



INTER-RACIAL EQUITY AND NATIONAL UNITY IN SRI LANKA

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A MARGA INSTITUTE publication
(Sri Lanka Centre for Development Studies)
61, Isipathana Mawatha, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka

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PREFACE

This document was produced by the Marga Institute in October 1983, as part of a programme of work initiated by the Citizens' Committee for National Harmony, immediately after the communal violence in July 1983. In its efforts to promote a peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict, the Committee sought the collaboration and support of several concerned groups and institutions, including the Marga Institute. The Institute responded by reordering its own work programme and assigning high priority to the study of various aspects of the ethnic problem. Its first task was the preparation of a background paper on the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, which would serve as a basis for rational and informed discussion and analysis of the main issues. The paper was released in early October as a draft to the Citizens' Committee for discussion and comment. Subsequently, it was widely circulated both in Sri Lanka and abroad, among various organisations, political parties and other interested groups.

Since the document was first released, more up-to-date information and data on some aspects of the problem have become available—for example, the data from the socio-economic survey 1980/81. Recent developments, such as the negotiations in the All-Party Conference and the initiatives taken by the United Religious Organisation, have dealt with many of the issues which have been discussed in the Marga paper. Some of the proposals that have emerged have gone beyond what is envisaged in the Marga document. Nevertheless, the document is being reproduced essentially in its original form, both because it reflects the state of the discussions at the time it was prepared, and also as the substance of the report including its factual analysis has not been rendered any less relevant or valid by what has taken place. There has also been a continuing demand for the original document locally as well as from abroad. A few clarifications have been included in the present version, and typographical errors in the original edition have been corrected.

The Marga Institute, however, has undertaken a more comprehensive study of the ethnic problem after the paper was prepared. It organised a series of seminars on the critical issues

as they relate to the resolution of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The seminars were organised in collaboration with the Centre for Society and Religion, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, and the Citizens Committee for National Harmony. The subjects of the seminars included devolution, education, security and national identity in a multi-ethnic society. These seminars included several foreign participants who had studied the experience in other multi-ethnic societies which could offer lessons that were relevant for Sri Lanka. The work based on these seminars and other research conducted by the Institute will be presented in a series of studies which will be published shortly. These will examine the main issues in greater depth and at a more comprehensive level than has been possible in the present document, which was essentially limited to an overview of the problems.

The document was prepared by Godfrey Gunatilleke, Director of the Marga Institute. He was assisted by several members of the Institute who collected and tabulated the data and information available on various aspects of the ethnic problem. Wimal Diasena worked on the Education sector, and G. I. O. M. Kurukulasuriya examined the employment situation at the professional levels. The document benefited a great deal from the views that were expressed and the suggestions that were offered by the members of the Citizens' Committee, particularly its President, Ven Hevanpola Ratanasara, Joint Secretary Rev. Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, and Treasurer Maz Mohideen. The paper also drew on the intensive discussions of ethnic issues which took place in the Institute on a continuing basis during the preparation of the paper and to which the senior staff of the Institute contributed.

While the document reflects the overall evaluation of the ethnic problem and the approaches to its solution, as shared by members of the Citizens' Committee and the Marga Institute, Gunatilleke, who wrote the text of the report takes responsibility for the tone and manner of its presentation and the emphasis given in the analysis to particular aspects of the ethnic conflict as well as to specific options for its resolution.

INTER-RACIAL EQUITY AND NATIONAL UNITY IN SRI LANKA

INTRODUCTION

Some patterns of conflict in a plural society

The causes of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka range from antagonisms and fears rooted in the past history of the two communities, to specific grievances that have risen during the period after the country achieved independence. This paper is primarily concerned with the issues and grievances of the post-independence period. It attempts to clear many misconceptions and falsifications of reality that exist among both communities, and thereafter to define a framework for rational discourse on each other's grievances which can lead to the resolution of the conflicts. The paper confines itself to the relations between the Sri Lanka Tamil minority and the Sinhala majority, and the problems and conflicts arising out of these. It does not cover the special problems of the Indian Tamils or the other ethnic groups.

The problems of a multi-ethnic pluralistic society are by no means unique to Sri Lanka. There are any number of examples of countries which have had to cope with religious, linguistic and ethnic differentiation of all types. Although the pattern of conflict and differentiation varies from country to country, there are significant lessons which Sri Lanka can learn from the experience of countries which have been successful in finding systems which have provided the necessary means of accommodation and reconciliation among the different groups. These forms of accommodation again will vary according to the specific situation and the character of the problems in each country. First, the size and proportions of the different groups which constitute the nation as a whole will determine the framework of inter-group relations and the balance of power that will event-

usually emerge. For example, Switzerland has a large majority of German-speaking cantons with a small French and Italian-speaking minority; Yugoslavia has no single group constituting a majority—the largest group, the Serbian nationality, accounting for approximately 40 per cent of the population; in Malaysia the indigenous population and the migrant groups are more or less evenly balanced. Each situation with its particular ethnic balance results in different responses. Second, the ethnic and linguistic groups which have a territorial base have called for different types of solutions. The solution available to Switzerland and Yugoslavia where such territorial bases exist, do not appear to be readily available in a situation such as the one in Malaysia.

Third, if constituent ethnic groups are part of larger ethnic groups outside the national boundaries, then complications of a different nature are likely to arise. This was witnessed in the case of Cyprus where the external involvement of Greece and Turkey aggravated the internal divisions and conflicts. Fourth, the nature of the differentiation and the intensity of the conflict will vary according to the way in which the linguistic, religious and ethnic divisions reinforce each other or cut across each other's boundaries. Finally, the past history of the relations of different ethnic groups will have a profound influence in shaping their relationships in the present. Where the groups have fought together against a common foe, as in the case of the Swiss cantons, history will be a unifying force; where they have fought each other, history will be divisive. Again, where some groups have been later migrants, perceptions of each other's claims and rights, will be different and conflicting, as in the case of Malaysia.

All these factors are relevant in the case of Sri Lanka. The Sinhala community which is the ethnic majority, accounts for approximately 74 per cent of the population. With a majority of this size, ethnic amity will depend on two factors—the justice, sense of responsibility and magnanimity with which the majority exercises power, and the adjustments which the minority is willing to make to the leading role and the proportionate share of the majority. The Tamil minority has a relatively well-defined territorial base. The demand for autonomy, federalism or separation, derives from this reality. This is, however, complicated by the fact that nearly one-third of the Sri Lankan Tamil community lives outside this territorial base. The Tamil minority

is in ethnic, linguistic and religious terms, a part of the larger Tamil community in the neighbouring State of Tamil Nadu in India. While the Sinhala majority has always regarded this link as a possible threat to its national integrity and security, the actions of Tamil political groups both in Sri Lanka and India have contributed to these suspicions and fears. The large majority in each ethnic group is also separated from each other on linguistic and religious lines.

Finally, the early period of Sri Lanka's history is a record of intermittent conflict between Sinhala settlers and invaders from the South of India. Sinhala national ideology draws heavily on the history and legend concerning the liberation struggles of Sinhalese against Tamils. The perception of Tamils as migrants of a later date and as "outsiders" persists in large sections of the Sinhala community. To the Tamil mind, these attitudes relegate the Tamil community to the category of 'second-class' citizens of Sri Lanka. The Tamils, on the other hand, regard themselves as an indigenous ethnic community with a long history. The solutions to the Sri Lankan problems have to take full account of all these elements. Both communities need to make conscious readjustments and reorientations of a profound character. They need to liberate themselves from that part of their historical consciousness which is backward-looking, divisive and stands in the way of nation-building and the future of a modern society. They need to reawaken to the over-arching Buddhist-Hindu cultural traditions and the spiritual heritage which have united them and will continue to do so in a deeper human sense.

Countries which have succeeded in creating an enduring base for genuine national unity in situations similar to Sri Lanka's have done so only by evolving a sound framework of inter-racial justice and equity. It is through this framework that different groups have been able to develop a sense of belonging to a national entity, to identify themselves fully with it and to promote its growth and security in their mutual interests. There are three fundamental elements in such a framework of inter-racial justice. The first is the sharing of political power and governmental responsibility. This has played a key role in situations where groups have territorial bases. The second is opportunity for economic development which provides adequate growth and employment to each ethnic group. The third is the

environment for preserving and promoting the cultural integrity of each group.

The successful countries have been able to turn to great advantage the very fact that ethnic groups have territorial bases. The freedom and responsibility of each, together with a degree of separateness from each other, far from becoming divisive, has helped to strengthen national unity. Here, the comments of a serious scholar on situations of ethnic and other group conflicts are illuminating,

"... clear, boundaries between the segments of a plural society have the advantage of limiting mutual contacts and consequently of limiting the chances of ever-present potential antagonisms to erupt into actual hostility. Quincy Wright argues that 'ideologies accepted by different groups within a society may be inconsistent without creating tension.' The danger of great tension arises only when these groups 'are in close contact.'"¹

The main issues which have divided the Sinhala community and the Sri Lankan Tamil community fall into the three broad categories that have been mentioned above. The leadership of each of these communities, however, has not been able either to agree on the basic principles which should govern a framework of inter-racial equity in Sri Lanka or move in the direction of a common perception of each other's grievances and problems. In fact the perceptions of injustice and the sense of grievance which each community has acquired and accumulated over the years are based on positions and expectations which are very far apart. The gap in communication which exists between the two communities is immense. In order to work out an enduring and viable framework of inter-racial equity in Sri Lanka, it is necessary to examine closely these conflicting perceptions and the grievances that have been nursed by either side, establish a basis for communication with mutual understanding and then identify the space that is available for mutual accommodation and a lasting settlement of grievances.

Sri Lanka has often been singled out by the international community for social achievements which few other low-income

¹ **Democracy in Plural Societies — A Comparative Exploration**, Arend Lijphart, New Haven and London Yale University Press, 1977, p. 88.

countries can claim. The levels of literacy, the life expectancy of its people, the foundation of social welfare which helped to alleviate conditions of poverty and the democratic processes it has been able to sustain, all have given it an international stature of unique quality. This has been the achievement of all ethnic groups working together and contributing to it fully. This social fabric has been torn apart by the communal discord and violence which has erupted.

The Sri Lanka situation, it will be seen, combines the negative elements which are present separately in different multi-ethnic situations. To that extent the nature of the challenge which faces Sri Lankan society is more difficult and calls for social, political and moral responses which are more demanding for all the groups. The next decade is therefore the decade of this enormous challenge that faces Sri Lankan society, its peoples and leaders—the challenge of creating an equitable multi-ethnic society. What it achieves as a plural society in which peoples with great civilizations live harmoniously and develop together will be of far greater human value than what it has achieved in the pursuit of social welfare goals.

Grievances and realities—the general perceptions of each community

To begin with, there is the overall perception of each community regarding the relative position, the socio-economic status of itself and of the other community, the benefits it has derived or failed to derive from the socio-economic changes and the development processes during the last three decades. On the one hand, there is a common belief amongst sections of the Sinhala majority that the Tamil community enjoys a privileged position, has received benefits from the economy which are far out of proportion to the share it has in the total population, and that the average standard of living or income of Tamil households is significantly higher than that of the Sinhala households. The Tamil community, on the other hand, entertains the belief that they have been a disadvantaged community, have not been able to get an equitable share of the benefits of socio-economic development and therefore that they have seriously fallen behind the levels of well-being achieved by the Sinhala community.

Both these perceptions of the Sinhala and Tamil communities are highly distorted and exaggerated and do not reflect the real situation. While disproportionate shares of gains and benefits may have accrued to small segments of the Sri Lankan Tamil population, and again while political processes may have had the effect of placing sections of the Tamil community in seriously disadvantaged conditions, it would not be true to say that in terms of average socio-economic well-being the Tamil community has been adversely affected. At the same time it would not be correct to say that the socio-economic status of the average Tamil household is significantly higher than that of the Sinhala household.

Indicators of well-being in the Sinhala and Tamil Communities

All the socio-economic indicators that are available for conditions in the Sinhala and Tamil areas clearly bear out this conclusion. The indicators of well-being such as infant mortality, nutritional status and literacy all point to a trend which is quite different. On the one hand, the Tamil grievance, that Tamil-speaking areas have been neglected or have lagged behind in development when compared with the rest of the country, is clearly contradicted by the facts. Tables 1 and 2 which are annexed set out the comparative data for the ethnic groups and Districts. The rate of infant mortality, one of the most revealing indicators of social well-being, is 28.5 for the Sri Lankan Tamil compared with 34 for the Sinhalese. The Jaffna District has the highest levels of physical well-being, with an infant mortality rate of 17 per thousand, a literacy rate of 92 and a life expectancy of approximately 66.5 years. These indicators, however, are only marginally above some of the Sinhala Districts such as those in the South-West coast and Polonnaruwa. In nutritional status the Tamil-speaking areas are not below that of the Sinhala areas. In fact, again the Jaffna District is among the districts with the lowest rates, with 3.7 per cent acutely under-nourished and 28.4 per cent chronically undernourished (in 1976). The educational index for the Sri Lankan Tamil community is 4.94 as against 5.2 for the Low-Country Sinhalese, and 4.40 for the Kandyan Sinhalese. If we take another indicator—the unemployment rate—we observe that the unemployment rate in the Sri Lankan Tamil community is 10.93 per cent of the labour force, the second lowest for the country after the rate for Indian Tamils. This compares with the rate for Kandyan Sinhalese and Low-Country Sinhalese which is 13.8 per cent and 18.5 per cent.

