were from North America.

In the 1979-80 tourist season, Sri Lanka will have achieved a new status as a tourist haven—one German tourist company announced that Sri Lanka has become an end in itself! That is, no longer would planes chartered by that company for this part of the world go to Colombo and Bangkok jointly but the entire planeload of around 400 passengers or more will terminate at Colombo on some flights.

It must be confessed that only a few tourists come to Jaffna, which has a minimum of tourist attractions and a maximum of miles between it and Colombo. Tourists generally stay in the island for some time before they come to the northern tip. For domestic tourists, however, it is a different story.

Pilgrims—For Hindu, and especially for Buddhist pilgrims, Jaffna has a powerful attraction: the pleasure and spiritual

[228] *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1977, supplemented by the Ceylon Tourist Bureau.

satisfaction of a long pilgrimage before arriving at a sacred place. Various temples and shrines, especially Nallur Kandasamy Temple and Keerimalai, beckon the Hindus while the island of Nainative attracts thousands of Buddhist pilgrims each year to its *vihara* which is believed to be near a footprint of the Buddha.

Jaffna is singularly handicapped when it comes to attracting tourists to come for a visit-it has no air link to anywhere. More on this subject below.

Communications—The rest of the communications system endured by the inhabitants of Jaffna is not a whole lot better. When we came to Jaffna in 1947, we were told that in two or three years electric power would be provided to the Peninsula from the oil-powered generator being installed at KKS near the cement plant. The generators were soon powering the cement plant, fortunately, and slowly the lights went on in neighbouring villages but we left Vaddukoddai in 1960 and the electricity had not yet arrived. For the electric power to come fifteen miles in fifteen years compares very unfavourably with the speed of light. Electricity is now fairly well spread over the Peninsula and to the islands. On Delft, a diesel-powered generator furnishes electricity for the hospital, police station and the office of the Assistant Government Agent. For years, there has been talk of giving light to the Delft populace, but no one is optimistic. As for communications, Delft, Analaitive and Nainative, as the only populated islands not connected to the Peninsula by causeway, receive telecommunications by radio telephone.

The telephone and telegraph systems are very slow and very undependable. A decade ago or more, a story in the paper said it was faster to drive seventy miles from Galle to Colombo with the message than to attempt to send it by telegraph. In their first decade of operations in the mid-nineteenth century, the telegraph lines from Kandy to Trincomalee were frequently interrupted because wild elephants broke down the poles but today the reasons are much less dramatic and very much less excusable: bureaucratic inefficiency and poor maintenance of equipment. Many days go by in Jaffna during which two offices a few miles apart cannot talk to each other on the phone. The telegrams might be swifter but these are sent by

telephone to the central office in Jaffna Town where a bottle-neck exists behind which the grams pile up and get delayed for hours. Jaffna residents are thoroughly used to this inefficiency and accept it with little complaint. As long as there is little complaint there will be little remedy. But no one has any confidence that more complaints would make any difference. One of the many countries which, in friendly fashion, gives aid to Sri Lanka, offered to provide a direct dial telephone system which would do away with long distance or trunk calling. In an area as small as Ceylon, there is no reason why everyone with a phone should not be able to dial directly any other number in the country, but the offer was tragically turned down. Perhaps the maintenance of such a fine system would have been impossibly difficult (as today's system seems to be) or impossibly expensive to keep up. With so many of its trained personnel leaving the country for work, it is difficult to see how the country can solve its transportation and communications problems in which experienced people are so important. Here the country feels the pain of brain drain.

Transport—Transportation in Jaffna, particularly after the rainy season is well set in, becomes abominable. Any highway one travels on, while comprised of some portion of satisfactory surface, sooner or later breaks up into a surface of pits and potholes. Other areas degenerate into the washboard effect. The ditches which the local residents cut completely across the road obviously are hard on roads. During the dry weather months a few miles of road will have been patched haphazardly and ineffectually and one barrel of tar spread over so vast an area that the holes and depressions thus covered will be eroded out in a short time.

Buses—There are nowhere near enough buses so that the public who is dependent upon them endures every sort of inconvenience and indignity. A great many of the buses are of the vintage which you hear before you see. In a great understatement, Dr. Jeyasingham wrote over twenty years ago, "The development of transportation within the city [of Jaffna] has not at all matched the growth of the city in recent years."[229] The delivery of twenty-five new buses to

[229] *Urban Geography*, p. 169.

Jaffna on Nov. 16, 1979 was a move in the right direction provided that more than that number were not immediately retired from service.

Trains—Not only the buses supplied to Jaffna (and perhaps to the rest of the country) but also the railway cars are insufficient for the number of passengers who want to travel on them. Virtually no railway berths are available for the overnight trip to or from Colombo and the third class passengers, who are the overwhelming majority, would not be much less comfortable if they were riding in the cattle cars nor would they be provided with much less amenities.

Other means—The citizens have taken matters into their own hands to some extent by buying a great many bicycles and a considerable number of motor scooters and automobiles but the price of petrol was reducing the use of the latter noticeably by the end of 1979. The town boasts seven petrol sheds at four of which service and repairs are available. While some of Jaffna's ancient Austins are "hideously overloaded," the Jaffna man's mechanical ingenuity is nowhere better demonstrated than in his ability to cannibalize or fabricate parts and keep 40-year-old Austins (and younger Volkswagens) on the road. A few rickshaws, each drawn by a man trotting between the shafts, can be found, still, in Jaffna and in Colombo. The rickshaws are mostly novelties and their chief use is for transporting girls to school except in those areas in Colombo where tourists abound. (A last minute check reveals that quite possibly there is just one rickshaw left in Jaffna Town.) The bicycles have been a real godsend. A married couple with a small child, or even two, is seen these days on one bicycle. Compared to walking, the bicycle provides a wonderful mobility. Yet it is surely not too much for the citizens of Sri Lanka to expect their government to provide them with a much better bus service throughout the nation.

Planes—Since 1948, when Air Ceylon first landed in Jaffna, this area has had air connections with Colombo, generally with Trichinopoly, and sometimes with Madras. At first, Rs. 35 would take one from Jaffna to Trichy; today, after getting down to Colombo by train or by other means, one can buy a Colombo-Trichy ticket for around Rs. 650. It was a real convenience to have a plane coming to Jaffna but in September, 1978, the plane from Jaffna,

empty and sitting on the tarmac at Ratmalana Airport, Colombo, blew up. The government is believed to regard this as the work of terrorists in Jaffna. The people of Jaffna commonly attribute it to the Tigers. Partly for punishment and partly from lack of funds the plane has not been replaced. Air Lanka, which succeeded Air Ceylon in September 1979, has promised service to Jaffna. At year's end, Air Lanka has taken delivery of three planes and all are for international service.

Banks—Since the Jaffna man is famous for his thrift it might be expected that he would be interested in banks. However, such was not the case until very recent times. But by 1950 there were four banks in Jaffna Town though only two were regular commercial banks: The Bank of Ceylon (government sponsored) and the Mercantile Bank of India Limited which was obviously an Indian commercial bank with several branches elsewhere in Ceylon. The Oriental Bank of Malaya Limited was indeed limited: to exchange facilities involving only Malayan and Indian currency. The fourth bank was the Jaffna Cooperative Provincial Bank Ltd., the first of its kind to be registered in Ceylon (1928). This bank was rather interestingly different in its purpose: it was not for individuals but was a bank for all kinds of cooperatives to borrow from. In 1956 it had 1098 cooperative societies who were its customers.[230] Today, the picture has changed greatly: only the bank of Ceylon remains in Jaffna of the above four. The latter two banks have vanished and in a sense, the Commercial Bank, which has a single branch in Jaffna, has replaced the Mercantile Bank—at least the Commercial Bank is a private bank. Another private bank, the Hatton National Bank, also has a branch in Jaffna Town. The Bank of Ceylon has six branches in the Jaffna Region.

People's Bank—The People's Bank originated in Colombo in 1961 by assuming the operations and responsibilities of the Cooperative Federal Bank in that city. It systematically took over Cooperative Banks, one in each district, in the course of the next decade. In 1971, with the assimilation of the Cooperative Bank in Jaffna, the last Cooperative Bank disappeared. One of the important

[230] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

responsibilities of the People's Bank (PB) is to lend money to various cooperative organizations throughout each district. The Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies are financed by PB loans. Forty-nine percent of the shares of all the PB's are held by the Multi-Purpose Cooperative; fifty-one percent by the government.

The PB generated a good deal of its business by maintaining an agency in every Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society in each district. This agency was the Rural Bank or Banks which each MPCS operated, which numbered 31 in the Jaffna Region.[231] Through this agency, which was managed by the MPCS officers and supervised and audited by the People's Bank, the PB funded loans to farmer members of the cooperative. The government guaranteed 75% of the loan in case of default but after the bad harvests of 1977 and for other reasons, there were so many defaulters that demands for repayment were given up. Since that time the repayment rate plummeted, causing the government to withdraw its guarantee to underwrite 75% of each loan and the PB has ceased to advance agricultural credit as before.

Today if a farmer wants a loan so he can sow his seed and raise a crop, he must come with a positive credit rating and two guarantors either of which is liable in the event of his defaulting on the loan. The PB is putting its extension of agricultural credit on a strictly commercial basis.

The People's Bank is the only bank in Sri Lanka licensed to do pawn brokering. It readily gives loans which are secured by gold for which loans the borrower pays an interest rate of 18%.

The People's Bank is engaged in other kinds of extensions of credit, one of the more interesting of which is the Fisheries Loan Scheme. In the Jaffna Region, which in the case of the PB includes Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Mannar Districts, more than 500 such loans have already been made and more are pending. The Scheme involves purchase of a fishing boat with 35% of the cost subsidized by the Fisheries Department, 12% paid by the owner and

[231] Two-thirds of the Rural Banks were associated with the People's Bank; one-third with the Bank of Ceylon.

53% on loan from the PB. A cluster of five men (almost always fellow fishermen), each guaranteed by the other four, is required to sign the loan agreement. In case of default, the bank follows the usual procedure for recovering a loan which may include collecting the insurance on the loan and if necessary, taking over the boat and selling it. However, the cluster system has reduced defaulting to a minimum.

In Jaffna at present, the People's Bank has six branches in operation: two in Jaffna Town and one each in Chavakachcheri, Kayts, Chunnakam and KKS. It is about to open two new branches, one at Pt. Pedro and a third branch at Jaffna Town. There are also plans soon to reopen five branches which were closed a year ago at Pungudutive, Chankanai, Pallai, Valvettithurai and a fourth branch in Jaffna Town.

The growth in the number of banks came suddenly in 1976 and 1977. It is said that in 1976 there were 77 commercial bank branches opened in the country and 76 in 1977. Some of these were Agricultural (Rural) Banks which did not give the full range of banking services. Then in December 1978, the banks of Jaffna Region were dealt a stunning blow. The Nallur branch of the Bank of Ceylon was robbed of over a million rupees and during the hold-up one Tamil policeman and one Sinhalese policeman were killed. This was said to have been the fifth bank robbery in Jaffna within the space of a year or so; there had been 35 bank robberies in the rest of Ceylon during that time. However, the government officials came to Jaffna and summarily closed three branches of the Bank of Ceylon, eleven branches of the People's Bank and thirty-one Agricultural Credit Banks, leaving no banks anywhere except in Jaffna Town and one in Kayts, KKS, Chavakachcheri and Pt. Pedro. The people of Jaffna naturally interpreted this action as discriminatory and punitive and, in view of the wave of robberies in other parts of the island, of doubtful fairness. The closing of so many banks worked a hardship upon the people, especially those in distant places. On the government side, however, it is pointed out that the Sinhalese policeman who was killed was deliberately sought out in his hiding place and riddled with bullets in a manner that was certainly provocative of retaliation of some sort. In addition, it was contended that though there were many witnesses, none would help

in identifying the robbers. Some action, therefore, against the uncooperative citizens was called for.

The above paragraph is an excellent example of the fact that in these highly politicized days so very many subjects, even banking, lead to politics.

Chitu—People with minimal credit facilities, but some source of income, have resorted for generations in Jaffna to the *chitu* (note, chit), an informal savings club. The club rather naturally is begun each time by the person needing money for his daughter's wedding, or to tile his roof or some similar money-consuming project.

The organizer rounds up ten to twenty people and each puts an agreed-on amount into the fund every week or every month. The organizer takes the total contribution at the first time of payment. At the second pay time, the second member collects, and so on. All members go on paying until every member has received his payment. It is very simple and effective. This method of saving is a social matter rather than a private, commercial one. It is almost unheard of for anyone to collect his share of the fund and then stop contributing before it was paid out. There is a strong tradition of honesty and reliability in the *chitu* system reinforced by the sobering fact that anyone who did cheat on the system would cut himself off from credit perhaps for life.

There are those who do not believe in the extension of credit. A sign in a shop in the Jaffna bazaar reads: CREDIT CUTS THE LOVE.

However, the Jaffna man has unfortunately developed a social system which subjects him without notice (death) or inexorably (marriage of a daughter) to acute demands of maximum amounts of cash and credit. Weddings and funerals are exciting family celebrations; they are also financial disasters. The man described in connection with a funeral (Chapter Four), who spent the equivalent of ten months salary for the funeral of his sister generated an obligation he is not likely to meet in his lifetime. The tough-minded man of Jaffna is willing to put unbelievably irrational amounts into such family rites. Because of these needs he has evolved this considerable variety of credit facilities.

Other credit facilities—From time immemorial, the people of Jaffna have raised money by pawning and, in modern times, by mortgaging. Of these additional methods of finding credit, Dr. Jeyasingham comments:

> The banking habit is slowly catching on among the people; though the pawn-brokering institution is still very popular. The advantage in the latter system is that money can be raised at very short notice by pawning the gold jewels of the womenfolk, the jewel-wearing habit being a very strong one among the Tamil women here. A good share of the common man's savings are found in the gold jewelry of his wife and daughters. Another way by which money is raised by the business men of the city is by mortgaging lands and immovable property. Substantial amounts can be raised because land values are extremely high in the city, quite out of proportion to what they can earn by lease or by putting the land to any other use.[232]

Workmen's compensation—Workers of Sri Lanka are theoretically protected by the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance so that they or their families receive compensation from the employer if the worker is injured or killed on the job. To protect the employer, the latter can insure himself with the Insurance Corporation of Ceylon but few employers want to get involved with any more government institutions than they can help. So if an employee is injured at work, the employer pays for his hospital costs (which are minimal) and lets it go at that. The worker is entitled to fourteen work days off from work, if sick or injured and seven days of casual leave. After working for one year, he gets "annual leave" (vacation) of fourteen working days. The normal working day is 8:30-5:30 for a five and one-half day week (44 hours).

Few of the small businessmen whom I visited had insurance but they expected to pay for injuries if their workmen were hurt at work. All industrial accidents which keep the employee away from work for over seven consecutive days are supposed to be reported to the Commissioner for Workmen's Compensation. A workman earning

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[232] *Urban Geography*, p. 239.

Rs. 300 per month would receive a payment of Rs. 12,800 if permanently disabled, 10% of that if he loses his index finger, 50% of that if he loses a leg and 70% if he loses his right arm.

Strikes—There are strikes by labour in Jaffna but relatively few and generally of short duration. In 1978 and 1979, strikes were few indeed in all of Ceylon as President Jayewardene had labour unions on the defensive. The latter were unable to meet his head-on challenge of September 28, 1978 in which he ordered that any participants in a strike called among the bank employees unions should be replaced by other workers. "Strikes are a luxury which developing countries cannot afford and in Sri Lanka where the government is attempting to rescue the economy from years of stagnation and neglect, politically motivated strikes are nothing short of sabotage," said the President in explaining his position. Major development schemes which are about to be launched must not be hampered by strikes, he insisted.[233]

Days off—Since Jaffna is a Hindu culture, there is not as much social pressure for a regular day or two off each week as in societies built around traditions of weekly Sabbaths and "weekends." The vegetable market in Jaffna Town is wide open on Sundays and many adjoining shops are at least partially open. Jaffna used to be more closed up on Sundays but when the government chose the Buddhist *poya* days (new moon and full moon days) as the basis for determining the day off in the week (Monday one week, Tuesday the next week) it was not possible to keep one certain day of the week off. Even though the *poya* day arrangement was abandoned after some time as impracticable and inefficient by the same political party which introduced it, Jaffna seems to have retained from the experiment a somewhat looser notion of closing business on Sundays.

Foreigners are not the only ones to notice that there are a good many holidays in Sri Lanka scheduled each year by the government. Newspaper columns regularly complain about it. And when to this official list of days off are added those days when work stoppages

[233] *Ceylon Daily News*, October 5, 1978.

occur locally or regionally or nationally because of strikes by workers or students; electrical stoppages, train derailments, shortage of materials, floods, cyclones or other "acts of God," man or the devil, it is no wonder that most programmes are behind schedule. Clusters of half-built houses now abandoned, tiny factories now closed down and other signs of projects dropped while in progress are sometimes evidence of programmes overtaken by other ideas (or changes of government) before they could be brought to completion. But in Jaffna and many other places in the country at the beginning of 1980, the government displayed an impressive burst of energy and efficiency in completing half-built houses and thousands of additional homes for grateful citizens.

Aid and days off—The Jayewardene government (1977 -) has been given credit for attracting a great deal of aid from other countries. As Third World countries go, Sri Lanka has more than average attractiveness and is genuinely popular with aid-giving nations perhaps because it is a beautiful island, it is small and the size of its population is not discouragingly huge. The question is sometimes raised in the Sri Lanka press, however, as to how long more efficient and more hard-working nations will care to continue to subsidize a nation whose holidays and lackadaisical work habits may some day come to their attention. It was encouraging to note that the government had responded to the criticism and in mid-1979 announced that all employees in the public sector would have their holidays (as of January 1, 1980) reduced to nine per year: five religious and four non-religious holidays. Buddhists got two religious holidays and the other three religions got one apiece. It remained to be seen whether the government would actually strike any holidays off the list. Sure enough, in late October 1979, the government announced that there would be no change in holidays for 1980, but soon after amazed its critics by lopping off 21 days of casual leave from all government workers. This left such workers the 21 working days of vacation to which all are entitled after completing one year's work-sick leave or casual leave which the worker took was to be deducted from the 21 days. Although strikes

were threatened, observers were impressed that the reduction was rather quietly accepted.[234]

Low taxes—Because of relatively large infusions of aid and the considerable amount of revenue which the tea, rubber and coconut estates bring into the nation's coffers, the average citizen and certainly the citizens of Jaffna, receive a great deal of goods and services from the government for which they pay very little in taxes. Sri Lanka does not have a sales tax on most retail items and the great majority of citizens do not pay income tax, for most of them are below the level at which income tax begins.

Unemployment—A great deal is said about unemployment in Sri Lanka. Newspapers carry frequent articles on the subject, figures are reported, deplored and editorialized upon. The ministers of the government voice concern in speeches regularly reported in the press. But it is no longer a simple, straightforward subject in which the cure is to offer an unemployed person a job. On every hand in Jaffna one hears, "But I can't get anyone to do the work." Many an unemployed person will accept work only on his terms. In the summer of 1979, a responsible person advertised in Jaffna for several people with seventh grade education or above, to learn plumbing, offering to pay their bus travel to come for the training. No one came. Seeing some unemployed youths in the neighbourhood, he asked them why they did not come to take up the plumbing trade. Their reply was that any day labourer received Rs. 15 per day and they would not want to involve themselves for less than that. Contractors report that they not only have trouble getting carpenters and masons to work because so many are overseas but even those who are only learning the trade and are by no means qualified, ask for the regular wage of a carpenter or mason (Rs. 25 per day) and are unwilling to work for less while they are helpers, or, in effect, apprentices.

Child labour—Employment might be somewhat increased if all the children under fifteen who are illegally employed were laid off. But in many cases they would not be replaced because the employer

[234] Unfortunately this too was changed in March of 1980.

could not afford normal wages. The employment of children, generally as servants, below the legal age of fifteen, helps the family to some extent for it takes the child out of the family fold and relieves the family of its support. In the International Year of the Child (1979) it was sad to note how many children under fifteen were working in Jaffna and, as reported in the papers, all over Sri Lanka. As child servants in many private homes, as helpers of every sort, even minding the store when the owner is out, small boys and (as servants) girls remind one of scenes out of Dickens' novels. Though most are docile, and quite possibly tired, some are energetic, street-smart and obviously headed for lives as successful businessmen who are not afraid to work, even if only a little more than literate by education. Few employers of children find it possible or desirable to arrange any schooling for them.