Levels of Income

On the other hand, when we look at the average incomes of households we see that it would not be correct for the Sinhalese to claim that the Tamil population on the average enjoys a much higher condition of well-being and a significantly higher level of income than the Sinhala community. The facts clearly contradict such a conclusion. Any of the measures we use to compare incomes between the communities indicates that there are no significant differences. Table 1 sets out the comparative data on

income for the five Zones in the country. Zone 3 which covers the Tamil-speaking areas and contains 68 per cent of the Sri Lankan Tamil population is representative of the average incomes of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. Zones 1, 2 and 4 contain over 95 per cent of the Sinhala population, Zones 1 and 2 covering the low country districts and Zone 4 the Kandyan districts. Zone 5 is the Colombo city.

The differences in incomes in all four zones are within a very small range. In Zones 1 and 2 which contain 68 per cent of the Sinhala population, the income of the average household is marginally higher than those of Zone 3—Rs. 1,040 for 1 and 2 and Rs. 1,022 for 3. The income of the average income receiver in Zone 3 is marginally higher than those of Zones 1 and 2. Similar differences of a relatively insignificant size are reflected in the average incomes of spending units. The per capita income of the average household in Zones 1 and 2 taken together is Rs. 189, the same as for Zone 3.

The incomes for the Sinhala community also include Zone 4. This zone covers the Estate sector. Its incomes are 10 per cent to 12 per cent lower than those of Zones 1-3. When we make approximate adjustments for incomes of Estate sector incomes which are slightly lower than the average for the Zone, the average non-Estate household in the Zone has a per capita income of approximately Rs. 170. When this figure is included, the average per capita income for Zones 1, 2 and 4 will be in the region of Rs. 183. Zone 5 which is the Colombo Municipality has not been included in this analysis. It contains only 4 per cent of the country's population but accounts for 15 per cent of the total household incomes. The average per capita income in this segment is Rs. 349.95, or about 1.8 times that of Zones 1-3. The Sinhalese comprise 50 per cent of this component, the Tamils 22 per cent. For a variety of reasons, however, this does not affect the analysis of comparative incomes given above. The Greater Colombo urban sector which contains some of the richest households spreads beyond the Colombo City and in this component the Sinhala population is approximately 78.1 per cent and the Tamil 11.7 per cent.

It might be argued that this analysis of average incomes of ethnic groups does not take into account the fact that the Sri Lankan Tamil community of approximately 600,000 working in

Sinhala areas, particularly in the South-West enjoys a relatively higher level of well-being than the average Sinhala households in these areas, as this Tamil segment falls largely into the lower-middle, middle and upper-middle income levels. This segment has found employment in various sectors of the economy and are in occupations which range from relatively low-income jobs in the rural and estate sectors and in small trading establishments, to the high-income professions and elite positions in the public and private sectors. This line of argument suggests that the average for Sri Lankan Tamil incomes as a whole would rise significantly if the incomes of this segment are included. Unfortunately, the latest socio-economic survey for 1978-79 does not give a breakdown of income distribution in exclusively ethnic categories. It is therefore difficult to substantiate or counter this argument on the basis of firm accurate data. There is, however, other convincing and reliable evidence which indicates that such a conclusion is not justifiable.

The sample survey conducted in 1973 for the Central Bank consumers' finance survey provides an ethnic breakdown of the incomes of income-receivers and spending units. In that breakdown the income of the Sri Lankan Tamil spending unit is lower than that of the Low-Country Sinhalese. The reasons which belie the first impression that the incomes of the Tamils in Sinhala areas ought to be on the average higher than the Sinhala incomes in these areas are two-fold. First, contrary to the popular belief, a large component of the 600,000 Sri Lankan Tamils in Sinhala areas are not in the urban sector; they are in the rural and urban sectors and are occupied in a variety of economic activities and jobs which cannot be regarded as above average. Second; a large component of the higher income segment earn salaried incomes and professional incomes. The exceptions who are in high profit-yielding industry, trade or other business are relatively few. We have to compare the income structure of a migrant group of this type with the more diversified economic structure of a total community of rich and poor as in the case of the Sinhala community in these areas. In the former, the income structure does not contain the most deprived sections of the rural and urban poor at the one end nor does it have a proportionate share of the highest income classes. The latter contains the total income structure and includes higher proportions of both ends of that structure. The net result is an average for both which is not significantly different from each other.

Ownership of consumer durables

If we look at other indicators—the ownership of selected consumer durables such as sewing machines, radios, motor bikes etc., urbanisation and housing—we come to a similar conclusion. In Zone 3 the percentages for ownership of selected consumer durables are again not significantly different from the highest percentages in the Sinhala Districts; if at all, they are higher for many items. Electricity is available for 15.4 of the Zone 3 households compared with 14.2 for Zones 1 and 2. Thirty two per cent of the Sri Lankan Tamil population lives in the urban sector compared with approximately 20 per cent of the Sinhala population. This by itself does not imply relatively higher levels of living for the Tamil population as rural-urban differentials are low, particularly in the Jaffna peninsula where the largest urban segment of the Tamil population lives. But conversely, it is a clear indication that the average levels of living of the Tamil community are in no way inferior to those of the Sinhala community. Again, the proportions of permanent housing in the housing stock in the Tamil-speaking districts are not significantly different from those of the Sinhala Districts.

There are several lessons we can draw from this brief analysis of the overall conditions of socio-economic well-being of both the Tamil and Sinhala communities. The figures show that there is little purpose in both communities engaging in a controversy whether one community is better off than the other, or whether one community is seriously disadvantaged in relation to the other. Both communities are more or less at similar levels of well-being and face similar problems of social and economic development. The arguments of the Tamil community that they have been a seriously disadvantaged community—particularly the propaganda at the international level which tries to draw analogies between the Tamil community and other gravely oppressed minorities and communities in other countries and which suggests overtones of apartheid in South Africa or the Nazi persecution of the Jews—are unconscionable misrepresentations of the reality which tend to provoke strong reactions from Sinhala leaders. The welfare state which was expanded in the post-independence period reached out to all parts of the country and to all Sri Lankan citizens, irrespective of community or creed. The facts and figures as well as the socio-economic changes that have taken place over the past 30 years validate this position beyond any serious doubt. The major

growth sector in the economy during the 60s and the 70s was the domestic agricultural sector which saw a rapid expansion and growth in rice and subsidiary food crops. The Tamil-speaking areas in the North and the East have participated in this process of development in full measure. The national welfare system together with growth combined to raise the level of well-being in the Tamil-speaking areas as in other parts of the country. It is important that both the Sinhala and Tamil communities should agree on this broad foundation of socio-economic realities. Later we would see that these foundations, were built by the collective effort of both the Sinhala and Tamil communities and it is important that they take collective pride in that achievement.

A common perception of this kind regarding the changes that have taken place all over the country, including both the Sinhala and Tamil communities, would enable the communities to enter into a dialogue which is more positive, less recriminatory, more receptive and regardful of the truth. On such a basis it becomes much easier for both groups to examine what each claims are injustices and imbalances that have either crept into the system in specific areas or continued in these areas from the colonial past. Let us enumerate these specific areas. They are language, education, employment, land, devolution of power, and security.¹ They range from the right to preserve and promote cultural integrity, to the basic right to survival and life. On each of these issues the two communities have different perceptions of what is the reality as well as what is equitable. Indeed, they remain very far apart. It is not easy to define these positions in all their complexity and their ramifications. What has been set down below tries to capture as far as possible the different perceptions as they are reflected in the main arguments that have been adduced by either side. The broad analysis which is given below can be used as a starting point for a fuller and more meaningful dialogue between the two groups. Where it does not correctly reflect the reality, it could be corrected through the process of dialogue. Where there are gaps which leave out important elements from the positions and arguments of either side, they could be filled. In this way it would be possible to develop a framework within which both parties could conduct a rational discourse and enter into a disciplined process of negotiation related to a set of principles and objectives on which there is some measure of common agreement.

¹ The issues relating to security are considered in a separate paper.

II

The rights pertaining to Language

We could begin with the issues which are of a more specific character and which are perhaps therefore less complex, and then go on to the more fundamental issues of political devolution and security. The first issue concerns the language rights of the Tamils. These include principally the right of Tamils to education in the Tamil language and the right to manage the public affairs of the Tamil-speaking areas in the Tamil language. This covers both the Administration and the Judiciary. Finally, there is the right of Tamils resident in Sinhala areas to receive an education in Tamil and to be able to transact official business with the government in Tamil. There has been broad agreement between the two communities as to how the language problem should be resolved. The Tamil politicians have expressed the view that the problem of language in so far as it applies to the Tamil-speaking areas has already found satisfactory solutions in the more important areas. For all practical purposes, Tamil has now become the language of the administration and the courts in the Tamil-speaking districts.

Therefore the major problem regarding language rights of Tamils concerns the Tamils resident in the other districts. Here too the main cause for complaint is the failure on the part of government to implement effectively and fully the provisions already contained in the existing legislation, particularly the various provisions which have become part of the Constitution and are contained in Chapter IV. Under these provisions a citizen enjoys the constitutional right to receive communications from and communicate and transact business with any official in his or her official capacity in either of the National Languages, Tamil and Sinhala. A citizen is entitled to initiate judicial proceedings or submit to court, pleadings and other documents

Table 3

Ethnic Distribution in Sri Lanka

	Sinhala %	Sri Lanka Tamil %	Indian Tamil %	Sri Lanka Moor %	Burgher %	Malay %	Others %							
SRI LANKA	10,985,666	73.98	1,871,535	12.60	825,233	5.50	1,056,972	7.12	38,236	0.26	43,378	0.29	28,981	0.20
Jaffna	4,615	0.56	792,246	95.32	20,001	2.41	13,757	1.66	350	0.04	46	0.01	97	0.01
Mannar	8,710	8.14	54,106	50.59	14,072	13.16	28,464	26.62	41	0.04	23	0.02	1,524	1.43
Vavuniya	15,876	16.55	54,541	56.87	18,592	19.39	6,640	6.92	21	0.02	31	0.03	203	0.20
Batticaloa	10,646	3.22	234,348	70.82	3,868	1.17	79,317	23.97	2,300	0.70	49	0.01	372	0.11
Mullaitivu	3,948	5.09	58,904	75.99	10,766	13.89	3,777	4.87	93	0.12	17	0.02	07	0.01
Trincomalee	86,341	33.62	86,743	33.78	6,767	2.64	74,403	28.97	1,211	0.47	735	0.29	590	0.23
Colombo	1,322,658	77.88	165,952	9.77	21,504	1.26	140,461	8.27	18,997	1.11	20,041	1.18	8,709	0.51
Kalutara	722,075	87.29	8,601	1.03	33,510	4.05	61,706	7.45	330	0.03	712	0.08	255	0.03
Kandy	844,325	74.96	55,675	4.94	104,840	9.90	112,052	9.94	2,402	0.21	2,648	0.23	4,354	0.38
Matale	285,514	79.88	20,936	5.86	24,084	6.74	25,836	7.23	250	0.07	514	0.14	307	0.09
Nuwara Eliya	187,280	35.86	70,471	13.49	247,131	47.32	14,668	2.81	602	0.12	1,113	0.21	954	0.18
Galle	768,928	94.40	6,093	0.75	11,069	1.36	25,896	3.18	216	0.03	158	0.02	2,219	0.27
Matara	609,367	94.59	3,918	0.61	13,931	2.16	16,457	2.55	254	0.04	61	0.01	243	0.04
Hambantota	412,965	97.37	1,553	0.37	308	0.07	4,732	1.12	63	0.01	4,380	1.03	101	0.02
Kurunegala	1,128,548	93.06	13,438	1.11	6,427	0.53	61,342	5.06	605	0.05	1,201	0.10	1,194	0.10
Puttalam	407,453	82.59	33,218	6.73	2,964	0.60	47,959	9.72	444	0.09	882	0.18	424	0.09
Anuradhapura	536,899	91.34	7,113	1.21	785	0.13	41,833	7.12	280	0.05	266	0.05	646	0.11
Polonnaruwa	238,803	90.88	5,875	2.24	205	0.08	17,091	6.50	57	0.02	132	0.05	590	0.22
Badulla	440,245	68.48	36,585	5.69	135,795	21.12	26,808	4.17	641	0.10	1,300	0.20	1,519	0.24
Moneragala	259,825	92.88	5,023	1.80	9,164	3.28	5,322	1.90	80	0.03	152	0.05	177	0.06
Amparai	146,371	37.65	78,315	20.14	1,410	0.36	161,481	41.53	643	0.17	179	0.05	387	0.10
Ratnapura	674,657	84.71	17,979	2.26	88,429	11.10	13,531	1.70	450	0.06	410	0.05	1,012	0.13
Kegalle	588,675	86.26	14,095	2.07	43,879	6.43	34,832	5.10	164	0.02	251	0.04	515	0.03
Gampaha	1,280,942	92.19	45,807	3.30	5,732	0.41	38,607	2.73	7,742	0.56	8,077	0.53	2,583	0.19

and participate in the proceedings in court in either of these languages. These provisions are quite unequivocal, and if implemented would go almost all the way to satisfying the demands of the Tamils in regard to their language rights.

Problems of Implementation

The implementation of these language provisions, however, in their administrative detail raises practical problems of all types. On the one hand, the Sinhala community must recognise the fact that the Tamil community resident in Sinhala-speaking areas are often reduced to the condition of the illiterate when they receive communications in the official language. The speedy implementation of the Language Provisions should therefore receive high priority. On the other hand, the Tamil community has to recognise some of the major practical constraints to the full and early implementation of these provisions. Given the availability of persons who are bilingually proficient in both Sinhala and Tamil, the government does experience serious difficulty in implementing the provisions of the Language legislation speedily on an island-wide basis. The large majority of recruits to the Administration in the 60s and the 70s are those who have been educated in the Sinhala medium and have little or no proficiency in English and Tamil. Conversely, this is likely to be true in the Tamil-speaking areas in regard to Sinhala and English. A Tamil person may probably not be able to send a telegram in Tamil from a post-office in a provincial town located in a Sinhala-speaking area. The same difficulty is likely to be encountered by a Sinhala person in a Tamil-speaking area. The problem of language in regard to the transaction of official business will vary in intensity from district to district in the Sinhala-speaking areas. In some districts the Tamil minority would be quite negligible in size such as in Hambantota or Matara. In other districts the Tamil minority would be sizeable as in the case of Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya. In the case of Colombo the language of communication with government in the case of Tamils would in all probability be English. The language problems of Sinhalese who are minorities in Tamil-speaking areas will be of an entirely different character.

Priorities for a phased programme

First, it would be necessary for both groups to agree on some of the inescapable practical limits to the implementation of

the Language provisions, at least in the short term. Such limits are dictated by factors such as the cost and the availability of qualified personnel to establish and maintain special units to give effect to the Constitutional provisions regarding language in all parts of the administration and all parts of the Island. In the first stage it may be difficult to cover the whole range of official transactions or to cater to the Tamil minority in all parts of the Island regardless of the size of the minority in a particular district. It would therefore be appropriate to agree on a phased programme of implementation which would set out priorities both in regard to government activities which transact a high volume of public business and areas where the Tamil minority is sizeable. In regard to language it is likely that there are some grievances of Sinhala minorities resident in Tamil-speaking districts.

Second, when the phased programme has been agreed upon, special arrangements for its efficient implementation would have to be made in each important unit of administration, the cadres with the required language proficiency assigned to the task, and given the right orientation to perform their duties without communal bias. The co-operation of trade unions would have to be obtained and would be of great help in achieving this objective. Third, it would be necessary to have a special governmental agency which would be entrusted with the task of monitoring the implementation and solving the problems as they arise. Such an agency could provide periodic reviews of progress to a special committee of the Parliament which could be set up to oversee the implementation of the programme. In the alternative, if the government goes ahead with the establishment of a national commission to look into grievances and discrimination of an ethnic character, this could devolve on the commission. It could have one of its divisions overseeing the entire area of language rights. The language issue has other implications of a far-reaching nature for inter-racial understanding and amity. It has been repeatedly argued that one essential ingredient of national unity and inter-racial amity is the capacity for communication in and understanding each other's language. Others have talked of the feasibility of using English as the link language. These long-term aspects of the language issue are no doubt vitally important for laying a stable foundation for communal harmony, but these cannot be discussed within the limits of this paper.

III

Educational issues in the Ethnic Conflict

Education has become one of the most controversial issues in ethnic relations in Sri Lanka and has clearly been one of the major causes underlying the intensification of ethnic conflict. At the primary and secondary level there have been no major grievances which have been articulated by the Tamil community. Nevertheless, one of the important issues is the provision of educational facilities for the Tamil minority which is resident outside the Tamil-speaking districts. This is linked to the size of the school-going population which is Tamil. This is a problem which needs to be examined and which calls for corrective action where necessary.

The role of education in the Jaffna Community

It is as we move into the field of higher education that we encounter much fiercer competition and sharper conflict of interests between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. In order to understand why access to higher education has become such a vital issue for the Tamil community, it is necessary to keep in mind that this community, particularly the Jaffna Tamil community, has had a long tradition of exporting its manpower for white-collar employment and professional occupations. With a high density of population and a poor base of natural resources, offering very limited prospects of economic growth and expansion, this community learnt to look outwards for employment during the colonial period and organised itself efficiently to supply the requirements of manpower at different levels of the colonial system. Jaffna had a sizeable outflow of migrants to the Malay Peninsula to work in the British administration in that colony. A considerable number came to the south of Sri Lanka in search

of white-collar employment. Supported by the efforts of the American missionaries and other Christian denominations, the Jaffna peninsula was able to develop an educational system of high quality for that period. It entered the post-independence period with an educational infrastructure which was equal or second only to that of Colombo. The free education system built on this foundation, rapidly increased the participation of the school-age population in the expanding school system. A significant flow of migration to the south, particularly to the Colombo District which was by far the largest employer of high and middle level workers, continued during this period. For example, the Sri Lankan Tamil population in this area increased from 132,000 in 1963 to 210,000 in 1981 which is much more than the rate of natural increase.

These increasing cohorts of school-goers naturally would have looked forward to the opportunities for upward social mobility in the same way that rural children in the Sinhala areas were aspiring to higher social status. In the case of the Jaffna community the demand for retaining the old areas of employment and moving in larger numbers to these areas would have been greater for the reason that it had traditionally geared itself for employment of this type in the labour market outside the peninsula. The developments that took place in the field of employment and education during the past thirty years eroded a significant part of the base on which that educational structure and the employment pattern had been developed. First, with the implementation of the Language policy, the opportunities for large-scale employment at the subordinate and middle levels such as the clerical service, the teacher positions in denominational schools as well as government schools, the posts such as postmaster, stationmaster and service personnel of various categories contracted in response to the requirements of the administration in the majority areas. This was in many ways an unavoidable process and was not the result of deliberate discrimination against the Tamil community. With the changes after independence it was inevitable that the administration had to be in the language of the people who were being administered and in the greater part of the Island Sinhala had to be that language. The large majority of those recruited to the lower and middle grades had to be proficient in Sinhala. When the State apparatus began to expand rapidly, a major share of the employment opportunities that were made available in the Sinhala-speaking

Table 5

Summary of Schools, Teachers Classified by Education District and Academic/Professional Qualifications and Teacher Pupil Ratio (1980)

Serial No.	Educational District	Graduates				University Diploma	Teacher-Pupil Ratio	Total L.K.G. No.	Drop-outs to Gr. 8 Ratio
		Schools	Science and Mathematics	Arts, Commerce Accountancy'	Science and Mathematics				
1.	Colombo	251	364	1,450	25	23.99	1,786	1.06	
2.	Homagama	200	45	743	15	23.03	2,688	3.25	
3.	Gampaha	345	113	1,002	18	24.88	4,113	2.94	
4.	Minuwangoda	249	55	413	11	24.47	3,200	3.81	
5.	Kalutara	462	104	866	11	23.21	4,286	3.19	
6.	Galle	511	133	1,388	13	23.34	4,938	3.35	
7.	Matara	418	87	1,012	4	22.44	3,504	2.9	
8.	Tangalle	279	35	834	5	27.31	2,441	3.08	
9.	Moneragala	175	13	350	—	28.10	333	0.74	
10.	Amparai	102	7	212	1	29.39	260	1.05	
11.	Polonnaruwa	146	11	369	1	26.48	2,175	4.99	
12.	Anuradhapura	507	30	744	2	23.47	3,636	3.98	
13.	Puttalam	142	7	99	—	28.45	1,679	5.24	
14.	Chilaw	171	32	315	4	21.32	2,797	5.62	
15.	Jaffna	559	40	700	2	29.41	4,141	2.86	
16.	Mannar	97	20	73	—	27.04	1,043	5.99	
17.	Vavuniya	213	23	123	1	27.71	1,206	4.57	
18.	Trincomalee	195	43	215	1	30.65	1,874	3.98	
19.	Batticaloa	246	57	144	—	31.04	2,590	4.69	
20.	Kalmunai	156	23	107	1	28.72	901	2.01	
21.	Kandy East	306	52	631	7	22.31	4,140	2.07	
22.	Kandy West	400	135	1,091	13	20.37			
23.	Matale	287	49	513	4	21.48	2,591	3.99	
24.	Nuwara Eliya	326	38	651	9	23.83	3,846	4.35	
25.	Bandarawela	342	48	807	3	20.96	1,649	2.08	
26.	Ratnapura	546	36	805	12	24.35	4,059	3.17	
27.	Kegalle	569	84	1,043	7	21.27	3,316	2.74	
28.	Kurunegala	386	82	948	10	19.62	3,600	3.5	
29.	Kuliyapitiya	285	40	502	6	20.24	2,579	4.24	
30.	Nikaweratiya	245	12	299	1	29.94	2,250	3.89	
TOTAL		9,117	2,238	18,450	187	23.99	77,621	3.11	

Source: School Census 1980

areas therefore went to the Sinhala majority. Employment was similarly available in the Tamil-speaking areas but not adequate to meet the increasing demand for employment that was being generated in the Tamil community which had been originally geared to supplying to the national system as a whole. We will see later how the proportions of Tamil employment contracted in the public sector in those very areas which expanded on a large scale.

The demand for higher education

At the same time as participation at the secondary level increased, the pressure for education at the tertiary level in the Tamil stream increased much in the same way as it did in the Sinhala stream. In the case of the Tamil stream several other factors compounded the problem. First, early in the process the Tamil community realised that the ready access they had enjoyed in the past to non-technical white-collar employment in the public service was not going to be available. This meant that they had to concentrate on the acquisition of skills which would have high demand in the market regardless of language proficiency. Second, when the avenues for large-scale employment which had been traditionally available to secondary school-leavers in the Tamil community such as jobs in the clerical service, teaching profession and similar categories declined, the pressure for higher education began to rise correspondingly. In response to these problems the educational system in the Tamil-speaking areas, particularly in Jaffna, had quickly adapted itself to provide education in the scientific and professional disciplines which were most in demand in the country. Some of the very problems arising out of the employment situation helped to strengthen the educational structure in Jaffna and in other Tamil areas. Quite early it had begun to produce a proportionately larger number of students in the science stream. Given the limited opportunities for non-professional employment in the non-Tamil areas, science graduates returned in increasing numbers to serve in Tamil schools. As a result the educational segment in the Tamil stream became quite well-equipped for science education.

On any criteria that we employ—whether they be the ratio of science teachers to pupils, laboratory space, schools classified according to Advanced Level courses—the Jaffna District occupies the first place. Tables 4 and 5 provide some comparative data which demonstrate the capacity of the educational

system in the Jaffna District relative to some of the other best developed districts in the Sinhala areas. In 1980 the schools in the Jaffna District had approximately 6,202 students in grade 12 of the science stream as compared with the total of 45,979 for the whole country. This accounts for approximately 13.5 of the total number of students at this level. The share of the population of the Jaffna District in the total population is only about 5.5 per cent. These figures indicate that Jaffna is organised both in terms of numbers as well as in terms of the quality of education to obtain a high share of the severely limited number of places in those disciplines which are most in demand and which provide access to some of the highest elite positions.

Table 5A
Facilities available in Government Schools (1980)

<i>Educational District</i>	<i>No. of Schools</i>	<i>Library</i>	<i>Science Labs.</i>
1. Colombo	251	126	128
2. Homagama	200	99	95
3. Gampaha	345	123	158
4. Minuwangoda	249	45	90
5. Kalutara	462	118	111
6. Galle	511	163	179
7. Matara	418	148	118
8. Tangalle	279	50	58
9. Moneragala	175	16	16
10. Amparai	102	36	23
11. Polonnaruwa	146	18	37
12. Anuradhapura	507	91	61
13. Puttalam	142	31	18
14. Chilaw	171	59	52
15. Jaffna	559	116	166
16. Mannar	97	9	16
17. Vavuniya	213	16	28
18. Trincomalee	195	41	35
19. Batticaloa	246	21	28
20. Kalmunai	156	9	21
21. Kandy East	306	79	67
22. Kandy West	400	109	89
23. Matale	287	50	64
24. Nuwara Eliya	326	75	84
25. Bandarawela	342	88	63
26. Ratnapura	546	128	123
27. Kegalle	569	164	157
28. Kurunegala	386	98	138
29. Kuliyaipitiya	286	100	93
30. Nikaweratiya	245	23	35
Total	9,117	2,249	2,351

Source: School Census — 1980

It is in the seventies that the ethnic imbalance in the admission to the Science, Engineering and Medical Faculties of the Universities surfaced as a major issue. The proportions of Tamil students entering these Faculties in the sixties continued to be considerably higher than their share in the total population. In the late sixties and the beginning of the seventies there was a further increase in these proportions. Some data on past admissions are given in Table 6. The Sinhala community saw this as both unusual and as a denial of the equitable share due to students in the Sinhala medium. The marks in the Tamil medium recorded a much higher average than that of the Sinhala medium. The validity of such a distribution of marks came to be questioned. It seemed to deviate considerably from the distribution in the Sinhala medium, or the distribution in both media at the 'O' Level.

Changes in the process of selection

In order to deal with this problem, the process of selection was modified and a system of standardisation was introduced. Under this system the marks were readjusted according to a standardised mean across the media. This apparently worked to the disadvantage of the students of the Tamil medium, many of whom found that whereas on their original marks they would have entered the University, they were now excluded on the standardised marks. Standardisation was soon replaced with a system of quotas for districts, based on population. This system was further modified when the present government came into power. Under the present system, 30 per cent of the places are filled in order of merit from all media without standardisation, 55 per cent on district quotas based on the total population of the district and the balance 15 per cent from districts classified as backward. This three-tier system was expected to give sufficient scope for the admission of the above-average students with high-level performances. The district quota of 55 per cent which applied to the majority of the candidates, was designed to correct to some extent the ethnic imbalance as well as adjust some of the disparities in regard to educational facilities as among the districts. This category was likely to contain the bulk of the 'average' performances; the range of marks in this category and the differences in performance would not be very significant. The district quota would not, therefore, seriously offend the criteria based strictly on the order of merit. The

third quota of 15 per cent was available to the students from the most backward districts which included both Sinhala and Tamil areas.