The heart-rending question is, "Isn't it commonsense that many of these children who get board and room and a garment now and then are actually better off than if they were returned to their families where a shortage of everything exists except mouths to feed?" So the child's employer asserts. It is an argument that the considerate employer can make use of, and the inconsiderate and exploiting as well. A different view of child labour is given in Chapter Seven.

Unemployed youth—In 1977, the Central Bank of Ceylon reported that 177,000 youths entered the working force and 50,000 persons left it. So 120,000 new jobs were needed. The Bank was able to make a vague estimate of perhaps 40,000 new jobs having been created in 1977, although several factors could not be included in this estimate for lack of information. There were approximately one million unemployed at the end of the year, the Bank stated.

Job Bank—The UNP's government scheme for helping to reduce unemployment is the Job Bank. Each Member of Parliament was given a thousand application blanks for applying for work through the Job Bank. The MP's doled these out to their supporters who handed the applications to those who came to see the MP about getting a job. The completed forms were sent to the AGA and each applicant was interviewed-a horrendous task. The results of the interview together with the application were sent to the Kachcheri

Planning Division which checked them over. They were then sent to the Plan Implementation Division to have the data put onto a computer. Government jobs are supposed to be assigned in careful conjunction with the Job Bank and the computer. It will be interesting to see whether the citizens' awe of the computer will overcome their reliance on the direct, personal touch which has so far been the essence of the relationship between constituents and Members of Parliament. There is a strong presentiment that personal dealings will frustrate the usefulness of the computer and the goals of the Job Bank although first appraisals are fairly encouraging. At any rate, all government branches must fill vacancies by sending their requests to the Job Bank which then sends a number of persons for interview. And in that process there is room for the MP to let his wishes be known.

Jaffna unemployed—In Jaffna, unemployed persons began to register with the Job Bank in March 1979. In the next ten months, nearly 10,000 people registered but less than 500 (485) have obtained jobs through the Bank after nine months. It is not possible to say what proportion of the total unemployed in Jaffna is represented by the 10,000 who registered.

It is also difficult to obtain estimates of the number of unemployed in the Jaffna Region. For unemployment is concealed here because there is a tradition of not admitting that one is unemployed. Nearly everyone can say he or she is sometimes employed. So it is mostly a question of underemployment and that is hard to reckon. In the mid-summer of 1979, the UNP proudly announced it had reduced unemployment from 1,200,000 to 900,000 in two years. It had cause for self-congratulation.

The majority of the high caste people are mostly employed or at least making ends meet. A great many of them have one or more relatives overseas who may be helping them. The group that causes the most concern is the 17 to 25-year-olds who are educated and in many cases, have passed the Advanced Level. It will be several years before some of them will find a job and even that job may be considerably less than what they had hoped for.

Family Planning—In the case of the higher castes, employment and making ends meet are assisted by the fact that modern families tend to be smaller. The Tappers, on the other hand, for example, although aggressively pursuing jobs in all sorts of occupations, are poorer because their families are larger. The only positive thing that can be said about unemployment is that, painful as it is, it forces many of the nation's youth to postpone marriage for a few years and thus contributes to smaller families and a decline in the population.

Miseries of the poor—A black lady singer who had attained success was asked to comment on her struggle to the top. A very few words sufficed: "I've been poor and I've been rich—rich is better." Being poor is bad enough in itself even though Lincoln spoke truly when he said, "God must have loved the poor; He made so many of them." Yet it is a serious question as to who has more worries—the rich man or the poor. But the rich man's woes are often more his than his family's while all the members of a poor family are poor together and equally. And the rich man can be very comfortable while his brow is furrowed over his income tax return while the poor man is not only at the mercy of his employers and his landlord but in South Asia very much the victim of the weather. In a society which cherishes light complexions, his skin and that of his children is several shades blacker because of over-exposure to Sri Lanka's bright sun.

About once a year in Jaffna in November or December, a strong wind sometimes of cyclonic proportions, strains at his roof or may remove it, allowing the rain to pour in. Because of the chill, he and his family often are ill in the rainy season and, if he is fit to work, rain generally deprives him of a day or a week of work—a loss which a salaried person has almost forgotten can occur. But surely the most terrifying trick the weatherman can play on a poor man is to wash down his walls so his house collapses in the middle of the night in a downpour of rain. Few terrors can exceed this.

Some poor men have a quiet dignity so pervasive that it is respected by even his prosperous neighbours but the typical poor person has no stature, no dignity in the society. He is not much taken into account. Others are employed before him, others are educated before his children, others board the bus before him. He well

exemplifies the epigram, "The meek shall inherit the earth—after everyone else is finished with it."

Dehumanization of Poverty—Workers in industrial nations complain that they suffer dehumanizing effects from the boredom of their work, chiefly because of its repetitious nature which gives no place for imagination or personal contribution. But poverty is more dehumanizing than machines.[235] The repetition can be present just as much whether the worker is making bidis or weaving cloth or setting type in a language in which he is not acquainted. But between hand work and machine work there are differences—and they are all in favour of the machine worker. Not because the owner has any concern for the health of the worker but because he wants the machine to last longer, the machine is apt to be placed in a somewhat healthier, better place than where the manual worker may be expected to work. Manual workers can be secreted in attics, basements and back rooms where no inspector ever finds them. (There may well be an understanding that such dehumanizing, pathetic little businesses should be left alone for any employment is better than none.)

The worker at a machine is more obvious; he is part of a larger operation, a visible operation. Labour unions and labour inspectors are more likely to demand some relief for the worker-shorter hours, higher pay, a few minutes off every hour or two, better working conditions. Poverty is the worst dehumanizer.

The poor have no credit but in Jaffna they are sometimes benefited by the principle of *noblesse oblige* (the moral obligation of others of better circumstances). In time of dire financial need (most often weddings or funerals or illness) their more prosperous neighbours, especially those to whom they are obligated by caste, in turn are obligated to help. Somehow the money is found. Donations and loans bridge the gap—loans which frequently go unpaid.

The poor stand by the wayside. The loaded bus passes him by; the conductor could not possibly squeeze another like him aboard—not that he weighs too much but rather too little. If he had been

[235] Naipaul, V. S., *India, A Wounded Civilization*, p. 171.

better dressed, of respectable appearance or even a bit confident looking, the bus might have stopped. There will be another bus.

As in nearly all countries of the world one of the greatest miseries is excessive drinking. There are men in Jaffna who drink four bottles of toddy after a day's work at Rs. 1.20 per bottle. (The daily wage for labourers is Rs. 15, plus lunch and generally a cup or two of tea.) Some drink six; there are even some who exceed this. Then their wives and children go hungry because so much of father's earnings were left with the toddy tavernkeeper, who thus, as for ages past, becomes the oppressor of the poor and the killer of children. A Hindu society with Muslim and Christian minorities (most of which oppose the drinking of liquor, more or less) faces a great challenge as too much of Jaffna's new wealth is spent on liquor.

The poor must stay healthy. If they don't, they are a cruel burden to their families who may quite literally not be able to support them. They may then starve to a weak condition and be carried off by a disease which they would have escaped if they had been healthy.[236] There is no health insurance for the poor. He that does not work shall not eat is a fair rule for the lazy but cruel necessity for the poor.

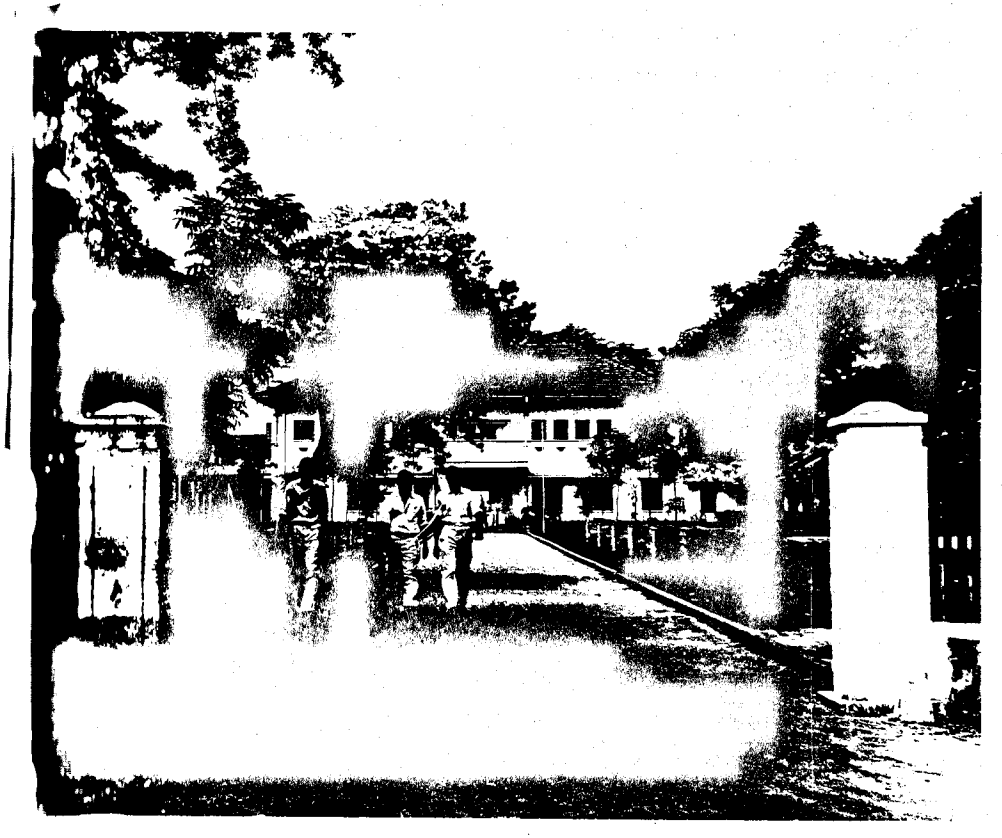
The poor who live near prosperous neighbours find that they are generally under suspicion whenever anything is missing in the house or compound of the prosperous neighbour. If the latter is sufficiently annoyed he may inform the police and the poor man may be taken away for questioning, for a little time in jail and probably for violent treatment to see if he will confess. On the other hand, if the poor man should suspect his wealthier neighbour of any misappropriation, he would not be likely to be listened to even if he made a complaint.

Government corporations—In Sri Lanka, one hears constantly of Government Corporations, Boards and other agencies of government. Most people can name only a few and have no idea how many there are. In 1980 there appear to be 106 and they are

[236] Skjonsberg, E., *A Village Study*, p. 72.

listed in the Appendix for reference purposes. They are listed because an examination of their titles shows graphically the broad extent to which the means of production of the economy of Sri Lanka and therefore of Jaffna, is bound up in government organizations. Those who are happy about the existence of so many socialized facets of the society often seem unconcerned about the fact that many of these corporations function inefficiently and uneconomically. Such persons appear to be pleased that whether there is profit or not, any financial gain comes to the state and individuals are not receiving it. Those who deplore the existence of so many state enterprises believe that they are generally wasteful of public money and that the whole country would be benefited if entrepreneurs were allowed to flourish. It should be noted that when state corporations lose money it amounts to government subsidizing the citizenry, for example, the low bus fares charged by the Ceylon Transport Board.

The names of the corporations are also printed here because, although they are constantly referred to in the newspapers, it is hard to find them listed anywhere. I regret to state that I am by no means certain that my list is complete.



JAFFNA COLLEGE
SITUATED IN THE VILLAGE, VADDUKODDAI, JAFFNA.
ESTABLISHED IN 1823 BY THE AMERICAN MISSIONARIES

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER NINE

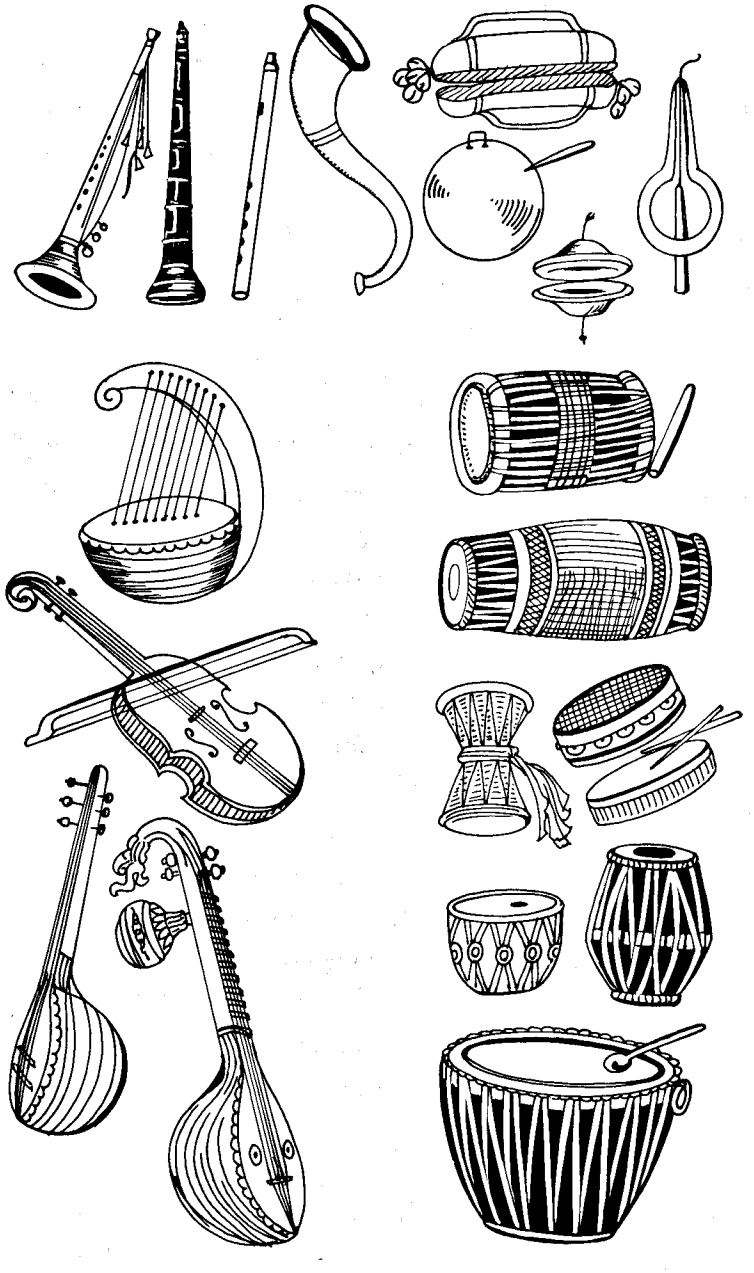
Statutory Authorities, Commissions, Boards, Corporations

Agrarian Research and Training Institute
Agricultural Development Authority
Agricultural Insurance Board
Agricultural and Industrial Credit Corporation of Ceylon
Air Lanka Limited
Bank of Ceylon
Building Materials Corporation
Central Engineering Consultancy Bureau
Central Freight Bureau of Sri Lanka
Ceylon Cement Corporation
Ceylon Ceramics Corporation
Ceylon Electricity Board
Ceylon Fertilizer Corporation
Ceylon Fishery Harbours Corporation
Ceylon Fisheries Corporation
Ceylon Government Railway
Ceylon Hotels Corporation
Ceylon Institute of Scientific and Industrial Research
Ceylon Leather Products Corporation
Ceylon Mineral Sands Corporation
Ceylon National Library Services Board
Ceylon Oils and Fats Corporation
Ceylon Petroleum Corporation
Ceylon Plywoods Corporation
Ceylon Shipping Corporation
Ceylon State Hardware Corporation
Ceylon State Mortgage Bank
Ceylon Steel Corporation
Ceylon Tourist Board

Ceylon Tyre Corporation
Coconut Development Authority
Coconut Cultivation Board
Coconut Marketing Board
Coconut Processing Board
Colombo District Reclamation and Development Board
Colombo Dockyard Limited
Colombo Port Commission
Common Amenities Board
Cooperative Wholesale Establishment
Development Finance Corporation of Ceylon
Freedom from Hunger Campaign Board
Government of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) successor to the Business Undertaking of British Ceylon Corporation Ltd.
Government of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) successor to the Business Undertaking of Ceylon Manufacturers and Merchants Ltd.
Ditto of: Colombo Gas and Water Company Ltd.
Ditto of: Times of Ceylon
Ditto of: Acland Finance and Investments Ltd.
Ditto of: Colombo Commercial Company (Engineers) Ltd.
Ditto of: Consolidated Commercial Agencies Ltd.
Ditto of: Essential Oils (Ceylon) Ltd.
Ditto of: Heavyquip Ltd.
Ditto of: Hunas Falls Hotels Ltd.
Government Owned Business Undertaking of Ceylon Silks Ltd.
Government Owned Business Undertaking formerly of Wellawatte Spinning & Weaving Mills Ltd.
Insurance Corporation of Sri Lanka
Janawasama-Janatha Estates Development Board
Jute Industries
Lanka Porcelain Ltd.
Local Government Services Advisory Board

Mahaveli Development Board
Marketing Department Fruit Cannery
National Milk Board
National Apprentice Board
National Engineering Research and Development Centre of Sri Lanka
National Livestock Development Board
National Lotteries Board
National Paper Corporation
National Salt Corporation
National Savings Bank
National Textile Corporation
National Water Supply and Drainage Board
Paddy Marketing Board
Paranthan Chemicals Corporation
People's Bank
Port (Cargo) Corporation
Port Tally & Protective Services Corporation
River Valleys Development Board
Rubber Research Board
Rubber Research Institute of Sri Lanka
Silk and Allied Products Development Authority
Sri Lanka Ayurvedic Drugs Corporation
Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation
Sri Lanka Cashew Corporation
Sri Lanka Central Transport Board
Sri Lanka Cooperative Marketing Federation Ltd.
Sri Lanka Foundation Institute
Sri Lanka Fruit Board
Sri Lanka State Flour Milling Corporation
Sri Lanka State Trading (Consolidated Exports) Corporation
Sri Lanka State Trading (General) Corporation

Sri Lanka State Trading (Textile) Corporation
Sri Lanka State Trading (Tractor) Corporation
Sri Lanka Tobacco Industries Corporation
Sri Lanka Sugar Corporation
Sri Lanka Transport Board
Sri Lanka Tyre Corporation
State Distilleries Corporation
State Engineering Corporation of Ceylon
State Fertilizer Manufacturing Corporation
State Film Corporation
State Gem Corporation
State Graphite Corporation of Ceylon
State Pharmaceuticals Corporation of Sri Lanka
State Printing Corporation
State Rubber Corporation
State Timber Corporation
Sri Lanka State Plantations Corporation



Musical Instruments
These instruments are used, in classical musical recitals by the Tamils.

CHAPTER TEN

Farmer in Jaffna

Many other industries may be taken up but ultimately the world depends on agriculture. *Tirukkural*

Farmer or peasant?—Eighty percent of the population of Sri Lanka lives in rural areas and earns its living from agriculture (including plantations) though of course that proportion is slowly declining.[237] In Jaffna Region, the percentage is less but agriculture is still the leading occupation. So the farmer is very important. The Jaffna farmer is rarely called a peasant and probably with good reason. If the difference between a farmer and a peasant is the greater independence of the former, a slight inclination toward experimentation or daring to try a new idea while a peasant is somehow more stolid and less venturesome, the agriculturist in Jaffna is properly called a farmer. The term sounds right; though a good many *are* peasants, the better ones are truly farmers. No English-speaker uses the term "peasant" in Jaffna, yet it has the support of the greatest (Ceylon) agricultural writer of them all, a man whose very name is Farmer—Mr. B. H. Farmer, who wrote a book called *Pioneer Peasant Colonisation in Ceylon.*[238] Of course, Mr. Farmer was not thinking about Jaffna farmers primarily.

Model Farmer—The Jaffna man is a model farmer with respect to crop rotation and fertilizing his fields and is careful to put enough vegetable matter into the soil each year to produce a crop. Green leaves or old palm leaves discarded from the fences or thatched roofs are the commonest materials. But bullocks of all sizes and

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[237] Fernando and Fernando, "Towards Self-Reliance in Sri Lanka," p. 6. The proportion of the population of the Jaffna Region engaged in agriculture is 37%, i.e., 60,000 out of 160,000 employed people according to the Census of 1971. In 1953 the Census reported 55,000 agriculturists out of 127,000 workers, or about 44%.