The quota system has been based on the argument that merit measured in terms of raw marks cannot be used as the sole criterion for selection to the universities and that the merit principle needs to be modified both on the ground of equity as well as efficiency. It has been repeatedly argued that it would not be correct to compare the performance of a student from a less advanced school with that of a student from one of the more advanced schools solely on the basis of the raw marks obtained by each. The most striking example of the application of this principle would be the situation in which a student from Royal College and a student from Moneragala obtain the same marks at the examination. In this case there would be no doubt that the abler student with the higher potential for university education would be the Moneragala student who with the initial handicaps of poor educational facilities has been able to perform equally well. Given the present reality where there are major disparities in the educational facilities available to students seeking admission to universities, the methods of selection should be able to take account of these disparities in order to select students with motivation and potential for university education.

The present system we saw attempts to do this by allocating quotas to districts as well as additional quotas for under-privileged districts. Admission under these quotas are, however, subject to a minimum qualifying mark. On the whole, this system has served two purposes. First, it has distributed the opportunities for higher education on a nation-wide basis so that able students eligible for higher education can overcome the initial disadvantage of the poor educational facilities that they have enjoyed. It has also been less discriminating in ethnic terms. For example, it benefits the disadvantaged student from Tamil districts, such as Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and even Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Second, the system to some extent has contributed to the retention of students in their districts and thereby helped to strengthen and improve the educational facilities in those districts in a manner which would in the long-term lead to an equalisation of educational opportunities. In the case of the first objective, although there has been some controversy regarding the quality of students and their performance at the university

Table 6

University Admissions 1975 compared with Hypothetical

District	Population Percentage		Medicine and Dental Surgery	
	Actual selection on District basis	Hypothetical selection according to merit		
Colombo	21.03	110		132
Kalutara	5.76	15		11
Kandy	9.34	24		17
Matale	2.49	08		03
Nuwara Eliya	3.57	02		02
Galle	5.80	29		18
Matara	4.63	08		05
Hambantota	2.68	01		—
Jaffna	5.54	29		61
Mannar	0.61	01		01
Vavuniya	0.75	—		—
Batticaloa	2.03	06		04
Amparai	2.14	—		—
Trincomalee	1.51	03		01
Kurunegala	8.09	12		03
Puttalam	2.99	03		02
Anuradhapura	3.06	02		01
Polonnaruwa	1.29	01		—
Badulla	4.84	02		01
Moneragala	1.51	—		—
Ratnapura	5.21	11		07
Kegalle	5.13	08		06
	100.00	275		275

Source: Planning and Research Unit, University

Table 6

Admissions 1975 compared with Hypothetical Admissions on Raw Marks

Population Percentage	Medicine and Dental Surgery		Engineering and Sciences	
	Actual selection on District basis	Hypothetical selection according to merit	Actual selection on District basis	Hypothetical selection according to merit
21.03	110	132	70	129
5.76	15	11	20	16
9.34	24	17	31	11
2.49	08	03	08	03
3.57	02	02	06	—
5.80	29	18	20	24
4.63	08	05	15	20
2.68	01	—	08	—
5.54	29	61	20	56
0.61	01	01	01	—
0.75	—	—	—	—
2.03	06	04	07	02
2.14	—	—	01	01
1.51	03	01	05	05
8.09	12	03	26	09
2.99	03	02	10	02
3.06	02	01	04	01
1.29	01	—	01	—
4.84	02	01	07	02
1.51	—	—	02	01
5.21	11	07	10	05
5.13	08	06	15	03
100.00	275	275	290	290

Source: Planning and Research Unit, University of Sri Lanka.

Table 6A

1983/84 Admissions compared with Hypothetical Admissions on R

D/STR/CT	MED/C/NE			PHYS/CAL SC/ENCE			AGR/C/B/OLOG		
	(1) Present Policy	(2) Raw Marks	(3) Differ- ence	(4) Present Policy	(5) Raw Marks	(6) Differ- ence	(7) Present Policy	(8) Raw Marks	(9) Differ- ence
1. Colombo	84	180	+ 96	167	148	-19	148	216	+ 68
2. Jaffna	61	118	+ 57	118	106	-12	94	163	+ 69
3. Galle	21	36	+ 15	52	44	-08	47	65	+ 18
4. Matara	11	16	+ 05	33	53	-20	25	45	+ 20
5. Kandy	22	25	+ 03	60	52	-08	37	56	+ 19
6. Mullaitivu	02	—	-02	03	02	-01	04	01	-03
7. Vavuniya	03	—	-08	—	02	+ 02	06	01	-05
8. Mannar	03	—	-03	—	03	+ 03	05	02	-03
9. Kalutara	15	12	-03	38	38	- 0	23	24	+ 01
10. Matale	06	02	-04	16	15	-01	09	06	-03
11. Trincomalee	07	02	-05	02	09	+ 07	16	03	-13
12. Moneragala	07	01	-06	01	—	-01	02	—	-02
13. Kegalle	11	03	-08	31	20	-11	18	17	-01
14. Batticaloa	11	03	-08	06	15	+ 09	19	09	-10
15. Polonnaruwa	08	—	-08	—	01	+ 01	10	01	-09
16. Kurunegala	18	09	-09	52	46	-06	34	20	-14
17. Ratnapura	12	02	-10	—	04	+ 04	21	07	-14
18. Amparai	12	01	-11	15	17	+ 0	26	102	+ 76
19. Gampaha	23	12	-11	66	61	-05	40	45	+ 05
20. Hambantota	12	01	-11	05	08	+ 03	34	03	-31
21. Nuwara Eliya	14	—	-14	01	02	+ 01	11	01	-10
22. Puttalam	15	01	-14	—	10	+ 10	27	10	-17
23. Anuradhapura	17	01	-16	02	02	- 0	31	04	-27
24. Badulla	18	—	-18	02	14	+ 12	35	03	-32
Total	413	425		670	672		712	704	

*This Column gives the number of students who would have been admitted or Excluded (—) if selection was based on raw marks.

Source: University Grants Commission.

Table 6A

ns compared with Hypothetical Admissions on Raw Marks

NE	PHYS/CAL SC/ENCE			AGR/C/B/OLOGY			ENG/NEER/NG			Total of Columns 3, 6, 9 and 12
(3) Differ- ence	(4) Present Policy	(5) Raw Marks	(6) Differ- ence	(7) Present Policy	(8) Raw Marks	(9) Differ- ence	(10) Present Policy	(11) Raw Marks	(12) Differ- ence	
+ 96	167	148	-19	148	216	+ 68	96	175	+ 79	+ 224
+ 57	118	106	-12	94	163	+ 69	64	148	+ 84	+ 198
+ 15	52	44	-08	47	65	+ 18	18	33	+ 15	+ 40
+ 05	33	53	-20	25	45	+ 20	16	16	+ 0	+ 45
+ 03	60	52	-08	37	56	+ 19	23	32	+ 09	+ 23
										530
-02	03	02	-01	04	01	-03	03	02	-01	- 5
-08	—	02	+ 02	06	01	-05	05	02	-03	- 9
-03	—	03	+ 03	05	02	-03	04	—	-04	- 7
-03	38	38	- 0	23	24	+ 01	24	15	-09	- 11
-04	16	15	-01	09	06	-03	07	03	-04	- 12
-05	02	09	+ 07	16	03	-13	16	04	-12	- 23
-06	01	—	-01	02	—	-02	—	—	—	- 9
-08	31	20	-11	18	17	-01	15	07	-08	- 28
-08	06	15	+ 09	19	09	-10	00	03	-19	- 38
-08	—	01	+ 01	10	01	-09	05	—	-05	- 21
-09	52	46	-06	34	20	-14	22	07	-15	- 44
-10	—	04	+ 04	21	07	-14	08	02	-06	- 26
-11	15	17	+ 0	26	102	-24	22	07	- 5	- 48
-11	66	61	-05	40	45	-05	29	26	-03	- 24
-11	05	08	+ 03	34	03	-31	16	01	-15	- 54
-14	01	02	+ 01	11	01	-10	06	—	-06	- 29
-14	—	10	+ 10	27	10	-17	24	07	-17	- 28
-16	02	02	- 0	31	04	-27	09	—	-09	- 47
-18	02	14	+ 12	35	03	-32	19	01	-18	- 56
670	672			712	704		473	491		519

the number of students who would have been admitted (+)
if selection was based on raw marks.
Grants Commission.

level, it would appear that students who have not been selected on the basis of their performance on the raw marks but who have entered under the quota system have performances which on the average do not compare unfavourably with those of the other students. If this is correct, the argument that the present system of selection impairs the efficiency of the education system and results in the deterioration of the quality of the university outputs cannot be sustained. It is, however, necessary to make a systematic evaluation of the results of the selection system as it has been operating in the last few years and examine its impact on the efficiency and quality of higher education as measured in terms of wastage and other indicators of performance and quality.

The grievances of Tamil students

These processes of selection, particularly the process of standardisation have been perceived by the Tamil community as devices which denied the students fair access to higher education. The special grievances of the Sri Lankan Tamil community can be illustrated by examining the admission to the Science, Medical and Engineering faculties for two years—1975 and the quota system as it operated then, and 1984 under the modified quota system. The data are set out in Tables 6 and 6A. In 1975, 117 students would have been eligible for admission from the Jaffna District if the selection had been made according to the order of merit based on raw marks. Only 49, however, gained admission on the system of selection which was in force. Galle with about the same population and the same district quota, obtained its full quota of 49, although on the basis of 'merit' assessed on raw marks, it would have qualified only for 42 places. Therefore, in 1975, only 42 per cent of the students eligible on the raw marks in the Jaffna District gained entry to the university. The situation has improved slightly with the introduction of the merit quota. In 1984, 337 students from the Jaffna District obtained admission to the Science, Medical and Engineering faculties on the basis of the quota system. Selection on raw marks would have given 535 places. The actual admissions amounted to approximately 63 per cent of the hypothetical selection.

It is, however, important to note that it is not only the Tamil students who are affected adversely by the district quota system.

The system also results in the exclusion of Sinhala students eligible on raw marks. In 1984, a large number of students from the districts of Colombo, Galle, Matara and Kandy fell into this category. In 1975, there were 81 such cases from the Colombo District. The total number eligible on the raw marks and excluded under the present system amounted to 332 in 1984, in these four districts as against 198 for the Jaffna District. But in the redistribution that takes place, it is the Tamil community that suffers the net loss. A small proportion of the students excluded from the Colombo District will be Tamils. If we assume that this amounts to 25 per cent, the figure for the Tamil students who are excluded amounts to 254. After taking into account the gain of approximately 72 places to disadvantaged Tamil districts, the net loss to the Tamil ethnic group taken as a whole is approximately 182. These places go to the other ethnic groups—Sinhalese and Muslims—in the educationally less advanced districts.

However, if we accept the underlying principle of equity which the system seeks to apply, it is incorrect to depict the outcome of the district quota system as a loss to any particular community. As we saw earlier, the Sinhala group of students who are adversely affected under the system, outnumber the Tamils. What takes place as a result of the system is a redistribution from educationally advanced districts to districts which are less advanced. But this does not offer much consolation to the individual students who have demonstrably fared quite well but have no access to higher education. Furthermore, when we consider the number excluded as a proportion of the student population who sought admission to the University, we observe that the impact of the district quota system is severest on the Jaffna students. The sense of injustice it generated in the Jaffna Tamil community has been quite intense and has probably had far-reaching effects in inciting the young generation to militant forms of protest.

The examination system and allegations of malpractices

Meanwhile, the examination system itself has come under strong attack. The wide disparities between the marks obtained in the Tamil medium and that of the Sinhala medium have been the subject of serious allegations. There have been accusations of irregularities against examiners in the Tamil medium. These

Table 7

Percentage distribution of Undergraduate Entrants by Academic Stream for the academic years 1977/78 to 1979/80

A

Academic Stream	Arts-oriented Studies			Phy. Sc./Bio. Sc. and Agriculture			Medicine and Dentistry		
	77/78	78/79	79/80	77/78	78/79	79/80	77/78	78/79	79/80
Ethnicity									
SINHALA	83.6	NA	81.4	68.4	62.7	65.6	54.7	60.0	55.6
TAMIL	15.4	NA	13.5	30.1	33.6	30.5	44.9	36.6	42.4
OTHERS	4.0	NA	5.1	1.5	3.7	3.9	0.4	3.4	2.0

Percent distribution of Undergraduate Entrants by Academic Stream For the academic years 1980/81, 1981/82

B

Academic Stream	Arts-oriented Studies			Law			Phy. Science		
	80/81	81/82	82/83	80/81	81/82	82/83	80/81	81/82	82/83
Ethnicity									
SINHALA	82.8	79.4	77.1	73.0	68.8	78.5	63.5	61.1	73.4
TAMIL	13.3	16.3	16.4	16.2	24.0	11.5	31.8	33.5	23.1
OTHERS	3.9	4.3	6.5	10.8	7.2	10.0	4.7	5.4	3.5

Source: U.G.C. (Research Division)

Note: These figures may differ slightly from the figures recently published in the Revised Public Service employment and admissions to Universities. This is due to differences in

Table 7

Graduate Entrants by Academic Streams and Ethnicity
Academic years 1977/78 to 1982/83