[238] Oxford University Press, 1957, London.

colours pass up and down the roads as draft animals, and grazing cows also wander along the roads. Both kinds of cattle are given to laying down very specific reasons why it is wise for the pedestrian to watch his step. Cattle manure is carefully collected by hand, even from roads, for the same purpose as the green leaves and other vegetable matter are used for. A touching sight in Jaffna is that of an old woman walking down the road with woven palm leaf basket balanced on her head and, while deftly keeping it balanced, bending down at the knees, scraping up a fresh deposit of cow dung from the road with her fingers and chucking it into her basket without losing either her balance or the basket's. A small sign of the increased prosperity of Jaffna is that this sight is witnessed much less today than twenty years ago.

Manure—The Jaffna farmer is also commended by agricultural experts, domestic and foreign, for not following the pernicious example of most Indian farmers (including the South Indian Tamil farmers) of burning cow dung patties for fuel. One sees no patties drying in Jaffna, even though fuel is frequently scarce; the Jaffna farmer values cattle manure too highly for such a wasteful practice.

During the dry season especially, flocks of cattle are driven about by herders over the withered fields. These flocks produce no milk but are merely manure manufacturers. People give their livestock to be thus "grazed" through the time when fodder is scarce; the herdsman is paid a little for the care of the stock and he also gains by selling the manure he collects when his flock is grazing in the wastelands. Field owners will pay ten to twenty-five cents per head for the flock to spend the night on one of their fields; and ten cents per sheep (although sheep are scarce in Jaffna there are still a few flocks left).

The cattle in these herds include a good many dry cows some of which are inseminated by one or another of the few bulls which are also in the herd. When the cow calves, the herdsman returns the mother and calf to the owner and gets an additional bonus for the happy event.

Expert—For this very fertilizing efficiency, the Jaffna cultivator was specifically praised by the aforementioned Mr.

Farmer. The high quality of Jaffna agricultural skills was strikingly illustrated for the present author when he met an American soybean expert from the Agricultural Institute at Peradeniya.

That gentleman reported that the soybeans grown at the Thirunelveli Agricultural Research Station in Jaffna were so high in yield that the results were unbelievable. But he and his colleagues had checked the results, which equalled the highest yield ever reported in soybean history and they saw individual bean plants which were more heavily laden than they had ever before seen. Their conclusion: the Jaffna farmer is really good! This is the reason why that knowledgeable agriculturist of ninety years ago, William Ferguson, spoke of Jaffna's "most exquisitely cultivated soil."

Individual artists—The village cultivator is typically quite independent and individualistic. Even if his relatives live on adjoining lands and though they cooperate enthusiastically in religious and social matters, they pay little attention to each other when they start farming. They seem to regard this activity as an individual art or craft and not a proper subject for cooperation and group enterprise.[239]

Green Manure—"Green Manure" is an unfamiliar term to the western farmer but available by the ton in Jaffna. As the manuring season approaches after the rains have been descending for several weeks and causing every growing plant to sprout in tropical profusion, the thrifty home owner trims the trees which grow in his compound and in his fence-line particularly. The trees he trims are chiefly of the two species planted for this purpose, the tulip tree *(thespesia)* and the *glyricidia*. The former is said to be unusually rich in nitrogen. The trimmings are leafy wands two to five feet in length which are gathered up and used by the farmer to manure his fields—green manure—or are sold to others at a considerable price. A tractor-drawn wagon load costs Rs. 500-900. If Rs. 900, it has been stacked so as to contain the equivalent of an entire lorry load.

So determined is the Jaffna farmer to use all available plant nutrients that when granny is not out collecting cow dung from the

[239]Selvanayagam, S., "Intensive Farming..." 1966, Colombo.

roads in the basket on her head she is just as apt to seize a stiff iron rod, pointed on one end, and go along the edges of the roads and down the lanes spearing every leaf she sees until she has a stack a foot or two in height which is peeled off at home on the compost heap or fed to the goats, mostly the latter. There can be no doubt that this enriching exercise contributes to the senior member's peace of mind by making her feel useful to the household as indeed she is. This practice also has sharply declined in recent years.

It is a boon to his country that the Jaffna farmer uses natural fertilizer (manure) almost entirely for it is home-grown and does not involve foreign exchange as does chemical fertilizer. For even when the latter is produced in this country most of its components come from abroad. In addition, the farmer who relies on natural fertilizer is much less in danger of finding the supply gone or transport unavailable just when he needs it as has so often happened to farmers dependent on chemical fertilizers. Furthermore, too much reliance on chemical fertilizer gradually has a deleterious effect on the soil so increased use of manure seems to be vital for the future of Jaffna's agriculture.

The farmers of Jaffna live in villages or towns from which they walk or ride (more often using a bullock cart or bicycle than a motorized vehicle) to their fields. Sixty-six percent of the people of Jaffna live in villages. The location of these villages is determined to a considerable extent by the availability of fresh (non-brackish) well water.[240] As many as half of these villagers are landless labourers very much underemployed, all too often unemployed, eking out a precarious living, making the best of their bad lot because their position in the middle and lower levels of the caste system have accustomed them to accepting their fate. Some have benefited by getting an education, others by learning a trade, while sometimes a political party, courting their vote, has obtained more than fleeting assistance for a considerable group. They have moved to a cash economy rather largely, no longer being paid in kind.

[240] Selvanayagam, S., "Population Densities...," p. 37

In 1956 a survey informed the public that Jaffna Peninsula's land use was :[241]

23% paddy
32% palmyra
27% homesteads
10% market gardening
8% coconut

It is very important to note that this analysis applies to the 60% of the land which is used or productive. Forty percent of Jaffna's 436 square miles are alkaline or sandy waste or rocky areas, some of which have been, and continue to be, reclaimed.

The whole country of Sri Lanka is divided into a Wet Zone and Dry Zone, the Wet Zone being that lucky wedge of the country which gets rain throughout the year and extends westerly from the mountainous interior. The Wet Zone is one-third of the country; Jaffna lies in the two-thirds which comprise the Dry Zone. The most intensive and complex land use in the entire Dry Zone is in Jaffna.[242] "Particularly since the racial riots of 1958, houses have been springing up along all main roads in steadily increasing numbers, particularly around the edge of Jaffna Town and other towns. In the islands the settlements are established in the central areas where the ground is a little higher above the sea and where fresh water is available in wells."[243]

In 1966, the population per square mile in the Jaffna Region averaged 1000 but on the actual agricultural lands including the farmsteads where some food is produced, the population averaged

[241] *Ibid.*, p. 39. No subsequent land use survey has been made, according to Dr. Selvanayagam, in remarks to the author in March, 1979. His article was published in 1965.

[242] *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 37.

[243] *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 37.

3000 persons per square mile.[244] "It appears that subdivision of garden lands has proceeded even to absurd levels."[245]

Selvanayagam, a careful student of the problem, continued his analysis, "The average family membership in this area is about five. But the distribution of cultivated land is rather unsatisfactory. The majority of the families operate minute amounts and there is no possibility in the face of increasing population to increase their farm holdings. Therefore the main problem in these villages is the diminution in the size of cultivated land accompanied by a rapid increase in the number of landless families. Subdivision and fragmentation have been going on for generations."[246] The problems caused by this exceedingly small farm size are generally increased by the variation and unreliability of agricultural income, inadequate credit facilities and rural unemployment and underemployment.[247] The small size of these tiny farms is sometimes the result of the division of small landholdings among the children of the landholder although it is quite usual for one child to buy out the others in order to avoid further subdivision.

Selvanayagam is able to suggest half a dozen ways by which agricultural output can be increased even in crowded Jaffna:

1. Increase the yield of paddy per acre.
2. Plant compound land full of productive plants.
3. Plant barren lands with palmyra, coconut and tamarind.
4. Raise more poultry which requires only limited land.
5. Reclaim waste land, which requires money for a well and the removing of the stones.
6. Reclaim salt lands around the two inland lagoons.

[244] Selvanayagam, "Market Gardening," p. 172.

[245] Selvanayagam, "Population Densities," p. 42.

[246] Selvanayagam, "Market Gardening," pp. 175-6.

[247] Selvanayagam, "Agrarian Problems," p. 55.

A seventh point which can be added is increased animal husbandry. If the farmer would increase his growing of cattle or goats he would not only add to his diet and income but also increase the supply of manure. An agriculturist friend of mine suggests for an eighth point the growing of *ipil* and casuerina trees for cattle feed and firewood.

It is somewhat encouraging to learn that there is still room to increase agricultural production in Jaffna. Working actively against this is the fact that a small but steady stream of people is buying land and building houses in Jaffna. In doing so, good water is the first requirement and therefore much of the land used for house sites is prime agricultural lands for good soil and good water often go together. Such encroachment in another decade or two, will seriously reduce the amount of arable land. This is a very serious long range problem for Jaffna farmers and others.

Mechanization—In the past twenty years a noticeable mechanization has invaded the agriculture of Jaffna. It began with oil-powered pumps[248] which removed the irrigation water comparatively swiftly from Jaffna's shallow wells and thus began to displace the picturesque well sweeps, the bullock-powered *mhote* and the Persian water wheel systems which were Jaffna's means of irrigation until about 1955 when the first pumps arrived. Enterprisers learned to purchase a pump mounted on small, sturdy iron wheels with which they could then pump out several wells a day for their own profit while saving money and time for the farmers who hired them. The ease of pumping water is one of the causes of increased irrigation in Jaffna. Unfortunately the ground water levels in most of the Peninsula and in all of the islands are not sufficient to permit increased consumption so the result is that the ground water in the islands and around Vaddukoddai and Chavakachcheri especially is becoming gradually more saline. Mechanization may ruin Jaffna agriculture in paddy areas by continually lowering wells too swiftly, thus causing the brackish water to come in. Perhaps the

[248] Though commonly called petrol pumps, petrol is used only to start the pump; it runs on kerosene or diesel.

oil crisis will drive the Jaffna farmer back to traditional methods of irrigation.

In a short time after the introduction of the pumps, the first tractors followed, generally pulling ploughs, but the small fields made the latter somewhat impractical. In 1960, tractors were rarely seen; airplanes were seen at least as often as tractors. Today tractors are much more common on the roads of Jaffna; they usually are pulling well built farm wagons and tractors of all sorts, many of them miniature models, ply the narrow lanes and roads.

There are also tractors on all the lived-on islands. In addition, throughout the 1970's many farmers have owned bicycles. Once again the more picturesque, traditional means, the large bullock cart, often cadjan covered, is being supplanted. With the price of oil climbing so swiftly, one wonders if there will soon come a time when it will pay the farmer to rebuild his well sweep and purchase another country cart. By the end of 1979, the small bullock cart was already seen in increasing numbers.

The economics of the water pump will be discussed later in this chapter. The economies of tractor hauling a wagon are that until June, 1979 the tractor charges were no more than, if as much as, the cost of a bullock cart and the job would be done in much less time. With the price of diesel doubling and petrol rising to Rs. 38.00, economy is now on the side of the bullock cart.

One of the natural features which makes Jaffna agriculture picturesque and quaint is the size and appearance of the miniature fields. It is doubtful if an unbunded field as large as one acre exists in Jaffna except on the coconut estates. A quarter of an acre, more or less, is a common size and a man can make a modest living on a quarter acre if the soil and water are good, and the prices remain at a fair level. If a man owns an acre or more, he divides the field up into several smaller ones by putting a ridge ("bund") across it, 12-18 inches in height, to form fields of a size more easily handled. The bunds reduce the problem of water settling in the low part of the field to the detriment of the areas slightly higher. The bunds are essential to paddy culture for the rice plant needs to stand in stagnant water for growth and to keep the weeds under control but

also to enable the plant to take in nitrogen which it can only do in the portions of the plant stalk which are under water.

All fields are bunded and while most bunds grow up in grass and weeds, some contain well-worn paths because they connect two inhabited areas. From time a householder or his child leads a goat or a cow along the bunds to allow it to feed on the grass and weeds, carefully keeping the animal's agile tongue and lips from the grains of paddy hanging heavily on either side of the path.

Costs of Various Agricultural Items in 1979 (Rupees)

	Chunnakam	Vaddukoddai	Varany
Lorry load of green manure		600	4-500
Tractor load of same	500	500	250-500
Lorry load of cattle manure	1,000	800-1,000	900-1,000
Team of white India bulls	2-2,500	4-5,000	2,000
New small bullock cart	700	1,000	1,000
New large bullock cart	2,000	3,000	2,000
Tractor ploughing	Rs. 10/1 chm	Rs. 5/1 chm	Rs. 150/acre
Bullock ploughing	Rs. 5/1chm	Rs. 5/1 chm	Rs. 90/acre
Labourer, daily (7-8 hours)	Rs. 15 + lunch, tea	Rs. 12 + lunch, tea	Rs. 15 + lunch or 17 without
Wage of woman weeder		Rs. 5	Rs. 5,6	Rs. 7
Price of land, fronting on road, per lacham (16 per acre)		10,000	6,000	850

Cost of transport of sand:

5 ton diesel lorry	2 cubic yards for Rs. 120
3 ½ ton petrol lorry	1 ¼ cubic yards for Rs. 100
Tractor and wagon	¾ cubic yards for Rs. 65
Bullock cart	¼ cubic yard for Rs. 30
Rental ¼ acre paddy land	50% of crop or 1 bu./ 1 chm for Rs. 40
Rental ¼ a, irrigable land for vegetables	Rs. 150

Irrigation

Although Manogaran[249] has estimated that as much as an inch a day of the water in Jaffna's tanks evaporates in the dry season, the tests at the Station at Thirunelveli, indicate that 7mm, or just over a quarter inch is the maximum amount lost by evaporation daily in the dry season. The figure is no higher because Jaffna is a humid tropical area not an arid tropical area. Some of the water in the various tanks which dot the landscape once the monsoon rains come disappears in the other direction—it soaks into the ground. The rate of evaporation is as high as it is because the mean annual temperature is 81 degrees. If this figure were only half a dozen degrees less, the rate would be significantly lessened. But the thermometer declines to decline and the amount of water loss per day is doubled for want of so small a cooling. So the water in the tanks disappears steadily and when it entirely disappears, the fierce attraction of the sun continues to evaporate all available moisture out but this rate is lessened by the fact that the moisture must come out of the soil and the growing plants and not out of open bodies of water. Even if a mere quarter inch evaporates every day of the year (and of course on rainy days the rate is reduced) it means that 91 inches a year would have been taken up into the atmosphere and Jaffna's average rainfall is 52 inches per annum. Luckily, the ground water supply is adequate in most of the Peninsula and it is in that

[249] Unpublished paper presented to the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science, cited by Manogaran, C., *Changes in the Production of Tobacco*, 1968, M.A. thesis, Clark University (Massachusetts), p.89.

area that irrigation takes place. Luckily also, certain dry weather crops like gingelly (sesame), kurukkan, green gram (mungo bean), and sunn hemp can manage to grow without the artificial addition of water. But the Jaffna farmer has to be continually supplying his tobacco, chillies, onions and some other crops with water from his well. One break he does get is that the dew which comes in the nights of January, February and March, though small in amount, assists him slightly in his task. The dew also slows the amount of moisture the plant gives off, for a few hours each night and early morning in the dewy season.

Well sweeps—Water is raised from wells for irrigating the plants in two ways. The traditional methods of well sweep requires three to four men to lift water from the well and to direct it, by way of the channels formed in the mud, to the plants. One or sometimes two men are required to walk on the well sweep, while a third person directs the vessel or basket in its ascent from the well and empties its contents into the reservoir which feeds the channels. At the end of the channels, a fourth person is needed to close a channel as its area is watered and to open a new channel. On the average, for a quarter-acre farm, 340-345 lifts of water are necessary to irrigate the plants. This takes three hours time and the well is generally fairly close to drained at the end of that time. The basket may hold ten gallons or more but if only one man is walking the well sweep, it will be a smaller basket.

The well sweeps were picturesque additions to the flat landscape of Jaffna. They raised their heads in considerable numbers in the more fertile parts of the Peninsula, faintly reminiscent of the manner in which a Dutch windmill stands out on the horizon in Holland. The well sweep is invariably a palmyra palm trunk which has been tooled by a Carpenter to a nice smoothness and is from 18 to 30 feet long. The deeper the well the longer the sweep required. It seesaws over a fulcrum lashed between two trees or sometimes the entire fulcrum is a structure of timber. In some farms, those two trees over the well sweep are the only shade on the place. The trees or the timber must provide a handhold so that men walking the well sweep will not lose their balance. They shift a few steps up the well sweep and it dips its rope and basket down into the well to get water. They shift back toward the butt end of the sweep and the basket, now

brimming, is brought to the surface. Three hundred forty trips like that are bound to give one a good appetite for his morning meal.

Wells vary in depth from 15 to 30 feet. Since 1960, the use of woven palmyra leaf baskets for containing the water brought up from the well has begun to decline and the baskets, ropes and the scenic sweeps themselves are in danger of being replaced by the small portable pumps which require only two men, or, in a pinch, a single person, to irrigate.

The oil-powered pump can eliminate two of the three men required by the old well sweep for one man can put the pump's hose into the well and start the motor. Then as the water comes down the channels he directs it into one small area formed by dirt walls and when that one has sufficient water, on to the next. The "pumper" who walked the well sweep and the "dumper" who poured the water out of the vessel raised from the well by the well sweep are no longer necessary. But if one man does it alone, he is pretty busy; perhaps he should be called the "jumper."

Twenty years ago there was a system of irrigation called *mhote* which involved bullocks pulling water baskets up from the well by chains which ran over pulleys—a system still seen in many parts of India. This method has entirely disappeared from the agricultural scene in Jaffna today and so has the Persian wheel. In 1979 it is almost impossible to find a well sweep being used in irrigation in Jaffna Region, though many can be found in use at the family well within the compound walls. At the very end of 1979 I learn that four or five new double *mhote* systems have just been constructed on small farms near Tellippallai, a rather immediate response to the cost of oil.

Ground water—Underground water, soil, fertilizers, seeds, labour and agricultural skills are the foundation of Jaffna's agriculture. The Northeast Monsoon brings most of Jaffna's annual rainfall of 52 inches, average, in the winter months, so what happens to the rainwater after it touches the earth is of crucial importance. Fortunately the soil of Jaffna is underlaid by coral and more or less porous Miocene limestone which act somewhat like a sponge. In a large part of the west central portion of the Peninsula, this stratum

absorbs fresh water to a depth of sixty feet or more and it is only below this layer of fresh water that brackish and saltier water exists. The salt water is, of course, heavier than fresh so the latter floats on top of the salt water, in effect. As the rains cease and the crops growing on the surface drink up the water, the layer of fresh water becomes shallower and the salt water rises but there is good news for some of the Jaffna farmers. Where the soil is best (the red earth region)[250] and the most irrigation is occurring (the central part of the western section of the Peninsula), the supply of water is abundant and promises to be sufficient for the foreseeable future. In fact, the experts are trying to devise means by which the central reservoir of fresh water can be used further, to the maximum, during each dry season so that less rainwater will be wasted than is now the case from the unnecessary run-off and spring-flow of the surplus in November and December. A prime consumer asking for more fresh water is Jaffna municipality which today receives 1/3 million gallons per day but requires 1 1/2 million daily to supply all residents with water. The present 350,000 daily come from two wells, one at Thirunelveli and the other at Kondavil.[251]

But by far the larger portion of Jaffna Peninsula has much less abundant ground water, especially all areas near the coasts where the depth of fresh water varies from ten to thirty feet. And right through the middle of Jaffna Peninsula from the Bay of Bengal on the north to the lagoon on the south, an inland sea of saltwater exists, fed by the Bay and lagoon respectively. Fifty years ago, however, British engineers began to talk of excluding the saltwater. The road and the railroad occupy a causeway at Elephant Pass and this was made watertight so that no sea water could enter on the east side of the causeway. The water to the east of Elephant Pass began to become sweet, thanks to the rains and the fact that half a dozen small rivers flow out of the northern portion of the island and empty into the

[250] The colour comes from iron oxide which constitutes 17% of the soil. Silica is 44% and the rest is aluminia.

[251] These facts are based on an interview with Mr. J. A. Lewis, research officer at the Agricultural Research Station at Thirunelveli. His information is supported by the Hydrology Research Unit at Nallur which has been studying ground water in Jaffna for the past ten years.

basin east of Elephant Pass. However, when storms come in the rainy season, the waves break over the thin sand barrier which connect Jaffna Peninsula with the rest of the island and Jaffna itself becomes an island for a few hours or a day or two as the fresh water receives an unwanted infusion of saltwater from the east.[252] Unfortunately, this shallow lake east of Elephant Pass also dries up in June or July each year and remains a desert for two to four months until the fall rains come.

That inland fresh water tank east of Elephant Pass was connected after World War II by a channel with the lagoon which runs along the entire east side of the Peninsula, separated from the ocean by a strip of land two to three miles wide. And it has over the years since, had a sweetening effect on the water of the wells in that area, thus improving the agriculture there.

In the 1950's an attempt was made to sweeten the central salt water area of the Peninsula by a Salt Water Exclusion project. A 600-foot dam was built at Thondamannar about a quarter mile from the Bay of Bengal so that no more sea water could come in from the Bay of Bengal. A windmill was installed near it to pump salt water out of the inland area and into the sea and thus hasten the desalinization process.

Other barriers were erected near the southern coast of the Peninsula close to the Jaffna-Kandy highway. The center of the land began to become a fresh water area. Then the best laid plans of men were found to be unsatisfactory or only partially satisfactory. Fishermen broke a portion of the dam at Thondamannar and allowed the sea to enter the protected area once again. The dam had eliminated a good many square miles of saltwater in which the Fishermen had formerly gathered prawns, thus depriving them of part of their livelihood. It would have been possible to repair the dam and reason with the Fishermen but another problem was discovered at the same time. When the seawater fed the inland lagoon, the lagoon was always filled with water, even though it was

[252] This strip of sand at Chundikulam in the extreme southeast corner of the Peninsula, is less than 200 yards in breadth.

saltwater. But when the ocean was kept out and the inner lagoon was filled with rainwater instead of seawater, the water dried up by early summer and for several hot dry months the wind swept across an area which had formerly been "water cooled" by nature's air conditioning. Not only were local residents several degrees warmer but the wind brought plenty of salt-laden dust whereas it had formerly been relatively clean air blowing off the lagoon. So the voices of those benefited by the exclusion of salt water seemed to be drowned by the voices who suffered and complained.

However, the idea of collecting sweet water to improve wells and to improve the irrigation which is based on wells is still being considered. While the plan was in operation the water in adjoining wells improved for cultivation—a significant benefit. The latest idea is to leave some sections of the inland lagoon salty in order to keep that land moist the year around. Then other alternate sections will be dammed off from the sea water and allowed to become fresh. It is hoped that maintaining alternate areas of salt and fresh water will benefit the greatest possible number of persons of the area.

In our consideration of ground water we have concentrated on the good water supply located in the rich, red earth region of the western central portion of the Peninsula. But all around that fortunate area are the grey-yellow soil areas under which the fresh water supply is much more shallow. With the increase in irrigation, the exhausting of the supply of fresh water causes saline water to come in, which makes the top soil to become more or less saline. Some farmers, for example, those north of Pandaterruppu, have learned to manage their irrigation so carefully that salinity does not result. They do this by pumping only small amounts of water from their purposely shallow wells and allowing time for fresh water to seep in again before pumping again. Such intermittent, repeated pumping is inconvenient and time-consuming and all too many farmers are unable or unwilling to be so patient.

The Water Resources Board of the Ceylon Government is alert to the threat of salinity caused by excessive irrigation. On August 29, 1979, various daily newspapers carried this notice from the Chairman of the Water Resources Board:

We earnestly request that no tube wells be constructed by an individual or an institution either by the private or the public sector in the Miocene Limestone areas lying North and Northwest of the line joining Puttulam and Mullaitivu including the Jaffna Peninsula. Any unprogrammed extraction of ground water in these areas could lead to irreparable damage, causing severe salinity in the top soil.

Deepening of existing wells could also cause extraction of saline water, which would have the harmful effects of ruining productive farm lands. Please do not deepen your well and ruin your land. This Board will advise you free of charge about your ground water problems including the feasibility of deepening your existing wells.

The government has taken note of the problem and moved to provide a solution to it. To what extent the public will cooperate with this remains to be seen. If the Water Resources Board is able to respond promptly to requests for advice it will certainly increase the public response.

Paddy

It is not a compliment to the initiative of her people that Sri Lanka, a land of plentiful water, has never grown enough rice to feed her own people and, though an island and therefore close to the sea, does not supply them with sufficient fish. After a generation of independence, scores of governmental plans and innumerable resolutions and speeches, the quantity of rice grown is approaching self-sufficiency and the amount of fish caught is increasing year by year. In Jaffna, where much less water and land are available for rice, only 20-25% of the needs of the population for rice were grown in 1978.[253] The supply of fish in Jaffna remains unequal to the demand partly because a good deal of marine products are iced and shipped to Colombo daily.

[253] Estimate by an economist of Jaffna.

Paddy is unhusked rice and it is the term used for the grain until it is ready to be cooked and served. Paddy is planted in Jaffna in the less fertile grey soil areas. It is of interest to note that certain crops are associated with each of the main soil types: paddy with grey and yellow loams, garden crops with red soil and tree crops with the rocky and sandy areas. Paddy could not be economically grown in the red soil area because red soil is porous and lets the water through too quickly. Paddy grows in the grey soil because underneath the top few inches of loam is a layer of clay which retains the water so that the paddy can stand in it. If paddy were sown in red soil it would have to be irrigated every day or two and that would be costly as well as difficult because the ground in Jaffna is flat. In those parts of Ceylon where paddy is irrigated the irrigation tank is a bit above the paddy fields so the water comes in by gravity flow-no pumping.

The water is much more commonly brackish in the grey soil area and so, between the poorer soil, poorer water and the frequent failure of the rains to come at the right time or perversely to come when not wanted (such as in the midst of harvest), Jaffna's reputation for excellence in agriculture does not rest on its record in paddy culture. Although yield per acre for Jaffna Peninsula cannot be separated from the figures for the entire Jaffna District, an examination of paddy production since 1963 shows that the whole District has a very ordinary production record.

The Jaffna farmer lavishes a lot of loving care and labour on his paddy fields even if the returns are so often disappointing. Before planting, every field is fertilized as described elsewhere. But before anything else is done, the pious Hindu farmer performs the religious duties by which he assures himself that, if the gods will not act directly in his favour, at least they will not be in opposition to the prosperity of his crop.

When the economics of paddy culture is discussed, it often happens that the questioner concludes, after hearing a recital of the costs, "It is not worth it. You would be better off to save your money and labour and buy your paddy in the market. Why do you go to the trouble?" Then one runs into the sentimental side of the Jaffna man. "The best tasting rice in the world comes off your own land." This means it continues to be planted uneconomically and keeps the

average production in Jaffna low. There is an indirect benefit, however, from keeping paddy in the fields even if its yield is very low. The water in the paddy fields slowly percolates through the clay layer and thus the fresh water is retained much longer than it would be if vegetables were grown and the standing water were drained off as quickly as possible. Thus the supply of ground water is increased for less runs off into the sea.

The fields which are to be sown to paddy are often ploughed right after harvest and then stirred up again when fertilized some time before seeding. The ploughing is done by bullocks or tractors, or men. If it is done by sheer manpower, it is not strictly ploughing for no plow is used, but the effect on the soil is the same. When men do it directly, they use a mamoty, a large hoe with a handle about three feet long. The blade is larger and heavier than a hoe and has the same effect on the soil as if it were spaded up. But it turns over the soil about as deeply as if it were ploughed with the ancient wooden plough still used in Jaffna and likely to be used still more in the future, with the price of diesel for tractors rising steadily. The mamoty is the farmer's basic tool. He uses it for many things including burying the green manure in his fields and in preparing the soil for planting and irrigating. A different shaped mamoty blade is used for different operations; mainly there are two types.

The paddy fields are prepared in expectation of a paddy-sowing rain in late September (which arrived in 1978 only on October 19). After the earth has been moistened, the fields are sown and usually heavy monsoon rains follow before long. Some farmers sow one little corner of their field thickly and raise the plants as in a nursery. After they reach nearly a foot in height the plants are transplanted to fill the field. In the midst of the season, the farmer may buy some nursery plants to fill up empty places in his field where his seeds failed to sprout A few farmers hire a group of labourers, usually women, to weed the crop once but weeding is often omitted. For a day's weeding, a woman is paid Rs. 5 for four or five hours of work.

The last monsoon rain is supposed to fall in the first week of January and harvest begins, in the ripest fields, as soon as the field is dry, continuing for a good two months as the fields ripen. Harvest

time wages for reaping paddy as 1980 opened, went up as high as Rs. 25 for a labourer and Rs. 15 for a female labourer.

Harvest time is protracted because there are many varieties of paddy available now, some maturing in as little as three months and others requiring four, five or six months. When the harvest is finally finished, if the field contains a well, the field may be planted to chillies which require only a limited amount of irrigation, or to sunn hemp, pulses (beans) or gingelly or to cigarette tobacco all of which are capable of maturing with little or no irrigation, being sustained by an occasional shower during their three months growing period.

Many paddy growers do not own their land but rent it from landlords absent or no longer interested in the gamble. In 1978-79, an acre of paddy land rented for 50% of the harvest. Paddy land is normally rented on shares, with half of what is grown going to the landlord, or a bushel per lacham. The same land, if rented for growing of the subsidiary crops listed in the previous paragraph rented for Rs. 20 per lacham in Valigamam West in 1979. While the tenants often entered into long term leases of five or ten years, it was understood that the landlord could interrupt this arrangement by asking for more rent (in those cases where the payment was in cash) or changing the tenant if the landlord decided to do so.[254] Therefore, this was a contract that bound only one way.

As the paddy ripens, parakeets who are birds of grace and beauty in their paddy-green plumage, come to the fields, hover over a well-filled head of paddy, pull it off and take it to a perch where they eat it grain by grain. In some years, they come in large enough numbers to constitute a hazard to the crop. Their increased numbers are believed to be due to the deforestation in the Wanni.

At harvest time the paddy is cut by hand and laid in neat windrows. It is gathered up that day or the next day and shaken or beaten by hand, a handful at a time, over a large mat or canvas, or a carpet of gunny sacks. At this time 80% of the grain falls from the stalk. The straw is then stacked in a neat little hay cock or straw stack for a few weeks. Then it is scattered out in a flat heap and

[254] Selvanayagam, S., "Intensive Farming...," p. 10.

threshed again. The earth is sufficiently dry and hard that the threshing is done in a corner of the field. The task of making a special threshing floor, so necessary in the Wet Zone, is one task the Jaffna farmer is spared. There is no threshing machine in Jaffna but the time-honored way is to drive a few cattle round and round in a circle over the grain. The modern mechanized way, used by some farmers today, is to run a tractor in a circle over the pile and back and forth until that last 20% has been shaken loose. The straw can then be stored at the farmer's compound or sold.

When the harvest is finished, poor people from the neighbouring villages come to the stubble fields and dig up the rat holes which are to be found in most fields. At the end of the burrow, which generally is two to three feet long but not over one or one and one half feet deep, is approximately a large double handful of the heads of paddy stalks which the paddy rat has stored away. It is descriptive of rural poverty in Jaffna that the poor find it worth their effort to reclaim this paddy. However, most of the diggers are older women or young children and not of the usual working age. It should be added that this digging operation is less of a chore than might appear at first for to it is added the excitement of a hunt. The excitement comes when the rat is dug out and killed. Its meat is fancied by those who hunt it.

When the harvest is completed the Jaffna farmer averages around 30 bushels to the acre (see following chart). But the very best fields, such as those around the village of Kandarodai, yield as high as 80 bushels. The government guaranteed price in 1979 went from Rs. 40 to 55 per bushel. Very little home grown paddy is sold. In Jaffna, most of it is consumed by the grower and members of his extended family. Most of the rice eaten in Jaffna is imported from abroad and sent to Jaffna by lorry. Because of the soil conditions and of the large population, self-sufficiency in paddy is far beyond Jaffna.

Paddy Production in Jaffna

Year	Total Acres harvested in Jaffna District	Yield per Acre for Jaffna District	Total Acres sown in Jaffna Peninsula
1979	-	-	-
1978	75374	31.87	31889
1977	77978	33.36	31345
1976	66269	35.44	29482
1975	17740	13.81	31477
1974	80921	37.74	33067
1973	68886	36.12	32392
1972	62450	33.88	31359
1971	71311	31.63	31082
1970	71920	33.00	31295
1969	59898	23.65	26253
1968	71066	32.10	28153
1967	59898	23.65	28153
1966	75132	28.45	31078
1965	6360	16.55	29568
1964	21800	28.30	29744
1963	68761	28.50	29321
1962	66177	28.72	29155
1961	-	34.02	28704
1960	56245	25.65	27595

Tobacco

The Portuguese introduced tobacco into Jaffna in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Up to that time, the farmers of Jaffna were almost self-sustaining, producing what they needed to get through the year. Growing tobacco introduced the Jaffna farmer to the ele[illegible] of cash economy. While the Portuguese wanted tobacc[illegible]ed and made available to them as an alleged

preventative of beri-beri as well as for relaxation of the soldiers, the Jaffnese gradually began to mix the combustible comestible into their betel. Betel tasted better with addition of the nicotine.[255]

By the end of the seventeenth century, some Jaffna tobacco was being exported to India and this practice continued down to 1960, when the Indian government wiped it out with an import restriction. Even from the earliest times, however, some Indian tobacco was likewise imported into Ceylon. The two-way traffic in tobacco is presumably to be accounted for on the basis of customers' taste and choice, as well as their desire to choose their chews. Most of the tobacco going to India from Jaffna was chewing tobacco.

Cigars—The Tamil word for cigar is "cheroot" which means "to roll." The cheroot produced in Ceylon is of two varieties: wet and dry. The wet type means the cigar is soaked in *koda,* a brew of palm beer, spices and the stalks and veins of the tobacco plant, which of course makes the cigar very strong. The cigars are made in simple factory rooms and back verandas and sheds by groups of men ranging in number from five to seventy-five employees. Rings of four or five men or boys work together, the best craftsmen beginning the rolling and passing it to the others. The production per worker is 500 to 750 per day and one can earn Rs. 15 to 22 per day, after having paid one's helper. But the work is seasonal, varying with the market and the supplies. It is said that Ceylon manufactures 250 to 400 million cheroots per year and Jaffna's share in that business was alleged to be about one-seventh of the total production. There seems to be no way to get any estimate or figures, to confirm or to deny this report. Cigarettes are not manufactured in Jaffna, but in other parts of the island.

Bidis—The poor man's cigarette is called a bidi (beedi). It is a grey or grey-beige coloured, tapered imitation of a cigarette, about three inches long, hardly half the length of a regular cigarette. Its name comes from the leaf of the plant in which the tobacco is wrapped to form a bidi. It is not wrapped in tobacco leaf as is sometimes assumed. Although the name of the plant is *kadumberiya,*

[255] Manogaran, C., *op. cit.,* p. 46.

its leaves are called bidi leaves. These leaves are about six inches long by four in width and from one leaf, four or five wrappers can be cut. The bidi plant grows in Orissa in India, and will not grow in Ceylon because it requires a very hot climate.

Until 1956, bidis were imported from India. Then a company was formed in this country and in 1972, the Sri Lanka Tobacco Industries Corporation—a state corporation—took over the business. It imports 2250 metric tons of bidi leaf annually. Until very recently, all the bidi tobacco was grown at or near Galawela in Matara District. But it was decided that, beginning in 1979, the Galawela tobacco should have five percent of Jaffna tobacco added to it which would increase the nicotine content. Since the Jaffna tobacco has a high salt content, five percent is all that can be added for salt retards the rate of burning more than is desirable.

In 1979, thirty acres of bidi tobacco were planted in Jaffna, mostly around Thondamannar and Araly. Because of late planting in that year, the tobacco was harvested in August although normally the harvest is in June or July. 55,000 pounds of tobacco leaves were produced on the thirty acres which, when cured, became about 10,000 pounds. In 1980, the Corporation hopes to grow 500,000 pounds of fresh tobacco leaf in Jaffna.

After the leaves are cut off, they are cured in the sun for four days, then hung up in the shade (if no rain) or on verandas for an additional ten days. They can then be bundled into gunny wrappers with the ends of the parcel left open, and shipped to Galawela where processing and blending will take place. First grade bidi tobacco brings Rs. 10.50 per kilogram. The manufacture of bidis affords opportunity to see a cottage or domestic industry in action.

Some of the proper bidi mixture is shipped back to Jaffna to the Tobacco Industries Corporation, along with a sufficient amount of bidi leaves. These materials are given out to about a hundred bidi manufacturers, twenty-five of them in Jaffna Town alone. These persons engage groups of people, mostly women and girls, to make the bidis, rolling the leaf around a bit of blended tobacco and tying it with a thread. These are bundled together in packets of twenty-five, with a thread around each bundle. The piecework payment is Rs.

Il.00 per thousand bidis. The company contributes to the Employees' Provident Fund also. This is the domestic system, the work often being done at home, sometimes by several members of the family. In eight hours, the nimblest workers can make a thousand bidis. Working in a social group, the "bee" effect reduces the monotony.

The thread-wrapped packets, each with twenty-five bidis, are called "thread bidis" or *nool bidi.* Those who make them deposit hundreds of them at a church on Main Street, Jaffna, where an active cottage industry continues in a second stage, employing about 250 girls and young women. The bundles of bidis are distributed to these latter women in lots of 5,000 to 10,000 or more. Sheets of tiny coloured strips of paper have to be cut with scissors, coated with paste and one band of paper wrapped around each bidi, covering the individual thread which holds it together. For banding one thousand bidis the worker is paid one rupee. The hardest working and most skillful employees make up to ten rupees a day.

As the thousands of bidis, with their bright little bands on each one, are returned to the centre at the church, five or six men put twenty packets at a time (500 bidis) into packages of coloured paper printed in four colours.

Forty thousand bidis are sold to wholesalers for Rs. 1400 and eventually they are retailed for five cents each, generally in bundles of twenty-five. Formerly a good many bidis were smuggled into Jaffna but by 1980 those manufactured in Jaffna and elsewhere seemed to meeting the need.

All of this activity begins with unbelievably tiny seeds of tobacco, almost as fine as dust, being planted in nursery beds to produce seedlings. A single ounce of these seeds, costing two rupees, will produce sufficient plants for five acres at 5,000 to 6,000 plants per acre.

Chewing tobacco—Jaffna for generations produced salt-treated chewing tobacco which was exported to Travancore (Kerala) in South India. It is rarely chewed in Jaffna—betel is very much preferred. The salt water treatment was given by quickly dipping the bundle of six to eight dozen tobacco leaves into a vat of sea water taken from the Jaffna lagoon. The tobacco chewers of Travancore

evidently felt that the salinity of the lagoon was just right. After dipping, the bundles were stored for three weeks, then dried, baled and shipped. This is the business that was stopped by a quota system and very high duty in 1960. But there continues to be a market for tobacco and the Jaffna farmer continues to grow it. For a good many farmers it is the number one cash crop. In recent years, the market for cigars and chewing tobacco has declined and while for a time there was hope for a market in cigarette tobacco, this market has remained relatively weak because the Jaffna soil produces only poor quality cigarette tobacco and therefore the farmers receive a low price for their crop. However, some cigarette tobacco is grown each year. More details on cigarette tobacco are given at the end of the Appendix to this chapter.

Cigar tobacco: Appendix—The above may be all the information about tobacco which some of my readers require. If so, they can move on to a subsequent chapter or to the next section which deals with onions and chillies, which give flavour to much of the rice consumed at many a meal in Jaffna. For those who want more details of Jaffna's intensive agricultural picture, an excellent account has been prepared by Dr. C. Manogaran (the son of a gentleman tobacco farmer in Jaffna) who now teaches geography at the University of Wisconsin in the United States, and who has given me permission to quote and to paraphrase his account freely. That description is in the Appendix to this chapter. These details show both how cigar tobacco is raised and how intensive agriculture is carried out with little or no use of modern machinery.