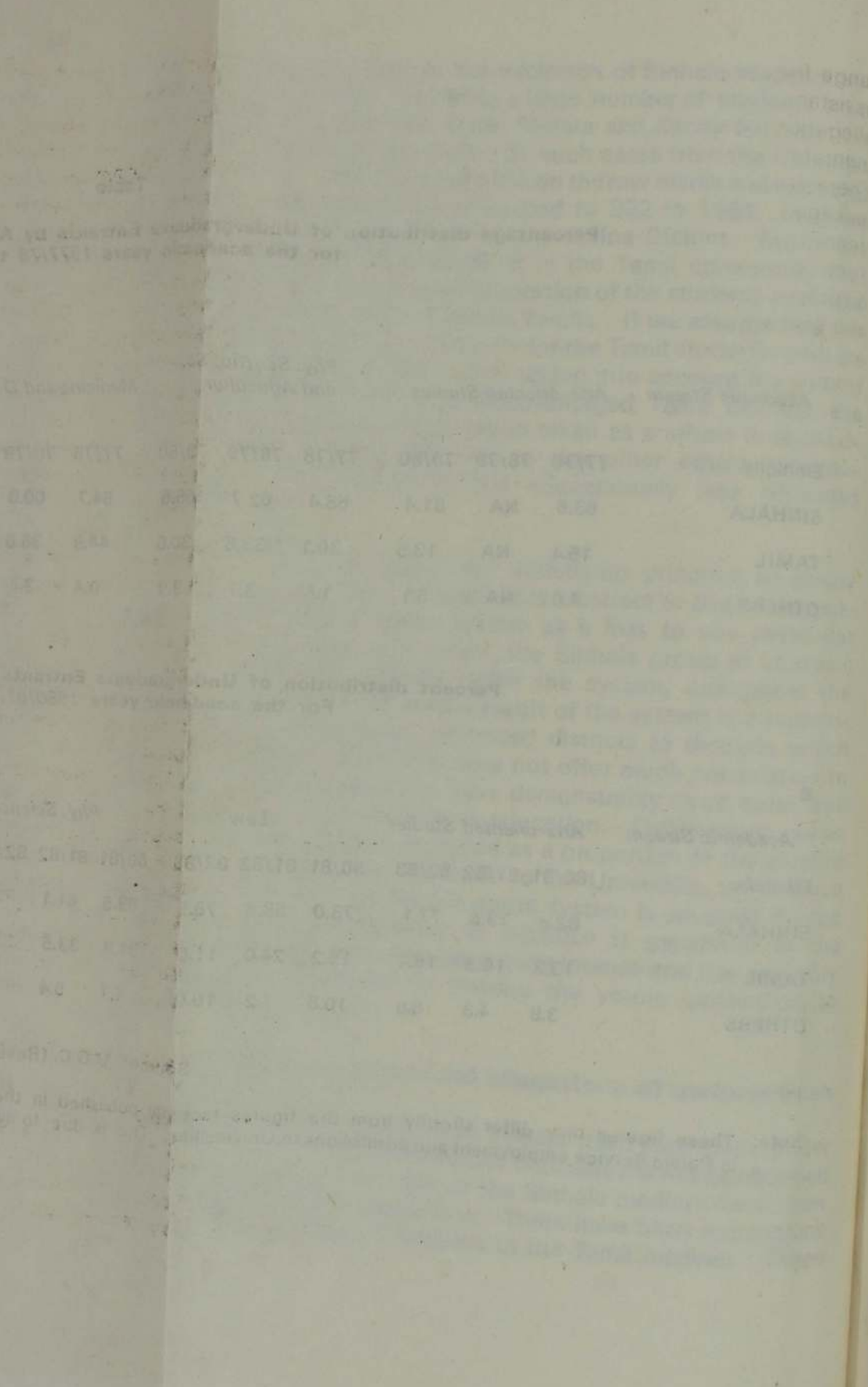
D. Sc. Entrants	Medicine and Dentistry			Veterinary Science			Engineering		
	77/78	78/79	79/80	77/78	78/79	79/80	77/78	78/79	79/80
19/80	77/78	78/79	79/80	77/78	78/79	79/80	77/78	78/79	79/80
65.6	54.7	60.0	55.6	46.7	NA	59.3	60.1	66.1	65.7
30.5	44.9	36.6	42.4	50.0	NA	33.3	37.9	29.6	30.0
3.9	0.4	3.4	2.0	3.3	NA	7.4	2.0	4.3	4.0

Undergraduate Entrants by Academic Stream and Ethnicity,
Academic years 1980/81, 1981/82 and 1982/83

	Phy. Science			Biological Science			Medicine			Engineering		
	80/81	81/82	82/83	80/81	81/82	82/83	80/81	81/82	82/83	80/81	81/82	82/83
1983	80/81	81/82	82/83	80/81	81/82	82/83	80/81	81/82	82/83	80/81	81/82	82/83
63.5	63.5	61.1	73.4	72.5	71.7	70.3	72.7	72.4	72.8	68.2	66.9	66.4
31.5	31.8	33.5	23.1	24.3	26.1	23.1	23.1	25.3	22.1	28.1	28.5	28.1
4.0	4.7	5.4	3.5	3.2	2.2	6.6	4.2	2.3	5.1	4.7	4.6	5.5

Source: U.G.C. (Research Division)

ently published in the Revised Interim Report of the Official Committee on ethnic proportion
 es. This is due to differences in classification and grouping of disciplines.



range from over-marking to leakage of questions, and to unfair assistance given to students in the Tamil medium. These allegations have in some instances been supported by documentary evidence and sworn statements of the University staff. There has been at least one instance in which allegations of leakage of question papers were proved. These allegations have been the basis of widespread national propaganda, that the Tamil community through unfair practices, had been obtaining a disproportionate share of the university places and have deprived eligible Sinhala students in the process. The Tamil community, on the other hand, has vigorously denied these allegations of irregularity and called for full-scale investigations and punishment of any found guilty. They have argued that the higher proportion of Tamil students entering the Science faculties is the result of a combination of factors which include the relatively high share of Tamil students in the science stream at the Advanced Level, the higher motivation, better preparation and higher natural ability of this segment of the Tamil community. The Sinhala spokesmen counter that neither the comparative performance prior to the 'A' level, nor those after admission to the University, lend support to the argument concerning higher natural capability. As a result of all this propaganda and controversy, communalistic and acrimonious ethnic conflicts have begun to disrupt the life of the university communities as well—communities which up to then had been able to preserve some measure of inter-racial amity and keep out communal violence from their institutions.

Improvements in the present system

It is unlikely that any type of investigation into irregularities, by itself will be successful in coming to any convincing conclusions or in dispelling the sense of grievance on either side. The allegations themselves are of such a nature that they are not readily amenable to investigations which can lead to either indisputable confirmation or rebuttal. What is much more important is positive action in regard to the future. The tertiary educational system has to be so developed and structured as to provide for a more equitable distribution of the opportunities for higher education, both across ethnic groups and within them. The ideal situation would be where the selection on the basis of merit increasingly reflects the ethnic proportions in the population. There is some evidence to suggest that with the levelling up of the quality of educational institutions which are outside Colombo

and in which the Sinhalese are in a majority, the proportions of the Sinhalese are slowly improving. Table 7 gives the data for admission for the years 1977 to 1983. The share of the Sinhala students has increased from 54.7 per cent for medicine and 60.1 per cent for engineering in 1977, to 72.8 per cent and 66.4 per cent respectively in 1983. This process reinforced by expansion of the tertiary sector, may eventually eliminate many of the causes for ethnic grievance and bring about a more equitable system. This, however, is a long-term evolution if it has to take place by itself. In the short term and medium term, there has to be effective intervention which takes the system more speedily in that direction.

For such interventions in the system of higher education to be acceptable to all communities, they have to be based on some general principles on which there is agreement. There has to be acceptance of the principle that given the system of education as at present with its wide disparities between the educational facilities available to different groups of students, there is need for a process of selection which can compensate for these disparities. This has to be done in a way which enables students of ability who have been affected by these disparities, to gain admission to the institutions of higher education. This has to be done in a manner which does not entirely disregard the criterion of proven merit. The present three-tiered system of an all-island merit quota, a district quota and a quota for backward districts could be improved to enable the selection process to take account of these considerations of both merit and equity. The proportions between merit, district quota and backward quota could be established more scientifically in which the district quota could apply to the large "middle" category of students where the difference in marks is within a relatively small range. It may be necessary to consider whether the formula for the district quota should be modified in terms of student population either at the secondary level or the 'A' Level, and whether the quota for the backward segment should take into account not only the inter-district differences but also some of the more marked intra-district differences such as those between poor disadvantaged schools and highly developed schools. It is said, for example, that the disadvantaged groups in the Colombo District have a dual disadvantage of the district quota, being lumped together with the best schools in the country. There are various methods of compensating for such inequalities. There

could be a grading of schools based on educational facilities which could be taken into account in identifying the disadvantaged category. If this is done it would be possible to monitor the elimination of educational inequalities as facilities are upgraded. This then will also make it possible to phase out the quota system progressively. After admission, the university system itself has to make special arrangements for upgrading the students taken on this basis so that they can benefit fully from higher education. Next, there has to be a relatively foolproof system of moderation of the markings of answer scripts of different media which can put an end to the allegations of irregularities or possibilities of such irregularities. This will apply primarily to the merit quota. It is not difficult to develop the capacity for implementing such a system of moderation which can reduce disparities in the standards of marking across media. Both the controls over setting of question papers, and supervision of examinations would have to be tightened. There has to be a strict code of conduct to govern university staff, to deal with allegations that staff are engaged in coaching candidates for admission. Some weightage should be given to a well-designed aptitude test which would be administered across the media. All these measures would help to reduce ethnic biases in selection.

The need for rapid expansion of the tertiary system

But even if these are worked out in a manner which does not adversely affect the capacity of the system to produce professional and managerial elites of high quality, it is still not likely to provide a full answer to the ethnic grievances relating to discrimination and imbalance. Here it is of utmost importance to take a look at the way in which the tertiary education system has expanded relative to the rest of the educational system. If we depict this system visually we would see that the primary level has a very wide base, permitting a high rate of participation of the relevant age group. The secondary level, though considerably smaller in size, still retains a fair proportion of the relevant age group in the school system. When we come to the tertiary level, particularly the university system, we find that it is a very thin narrow outgrowth from the rest of the system providing very limited access to the large output coming out of the secondary system, resulting in a rate of participation in the tertiary system which is one of the lowest in Asia. The number of students in Grade 12 is approximately 50,000; the number eligible for

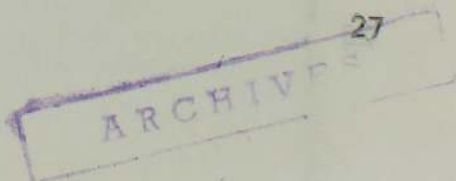
admission to the Universities in 1980 was 29,698. The number admitted was 4,857, a mere 16.35 per cent of those eligible. This is a highly contradictory situation for a country which boasts one of the highest rates of literacy in the Asian region and which has a high level of participation in the primary and secondary parts of the system. It points to the immense frustration that is generated at this level of the educational system.

One obvious answer is a rapid expansion of the tertiary system which includes both academic institutions, institutions for professional and higher vocational training, and higher educational opportunities through institutions such as the Open University and granting of external degrees and professional qualifications. Such an expansion of the tertiary level which can respond equitably to the demand will reduce the intensity of the competition and conflict which has been diverted to ethnic forms to the detriment of the whole nation. There are two major arguments that have been adduced against such a rapid expansion of the tertiary system. One concerns the availability of resources and the difficulty of allocating additional funds to higher education in a context in which other sectors with higher development priority are competing for the available resources. The second argument questions the wisdom of expanding the tertiary sector in a situation where the employment opportunities for higher level manpower will not proportionately expand to absorb the output of the tertiary system. These arguments cannot be dealt with fully within the scope of this paper and will have to be considered carefully on their own merits. The argument regarding resources has to be considered in relation to the national priorities arising out of the burning issues relating to the ethnic conflict. The budget for higher education itself is a relatively small component of the total educational budget and the total national budget. In 1981 it was 12 per cent of the former and 0.98 per cent of the latter. Doubling or even trebling the budget for higher education over a period on a phased programme for the substantial expansion of tertiary education is not likely to impose any intolerable strains on the national budget. Such an effort should aim at absorbing all those eligible for higher education in some form of tertiary education.

In regard to employment, a conservative approach might suggest that the expansion of tertiary education is fraught with considerable danger in that the problem would be postponed

only for a short period. The output of the tertiary system will be unloaded on the labour market with a higher level of education, and if the economy is not able to absorb it, the competition for employment and the problems that are generated would be of a more explosive character. As against this argument, there is evidence that the demand for manpower in the international market and the resultant drain have created shortages of critically important skills in many parts of the economy. The system has to be able to supply both domestic demand as well as the international market. Supplying the international market does not ultimately result in any national loss. The remittances which we receive from all parts of the world suggest that the country receives incomes from migrants of all categories, including the professional and the technical. Decisions in this area are no doubt fraught with some uncertainty and risk as the international labour markets may be subject to fluctuations of all types. We need, however, to take decisions which face these risks and uncertainties and consider the entire question of tertiary education, taking into account both the domestic and international markets.

In the Sri Lankan context, the scope for expansion of tertiary education is obviously in the professional and scientific disciplines and on vocationally oriented studies for which the employment prospects are better. The proportion of arts, commerce and law students to students in the professional and scientific disciplines in 1981 was 2:1 in the Sinhala stream, in sharp contrast to the Tamil stream where it was 3.7:6.3. A phased programme for the substantial expansion of tertiary education can significantly help to reduce both the ethnic imbalances and the discrimination in the selection to this level. Such a programme has to include Universities, higher and intermediate institutions for vocational studies and external degrees. Taken together with the improvements in the selection process discussed earlier, these measures can form part of a package which can fulfil national aspirations and restore faith and confidence of the minority community in the capacity of the national system to satisfy their needs.