The farmer who owns or rents a quarter-acre farm and clears only several hundred rupees a year is obviously not going to be investing his money in much beyond subsistence living. Those farmers who have more land grow cash crops like tobacco, onions and chillies because with the cash they can buy water pumps (more than 60% of the tobacco farmers of Jaffna bought pumps in the period 1955 to 1965), improve their houses and give a better education to their daughters and sons. They maximize their earning of cash by employing as little non-family labour as possible. It usually costs nothing to market their cash crops; the persons who grow them carry them to market where they are sold, except for

tobacco—the dealers come to the farmers' houses or fields to make an offer for their tobacco.

When one sees how hard the farmer and his family have to work to earn a profit of a thousand rupees for the year, it is of interest to see how much he is willing to spend on a funeral, a temple festival and the construction of a house for his daughter's dowry. If the quarter-acre is his only resource, there is not likely to be much of a dowry, other than the farmstead itself.

Like so many farmers the world over, the tobacco farmer is not sure of the price he will receive after all his hard work. He is not sure if he will raise his tobacco plants to maturity since he is at the mercy of the weatherman who is, indeed, a fair weather friend! However, irrigation delivers him from most of the vagaries of the weather, making him much better off than the paddy farmer. But in addition to his natural enemies, the farmer has a very threatening enemy in his government or in the government of India which can affect him as disastrously as a hailstorm by making a sudden regulation of the crop which he has just produced. In the 1970's, the Jaffna farmer got high prices for his onions and chillies for several years; in 1979, the government of Sri Lanka permitted enough chillies to be imported from India to spoil the price which the Jaffna farmer hoped to receive. In 1979, one tobacco farmer told me that he had produced very much the same amount of tobacco last year and this year but that the price dropped and his profit in this year was one-tenth that of 1978.

Persons with garden plots are sometimes forced to grow tobacco even though they may prefer vegetables, if they suffer from nocturnal thefts.

Onions and Chillies

The importance of onions and chillies in the economy of Ceylon and of Jaffna is strikingly underscored by this fact: the farmers of the entire island devote approximately 120,000 acres to chillies and about the same amount to onions each year. In Jaffna Peninsula, about 12,500 acres are devoted to each crop—roughly one-tenth of the national total. But in Jaffna Peninsula's one-tenth of the area,

65% of the total chillies and 90% of the nation's total of onions are grown.

Tobacco Chillies and Red Onions Produced in Jaffna

	Tobacco		Chillies		Red Onions	
Year	Acres	Cwt.	Acres	Cwt.	Acres	Cwt.
1977	1596	111353	8520	95553	8959	680735
1976	2562	85434	7425	70801	9051	758465
1975	5664	296988	8683	60551	8749	1407750
1974	2581	299774	5209	67465	7317	719468
1973	3117	83393	4476	40139	6884	631661
1972	3914	137308	4789	56415	7679	630337
1971	3989	78779	3085	37897	6611	603702
1970	3858	89074	2746	35547	6690	621888
1969	2791*	117317*	2647	37340	6658	594383
1968	2923*	73855*	2705	42159	5613	449247
1967	3512	50626	1039	9994	6144	539298
1966	438	9996	1217	23816	4604	420377
1965	2999	16709	1481	21245	4892	407406
1964	6478	142218	1624	23143	4365	369483
1963	1967*	140502*	1274	27212	6374	564494

*Tobacco figures for 1969, 1968 and 1963 are incomplete.

These statistics on onions and chillies which originate at Jaffna University impressively illustrate the intensive nature of Jaffna's garden agriculture and show that the Jaffna man "knows his onions." The onions we are talking about are small, red onions not the larger white onions known in Ceylon as "Bombay onions."

The great heat which chillies add to the flavour of curries somehow conveys the impression that chillie plants are strong and hardy. Actually they are extremely vulnerable to rain. If an

unseasonable rain comes before the chillies mature, it destroys much of the crop.

The future of red onions and chillies in Jaffna as a money crop is not bright. Various experts have informed me that it would be better for the economy of Ceylon if onions and chillies were imported and if Jaffna farmers raised other crops. The reason for this advice is that the onions and chillies can be imported from India for less than what it costs the Jaffna farmer to grow them. Onions and chillies also require fertilizers, weedicides and insecticides which not only cost the country foreign exchange but which constitute a considerable fraction of the production cost to the farmer.

On the other side of the argument is the fact that the government's import practices are clumsy, resulting in temporary shortages, sometimes temporary gluts and the spoiling of large quantities of onions from time to time.

Costs of Cultivation of Chillies and Red Onions

(Per Acre, Fall, 1978, in rupees)

	Onions	*Chillies*
Land Preparation		
Disc ploughing/mamoty work	Rs. 200	
Tyne tilling/ mamoty work	160	
Main channel	60	
Manure and manuring		
2-3 lorry loads cow manure, Rs. 1100 ea.	2200	3300
Unloading and spreading	200	
Tyning/ mamoty mixing	160	
Planting onions		
20 cwts. at Rs. 250 per cwt.	5000	
Making beds and channels	320	
Planting labour	224	
Planting chillies		
20,000 seedlings at 2 cents ea. 400		
Lining and marking		60
Planting		224
Hand watering 3 times daily, 1 week		300

2 cwts. urea application and stirring		260
After care (onions)	*Onions*	*Chillies*
3 weedings by hand (40 women, Rs. 6/ day)	720	
Fertilizer 6 cwts. at Rs. 85 ea	510	
Labour for application	60	
Furrow irrigation		
Opening furrows and ridges		160
4 cwts. chillie mixture application and stirring		380
Bed irrigation (chillies)		
Mamotying area, making beds, channels		160
4 cwts. chillie mixture, application and stirring		380
2 cwts. urea application and stirring		260
Loosening soil, handweeding 4 times		500
Irrigation and distribution of water	1200	2600
Pest and disease control (onions)		
Insecticides and fungicides	600	
Labour for spraying	250	
Pest and disease control (chillies)		
Components of spray:		
Insecticides, 16 oz. Rs. 90		
Fungicides, 16 oz. Rs. 40		
Miticide, 16 oz. Rs.12		
Labor cost per sprayer Rs. 1, 40 gals./acre 2500		
Average spraying: 25 times in 6 months		
Harvesting onions		
Labour	250	
Preparing for market	500	
Harvesting chillies		
8 picks, 25 women each, Rs. 6 per day		1200
Drying and grading		350
Rent of land on lease	300	1200
Yield per acre (onions)		
100 cwts minus 15 cwts for drainage = 85 net cwts.		

Rs. 12,914 divided by 85 = 151.93 per cwt.
Cost per lb,: 1.35; World price .70

Yield per acre (chillies)	*Onions*	*Chillies*
15 cwts		
Rs. 15,000 divided by 15 = 1,000 per cwt.		
Cost per lb,: 8.93; world price 7.00		
Total costs: Rs.	12,914	15,018

Note: A second crop of onions can be grown during the year. The manure put on the land for the first planting would not need to be renewed for the later planting and so the cost would be much reduced.

Millions of Palms[256]

The grandparents of the mature adults in Jaffna today lived in a time when the poorest people of the Peninsula existed for much of every year on the products of two kinds of palm trees: the palmyra and the coconut. Since the poorest were apt to have no coconuts, the palmyra furnished half or more of their sustenance. The palmyra palm (Borassus Flabellifer) may be called the father of the Jaffna man; the coconut is his mother. The palmyra is a fan palm; the coconut is a member of the family called feather palm.

If one wants to be uncomplimentary, he can say the palmyra is a weed palm which will virtually grow on a concrete pavement. Its regular abode is land which is good for nothing; the food it produces is much inferior to the product of the coconut palm and its chief

[256] My chief sources for information on the palm trees of Jaffna, in addition to interviews, are: Ceylon Coconut Commission, *Report of the Palmyrah Industry Committee,* 1972, Colombo; Ferguson, W., *The Palmyra Palm,* 2nd ed., 1888, Colombo; Saverimuttu, A., "The industrial and economic potential of the palmyrah palm," *Industrial Ceylon,* 1971, Colombo; Child, "The Destructive Distillation of Coconut Shells," *The Tropical Agriculturist,* vol. 93, Oct. 1939; Ferguson, J., "The Coconut Palm in Ceylon," *Journal, Ceylon British Royal Asiatic Society,* vol. 19, no. 57, 1906. There is a joke in Sri Lanka to the effect that the island boasts 29 varieties of palm, including the outstretched.

contribution for human consumption (toddy), is frequently turned into palm beer or whiskey which offends the religious and moral views of a considerable portion of the society. By Brahmans especially, it is therefore called the Devil's tree (although the more beloved coconut also produces toddy). But the palmyra is the symbol of Jaffna; if the region had a flag the palmyra would be on it. It is certainly cherished in Jaffna and we hasten to proclaim its virtues.

The palmyra provides the Jaffna man with food, drink, fuel, baskets and mats, fencing, rope, fertilizer, medicine and timber. It is called in Tamil *katpaha virudsham:* the heavenly tree that supplies everything. To begin with the food, even today many people in Jaffna get some of their basic starch from the sprouts which come from the mounds of palmyra nuts buried in the earth of their compounds. Frequently these roots are ground up to make flour, but they can be consumed in other forms as well, especially a popular porridge. Sometimes the juice is extracted from the nut; more often the pulp is dried and used as a sweet; molasses and jam can be made from the pulp-juice. But the best known food product taken from the palmyra is a drink called toddy—sweet toddy if consumed shortly after being tapped, fermented toddy if allowed a very few hours to generate a small percentage of alcohol. By the end of six to eight hours, toddy will contain 3% or more of alcohol. A little lime in the pot prevents fermentation. If allowed to ferment further, the hard toddy can be distilled into arrack-palm whiskey. Returning to the sweet toddy, it can be treated like the sap of the American maple tree, evaporated by boiling and made into syrup or brown sugar.

Every two years the leaves of the palmyra are harvested, leaving only a tuft of four or five leaves at the very top of the tree. Thirty to forty leaves are obtained from each tree and one leaf, or *ola,* sells for ten cents—a mere Rs. 2 or 3 realized from leaves biennially. Before this book could be completed, the price of one leaf had risen to forty cents, making the biennial revenue four times as attractive.

The palmyra's leaves provide a great variety of baskets of all shapes and sizes, often reinforced with fibres stripped from the stem of the leaf. To a small extent these fibres are used for rope or cord. A very common use of the leaves is for fencing. Not even tough

palm leaves are particularly permanent, however, and these have to be renewed every two years. When replaced, the old leaves, riddled by white ants, are used for organic manure. Even the fresh green leaf may be buried for organic manure, although this is relatively expensive fertilizer. When green, the leaves are also sliced into strips and then into bits and used for cattle food if the farmer has palmyra available and insufficient grass or hay.

Ayurvedic medical practitioners use palmyra in a variety of decoctions, essentially as a diuretic, a laxative or a vermifuge. Sugar crystals from palmyra treacle are used as cough medicine. Palmyra fruit is said to be a cure for thread worms. While scientific tests of these alleged qualities are lacking so far, it has been substantiated that the yeast produced by toddy contains vitamin B 1 complex and it has been found in India that the population does not suffer from B 1 deficiency in areas where the palmyra is abundant.[257] It is unfortunate that with all the doctors and scientists who come from Jaffna, not one, I believe, has tried to test palmyra, or any other natural medicines, to see if they have verifiable medicinal value.

Sometimes the palmyra leaf is used as an umbrella or woven into various styles of straw hats.

The palmyra also provides some remarkable timber. A palmyra must be quite old (estimates vary from 40 to 80 years) before its pithy, fibrous, useless wood hardens up into the rock-like quality which makes it last virtually forever. Some knowledgeable Jaffnese insist that the palmyra must be a hundred years old before its wood is really hard. Most well-sweeps and all rafters of every house in Jaffna are made of palmyra. As long as termites are not allowed to feed on them (which calls for an occasional application of solignum, a liquid tar), it is doubtful if palmyra wood ever wears out. Across the rafters, to support the tiles of the roof, long narrow laths, called reepers, also are palmyra products. The wood itself, on those rare occasions on which it is tooled and used for finer furniture, takes a very high polish and is black, streaked with brown, and very handsome. Coconut wood is a paler grey and brown colour, with the

[257] Ceylon Coconut Commission, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

same grain when polished but less striking in appearance. The timber of the coconut palm is said to be weaker than palmyra and is not often used for building purposes. Perhaps the chief reason why it is not used for building is that hardly any is available. Coconut palms are rarely cut for timber, unlike palmyra, but occasionally rafters or well sweeps are made of coconut, especially in other parts of the island.

There is one more category that separates these two palms: their holiness! The palmyra is not regarded as holy by any means, particularly in South India although the attitude seems surprisingly ungrateful towards a tree which has done so much for the Tamil people. Little of this negative feeling for the palmyra is found in Jaffna, although the palmyra is omitted from religious rites. The coconut is just the opposite. It is used in a great many Hindu ceremonies in the home, in the temple, or in the religious practices connected with paddy cultivation. Next to flower petals and camphor, the coconut is the most common offering at a Hindu temple. Although it is said that in India no palmyra wood, mat, basket or product of any kind would be permitted in a temple, the practice in Sri Lanka is more tolerant in that palmyra rafters and reefers support the orange-red tiles of the temples as commonly as those of the homes of the worshippers.

Even though it is no longer true today, in the past when paper was non-existent in Ceylon, scholars wrote on sections of the leaves of the palmyra or coconut with a metal stylus. The letters were then rubbed with a mixture of oil and charcoal, to make them clearly readable, the pages stacked up, a hole drilled at each end of each strip and a cord inserted, to constitute a book or a chapter. Both the page and the leaf itself are referred to as an *ola*, the Tamil word for palm leaf. Many of these *olas* are in the libraries of Jaffna and elsewhere.

Toddy Tappers—All too often the daily paper notes the death of a Toddy Tapper, or palm tree Climber, who was a member of one of the three most dangerous occupations in Sri Lanka, the others perhaps being electrical work and fishing. From time immemorial, the removal of the inspiring juice of the palm trees has been assigned to one or two castes who might deserve a little respect for

the skill and courage required to carry out their work. Instead, the Tree Climbers have been relegated to outcaste status, that is, untouchable. This is something of an anomaly in the caste system because the Tapper handles food, in liquid form, and high-caste Hindus are usually extremely careful about whose hands have gone into the making of their food and drink. No untouchable is welcome to cook in any strict Hindu home today and such a home is generally prohibitionist in outlook—shunning toddy and other alcoholic beverages.

Trees are not tapped until after they begin to bloom for it is the bloom which is tapped. By that time, the tree is nearly twenty years old and 25-30 feet high. The average Tapper can work at any one time 15-25 trees per day in the season (late January or February to late July or August)—a good six months. (They keep switching trees, however, as one tree can be tapped for only a few weeks.) But this number of 15 to 25 would be a privilege compared to the very few trees which most of the Tappers are allocated in these times of severe Tapper underemployment. Most of the Tappers belong to one of the eighteen Palm Products Sales Cooperatives which attempt to spread the tapping business among 7,000 Tappers. Four thousand more would like to belong but there is absolutely no work for them. The Cooperative organizes and rations the work by dealing with the 264 toddy taverns, allocating to one tavern, for example, twenty tappers and eighty trees.[258]

Less than two percent of the palmyras of Jaffna are tapped. Few Tappers own palmyras or coconuts. They depend on the cooperation of landowners, whom they generally pay Rs. 10-15 per tree (usually in kind), to permit them to tap. Many landowners do not wish to grant the permission for various reasons. The soberest reason is that the owners may be opposed to toddy-drinking or they may not enjoy having socially low caste people around on their property. Also, the low compensation is not appealing. Owners may find it aesthetically or religiously more pleasing to harvest the cannonball-like palmyra fruit (averaging fifty per tree). Each fruit contains three nuts

[258] A doctor informed me that he had noticed that the number of assault cases treated by him had increased after the coming of the toddy taverns.

(occasionally two). The nuts when buried in heaps of earth will send out a long, white starchy root as a sprout, which can be sold for ten cents; average yield per tree, Rs. 12.

For several days before the palm juice begins to flow, the Tapper has ascended the trees daily and bruised the end of the bloom or spathe, which after a week of such punishment begins to weep its effervescent tears. One wonders how a process was ever discovered which depends upon a man's climbing a dangerously tall palmyra tree once or twice a day for nearly a week before any result can be seen. Since it does not seem to be the kind of discovery which would come by accident, there are those who believe the knowledge of how to get toddy from the palmyra must have come by divine revelation!

From two to five or six pots are left in the top of each tree. To climb these trees early each morning and again late in the afternoon is hard work. Clad in little more than a loincloth, with a collection pot and a little box of his tools fastened to his belt, and with a breastplate of leather to prevent the skin on his chest being worn off by the climbing process, the Tapper puts a circlet of palmyra fibre around his ankles which also are protected from too much wear and tear by leather pieces.[259] He then plants his bare feet on the base of the trunk as he embraces it. With his ankles thus confined, his body weight forces his feet against the trunk so tightly that no slipping is possible. His life depends on the strength of that circlet and the fact that his feet will not slip. He embraces the tree and raises his feet one step, stands up, embraces the tree one step higher up, elevates his feet another step and so proceeds until he is safely among the tuft of leaves which crown the spear-like palm. Once aloft, he pours the toddy from the clay pots[260] into which it has been flowing or dripping

[259] It is appropriate to state here, a little facetiously, that the only person in Jaffna with a clearly visible halo is the occasional Tapper who wears on his head the circlet on which his life depends. When he is walking or bicycling to work, he carries the circlet on his head in such a way that it scarcely touches his head and gives the appearance of a thin but substantial halo. Carrying objects on one's head is a common practice in Jaffna and leaves the hands free.

for half a day, into the pot he has on his belt and descends, hug-step, hug-step, back to terra firma.

It is a little surprising, perhaps, that aerial ropeways[261] for palmyra tapping have not been adopted in Jaffna wherever the trees are close enough together to warrant it. But in most places, the trees are too widely scattered to make the ropeways practicable. Coconut husks could be tied on the trunk for footholds, which would make climbing a bit easier. Now and then such footholds are seen in Jaffna, but rarely. Methods of climbing in Jaffna have varied scarcely at all for centuries; in the Philippines and some other countries they have been made better and safer.

In 1927, Mahatma Gandhi visited Jaffna. In the wake of his visit, there was a new enthusiasm for prohibition and some people believe that the Tree Tax system was instituted for the regulation of toddy tapping as a result of Gandhi's visit. But the Tree Tax began in 1937, a full decade after his visit and can only partially, if at all, be connected with the Mahatma who, after all, wanted prohibition, not regulation.

The aim of the Tree Tax system was to reduce the consumption of toddy by requiring that the toddy be sold in the areas immediately adjoining where it was tapped. So the Tapper paid a tree tax and then he and his family operated a selling booth near where they worked. The annual tax was not increased in forty-five years and the Tappers realized more money from the new system so they supported it strongly but gradually lost control of the family booth to *mudalalis* (local businessmen). In 1971, there were 2,000 toddy

[260] Ornithologists tell us that many species of birds quench their thirst at the toddy pot sheltered in the top of a palm tree. Ferguson, W., *The Palmyra Palm,* p. 30. Whether this affects the navigational faculties of the birds is not known.

[261] Coir ropes are strung about 15-20 feet from the ground which saves the climber having to go down that many feet on the tree he is in and climbing that many feet up the next tree to which the ropeway is attached. These ways are best suited to coconut palms which are set at regular distances from one another in plantations, unlike the palmyra palms.

booths in Jaffna Region and 15,000 Tappers. In 1978 there were, as stated, 264 toddy taverns and 7,000 partly employed Tappers.

In 1972, the Tree Tax system was abolished so the Tappers now sell directly to the operators of the taverns. The average yield per tree is a gallon, or a little over, per day or as much as 45 gallons in a month but it varies from tree to tree and from season to season, and the main part of the season has better production than either end of the season. Some trees on the islands where palmyras particularly flourish produce as much as two and one-half gallons of toddy in a day. A tree which produces six bottles (one bottle) per day yields four bottles in the morning and two in the evening. The male palmyra yields three to four bottles per day; the female six. The female toddy is sweeter; the male's contains more alcohol, so it ferments more quickly.

The eighteen Palm Products Sales Cooperative Societies of Jaffna Peninsula bring in toddy daily and that which is not sold immediately is supposed to be gotten rid of. Coconut toddy will keep for several days and none of it has to be disposed of other than by sale. Some excess palmyra toddy is sold to the State Distilleries Corporation at Kaithady for Rs. 2.70 per gallon if the alcohol content is at least 5%. But only two of the eighteen cooperatives are allowed to sell to the Distillery.