IV

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

The Ethnic Distribution of Employment

Access to employment and the distribution of employment opportunities raise another crucial issue in the relations between the two communities. The Sri Lankan Tamil community claims that they have been denied fair access to employment and that there has been serious discrimination against them in this field. The spokesmen for the Sinhala community, on the other hand, have repeatedly argued that the Tamil community as a whole enjoys a disproportionate share of employment available in the public sector as well as the opportunities in a variety of professional fields. A preliminary analysis of the ethnic distribution of the professionals (both in government and private sectors) supports the argument that the proportion of Tamils is much higher than their share in the population—vide Table 9. For medical professionals it is 38.5 per cent, for Attorneys-at-Law 28 per cent, for Engineers of all categories 34 per cent, for University staff 22 per cent. More recently the Sinhala spokesmen have stated that the Tamil community has been acquiring a disproportionate share in other economic activities in the Sinhala areas such as in trade, industry and commerce. In some of the arguments raised by some of the Sinhala protagonists there is an implicit criterion of ethnic proportionality which has several long-term implications for both efficiency as well as equity and needs to be examined carefully.

But quite apart from this, there are exaggerations and distortions in the way in which both communities present their grievances. At the time of Independence, the Tamil community already enjoyed a share of the employment in the public sector

Table 8

State Personnel classified by Major Occupational Groups

Occupational Groups	Sinhalese	%	Tamil	%	Moor and Malay	%	Blacks
Administrative, Professional and Technical Grades	5,413	67.8	2,275	28.5	201	2.5	
Middle Grades	76,532	81.2	14,397	15.3	2,073	2.2	
School Teachers	83,994	81.5	11,963	11.6	6,820	6.6	
Minor Employees	45,329	86.4	5,542	10.6	1,020	1.9	
Labour Grades	55,610	85.5	7,501	11.6	1,284	2.0	
Unspecified	773	—	114	—	17	—	
	267,651	82.68	41,852	12.93	11,415	3.53	

Source: Statistics of Personnel in the State Service.

Table 8 (Contd.)

Corporations Sector Employees by Major Occupational Groups

Occupational Groups	Sinhalese	%	Tamils	%	Moors	%
Total	195,955	85.7	24,373	10.66	5,847	2.5
Professional, Technical and Related Workers	8,155	75.5	2,304	21.33	202	1.8
Administrative and Managerial Workers	4,539	83.31	682	12.51	127	2.3
Clerical and Related Workers	62,596	86.55	7,175	9.92	1,678	2.3
Sales Workers	892	87.28	85	8.32	22	2.1
Service Workers	11,602	87.6	1,111	8.39	389	2.9
Agricultural, Animal Husbandry and Forestry Workers, Fishermen and Hunters	4,541	60.88	2,671	35.81	86	1.1
Production and Related Workers, Transport Equipment Operators and Labourers	101,884	88.0	9,687	8.36	3,278	2.8
Workers not classified by Occupation	1,746	69.72	658	26.27	65	2.5

Source: Census of Public and Corporation Sector Employment, 1980.

Table 8 (Contd.)

Public Sector Employees by Major Occupational Groups

Occupational Groups	Sinhalese	%	Tamils	%	Moors	%
Total	311,089	84.34	42,818	11.6	12,283	3.3
Professional, Technical and Related Workers	116,557	82.43	17,123	12.11	7,204	5.0
Administrative and Managerial Workers	3,013	81.3	576	15.5	71	1.1
Clerical and Related Workers	61,137	83.8	9,647	13.2	1,577	2.1
Sales Workers	1,741	83.14	297	14.2	46	2.1
Service Workers	23,839	86.9	2,472	9.01	668	2.4
Agricultural, Animal Husbandry and Forestry Workers, Fishermen and Hunters	2,145	73.2	618	21.1	146	4.9
Production and Related Workers, Transport Equipment Operators and Labourers	86,268	85.5	11,511	11.4	2,345	2.3
Workers not classified by Occupation	16,389	93.8	574	3.28	226	1.2

Source: Census of Public and Corporation Sector Employment—1980, Sri Lanka.
 Includes teachers who totalled 136,714 according to the 1980 School Census.
 The number enumerated for each ethnic group in the Census of Public Sector Employment, 1980.

Table 8

by Major Occupational Groups and Race — 1972

	%	Moor and Malay	%	Burghers	%	Others	%	Unspecified	%	Total
5	28.5	201	2.5	74	0.9	15	0.18	14	0.17	7,992
7	15.3	2,073	2.2	804	0.9	150	0.1	295	0.3	94,251
3	11.6	6,820	6.6	106	0.1	54	0.05	153	0.15	103,090
2	10.6	1,020	1.9	265	0.5	126	0.24	156	0.3	52,438
1	11.6	1,284	2.0	225	0.3	119	0.20	185	0.3	64,984
4	—	17	—	2	—	—	—	57	—	963
2	12.93	11,415	3.53	1,476	0.46	464	0.14	860	0.27	323,718

ics of Personnel in the State Services — 1972.

Table 8 (Contd.)

ees by Major Occupational Groups and Race — 1980

Tamils	%	Moors	%	Malays	%	Burghers	%	Others	%	Total
24,373	10.66	5,847	2.55	1,031	0.45	1,081	0.47	244	0.1	228,531
2,304	21.33	202	1.87	64	0.59	48	0.44	28	0.25	10,801
682	12.51	127	2.33	56	1.02	28	0.51	16	0.29	5,448
7,175	9.92	1,678	2.32	412	0.56	399	0.55	63	0.08	72,323
85	8.32	22	2.15	10	0.98	12	1.17	1	0.1	1,022
1,111	8.39	389	2.93	51	0.38	71	0.53	16	0.12	13,240
2,671	35.81	86	1.15	84	1.12	58	0.77	18	0.24	7,458
9,687	8.36	3,278	2.83	337	0.29	452	0.39	97	0.08	215,735
658	26.27	65	2.59	17	0.67	13	0.51	5	0.2	2,504

c and Corporation Sector Employment — 1980, Sri Lanka.

Table 8 (Contd.)

by Major Occupational Groups and Race — 1980

Tamils	%	Moors	%	Malays	%	Burghers	%	Others	%	Total
42,818	11.6	12,283	3.33	1,109	0.3	1,356	0.36	194	0.05	368,849
17,123	12.11	7,204	5.09	195	0.13	249	0.2	59	0.04	141,387
576	15.5	71	1.9	25	0.67	14	0.37	6	0.16	3,705
9,647	13.2	1,577	2.16	323	0.44	280	0.4	33	0.04	72,997
297	14.2	46	2.2	2	0.1	5	0.23	3	0.14	2,034
2,472	9.01	668	2.44	112	0.4	325	1.2	12	0.04	27,428
618	21.1	146	4.98	10	0.34	10	9.34	1	0.03	2,930
11,511	11.4	2,345	2.32	334	0.33	311	0.3	72	0.07	100,841
574	3.28	226	1.29	108	0.6	162	0.9	8	0.04	17,467

ployment—1980, Sri Lanka.

g to the 1980 School Census. Of these, 112,031 were Sinhala and 14,833 were Tamil.
 in the Census of Public Sector Employees is not available.

Occupational Group	State Personnel	Total
Unskilled	1,000	1,000
Labour Grades	1,000	1,000
Minor Employes	1,000	1,000
School Grades	1,000	1,000
Technical Grades	1,000	1,000
Administrative Professional and	1,000	1,000

Source: State Personnel Commission, 1935

Occupational Group	Corporate Sector	Total
Unskilled	1,000	1,000
Labour Grades	1,000	1,000
Minor Employes	1,000	1,000
School Grades	1,000	1,000
Technical Grades	1,000	1,000
Administrative Professional and	1,000	1,000

Source: State Personnel Commission, 1935

Occupational Group	Public Sector	Total
Unskilled	1,000	1,000
Labour Grades	1,000	1,000
Minor Employes	1,000	1,000
School Grades	1,000	1,000
Technical Grades	1,000	1,000
Administrative Professional and	1,000	1,000

Source: State Personnel Commission, 1935

which was relatively high compared with their share in the total population. Their present share of employment in the public sector as a whole, including both Government and State corporations, is in the region of 11.24 per cent compared with their share in the population which is 12.6 per cent (vide Table 8). These aggregate figures, however, do not tell the entire story. If we take the higher professional grades in the public service which includes engineers, doctors, accountants, and so on, the proportions of the Tamils and Sinhalese are in the region of 35-65. Therefore the ethnic imbalance regarding which the Sinhala community complains, is confined almost entirely to the superior grades in the professional and technical fields. This is primarily the result of the advantages which the Jaffna Tamil community enjoys in the field of higher education. The vociferous groups in the Sinhala community which complain against this state of affairs argue that this segment of employment contains an important part of the highly paid professional decision-making elite of the country, and that therefore should not be seriously out of balance with the country's ethnic composition.

The Implications of Ethnic Quotas

As against this, we have to recognise that the country needs all the professional expertise and high-level manpower that it can produce if it is to carry through a programme for the rapid development of the economy. We also need to realise that the professionals of all ethnic groups have contributed to some of the major developments that have taken place. If we say that a disproportionate share of the engineering staff of the Irrigation Department has belonged and continues to belong to the Tamil community, we are also saying that the Tamil community has contributed more than its share to the restoration of the country's ancient irrigation system. The Tamil community, on the other hand, has to recognise that the majority community will legitimately aspire to a proportionate share of the elite positions of the country. The majority community would therefore try to compensate for disadvantages that have been built into the system over a long period. They therefore seek recognition of the principle that the employment in the public sector, particularly the higher grades, must reflect an equitable ethnic balance and that the educational system and the processes of selection should contribute to the achievement of such a balance.

There are enormous difficulties in putting such a principle into effect. First, in the public sector as a whole there are a large number of vacancies in these high-level technical cadres which remain unfilled owing to shortage of personnel. In these circumstances, it is in the national interest to recruit as many qualified persons as available regardless of the ethnic balance. This problem will not exist if the intake to higher educational institutions expands and output matches or exceeds the existing demand. Then the question that arises is how the principle of an equitable ethnic balance can be made consistent with the criterion of merit and capability. The contention of the Sinhala community that the Tamils have an undue proportion of posts in the technical and professional grades applies mainly to the categories of engineers, doctors and accountants. Many of the documents of Sinhala nationalists select particular departments to prove their point. While there is what can be described as an unduly high proportion of Tamil professionals of higher grade in such departments as the Telecommunication Department, the Health Department, the Irrigation Department, the same cannot be said of a number of other technical departments such as the Highways Department, the Electricity Board or the Survey Department. It often happens that attention is drawn to those segments where the Tamil professionals and other public servants have high visibility. To place this in the proper perspective, it would be necessary to consider these areas of concentration in relation to the other large areas where the Tamil share may be less than the proportion due in terms of their share in the total population. First, a cursory examination of the ethnic distribution of the public sector such as the positions of Secretary, Additional Secretary, Heads of Departments, deputies and so on, indicates that while Tamils do hold key positions in the administration, the aggregate number of such posts do not appear to reach the proportion that might be required if we establish an equitable ethnic balance. Second, in the higher non-technical administrative grades, Tamil proportions are lower and barely reach the proportion calculated on ethnic lines—vide Table 10. In the Administrative Service their proportion is 13.3 per cent. The protagonists of Sinhala grievances therefore need to face the factual position with a due sense of impartiality and justice. When the various imbalances in different parts of the public service both for and against the Tamils are set off against each other, it is very likely that the ethnic composition of the public service in the higher grades, both technical and non-technical

Table 9

Summary of Analysis of the Ethnic distribution of Professionals listed in the Ferguson's Directory 1979-1981

Profession	Sinhala	Sri Lanka Tamils	Moors	Others	Total	Tamil %	Sinhala %	Moors %
1. Attorney-at-Law	1,883	857	238	86	3,064	27.97	61.46	7.76
2. Medical Practitioners	2,734	1,950	149	221	5,054	38.58	46.97	2.93
3. Dentists and Dental Surgeons	320	247	15	26	608	40.63	52.63	2.46
4. Registered Medical Practitioners	414	408	18	23	863	47.28	47.97	2.09
5. Ophthalmic Surgeons	3	12	0	2	17	70.59	17.64	0.00
6. Members of Sri Lanka Institute of Architects	67	21	1	8	97	21.65	69.07	1.03
7. Persons with Annual Licences in Surveying only	47	9	4	5	65	13.84	72.30	6.15
8. Persons with Annual Licences in Surveying and Levelling	219	80	5	9	313	25.56	69.97	1.59
9. Total of (7) and (8)	265	89	9	14	377	23.61	70.29	2.36
10. Veterinary Surgeons and Practitioners	175	142	9	12	338	42.01	51.78	2.66
11. Accountants and Auditors	72	80	17	2	171	46.78	42.11	9.94
12. Civil Engineers	410	273	15	16	714	38.24	57.42	2.10
13. Mechanical Engineers	130	30	2	10	172	17.44	75.58	1.16
14. Electrical Engineers	106	51	3	6	166	30.72	63.85	1.80
15. Water Engineers	12	13	2	0	27	48.15	44.44	7.41
16. Structural Engineers	9	4	0	1	14	28.57	64.29	0.00
17. Chemical Engineers	4	3	1	0	8	37.50	50.00	12.50
18. Metallurgical Engineers	2	0	0	0	2	0.00	100.00	0.00
19. Agricultural Engineers	0	1	0	0	1	100.00	0.00	0.00
20. Other Corporate Members of allied professions (Engineering)	30	17	3	9	59	28.81	50.85	5.08
21. Total Engineering Nos. 12 to 20	703	398	26	42	1,169	34.05	60.14	2.22
22. University Staffs up to Library Assistants	1,645	490	28	42	2,205	22.22	74.60	1.26
Share of total (1 to 2)	8,282	4,628	510	478	13,898	33.6	59.3	3.6

Note: Indian Tamils are almost wholly the estate population. They are 825,233 (or 5.56%) of the total population of 14,800,001 at the 1981 Census of Population. The Indian Tamil population has historically been isolated in the Estates and deprived of higher education.