At the Distillery during 1979 receipts of toddy have been about 12,000 gallons per month which are distilled into one thousand gallons of arrack at a strength of 50% alcohol. This product is sent to the large distillery at Seeduwa on the edge of Colombo where it is bottled after being diluted to 30%. Recent production at Kaithady has been:

1975	4376 gallons
1976	1549
1977	1750
1978	2000
1979	4000 (5 months only)

The Kaithady Distillery is the one place in Jaffna where arrack is legally and commercially distilled. A dozen persons work there

the year round but the palmyra toddy from which the arrack comes is available for only six months of the year, February through July. The workers, however, are paid for the year and do some maintenance work during the off season. There is discussion of trying to process toddy from coconut trees in the off season but the volume would be very small. Although the Distillery production is not large and the overhead is high, the manager says that it pays for itself. At any rate, the State Distillery Corporation reported a profit in 1978 of Rs. 800 million.

Palm sugar—Palm sugar is produced in many Tapper cottages in Jaffna by boiling the sweet toddy. It requires roughly a gallon of toddy to make a pound of sugar. Some authorities say one gallon will make a pound of jaggery (syrup) but one and one-fourth gallons are required for a pound of sugar. The "palmy days" for Tappers were 1975 and 1976 when imported white sugar was selling at Rs. 6 per lb. so palmyra sugar at a little less found a ready r. arket. Three sugar centres and 65 jaggery centres were established in Jaffna at that time. These buildings mostly stand empty now as monuments to the sugar subsidy provided by the new government in 1977 which set the price of imported sugar at Rs. 3 and wiped out the palmyra sugar business. It should be pointed out, in defense of the policy change, that the sugar subsidy benefited all the citizens of Ceylon except the Tappers engaged in making sugar.

Signs of prosperity—A sign of progress in the toddy tapping business, presumably dating from 1975 and 1976, is the number of Tappers who ride a bicycle to work. Another sign is the five gallon drum secured on the rear of the cycle, to hold the toddy, as it is collected, but the signs of prosperity among the Tappers are rather modest.

The palmyra palm is incredibly abundant in Jaffna. In 1971 the Ceylon Coconut Commission concluded there were 7,700,000 palmyras in Jaffna, covering 42,000 of the 70,000 acres of palmyra which exist in the entire country. This is an average of eleven palmyras for each resident in Jaffna! Yet, as mentioned above, less than two percent are tapped. Even in Jaffna Town only 4% of the palmyras were tapped (or were the figures reduced by cautious homeowners?). W. Ferguson has determined that 300 palmyras can

grow on an acre with reasonable spacing.[262] On estates, coconuts are given much more space and run 75 to 100 per acre.

Coconut—The coconut was named by the Portuguese from their word for monkey (macoco) since the three black spots on the end of a coconut shell look like the face of a monkey. Even though the palmyra is a sentimental favourite in Jaffna and its lore is deep in the heart of most Tamils, the coconut does more for the country. The coconut seems high class, the palmyra plebeian. The coconut is like a horse; the palmyra like a bull. The coconut adds richness to the flavour of curry in Jaffna; the palmyra doesn't. The coconut has a certain elegance denied the palmyra. It takes trouble and planning to grow coconuts; palmyras spring up just like weeds. Tests indicate that palmyras will grow in soil which is 95% sand.[263] The coconut's enhanced reputation is doubtless due to the vast attention focused on it in Sri Lanka's coconut estates which in 1978 covered an estimated 1,200,000 acres of the country.[264]

The nine major products of the coconut are:

The water and pulp of the young coconut, used as a fresh drink
The mature pulp
Copra, the dried kernel
Coconut oil (squeezed from copra)
Oilcake or *poonac*, the residue after the oil is extracted
Desiccated coconut made from the fresh kernel of the ripe nut
Coir fibre, made from the husk of the nut
Toddy
Arrack

The latter two products are more expensive than palmyra toddy and arrack because they have a better taste and a little higher alcoholic content. The higher price is also due to the fact that coconut palms yield considerably less toddy per day than do palmyras—averaging a mere two to three bottles per day. But they

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[262] *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

[263] *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1978-79, p. 36.

[264] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

produce twelve months of the year as compared to six weeks for individual male palmyras and three months for the average female tree. Palmyra toddy is Rs. 1.25 at the tavern; coconut toddy is Rs. 2. Coconut arrack produced by private distilleries was purchased by the State Distilleries Corporation at Rs. 38.40 a gallon from 1 January, 1976, thirty cents per gallon over 1975. This includes a payment of Rs. 4 per gallon of pure toddy to the contractor and a payment of Rs. 1.50 per gallon to the Tapper.[265] In 1978, sales of palmyra and coconut toddy in Jaffna totaled Rs. 28 million; coconut was only 2 million of that.

Jaffna estates—There are coconut estates in the sandy, southern tracts of Jaffna Peninsula. The acreage around Pallai (A. G. A.'s division) is about 3,000; in all of Jaffna Region it is estimated that there are 7,000 acres of coconut, which seems low. Compared to the 7.7 million palmyras there are only about 700,000 coconut palms if we figure 100 per acre for 7,000 acres. Incidentally, a coconut must be five to ten years old before it produces fruit.

Areas of Land under Principal Crops (Acres)
All Ceylon

	Tea	Rubber	Coconut	Paddy
1971	597,171	567,994	1,152,428*	1,448,403
1972	597,645	567,002		1,439,874
1973	598,740	564,824		1,498,487
1974	598,466	563,406		1,533,568
1975	597,691	562,494		1,557,680
1976	594,481	560,872		1,589,776
1977	598,024	559,850	1,200,000	2,050,000
1978	600,226	559,257	1,200,000	2,160,000

*This figure is from the 1962 agricultural census to 1976.

Cadjan—The leaf of the coconut is even more useful than the palmyra leaf, hard as that may be to believe. The long narrow

[265] *Sri Lanka Yearbook* 1977, p. 126.

fronds, already split into neat, narrow strips, are much more numerous than the palmyra's for the coconut is two to three times the area of a palmrya leaf. And the product which the coconut can contribute uniquely is the "Jaffna man's plywood"—cadjan (pictured near the front of the book). Two cadjans come from a single coconut leaf as it is split down the middle. On each half, the fronds are split to the middle rib and then braided to form a neat, tough panel about four feet long and fifteen inches wide. Cadjans have an immense variety of uses: the compound wall, the wall of poor people's huts, sheds for cattle, temporary structures to guide crowds at the stadium, a sun shade and the roof of country carts.

Ekel—The rib of the frond of the coconut palm is stiff when dry, and produces a quill nearly two feet long which is called an *ekel. Ekels* are bound together to form a stiff, durable broom. Some are also used as the tails of rockets in the fireworks industry.

Coir—An important by-product of the coconut industry is coir, the coarse fibre obtained from the husk of the coconut by wetting it in sea water or by mechanical beating. The fibres are spun into ropes and mats or rugs of many kinds. The matting of a cricket pitch is coir and so are some fishing and tennis nets. Wide mesh gunny bags are also made of coir.

Other products—In Sri Lanka, vinegar is distilled from the coconut juice and a great deal of the oil used for cooking is coconut oil. The shell, when polished, lends itself easily to the production of many handsome curios. Coconut shells, when made into charcoal, find a ready market in the West as a fine quality activated charcoal, useful in a number of medical and chemical products. It requires 20,000 coconut shells to produce a ton of charcoal![266]

Fond of salt—Both palms seem to thrive on salt, unlike most other plants. Salt water near their roots and salt-laden air all around seem to be good for them, although they will also grow many miles from the sea. Coconuts were found growing on an island over which the tide washed twice daily! Local proverbs suggest that the coconut palm requires the presence of men or it will languish. Those

[266] Child, "The Destructive Distillation of Coconut Shells," p. 1.

abandoned in isolated areas, it is said, gradually die off.[267] So they should thrive in Jaffna, surrounded by a considerable population, all of which is appreciative of the fruit of the coconut and palmyra palms.

Fruitful Trees

In addition to the two palms, there are several other trees which produce food in Jaffna. The most beloved and prized of these is the mango, of which Jaffna produces a great surplus. The people "down south" believe that the best mangos come from Jaffna while in Jaffna, the name of the best variety is Columban—grown, however, here and not in Colombo.

It is hard to explain why a fruit so delicious is relatively unnoticed in the United States where it grows mainly in Florida. Perhaps its lack of popularity there is due to its messiness—it is harder to eat in a neat fashion than any other fruit in the world. It has to be peeled for the skin has a very bad taste and peeling it liberates quantities of thick, orange coloured juice, very sweet, which is soon dripping from one's chin and hands until the art of a more graceful approach is mastered. When the children attack this delicacy, their noses and elbows are also stained and they must be half bathed before they can return to the table. The mango is hard to eat becau its choice centre portion is wrapped around a very large seed which occupies about a quarter or third of the entire fruit. To eat the fruit from around the seed is the juiciest part of the task.

When seeds have been bred out of oranges entirely and the thorns bred off certain species of cactus, it is a great pity that the giant seed of the mango has not been eliminated but continues to annoy those who enjoy mangoes. We urgently hope that some one in

[267] This belief seems to be current in the main part of the island, rather than in the Peninsula. It is possible that it originated because the elephants knock over coconut palms because they like the tender leaves and blooms that grow in the top. So coconuts abandoned in mainland areas would eventually be destroyed in their isolated state as elephants happened by. There are no elephants in Jaffna despite the suggestive name of Elephant Pass, a relic of history.

the Agricultural Research Station in Thirunelveli will take up the wonderful challenge of the seedless mango. Or even to produce mangoes with seed reduced half or more in size would cause untold joy to millions of people. The actual service to humanity of the average Nobel Prize winner would be dim in comparison.

Mangoes are of very many colours from black green to a beautiful orange with rosy red cheeks. Others are of various shades of green and yellow or both together. The flavours vary greatly. Some have a taste of kerosene which no one likes. Some have a rather thin flavour. The favourites are very sweet and have almost unidentifiable hints of licorice (anise) or grape.

A number of small canning factories in Jaffna tin mangoes or bottle the juice and some of these products are exported.

The mango tree, unlike the palms and especially the papaya, furnishes a thick and welcome shade which helps to moderate the temperature. A mango leaf is narrow and six to nine inches long but I once found a giant specimen which measured eighteen inches in length.

Although this does not seem to be true in India, so close at hand, a wonderful thing about mangoes in Jaffna is that they have two seasons for bearing, rather than one. In the rainy season of November through January, a smaller harvest of mangoes comes whereas the regular harvest is May through July. If the rains come late, mangoes are fairly abundant in the offseason. For example, in 1978 there were no rains in Jaffna until October 19th. By that time a host of mango blossoms were mature and the rain did not spoil them. Mangoes were in the Jaffna market from early October until the end of February—an additional bonanza of five months.

The orange and lime trees of Jaffna produce a great deal of fruit each year and their juice makes a very refreshing drink. The orange, however, seems somewhat misnamed since it stubbornly retains its original green colour and usually does not become orange. However, its juice is fairly sweet when it is fully ripe.

If the mango has a rival for the title of best loved fruit, it is the plantain or small banana. Jaffna produces around half a million (five

lakhs) bunches each year and certainly they are the staple fruit of rich and poor alike, though the very poorest may get very few plantains unless they grow them themselves.

The plantain is hardly a tree. It is scarcely tall enough to qualify but more importantly it is a cluttered collection of stumpy trunks and additional sprouts wrapped round with loose covers of fibre flapping in the ever-present breeze while the big leaves, which crown the untidy whole, sway gracefully over the great green plant. A plantain has a few more leaves than it actually needs and farmers cut these off and sell them to traders who cut each leaf in thirds or fourths and use them like "paper plates"—as throw-away plates on which to serve rice and curry. An inquiry as to the price of plantain leaves results in a brief demonstration of market forces in Jaffna. The average cost of plantain leaves is Rs. 8 per hundred. The average price represents the fact that from October through December the price is low at Rs. 5 because the rainy season brings plenty of good, firm leaves. In May through August the price is higher because the high wind makes it difficult to find leaves which are not split or torn. So the price goes to Rs. 8-10. And in May and June when the greatest number of weddings take place and the high wind has begun already, the price sometimes reaches Rs. 15 especially if there are several weddings in the same neighbourhood.

Although the coconut is the most common fruit used in temple worship, both the lime and the plantain are also used.

Whenever there is a festive occasion which demands that the home or a new building should be decorated and an ornamental arch or gateway *(pandal)* be erected—a universal custom throughout the entire island—the plantain often dominates the scene. Two entire stalks are brought and secured, one on each side of the entrance of the compound or building. Later a whole bunch of ripe plantains is tied into each plant—the ultimate symbol of overflowing hospitality.

From the Gardens of Jaffna

Other trees bring their fruit to Jaffna besides the palms, the mangoes and the plantains: lime, orange, papaya, pineapple, jak, breadfruit, drumstick and cashew.

The vegetables regularly grown in Jaffna are: green gram, cowpea, potato, sweet potato, manioc, ground nut (peanut), chilli, red onion, tomato, carrot, beetroot, green beans, cabbage, cucumber, bitter gourd, snake gourd, ash pumpkin, red pumpkin, ash plantain, okra, brinjal (eggplant) and *mineri.*

Three grains are paddy, kurukkan and maize. In a class by themselves in more than one sense, are the newcomer fruit grapes, pomegranate (which grows on a bush) and the ancient and beloved gingelly. The total comes to forty different edible plants. Not even in rugged Jaffna should people go unfed.

The mango and the drumstick are ideal trees for Jaffna as they weather droughts very successfully. Cashew nuts, coconuts and mangoes have the immense advantage that they can grow in sand. The production of cashew nuts is only beginning in Jaffna. Several small plantings have taken place in Jaffna Peninsula and at least one on the island of Karainagar. It is to be hoped that the production of cashews will steadily rise as they could make a small but important contribution to agricultural income.

Casuerina trees grow naturally near Pt. Pedro and on Karainagar. Some have been planted near Pallai but the planting of casuerina in Jaffna is nowhere near as extensive as one would expect to observe in an area short of firewood. They need to be on a scale comparable to that on the seacoast south of Madras, India.

The Jaffna Bull

As the plant kingdom's symbol in Jaffna is the palmyra and the kingdom of man is the yarl, so the animal kingdom is symbolized by the bull. The typical Jaffna bull is small, tough, nimble and durable. The bull is used chiefly for ploughing and for pulling carts; sometimes for treading out the paddy in threshing. One or two bulls are hitched to a cart, depending on its size. The biggest "covered wagon" type of cart, with a roof nearly twelve feet long, made of cadjan, is scarcely to be found in Jaffna any more. (Because of its size it was generally pulled by the largest bulls, white in colour, which came from India and which are still commonly seen in Jaffna.) All Jaffna carts are two-wheeled; four-wheeled wagons are

something new and are pulled by the tractors which have come in since the late 1950's. The carter sits at the front of the cart and urges the bull or bulls forward with harsh cries, often kicking the bull in the tenderest part of the bull's anatomy presented to him and sometimes twisting the tail or even biting it. Some bulls' tails are quite knotty from having been broken many times. Knots as a measure of speed, however, have much more to do with ships than with bulls. When the carter wants to increase his cruising speed from the usual two miles per hour to something closer to three, he usually holds a stick threateningly above the bull's back, shouts "aiyee " (one syllable), waves the stick and regularly thwacks the bull. It probably is not worth the carter's effort except that it undoubtedly helps the carter get rid of some of his frustrations.

Cruelty—Although at Thai Pongal and some other festive times of the year the farmer honours his working animals, some farmers are rather cruel to their bulls when they drive them as described above. And Jaffna farmers, impelled by superstition and by no scientific reason, treat their bulls very cruelly by unnecessarily branding them in three long painful stripes across their rears. Most farmers have no idea why they do this except that it is the custom. Some farmers attempt to connect it with the Hindu trinity but the theology has been inadequate for the task. Others imagine that the custom is good for the bull's health. It undoubtedly has the same effect on the bull's health as it would have on the health of the owner if he sat down on three red-hot railroad rails. (Actually, one rail would be quite adequate to get the message across.) That is, the bull receives a painful burn which slowly heals. The one benefit the bull gets out of it is that he has no work while the healing is taking place. It is possible that the rest which the beast enjoys at this time does improve the animal's health, leading the owner to a confirmed belief in the efficacy of branding.[268] For purposes of identification, the initials of the owner are often branded upon some other portion of the bull's anatomy.

[268] Simon, G., "Ceylonese Beliefs about Animals," *Western Folklore*, Vol. 13, no. 4, Oct. 1954, p. 261.

The law—Since the Animals Act of 1958 came into force it has been illegal for Jaffna farmers to brand their bulls in this manner. It is time that farmers are warned about their trespass by appropriate authorities. The latter are engaged these days in a branding programme of their own which has the government's blessing. The law specifies that on one flank of a bull should be branded the area number and on the other flank an ownership registration number ("license number"). Such a precaution makes theft a little more difficult since a glance at the area number shows whether the animal is "at home" or not. The branding irons used for these legitimate brands produce a much smaller burn than the old fashioned three stripes. And the brand is administered by an "iron" of copper alloy which heats to a much lower temperature and inflicts a much shallower burn. So far the new method does not seem to be catching on in Jaffna, however.

Because no rational purpose is served by the continuation of the practice of three-stripe branding, it is time the intelligent farmers of Jaffna stopped this cruel and unnecessary habit. Perhaps some day the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides of Jaffna will make a project of urging owners to abandon the practice.

Poultry

The most common kind of poultry seen in Jaffna is chickens ("fowls"). Chicken curry is a common non-vegetarian dish. Most of the fowls are White Leghorns, Rhode Island Reds or Rangers. In the past twenty years, a few people have found that there is money to be made in eggs and poultry and a number of good-sized chicken farms have come into being. At least one made a profit of half a lakh in 1978. However, the statistics on both fowls and egg production do not indicate any steady increase in them in Jaffna Region.

For some mysterious reason, egg consumers in Jaffna prefer brown eggs over white. Perhaps it is a carry-over from the preference for unpolished rice over white rice. (The latter preference, however, is declining.) A visitor from the USA informs me that residents of the city of New York prefer white eggs to brown while the inhabitants of Boston reverse the preference.

Fowls have many enemies in Sri Lanka, particularly mongooses, snakes and tree-dogs (*maranai*). Since many householders have only one or two fowls they protect them by putting them under a conical, woven basket which will hold just that many. In areas where coconut trees are available, fowl owners often suspend a "fowl shelter" four feet long and two feet wide on wires or ropes between two palm trees. The fowls will roost in such a shelter but predators do not seem to visit it. There are also deadly enemies which are not visible to the naked eye: various diseases.

Statistics

In his master's thesis in geography from the University of London, Jaffna University professor, the late Dr. S. Selvanayagam, remarked on the reliability of statistics.[269] "The Jaffna farmer is suspicious. He is careful in evading questions relating to land holding and income. He would never, for instance, declare the correct amount of income he derives from his crops. The general tendency is to quote a high figure for expenses and a low figure for yields."

On those rare occasions on which I was able to find a figure from two different sources, they were as apt to be in disagreement as in agreement. It was particularly hard to account for the fact that the Department of Census and Statistics in Colombo has put out a booklet, *The Population of Sri Lanka* (1974) and its handy (annual) *Statistical Pocket Book* (1978) which differ slightly as to the literacy rate in Sri Lanka for 1971.

In the same vein, however, an article in the newspaper reported that such has been the state of statistics in Ceylon's largest industry, the tea industry, that for the last ten years, the official government reports have shown that Ceylon exported more tea than it produced in seven of the ten years![270]

[269] *Land Use in the Jaffna Country, Ceylon,* 1963, p. 76.

[270] *Ceylon Daily News,* October 15, 1979.

So the statistics in this book are the best official figures I can obtain. And I shall always be glad for correction.

Basically, the people of the East simply do not have the awe and respect for figures and facts which the West does. Since the whole world now agrees that figures can be deceiving, it may be discovered in the future that the Wisdom of the East with regard to statistics is superior to that of the West. Certainly the West is in danger of drowning in its numbers. In Jaffna, whether it is keeping figures on industrial or agricultural production or on the membership of an organization, it is apparent that the hearts of those responsible for such figures are not, in most cases, in their task of careful enumeration. They do have a clear perception that large is good and small is bad. But the fact of the actual number is of less importance to them than getting the form filled out in such a manner as to avoid criticism; the principle followed is in case of doubt, add; don't subtract.