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taken as a whole, is not very different from the ethnic proportions in the total population.

Career Advancement and Recruitment

Another cause for complaint is the ethnic discrimination that affects the prospects of career advancement of Tamil officers in the public sector. The spokesmen who present the Sinhala grievances, on the other hand, argue that there is a strong tendency among Tamil superiors to show favour to Tamils both in the matter of advancement as well as recruitment. There is not much purpose in examining these general allegations. Individual cases of discrimination and bias will always occur. As against the complaints of the Tamil community there is the evidence that ethnic considerations have not stood in the way of the advancement of Tamil officers to the highest positions in such sensitive areas as the Police Service, the Judiciary and the Diplomatic Service.

When we exclude the professional and technical services, we find that in the other sectors of the public services such as the Clerical Service, the teachers, service workers, production and related workers, the proportion of Tamil employees is not very different from the proportion of the Sri Lankan Tamils in the total population. They are not marginally below or above this proportion. This is an important aspect of the whole issue regarding ethnic balance in public service employment. These subordinate grades which have been enumerated account for more than 90 per cent of the total employment available in the public service. Of the teachers, the Tamils have approximately 11 per cent; in the Clerical Service they have approximately 13.2 per cent; of production workers and related workers 11 per cent; and of service workers 9 per cent. The present shares of the Tamil community in such services as the Clerical Service or the teaching profession as a whole are significantly lower than the shares they enjoyed three decades ago. There has no doubt been a very sharp decline in these shares. If we go on the data of the censuses for public sector employment, in 1972 their share in State employment (excluding Public Sector corporations) was 12.92 per cent. In 1980 it had dropped to 11.6 per cent. Of an increment of 45,131 between 1972 and 1980 the increment in the Tamil segment was 966. Even if we make generous allowance for under-enumeration of Tamils in the total number under-

enumerated, the Tamil share in the increment is likely to remain very negligible.

A combination of factors has led to the contraction of employment for Tamils in these sectors of the public service. In almost all these areas employees have to be proficient in the language which is spoken in the community in which they work. In the teaching profession they have to be proficient in the medium of instruction in the schools in which they teach. The rapid drop in the share of the Tamil public servants in these segments of the public service was therefore part of an inevitable process. The sharp decline in the share of the Tamils during a period when government service has expanded very rapidly suggests that the share of the Tamils in the new recruitment has declined sharply from what they held in the past. The fact that their share has declined to levels which are only marginally different from their share in the population suggests that during the period of decline their share of the new recruitment was less than the share of the population. Existing cadres would have been increasingly deployed to man the expansion in the Tamil-speaking areas, while the expansion in the Sinhala-speaking areas would have created employment opportunities largely for the Sinhalese, it is likely that by now this trend would have levelled off and that the increment to the public service in these grades would correspond more closely to the ethnic composition of the total population. Such a process is not unacceptable either in terms of efficiency or equity, and can be administered and regulated in a manner which satisfies both communities.

With the decentralisation of government which has to be an essential part of the solution to the ethnic conflict, the composition of the public service at the district level would automatically tend to reflect the ethnic composition of that area. With a decentralised system it may become necessary to restructure the entire public service. The relationship between the district services and the central government services would have to be clearly defined. Relationships between the two, the movement from the one to the other, the processes of recruitment that would apply in each case, the ethnic composition of each, would be matters which would have to be considered in the course of such restructuring. It is essential, however, that the public service in all parts of the Island should contain an appropriate mix of ethnic groups. If the public service is to play its key role in promoting

Table 10

Ethnic distribution of Senior Administrative, Professional and Technical Personnel

	Sinhala		Tamil		Others	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Secretaries to Ministries	39	95.12	2	4.88	—	—
Heads of Departments						
(Directors and Commissioners only)	224	79.15	46	16.25	13	4.59
Additional Secretaries	25	83.33	4	13.33	1	3.33
Assistants						
(All personnel designated Assistants)	892	81.24	171	15.57	35	3.19
Other Secretaries	107	89.17	9	7.50	4	3.33
Chairmen of Corporations	86	88.66	6	6.19	5	5.15
Deputies (only)	394	76.06	100	19.31	24	4.63
All other Senior Grades	2,232	76.57	559	19.18	124	4.25
(Anyone who does not fall into the above categories is mentioned here)						
Total of all	3,999	78.38	897	17.58	206	4.04

The data in this table have been extracted from "SRI LANKA OFFICIAL TELEPHONE DIRECTORY 1982" and is subject to further verification. This excludes District officials such as Government Agents.

national unity, this should be one of the basic principles both in the employment as well as the deployment of public servants. It should be possible to accommodate the principle in a manner which is acceptable to both communities.

Towards an Acceptable Policy Framework

To summarise the position regarding public sector employment, in the higher grades while the Tamil community has a disproportionate share of the technical and professional positions, they appear to be obtaining less than their share of employment in other higher level non-technical posts. In the middle and lower grades, their present share is slightly less than the share in the total population indicating that they have been receiving a very small proportion of the increment. A rigid system of ethnic quotas, however, does not seem to be the answer to these problems, although such a system may bring some advantages to the Sinhala community in the higher grades and to the Tamil community in the lower grades. In the higher grades, the Government may need all the manpower that is available, while in the lower, a proportion of those recruited on ethnic quotas may not be readily employable for reasons such as language.

First, the growth of employment opportunities and the ethnic mix in the recruitment should be monitored over the next five years to examine how changes at the higher educational level on the one hand and the processes of decentralisation on the other are affecting the ethnic composition of employment in both the higher grades as well as the lower grades. Second, what is necessary in the short-term is some expansion of employment opportunities in the middle level and lower grades of the public service for Tamil school-leavers where the contraction of new job opportunities for Tamils seems to have been greatest. These jobs will be in the clerical and similar grades, junior technical grades, as well as manual and operative grades in departments and public corporations. This could be dealt with as a special problem and does not require a system of quotas. A task force could be appointed to examine the cadres of the relevant services in the Tamil areas and other parts of the public service where Tamil officers of these grades could be absorbed (as might be the case when the National Languages policy is implemented). It should then determine reasonable rates of expansion of cadres to meet current and future needs. Third, the recruitment to

higher grades both technical and non-technical should be kept under review for the ethnic imbalances that adversely affect Sinhalese in the former and Tamils in the latter. It should be the accepted recruitment policy to correct such imbalances, where the eligibility in other criteria is equal. Finally, if a National Commission on ethnic relations (or inter-racial justice), is established, the problems of ethnic discrimination in employment could be one of its major areas of responsibility.

Economic Opportunities in Trade and Industry

There is then the larger question of the distribution of economic opportunities in trade, commerce and industry. First, there is little evidence to support the contention of the Sinhala majority that the Tamil community enjoys a disproportionate share of these opportunities. There is a problem of deciding what this equitable proportion should be. The Sri Lankan Tamils comprise 4.5 per cent of the population in Sinhala-speaking areas. In the Colombo and Gampaha districts they comprise 10 per cent. What is the proportion that is appropriate, and then how do we measure this proportion in terms of the whole of industry, commerce and trade? Quite apart from this problem, how do we apply the criterion of ethnic proportionality in an economy which is open and competitive and in which the private sector operates with a relative degree of freedom? Would it not constitute an intervention in a market system which will militate against efficiency and growth and in the long run be detrimental to the interests of the national economy as a whole and therefore to the Sinhala community as well? We have seen that in the period of industrial growth, Tamil enterprise has been successful in creating a sizable volume of employment for a Sinhala workforce in the South. Should not the economy harness the entrepreneurial capacities of all groups, particularly when such capacity is relatively scarce and when the expansion of the economy depends critically on it.

The spokesmen for the Sinhala community would probably contend that they are not thinking of rigid ethnic proportions in private sector economic activity; they are only arguing that the Sinhala business community is disadvantaged in a large number of areas in which Tamil capital and enterprise has been able to establish itself over a long period, and through its own networks and linkages use the system to its advantage to secure a dominant

share in these areas. They would then proceed to argue that what the Sinhala business community requires are measures which take cognizance of the existing situation and which will promote Sinhala enterprise in the areas in which they are disadvantaged and at the same time will contain the expansion of Tamil enterprise in these areas. These arguments raise another set of issues which deserve objective and impartial consideration. First, it is quite probably correct that Tamil enterprise has entered certain sectors of industry, commerce and trade and holds a large share in these sectors which if compared with their size as a minority in the country appears to be disproportionate. For example, they have had high visibility in Petah in the wholesale trade in subsidiary foodstuffs. They had a large number of small trading establishments scattered throughout the city of Colombo and its suburbs, which again had high visibility in the pockets in which they were established. They had a few large-scale industries.

There is no detailed analysis done of the industry, trade and commerce in the Colombo and Gampaha Districts to come to any reliable conclusion in regard to the proportion of Tamil enterprise in the main industrial urban areas which contain the large majority of industries and large-scale businesses. A more comprehensive and reliable analysis of the ethnic distribution of industry and commerce is in progress,¹ and when complete should throw more light on these questions. The impartial observation of evidence that is available casts serious doubts on the categorical conclusions made by some of the Sinhala spokesmen. While pointing to areas where the Tamil entrepreneurs have, so to say, "specialised" and where their presence is substantial, it is also possible to point to a large number of areas where their presence is either quite negligible or not evident at all. In domestic agriculture and food production we can select the wholesale trade in fish and vegetables which are almost entirely in the hands of the Sinhalese. This can be set against the trade in subsidiary food crops where the main part of the marketable surplus comes from the North. Likewise, in most of the sectors in which the major part of the production is in the Sinhala areas, the predominant share is with Sinhala entrepreneurs. There are any number of trades and industries in this category—*e.g.*, cinnamon, the fibre industry, rice milling, the rubber trade, desiccated coconut production and so on. One can point to many commer-

¹ A survey is being undertaken by the Marga Institute.

cial areas in Colombo city and the suburbs where the Tamil presence is hardly visible and where the trading establishments are almost entirely in the hands of Sinhala and other communities. A small example is the trade in motor spares. Therefore, if we measure the segment of Tamil enterprise in relation to the totality of economic activity in Greater Colombo, we might very well find that this segment barely makes up 10 per cent.

The argument that is implicit in the grievance against Tamil enterprise is that opportunities for business activities, whether in trade or industry, which are available in the towns in areas such as Colombo should be available primarily to the Sinhalese majority. If the Tamil entrepreneur enters an area in which the Sinhalese are in a majority and establishes any business enterprise in trade and industry, it comes to be seen as an intrusion into an area over which the Sinhala entrepreneur had a natural right and a prior claim. Such a line of argument is fraught with great danger for the national unity of the country. It is in fact an approach which is complementary to and which reinforces the politics of separation. It is true that in a situation where ethnic conflict is latent and where ethnic relations are severely strained, when a small ethnic minority captures a significant share of the economic activity in the area inhabited by the majority, there is likely to be strong opposition by the business community of the majority. This would be equally true of the reverse process by which entrepreneurs of the majority community capture a large share of the economic opportunities in the areas inhabited by the minority community. These apprehensions have to be recognised by both communities. But as stated earlier, the realities themselves do not seem to warrant these apprehensions.

To begin with, there has to be the acceptance of the principle that Sri Lankan citizens, whether Sinhalese or Tamil, will enjoy the opportunities for trade, business and related economic activities in any part of the Island. Therefore, in principle, capital and enterprise of Sinhala or Tamil entrepreneurs should be free to move into both Sinhala and Tamil areas. Within this broad principle the business communities of all ethnic groups supported by the Government should work out an unwritten code where all ethnic groups can participate in economic activity without acquiring an undue proportion of economic power in each other's areas. This would imply that generally the business community of any ethnic group will maintain the economic

profile appropriate to a minority in areas in which other ethnic groups are in a preponderant majority. In such a framework the majority has to provide a secure environment conducive for minority enterprise. Both communities will also have to seek collaboration and participation in forms of enterprise which move away from closed private family businesses in which the ethnic character becomes sharply defined. There has to be an increasing use of public corporate forms which modernise private sector enterprise and broaden the base of participation. If the business communities of all ethnic groups subscribe to these principles in general, it could work out a framework for co-existence and accommodation in which much of the ethnic character of economic competition and rivalry will disappear.

There are other grievances of the Sinhalese regarding the distribution of economic opportunities. These concern their role in the Tamil areas. Many of the Sinhala spokesmen have protested that the Sinhala people do not have easy access to land, economic opportunities and ownership of property in the Tamil areas, whereas the Sri Lankan Tamils have continued to migrate out from Tamil areas to the Sinhala areas. There has been a sharp decline of the Sinhala population in the Jaffna District between 1971 and 1981—not only a decline in the share but a rapid decline in absolute numbers. The Sinhalese also complain that the traditional laws concerning ownership of land and property make it difficult for outsiders to acquire land. It is correct that a large proportion of the Sinhalese who were resident in the Jaffna District and were engaged in various occupations ranging from agriculture to the bakery industry had returned to the Sinhala areas. The events of 1977, both in the North and in the South and the growing violence and insecurity in the Jaffna District, have obviously been the main reasons for their decision to leave the District. There is also some substance in the complaint that a closely-knit traditional society such as that of the Tamil community does not readily provide opportunities to outsiders to enter it and acquire membership to participate in its social and economic life. In such communities, land is not easily available in the market for sale to outsiders.