I am not saying this to ridicule, nor am I under the illusion that all figures in other parts of the world are accurate. I am attempting to report what I believe I observe or sense: the form is sometimes more important than the fact. I have two illustrations:

About 1951, a servant fell into one of the backyard wells which are abundant in Sri Lanka, and drowned. An inquiry revealed that the village headman was immediately informed of this accident and that he had a rope in his office. He was asked why he did not try to rescue the girl. His reply was, "I filled out a report of the incident which was the most needful thing." While fortunately this attitude is not typical of most Ceylonese, it does illustrate the preeminence of the form.

A friend of mine used to produce an annual programme in his school in Jaffna which was a thing of beauty and a joy to behold. The perfectly rehearsed pupils in marvelous costumes put on a really enjoyable entertainment. But I used to wonder about my friend who was in overall charge. Busy with details of electricity, lighting, tickets, seating, etc., until the last minute, he showed little interest in the performance once it began but his eye roved the audience to see who was present and, ominously, who was not. But his whole

demeanour said very plainly, "It's the form that counts; the wheels are turning, the thing is running, the show is going on and that is what is important. How it appears to me in the audience or what they are saying, or doing up there is of little concern to me. And, of course, it is too late to do anything at this stage."

Since accurate figures are essential for planning and the government of Sri Lanka for several decades has been dedicated to planning, it is surprising that so little attention is paid to the gathering of accurate figures. It can only be concluded that planning in Jaffna in those areas in which I have checked is "by guess and by gosh." It is also likely that the local bureaucrats have made a great labour-saving discovery: the mere taking of last year's figures and revising them a bit may be as satisfactory as any other system of planning. Common sense certainly suggests that last year's figures and this year's estimates will surely be somewhat similar.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TEN
The Details of Tobacco Farming and Onion Culture

With the kind permission of Dr. C. Manogaran, the following is taken verbally or in paraphrase from his unpublished thesis for the Master of Arts degree from Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA, entitled *Changes in the Production of Tobacco and its Impact on Peasant Farming in the Jaffna Peninsula, Ceylon, 1968,* pp. 94-101. He obtained the facts by interviewing sixty-two farmers who farmed approximately one-quarter of an acre apiece, including the tenant farmer who farmed Dr. Manogaran's father's own little plot. The study was made in 1956 but the figures have been updated by me where possible. This study shows intensive methods applied at their finest even though the crop is of questionable value.

"How To Support a Family on One-Quarter of an Acre of Land" or "Intensive Farming in Jaffna"—either could be the title of this section. In the 1960s, approximately 12,785 farmers followed procedures like these described below for that is the number of persons reported to have been engaged in tobacco cultivation in Jaffna Region. Of course, the size of the plots varied greatly, from less than a quarter-acre to a rare two or three acres.

The tobacco farmer utilizes the rainy months of October and November (when cultivation often comes to a standstill) for the manuring of the farms. At the end of November, ploughing is done. Along with it, cattle manure is applied to the field. On the average, four cart loads of manure are spread on the quarter-acre farm, and hoed into the soil. The practice of penning cattle is only prevalent in some of the tobacco farms. Other farmers purchase cow manure from dealers who collect and transport it to the various parts of the region. The tobacco farmer is not in a position to raise cattle since he does not possess straw to feed them. The one or two cows or bulls he has are fed on palmyra leaves and rice straw purchased from paddy growers. After ploughing and manuring the field, the farmer buries green manure in the soil.

While the land is being prepared for cultivation, the farmer also raises tobacco seedlings. This he does by preparing nursery beds, three feet by three feet, in late November. These beds are manured with decomposed cattle manure. One ounce of seeds sown in four such beds is sufficient for planting one acre of tobacco (Earlier we saw a higher estimate). The seed costs nothing as the farmer saves it from his previous crop. The beds are shaded with woven coconut leaves and kept moderately wet for seven days. After the seventh day the shade is removed, but the plants are not removed for transplanting until seven weeks have passed.

The next step is transplanting. This begins during the fourth week of December and extends into the second week of January. Transplanting only takes place when the land has been hoed and levelled properly. Since the soil is not very clayey, it breaks down easily, especially when it is dry.

The seedlings can be removed from the nursery beds only when the soil is moist so they are kept moist on the day of transplanting. The spacing of the transplanted plants is determined by the farmer. He uses thin rope to indicate the spot where the individual plants are to be set. Normally they are about three feet from each other. Once the sites of the plants are determined, the farmer hand waters each spot. This is done in the evening just before the transplanting operations. Two seedlings are normally planted in each spot so at least one may survive. The young plants are shaded with leaves as

they are planted. After the third week, only one plant is allowed to grow in a spot. The plants that are uprooted are used to fill gaps where both plants have failed.

Young plants are watered from pots twice daily for three days. On the average, the thousand plants in a quarter-acre farm require 90 to 100 five-gallon baskets of water. The amount of water used for watering the plants is just sufficient to wet them and a couple of inches of soil within which the root of the plant is growing. After the third day, the young plants are watered only once every two days. Since the quantity of water required by a plant increases with its growth, it is necessary to increase the amount of water applied. Therefore it may take the whole morning and a part of the evening to water the whole farm at this stage. However, the intermittent drizzles and showers of this period of the year enable the farmer to reduce the amount of hand watering.

About a fortnight after transplanting, when the plants are well established, the field is weeded and light hoeing is done. Weeding around the plant is also done. Well-powdered cattle manure is then applied in handsful to the base of the plants, followed immediately by watering. After another fortnight a second weeding and hoeing are done to prepare plots and channels for irrigation. Generally, further cultivation will not be necessary unless the fields are unusually weedy. Beyond this stage the farmer merely irrigates the plants once every three days during the rainless period. The irrigation process is described above in this chapter.

Topping is performed when the plants have issued ten to thirteen leaves. This operation consists of pinching off the growing point with the finger and thumb. Usually four to six suckers are removed before harvesting; almost once a week an unwanted branch or leaf is removed from each plant.

In the case of smoking tobacco, the harvested leaves are placed into circular pits after they have been aired in open sheds. The tobacco is left to ferment for four days in the pit dug in the ground. Then they are removed, tied together and smoked in a tobacco barn for five or six hours. After smoking, the leaves are hung in an air curing shed till the mid-ribs are thoroughly dry. They are then

bulked and are ready for sale. The bulked tobacco must be occasionally inspected and re-bulked to avoid fungus infection until it is sold. ("Bulked" means packed into a big bundle weighing six hundred pounds and called by the interesting name of a "candy"). Chewing tobacco is cured somewhat differently from smoking tobacco.

Onion culture and other vegetables—Since onions follow the cultivation of tobacco the land is merely hoed and not ploughed in preparation for them. Two hoeings are normally done and the three by three-foot plots that are used for the cultivation of tobacco are strengthened. The onion seeds are planted directly in the plots and are flood irrigated from the outset. Apart from irrigation, weeding of the onions is done at least twice before they are harvested. Harvesting consists of merely pulling up the onions and removing the bulbs from the stalks. The onions are then put into jute sacks and taken by the farmer to the cooperative societies which purchase them.

Chillies and vegetables are transplanted from nurseries into the three by three plots by the farmer. The planting is done in the basin itself and not on the edge of the plot as in the case of tobacco. Moreover the plants are hand watered in the plot for a few days till they are firmly established. They are then flood irrigated as in the case of tobacco. Unlike tobacco and onions, chillies are not harvested all on the same day. The farmer only removes those chillies and other vegetables which are ready for consumption each day, to be sold in the local market. Dry grains are broadcast in the plots by some farmers and in most cases manioc is sown amongst the dry grain. They all mature together. That is, the manioc is planted on the edges of the basins in which the dry grains grow. Except for the tobacco and onions, the subsidiary food crops are sold in the village market. If the farmer is not in a position to sell these products in the market he takes them home to be consumed by the family.

Costs—The labour used on the typical quarter-acre farm is 425 man-days per year. The farmer normally works on it virtually every day of the year from 5 to 11 a.m. and 3 to 6 p.m.—a nine-hour day. The farmer's wife normally does not work in the fields but their

children contribute sufficient labour to bring the family output up to about nine hours a day the year around; the farmer gets some time off in the month of November while the rain is pouring down. The average farm required sixty man-days of hired labour for the critical times of harvesting and curing the tobacco and sometimes for irrigation, although nowadays the water pump has largely made irrigation a one-man task.

When it is time to plant or weed or harvest the onions, five or six women and their children are hired. They normally work a six-hour day from around 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. which is calculated as one-half a man-day. They add approximately 13 man-days of labour to round off the 425 man-days per year.

The farmers who had the best land, as most of those studied did, required about Rs. 718 per year for the cost of cultivating tobacco and later, red onions. Manure accounted for 60% of the cost (Rs. 430); what is put on the ground for the tobacco is also available for the onions.

When the tobacco was sold, the best leaves brought Rs. 200 per thousand and the poorer leaves brought Rs. 35. The average tobacco plant produces 5 of each grade so each plant had a cash value in 1965 of Rs. 1.17. Subtracting his production costs, the farmer averaged Rs. 460 profit for his tobacco plus Rs. 370 for his onions. His later crop of chillies earned about Rs. 300. The farmers averaged Rs. 50 per year on subsidiary crops so their net income was Rs. 1180, typically. The family was working for a little over Rs. 3 per man-day for a 352 day year. But it was their land, they found the operation satisfying, though if the land were rented, less so.

Updating costs—As indicated earlier, the above figures are from 1965. In 1979, a landholder of a little over half an acre harvested his 2500 tobacco plants and sold them at Rs. 2.75 per plant or Rs. 6800 for the lot. The top grade leaf brought 65 cents per leaf and the lower grade, 40 cents. His total cost for manure and labour came to Rs. 2550 per 1000 plants or Rs. 6375 for his 2500 plants so his profit was a mere Rs. 425 on the tobacco ($30). But in 1978 with a very similar crop, he had received Rs. 4 per plant and had cleared a little over Rs. 4000 profit—nearly ten times as much.

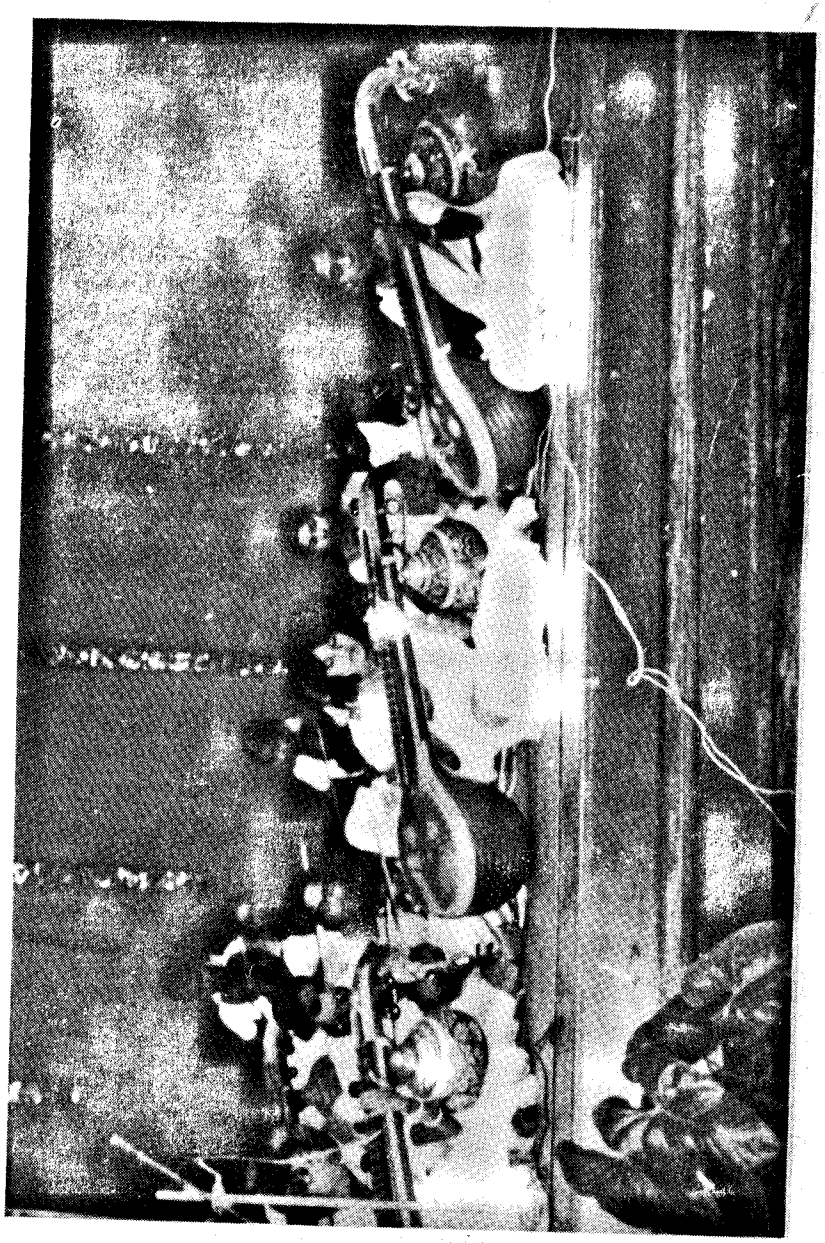
He blamed imported tobacco for ruining the price. He doubted that a typical farmer on the quarter-acre farm could make a living in the year 1979; he would run into debt because of the low price.

Environmental note—The environmentalist is shocked to learn of a whole new area of consumption of trees for firewood in connection with the processing of cigarette tobacco. For the curing of 15,000 leaves, which is the produce of around one acre of land, an entire lorry load of four and one-half tons of firewood is required, costing Rs. 900 in mid-1979. A newspaper article recently claimed that for every 200-300 cigarettes made, one tree was burned up, in order to dry the tobacco used.[271] The statement is certainly true since a tree can be of any size! The fuel is used to drive off eight-ninths of the weight of the tobacco leaf. Nine thousand pounds of green leaf will become one thousand of cured tobacco for which the Society pays about Rs. 10 a pound.

In the Jaffna Region, hardly forty acres of cigarette tobacco were grown in 1979. The growers were organized in six cooperatives, located at Vaddukoddai, Mathagal, Illavalai, Tellipallai, Kopay and Kaithady. In order, these groups produced 70, 33, 25, 12, 9 and 16 thousand pounds in 1979. Total production, then, was 165,000 pounds. The Vaddukoddai Cigarette Tobacco Cooperative Society in 1978-9 reported the following:

Membership: 80
Total acreage planted: 16
Nursery supplies: 18,000 seedlings from 15 nursery beds.
Production: 70,000 pounds of green leaves, or 4500 per acre.

[271] *Weekend (Sun)*, June 24, 1979.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Fine Arts: Music, Dance and Drama

He causes them to dance and beats the drum.

Tamil Proverb

As Egypt is the gift of the Nile, Jaffna in its mystical origins was the gift of the yarl or harp. At any rate, from as far back as it can be traced, the Tamil word for harp (yarl) has been connected with the name of Jaffna. The people of Jaffna continue to love music which is why transistors are so popular today. The music of the transistor is often film music and western popular music so the transistor promotes modern music more than classical. On the other hand, the reception in Jaffna of radio programmes from Trichinopoly and Madras in South India has been until recently of better quality than the reception of programmes from Colombo and the music which comes from Trichy particularly is nearly all classical music. Both kinds of music are flourishing quite well in Jaffna in the decade of the seventies.[272]

Patronage of Arts-The sources of strength for classical music, also known as traditional, Oriental or Carnatic music, are to be found in the great traditions of the Tamils who have patronized the fine arts for more than 2,000 years. The Tamil royal houses and high caste people have supported musicians, dancers and dramatic performers through the centuries in the social network of the caste system.

Arts and religion—However, the fundamental reason for the Tamil people's interest in the fine arts was that all the arts were solidly anchored in the Hindu religion. It is apparent that Tamil fine

[272] This chapter is based on conversations with the Principal of Ramanathan College, the Director of the Academy of Fine Arts, the President and Secretary of the Fine Arts Society of Jaffna, the Chairman of the Jaffna Western Music Society, professors at Jaffna University and a good many of my friends with an interest in the fine arts. I was unable to find anything printed in English on this subject.

arts were originally entirely religious. Sited in and around the temples, particularly at festival times, they were devoted to celebrating episodes from the lives of the all but innumerable divinities, obviously a fertile field. These stories often came from ancient Tamil literature which is largely religious in theme. In their religious setting, Tamil plays bear some resemblance, perhaps, to the morality plays of medieval Europe. While modern themes have crowded religion out of a part of modern Tamil music and drama, Hindu religious motifs persist in some films and music; all classical music, dance and drama, of course, are inspired by and permeated with Hindu religious ideas. The gods are alive and well in the fine arts of the Tamil people. At the same time, it must be confessed that audiences today are not so fond of ancient, religious themes in drama; they prefer more modern, real life situations.

Fine Arts popular—To return to the subject of the patronage mentioned above, the patronage of the fine arts has been democratized to a great extent although the caste elements are still important elements in the picture. But by making the support of, and participation in, the fine arts a much broader activity and not limiting it so much to the patronage of the landlord class alone, the support has been multiplied. In particular, to have the schools of the nation include classes in the fine arts within the curriculum for most years of the student's time in school is a huge social support for music and dance.

Education and the arts—The educational system today provides a small but steady stream of music teachers to conduct the music classes which are offered in almost all schools at all levels except perhaps the first two grades. Some private teachers of violin and *veena* are able to support themselves by teaching students privately. It is scarcely possible for vocal music teachers to support themselves by private lessons because they are so very numerous. Those music and dance teachers who have been able to go for study in India for a year or more, sometimes for several years, are regarded as the better qualified teachers.

The best violin and *mridangam* performers are also kept fairly busy in Jaffna today, often as accompanists of the better vocal performers. It is certainly encouraging to know that more people are earning a living in Jaffna today in the field of fine arts than at any previous time.

There is an increased emphasis on music and the radio, cinema and television are bringing music to more people than ever before. It is estimated that a majority of the people of Jaffna have opportunity to hear music at least once a week, and probably more often than that.

Yet Carnatic or classical music has not in recent years been the favourite art of the Tamils. It is estimated that perhaps only ten to fifteen percent of the population, or even less, enjoyed classical Tamil music in the past and perhaps not more than that proportion today. The majority prefer dance, drama and popular film music. However, there is a feeling that probably the appreciation of Carnatic music is on the increase. Fortunately, as mentioned, radio reception of the classical Tamil music from India is excellent. But with radio now reinforced with television, classical music appreciation is unlikely to continue to grow.

An important reason why there is a great deal more music and dance among the people of Jaffna today is that in ages past and down to as recently as the 1930's and 40's, there was no tradition of the children in high caste, educated homes learning music and dancing. The reason for this is explained by M. D. Raghavan, a Madras scholar who has studied and written extensively about Tamil culture in Ceylon. He states that the art of classical dance, Bharat Natyam, was kept going through the centuries by the *devadasis,* temple dancers sometimes of easy virtue, both in Jaffna and in South India. Describing Jaffna in 1920, he wrote:

> The three principal temples of Jaffna—the Sivan Kovil of Vannarponnai, the Nallur Kandasamy and the Mavittapuram temple—each maintained its own personnel of dancing girls. Dedicated to the temple, they lived in the temple premises. The dancing was done in the temple precincts only and not outside it. At the temple festivals, the devadasis headed the procession of

the Gods all the days of the festival. The numerous other Hindu temples of Jaffna which did not maintain their own staff of devadasis, engaged professional dancing girls for the days of the festival.[273]

It was this close connection between music, dance and the *devadasis* which caused Tamil parents to keep their children away from the fine arts until the last three or four decades. While music and dance were appreciated in those more distant days, high caste families regarded performance of them as unsuitable for their own children. The founding of the Kalekshetra Academy of Music and Dance by a Brahman lady on the grounds of the famous Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras in 1936, which has since become the premier institution for South Indian music and Bharat Natyam as well as Kathakali, has no doubt been instrumental in giving respectability to the fine arts.

Caste musicians and instruments—The traditional musicians still have their parts to play in the society on various ceremonial occasions. The Nadduvar caste people, as they have done for centuries., continue to play the trumpet which resembles a large clarinet (*nathaswaram).* Although they also play a drum called the *thavil,* the *nathaswaram* is the favourite instrument for all happy and auspicious occasions particularly weddings and temple festivals. Some Parayar people play the drums, especially at funerals, and at Kali and Vairavar temples. These drums are not a standard size and shape but vary considerably in both categories. There are four other kinds of drums in Jaffna although the *tabla,* a favourite North Indian drum, is rare here; it is popular among the Sinhalese, however. The *mridangam* is the only one of the drums which is taught as a subject at the Academy of Fine Arts. The *gadam* is an unusual kind of drum: a large, fat, clay pot with a fairly wide mouth. The pot is struck on the bottom with the player's fingers and the resultant sound is varied by the ways in which the aperture is closed, partly opened and fully opened by being pushed against the player's paunch. Finally, there is a drum called the *dolak* which is played now and then. The flute,

[273] *Tamil Culture in Ceylon,* 1971, p. 264.

violin and *veena* are the remaining Tamil musical instruments chiefly to be found in Jaffna today.

Classical dance—Today in Jaffna one can learn Bharat Natyam, ("the dance of India") or Kathakali, and those who gain admission can spend four years polishing their art at the Academy of Fine Arts. As Raghavan remarks, a musical concert is a feast for the ears but Bharat Natyam provides entertainment for both the ears and the eyes. Not only are the beauty of the dancer and her costumes and jewelry pleasing but the audience is absorbed by the evidence of the artist's training, revealed by her memory, alertness, poise and sense of rhythm. The dance involves complicated footwork, a great variety of facial expressions and even more gestures of the hands and arms, following the maxim, "Every gesture tells a story." A performance of either of the two types of dance is also a test of endurance for the dancer at these concerts, which are frequently solo affairs, often run for three hours with brief intermissions.

Decline of drama—A great amount of music, both Indian and western, both classical and popular, is being listened to and performed in all of Ceylon at present. There may have been some decline in the performance of classical drama, however, due to its discontinuance at temple festivals. The entertainments in the evenings, traditionally provided at festivals, are music and dancing but in the past decade or two Tamil dramas have been given up, allegedly because of rowdy elements who picked quarrels with the performers who were local persons, generally youths.

An additional factor contributing to the decline of drama in Jaffna is that the people here apparently prefer classical music to classical drama. The growth of the South Indian film business may have had something to do with reducing people's interest in the ancient dramas. For some years, especially in the early seventies, Indian actors were not allowed to come to Ceylon as the government attempted to retain as much foreign exchange as possible and this made the temple festivals offer less drama or less quality in the drama that was offered. Except during those years of the travel ban, top level musicians were brought over from India to perform, generally for a single night during a festival. Currently, the lack of plane service from Jaffna to Trichinopoly or Madras since

September 1978, has made any such imports of highly paid artists prohibitively costly.

Another explanation of what happened to the old village dramas is that they were almost an all-night affair with the family dozing on mats but remaining awake for most of the performance and the families liked it that way. But modern life makes it less convenient for people to stay out so late and the long-enduring audience has declined in numbers. Perhaps the audience has grown accustomed to the length of the cinema shows. But in the past very few years, new life has been breathed into drama as will be seen below.

Yarl—Jaffna may be the gift of the *yarl* but somewhere in the passage of time, the *yarl* has all but disappeared. As with the spring in the field which caused a number of towns and cities of the western hemisphere to be named Springfield, though the original spring can no longer be found, there is not a single person in Jaffna today who plays the *yarl.* Nor can one even find a *yarl* and pick it up and pluck its strings. Jaffna College has undertaken to get a local Carpenter to make a *yarl* but the project is only getting under way. Let us hope that the decade of the eighties will witness the playing of the *yarl* once again in Jaffna. Let there be friendly rivalry between the youth playing his *yarl* and the youth strumming his guitar.

In 1947, Swami Vipulanda published a scholarly book of 500 pages on the *yarl.*[274] The book is in Tamil and is well illustrated with pictures of many different styles of *yarls*. Several of these pictures come from instruments sculptured in stone on ancient Indian temples and are thus well authenticated models even if non-existent for centuries. So we have a wealth of information concerning the *yarl* at a time when no *yarls* exist.

The *yarl* has not quite completely disappeared from the Jaffna scene. A stylized depiction of the *yarl* with strings of neon tubing rests high above the front floors of the Jaffna Town Hall. It appears as a trademark also for a few industrial products in Jaffna. Two small wooden models of the *yarl* are carved partly in the round and

[274] *Yal-Nul*, 1974 (reprint), Karanthai Tamil Sangam, Tanjore [India].

partly in relief on the front of the altar of the Cathedral Church in Vaddukoddai. Before Jaffna University was fully constituted, that is, during the four years it was a Campus, the figure of the *yarl* was the motif on the official seal of the Jaffna Campus. There is also a *yarl* design on the front of the Jaffna Public Library. With so many reminders in existence, it is truly surprising that no working model of the *yarl* exists in Jaffna today.

Ramanathan College—In 1913 Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan founded a college, called by his name and located upon a large and sufficient campus, twenty acres in extent, near Chunnakam, in the midst of the fertile soil and fresh water region of Jaffna. From its inception an emphasis was put upon music, dancing and art. Because of its lifelong devotion to the fine arts, I shall give some details of the curriculum and various traditions of the College. Children in grades three through five have classes in music, dancing and art. Then, in grades six to ten, they may choose one subject among the three. After grade ten, a girl can choose music and dancing, among other subjects, for the Advanced Level examination (Grade 12).

Ramanathan College is large—1500 students apart from the Academy of Fine Arts. Of these 1500, there are 170 hostel residents. The food in the hostels is pure vegetarian (no meat, no eggs, nor fish). Most of the teachers at the College are vegetarians. The students wear short white frocks as uniforms in the first eight years of school; grades nine and ten wear half saris and grades eleven and twelve enjoy the privilege of wearing the full sari. Although it was taken over by the government in 1960, the College is able to maintain its traditions due to the fact that there has been very little transfer of teachers and administrators.

Academy of Fine Arts—The Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts was founded as a private organization in 1960. The Ministry of Education took it over in 1973, continuing to leave it situated on the Ramanathan College Campus. In the course of the next two years, the Academy was merged into the University of Jaffna while continuing to be housed and provided with classrooms on the Ramanathan campus. In 1979 the Academy had 217 students on its rolls: 195 women and 22 men, divided among four different years of

classes. Their academic programme consists of a main subject and a subsidiary, each from among these:

vocal music
mridangam (drum)
veena. (instrument resembling the *sithar*)
violin
Bharat Natyam (classical Tamil dance)
Kathikali (classical Malayali dance)

Those who complete the Academy course receive a Diploma in Music.

The students are expected to devote four hours in class per day to their main subject and perhaps an hour to the subsidiary. Normally, a student practices two hours a day on his or her "main." In addition, they have one class per day in musical theory, one a week in Hindu culture and one a week in Sanskrit. The students are expected to spend time listening to classical music on the radio, a pleasant assignment indeed for Tamil youth. Normally, if a student offers an instrument as a main subject, it is expected that the student will own his or her instrument but for subsidiary subjects, the instruments are provided by the Academy. At present, there is a shortage of instruments so that some students in some classes have to wait their turn in the class.

It would be good if Tamil cultural organizations would make sure that these instruments are supplied.

The teaching staff of the Academy numbers seventeen.

Concerts—Both Ramanathan College and the Academy of Fine Arts give a public concert once a year in which the students demonstrate their skills and artistry. It is expected that the Academy will make an important contribution to the cultural life of the Tamil people in the years ahead as it achieves a more experienced and better trained faculty and produces good performers and well-qualified teachers for the schools of Jaffna and beyond.

Performing Arts Society—In Jaffna, there is a growing interest in modern drama (as opposed to ancient classical drama). A

Performing Arts Society was formed in Jaffna about 1978, by teachers, students and former students of Jaffna University. They have staged Tamil versions of a number of plays by American and European playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, Bertold Brecht, G. Lorca, E. Ionesco and Anton Chekhov.

School of Drama—Also in Jaffna Town, a School of Drama has recently come into existence, the director of which is a teacher at Jaffna Central College. This is also a very active organization-a number of members, like the director, are products of the Post-Graduate Diploma in Drama of the Faculty of Education of the University of Colombo, many of whose Tamil diploma-holders live in and around Jaffna Town.

Members of the Jaffna School of Drama have written plays, translated others, staged a play for children, conducted seminars and forums on Drama and carried out experiments in that field.

Poetry Platforms—The Tamil-speakers of Jaffna are becoming friendly rivals of the Urdu-speakers of North India in their love of poetry. The latter listen to the recitation of classical poetry but in Jaffna, the poetry is newly minted in most cases and is sometimes extemporaneous. In the main, the poetry is composed for the occasion: a wedding, where it is joyous and congratulatory; a funeral, where it is eulogistic; or for a temple festival or to commemorate a great man such as the recent centenary of the death of Arumuga Navalar. Poets appear on the platform of politicians who hold public meetings and eye witnesses testify of two thousand people listening to the poet or poets attentively. Several poets may charm the crowd with their verses on such themes as liberation, Tamil *Eelam* or the glories of classic Tamil culture. Almost at the threshold of the twenty-first century, the oral tradition of the ancient past is being revived with enthusiasm on an impressive scale. Such poetry presentations are called *kavi arangu* which translates to "poetry platform." Poetry is described as rhymed repetition with a higher level vocabulary than is used in prose.

Writers and novelists—In the past twenty years or so, nearly two dozen authors of short stories and novels have become well known to the readers of contemporary Tamil literature. These

authors are male and generally they have written short stories but each of these nine have written one or more novels:

V. A. Rajaratnam
K. Gunarajah
L. Sivagnanasundaram
K. Daniel
S. Yoganathan
Soccalingam
S. Ponnuthurai
S. Ganeshalingam
Kanagasenthinathan

Nearly all have been published in Colombo with an occasional work being turned out in Jaffna, Kandy or Batticaloa.

Other promotional agencies—In addition to the organizations promoting drama, the Academy of Fine Arts and the music classes in the government schools and after school in the homes of private teachers, there are several other organizations in Jaffna promoting the cause of the Fine Arts.

The Fine Arts Society of Jaffna, begun in 1974, is a small group of persons dedicated to the cause of music. In the home of the secretary of the Society, they conduct a private school daily for about thirty students of voice or *veena*. These students participate in a public concert annually. Every month, the Society puts on a concert open to the public at no charge, in order to provide young artists with opportunities for performing.

The North Ceylon Oriental Music Society is sponsored by the Education Department whose chief regional officer is the honorary President of the Society. It gives annual examinations on the basis of which students pass through Grades 1 to 5 and may finally achieve Teacher Grade in Oriental Music.

From time to time the Municipal Council of Jaffna Town sponsors a drama in the open air near the Clock Tower for the benefit of the public.

The Young Artists Association was established in 1971 and conducted a school of music for some years. The school has since closed but the Association makes an important contribution to the Fine Arts of Jaffna with an 8 to 10 day Festival of Music once a year. Students present their work from 4 to 6 p.m. and their performances are followed by senior artists from 6:30 every evening of the Festival.

"Pop" groups—There are a number of "pop" groups, generally young people playing their own renditions of popular Tamil music. Some of the better groups are invited to perform at temple festivals. These young people have good musical ability with good voices and accurate ears. Playing the *tabla* (a somewhat long, narrow Indian drum), western drums, electric guitars and organs, piano accordions, guitars and bongo drums, they perform both instrumentally and vocally. Pop groups singing Tamil songs have been in Jaffna for the past fifteen years or so. The variety of instruments played had declined somewhat by the end of the decade.

Villupattu—Popular music of a very different nature has been presented by groups for many years in Jaffna. It is called *villupattu* (bow music) or the "song of the bow." A giant bow as used in archery, but six to eight feet long, is laid on the floor before the performers who sit behind it. On the bow string several small bells are suspended. They are struck rhythmically to beat out the time. A large clay pot is also tapped to rhythm. Meanwhile the members of the group are participating in a musical dialogue in which the leader sings and his colleagues respond. It is a village level entertainment much enjoyed by the audiences.

Naddukuttu—As *villupattu* is a local musical performance, so *naddukuttu* ("folk dance") is the village level drama which has pretty much disappeared from Jaffna though it can be found around Mullaitivu, not far away. One of its most advertised features is that its dramatic performances run most of the night; members of the audience customarily bring mats with them so they can nap from time to time.

Western Music—There is more western music in Jaffna today than ever before, in the opinion of those best acquainted with it. This

is true in spite of the fact that music books and musical instruments are scarce and hard to obtain. Another handicap is the difficulty of inviting outstanding performers to Jaffna on those comparatively rare occasions when foreign embassies bring them to Sri Lanka. Although a professional pianist would delight the largest group of western music lovers and performers in Jaffna, it is unlikely that such a cultural event will occur soon in Jaffna for there is not a single piano here which a professional would enjoy playing.

There are many more students of western music today in towns like Chavakachcheri, Manipay, Uduvil, Vaddukoddai, Pt. Pedro and of course, Jaffna, than in the past. Nearly all of these are studying piano and nearly all of them are girls. The chief western instrument which appeals to boys—and girls—is the guitar. Some years ago almost all the piano teachers available lived in Jaffna Town but today there are teachers in the towns mentioned above, except Chavakachcheri which, though a large town, has not a single piano available and its students continue to have to go into Jaffna for their lessons.

An important reason for a girl to make herself proficient on the piano is that it increases her appeal in the marriage market by presenting a picture of her as a cultured young lady. It also suggests that she may earn income by teaching music.

Many other reasons demonstrate the popularity of western music and show why its popularity is likely to increase:

1. There is much more western music available through transistors, cassettes and films.

2. The western music programme on Radio Ceylon is one of the best in the whole of Asia, and it is listened to by a wide range of people throughout India, Malaysia and other Asian countries.

3. Children in Jaffna have many more relatives abroad now who keep them supplied regularly with music books, instruments, cassettes and transistors.

4. The influence of easier exchange and travel among Jaffna people and friends, relations and visitors from the West facilitates the development of western music in Jaffna.

5. Music groups such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Osmonds, ABBA and individuals like Jim Reeves, Cliff Richard, Elvis Presley and others have had a tremendous impact on the youth in Jaffna. There were no such influences twenty years ago on such a scale.

6. The great musicals such as *My Fair Lady, The Sound of Music, The Great Waltz, Godspell, Jesus Christ Superstar* and a few others have also had a remarkable influence on the youth in Jaffna through cassettes and films.

7. There are many more non-Christian children taking to western music. At one time it was mostly an activity of Christian children.

8. For several years the government of Sri Lanka, through the Ministry of Education, has been promoting and popularizing western music throughout the country. Qualified Education Officers of Western Music were appointed and western music is now a recognized subject in the regular curriculum of the schools.

The point just mentioned leads us to the subject of how music teachers are produced in Sri Lanka. A student must pass the Higher Local or Grade VIII examination in order to have the minimum requirements for teaching western music. This does not preclude the fact that there are some good music teachers who have not passed any examination but through experience have proved themselves. The Grade VIII examination can be taken either from the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education (the regular government schools channel) or from the Association of Western Music, Speech and Drama or from either of two music testing institutions of England, the Royal Schools of Music and the Trinity College of Music. The two latter schools also examine students for the three more advanced grades of performers: the Associate, the Licentiate and the Fellow of the Royal Schools or of Trinity College. In Jaffna today, a number of school girls have

passed the Grade VIII examination in piano. A good many teachers of music are Associates or Licentiates of the above institutions. But the Fellowship depends upon a very high level of performance as well as upon written papers. Although there have been three ladies in Jaffna who have attained the Fellowship fairly recently, the two who are alive today are abroad and there is no person possessing the grade of Fellow at the present time in Jaffna.

All the qualifications listed above, in all grades may be obtained for either a performer or for a teacher and not only in the field of music but in English Speech or Drama as well. The most common qualification we have in Jaffna is for a performer or teacher in piano. There is hardly any musician of repute in Jaffna who is qualified in violin although some of the finest performers on the violin in Ceylon are Jaffna Tamils educated in Colombo. Several Sinhalese musicians have performed from time to time in Jaffna and they have been well received. These artists from Colombo and Kandy have been instrumental in increasing appreciation of western music in the classical tradition.

It is gratifying to note that the growth of western music does not seem to have been at the expense of Tamil music—there is more of that also, as noted above.

An enemy of western music and, in the long run probably of eastern music as well, is the ignorance and immaturity of those youth in Jaffna who are understandably amused by unfamiliar sounds. High soprano singing probably sounds as funny to them as Carnatic music does to anyone hearing it for the first time. Potential arrangers of western musical concerts hesitate to invite the artists to Jaffna who occasionally visit Colombo or the American Embassy or other agencies. Most concerts of western music in Jaffna have to be vigilantly planned to avoid those youths who are bold enough to whistle, shout and otherwise disrupt the performance. It was apparently the lack of careful planning of measures to prevent uncouth disruption that has caused the Tamil dramas, formerly a part of every temple festival's evening programme, to die out.

A Tamil folkway, which affronts persons unfamiliar with it, is the practice of talking in low tones to one's neighbour throughout

musical, dramatic and dancing performances. The resulting buzzing hum which arises immediately after each part of the performance gets under way is something which all Jaffna artists are entirely accustomed to. Jaffna audiences would enjoy it no other way. An additional appeal of the radio and television in Jaffna is that full blown conversation, meals and most of the business of living can be conducted in their presence.

Tamil movies—Before concluding this chapter a few paragraphs on Tamil movies are in order. In its first issue for 1980, *India Today* examined and reviewed the state of the films produced in India in the 1970's. During that time, India's film centre shifted from Bombay to South India, largely Madras, but not exclusively. Film production in that decade for all of India averaged roughly two films a day (680 per year).

During the seventies "screen heroines were rapidly shedding the demure virginal look" the fortnightly news magazine reported. "Love scenes were more torrid than ever before, though the censors still went heavy on the scissors." In 1978, the 18-year-old censorship rules were scrapped and replaced by a new set, ostensibly to offer more "artistic freedom" to film makers. About all it succeeded in doing, however, was to usher in more violence on the screen."

This is all relevant to Jaffna for most of the films shown here are made in South India where the language is the same and no dubbing is necessary. Popular films in Jaffna are noticeably sexier than twenty years ago. The girls dance in a voluptuous style and relations between the sexes are characterized by much more of a "hands on" policy than formerly. In very much a non-Tamil manner, Tamil film stars embrace on the screen. Kissing however, is still infrequent but increasing. Though Gandhi has forever associated India with ideas of non-violence, the film world has decided to follow the unfortunate example of the West and introduce fighting for the inspiration of its audiences. The lessons thus taught can be expected to be inflicted upon the society in years to come by those who learn them.

The combat pictures in Indian films is so artificial that many of the blows can be seen to be missing their targets and the heroine

may join in to knock men in all directions with a belligerence completely belied by her previous deportment and by her obvious lack of physical strength. The more youthful part of the audience cheers the hero at the end of the brawl when, having vanquished his foes he sits down to smile at his beloved with neither a bruise nor a drop of perspiration upon his plump and handsome face.

A considerable portion of the movies shown in Jaffna, however, are made in Europe and America. While good current movies come here and some of the old classics too, much of what is presented on the screen contains a good deal of trash—the usual caricature of the society which film producers seem unable to prevent from centering on crime, violence and sex.

Even with the movies, music, dance, drama and the, so far slight, contribution of television, one still hears such sentiments as, "These people are starved for entertainment. You put up two electric bulbs and a crowd comes." It is safe to predict that there will be more entertainment available in the decade of the eighties.

EPILOGUE

The business of collecting facts and writing this book began in 1947 and I have used a few of the materials collected during our early stay here which terminated in 1960. But writing this book began in earnest in 1978 and continued through 1979. In mid-January, 1980, it has gone to the printer. To me the most pleasant surprise has been the joy I have derived from every part of the work, even the typing and proofreading. I strongly believe that this pleasure is due to a large extent to the prayers of friends. Like C. S. Lewis, I have been surprised by joy.

So Sri Lanka in general and Jaffna in particular have always been to us—a source of joy and pleasure. While nature adds charm and beauty to the island, it is, of course, the people who have contributed the most to the positive ideas and experiences which all members of my family associate with Jaffna and with Sri Lanka.



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