The Tamils, however, have countered that there are no legal impediments to prevent non-Tamils from acquiring property and purchasing land in Tamil areas if such land is available for sale. They contend that the Sinhala grievance is more imagined than

real. They inquire whether there have been in fact instances where Sinhalese have made efforts to purchase land or sought investment opportunities in the Tamil areas and failed to secure them. They assert that the Sinhala people in fact see little economic opportunities in the Tamil areas, and left to themselves would not migrate or settle in these areas. This is largely true. In the socio-economic conditions as they exist we see the flow of migration in the other direction—*i.e.*, from areas where economic opportunities are limited and where population pressure on these limited opportunities is high, as in the case of the Jaffna District, to areas where prospects for income-earning opportunities are favourable as in the South. The Sinhala position in regard to economic opportunities for Sinhalese in Tamil areas is more the vindication of a principle than a real desire to seek such opportunities. A few, however, do seek such opportunities, and if they encounter difficulties, the argument that the Tamils who enjoy large economic opportunities in the South do not reciprocate in their own areas can arouse strong ethnic reactions. The Tamil community for their part need to give special attention to this problem and make a special effort to "host" the relatively small group of Sinhala entrants to their society and economy.

V

Distribution of land and land settlement

Availability of land and settlement policy

The distribution of State land and policies relating to land settlement have been another major issue which has aggravated the ethnic problem. The Tamil districts of Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee and Batticaloa cover approximately 25 per cent of the land surface of the country. The Sri Lanka Tamil population inhabiting this area is approximately 5 per cent of the total population of the country. Inclusive of Muslims, Sinhalese and Indian Tamils who are resident in this area, the total population of the region is approximately 11.4 per cent. Table 11 gives the distribution of land under forest cover in the different districts. If we exclude the small extents in the densely populated districts, the main extent under forest cover is distributed in almost equal proportions between the areas in which the Sinhalese are in a small minority—*i.e.*, in the North and East—and the areas in which they are in the preponderant majority. In the eight districts which have over a 1,000 sq. km. of forest area each, the total extent amounts to approximately 11,800 sq. km. Of this 5,781 sq. km. of forest are in these districts in which the Sinhalese are in the overwhelming majority. Approximately 3,738 sq. km. are in the districts in the North in which the Tamils are in a large majority and the balance in Trincomalee and Amparai in which Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims all have significant shares. These areas taken together contain the largest uninhabited extents of land and offer the greatest scope for new agricultural settlements. An agreed policy in regard to the settlement of these lands has to be an important part of any package which seeks to provide solutions to the ethnic conflict.

The Tamil community regards any attempt to colonise the lands in the Tamil areas with Sinhala people as part of a political strategy that is designed to reduce them to a minority in their own territorial bases. Past developments, however, do not seem to support such a conclusion. In none of the districts in the North has the share of the Tamil population declined in the

period between 1963 and 1981. They have increased marginally. In the East, in Batticaloa, there has been an insignificant drop from 71.08 per cent to 70.82 per cent. In Trincomalee where the Tamil population is in a minority, the share has declined from 36.6 per cent to 33.7 per cent. In Amparai it has declined from 23 per cent to 20 per cent. There has been a rapid increase in the Indian Tamil population in most of these districts. For example, in the districts of Vavuniya and Mullaitivu, the proportion of Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils combined has increased from 74.7 per cent to 82.3 per cent. These changes are presented in Table 12.

More recent developments, however, have aroused deep concern on both sides. In the Northern districts there has been an influx of Indian Tamils from the plantations who have encroached extensively on State lands and established illegal settlements. The Sinhalese regard this as part of the separatist strategy. In the East there have been large-scale encroachments by Sinhalese on lands which are to be developed under the Mahaweli Scheme, as well as in other areas in which Tamils or Muslims are in a majority. These are seen by the Tamil community as attempts to establish a strong Sinhala presence in predominantly Tamil-speaking areas. The Sinhalese, on the other hand, argue that the large extents of State land available for new settlements in areas which fall within the districts in which Tamils are in a majority, should not be reserved exclusively for the Tamil population.

Table 11
Distribution of Forest Area—Selected Districts

	(1) <i>Total Land Area</i>	(2) <i>Forest Area Sq. Km.</i>	% of (1)	(3) <i>1981 population density per sq. km^a</i> (i) a	(ii) b
Mannar	2,012.5	1,121	(55.7)	53.1	119.9
Vavuniya	2,647.5	1,104	(41.7)	36.2	62.2
Mullaitivu	2,067.0	1,513	(73.2)	37.5	140.1
Amparai	4,596	1,241	(27.0)	84.4	115.6
Trincomalee	2,716	1,138	(41.9)	94.6	162.9
Anuradhapura	7,283	2,083	(28.6)	80.8	113.2
Polonnaruwa	3,446	1,644	(47.7)	76.2	145.6
Moneragala	5,658	2,054	(36.3)	49.4	77.6
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Eight Districts Average	30,426	16,318	(24.9)	226.3	301.3
^a Overall Density					
^b Density in settled area					

Table 12

Proportion of Tamils in Predominantly Tamil Districts

<i>District</i>	<i>1963</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>%</i>
Jaffna				
Total population	612,596		831,112	
Sri Lanka Tamils	583,754	95.3	792,246	95.3
Indian Tamils	11,382	1.8	20,001	2.4
Mannar				
Total population	60,124		106,940	
Sri Lankan Tamils	30,514	50.7	54,106	50.6
Indian Tamils	9,654	16.0	14,072	13.1
Vavuniya				
Total population	68,621		173,416	
Sri Lankan Tamils	43,573	63.5	113,445	65.4
Indian Tamils	7,754	11.3	29,358	16.9
Trincomalee				
Total population	138,553		256,790	
Sri Lankan Tamils	51,081	36.8	86,743	33.7
Indian Tamils	3,372	2.4	6,767	2.6
Batticaloa				
Total population	196,189		330,899	
Sri Lankan Tamils	139,454	71.0	234,348	70.8
Indian Tamils	1,656	0.8	3,888	1.12

In 1963, Vavuniya included the present Mullaitivu District.

For 1981, the Vavuniya District is as 1963 boundaries.

Principles for future settlements

The problems in this area, however, are not intractable ones. The national policies for the distribution of land for new settlements will seek to redistribute population from areas where landlessness in the rural sector and the pressure of population on land are high. But within such a framework of national policy it would be possible to agree to the basic principle that settlement policies should take account of the ethnic balance of the region in which settlements are taking place, and that new settlements should not significantly alter the ethnic balance in that district. In terms of such a principle it should not be impossible to agree on "the tolerance limits" of any changes in the ethnic balance. The national policy on land settlements must first ensure equitable proportions of new settlements to all

ethnic groups, taking into account the share of each in the total population. Such a distribution however would be subject to other important considerations of landlessness, density of population, and demand for agricultural land. All ethnic groups are affected by these problems, although the relative intensity may vary slightly among them.

There would be general agreement that when all these criteria are considered, the national distribution of State land should provide approximately 74 per cent of the new settlements to the Sinhala community and 26 per cent to the other communities; roughly in proportion to the share of each in the total population. If, however, we take the districts which we earlier identified as those which have the greatest scope for new land settlement and apportion the new land strictly on the basis of the existing ethnic proportions in the different districts, the share which will accrue to the Sinhala community will not exceed 55 per cent—vide Table 13. If to this we add the total land under forest cover in the various other districts in which the Sinhalese are in a majority such as Ratnapura, Puttalam, Nuwara Eliya and Matale, the proportion would increase to approximately 65 per cent. It has, however, to be noted that the scope for new settlements in these other districts with the exception of Puttalam has been almost totally exhausted and any new distribution of State land would be on a very limited scale for such purposes as village expansion. This indicates that a strict adherence to the existing ethnic proportions in the different districts will not provide an equitable share of the available land to the Sinhala community. A national policy of this nature would be difficult to defend particularly in view of the fact that the pockets of highest density and land hunger are to be found in the south-west and hill region among the Sinhala majority. At the same time the transfer of Sinhala settlers to the Tamil areas on a scale which significantly diminishes the role and position occupied by the ethnic group which traditionally inhabited that area, is also not equitable. Therefore, a formula has to be found which is adequately responsive to both these principles.

If in the three districts Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya, in which the Sinhala population is in a very small minority, the "tolerance limit" of 25 per cent of new Sinhala settlements is accepted, the impact it would have on the ethnic balance in the districts would be quite negligible. Similarly, the proportion of

Sinhala settlements in the Amparai district could be adjusted above the share of the population to 50 per cent. On these proportions the Sinhala share in the districts which have high potential for new settlements will rise to approximately 60 per cent. When we take into account the forest land in the other districts and adjust the Sinhala share to include some of the benefits that would be available in these areas even though on a limited scale the proportion is likely to be in the region of 70 per cent.

Table 13

**Distribution of Forest cover on two assumptions
A—According to ethnic proportions in the districts**

1981

(11,898 sq. km. of 'forest' land)

<i>District</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>Sinhalese</i>	<i>Tamils</i>	<i>Indian Tamils</i>	<i>Muslims</i>
Mannar	1,121	90.8	567.2	146.8	298.2
Vavuniya	1,104	182.2	628.2	214.2	76.2
Mullaitivu	1,513	77.2	1,150.0	210.3	74.1
Amparai	1,241	466.6	249.4	5.0	515.0
Trincmalee	1,138	382.4	384.6	29.6	330.0
Anuradhapura	2,083	1,901.8	25.0	2.1	147.9
Polonnaruwa	1,644	1,494.4	36.2	1.6	106.9
Moneragala	2,054	1,908.21	37.0	67.8	39.0
	11,898	6,503.61	3,077.6	677.4	1,587.3
Percentage of total	100.00	54.7	25.9	5.7	13.3

B. According to alternative assumptions for Sinhala quota of 25 per cent for Mannar, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu, and 50 per cent for Amparai

<i>District</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>Sinhalese</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Mannar,) Vavuniya) Mullaitivu)	3,738	934.5	25	2,803.5	75
2. Amparai	1,241	620.5	50	620.5	50
3. Others	6,619	5,686.81	82.2	1,232.19	
Total	11,898	7,241.81	60.86	4,656.19	39.12

Constraints and likely trends

Although the different ethnic groups are seriously agitated about the land issue, the realities as they unfold in the future are likely to be very different from the assumptions on which the groups act at present. The Annexe provides a possible scenario of settlement and demographic change based on the assumptions that have been outlined above. The settlements have been calculated on a very low pojections density of 100 per sq. km. assuming that a large part of the land will continue to remain under forest cover. The projections bring to light a number of interesting factors which are normally ignored in the controversy on land settlement. First, assuming that the programme of settlement will be phased over a period of ten years and taking into account the migrant Sinhala population, the migrant population from the Sri Lankan Tamil community and other communities as well as the natural increase of the population already resident in these areas, it would seem that at the end of the ten-year period the share of the Sinhala population in Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya districts will be in the region of 17 per cent. At present it is around 10 per cent. If the limit of New Sinhala settlements is placed at 25 per cent; then the share of the Sinhala population, as a whole in these regions will continue to be well below 25 per cent, even if settlements continue beyond the ten-year period. It is not very likely that settlements will continue for long beyond this considering the need for adequate forest cover and the limited availability of land.

But given this ten-year scenario, an important question arises regarding the capacity of the different ethnic groups to supply the manpower for new settlements. On the basis of the projections that have been made, the Tamil settler population would amount to around 270,000. This is approximately 21 per cent of the total Sri Lankan Tamil population in the Tamil-speaking areas. It would be realistic to assume that the Tamil settlement would be from this part of the population and not from the Tamil population in the Sinhala areas which is already employed in various occupations. In numbers, this settler population will be approximately 70 per cent of the total addition to the population over a ten-year period if the population grows at a rate of 2.5 per cent per annum. These figures suggest that it would be difficult to draw a settler population of sufficient magnitude to use the land on the scale indicated in the

projections. The same problems of manpower for settlements is likely to hold good for the Sinhala community as well but this would be for different reasons. The settlements in the Tamil areas are not likely to be particularly attractive to the Sinhala population. In all probability the preference would be for land in the North Central Province and in Amparai.

The demand for land in all these areas, whether in the Tamil-speaking districts or in the Sinhala districts, would also depend on a number of factors such as availability of irrigation facilities and agro-climatic features which favour agriculture that would yield reasonable incomes. For all these reasons it is likely that settlements would continue at a much slower pace and that various other socio-economic changes in the country including alternative economic opportunities are likely to extend the settlement of these lands in terms of their full potential, very much beyond the ten-year period. In these circumstances, the changes in ethnic proportions in the population of these areas are likely to be even smaller than what has been projected. The existing populations in these areas would have grown and the new settlements would have a smaller proportionate impact. Therefore, if the concerns and fears that had been expressed by either side are subjected to a rational and an objective analysis there should be no difficulty in agreeing upon a national policy framework which would look after the pattern of settlement of the next twenty years and would reconcile the conflicting interests of the different ethnic groups. There are various other options and adjustments that are possible in the future scenario of settlements that was discussed earlier. One way of dealing with problems of ethnic balance is an exchange of quotas in one district for an increase of quotas in another. For example, Tamil quotas in Amparai or in the majority Sinhala areas, could be substituted for an equivalent number of settlements in the predominantly Tamil areas. Similarly, the Sinhala settlements could be brought closer to the ethnic proportion, through exchanges of this type, without significantly altering the ethnic balance in areas where the Tamil community is in a majority.

There are certain other aspects of the land settlement issue which cannot be ignored and which should receive special attention. While the framework of national policy that is suggested deals with the problem for the district as a whole, an inflow of migrants of any size can always cause problems of

adjustment and social tensions at the level of local communities which may feel the impact of such migration. There are no simple and ready answers in such situations. However, a national policy framework which the different ethnic groups as a whole and their leaders are committed will help to discipline and contain such situations, to prepare local communities to adjust to them and orient both migrant and indigenous groups towards relations which develop goodwill and complementarity of interests. This should be an essential part of national settlement policies. There is also another issue which has implications for equity. Agricultural settlements are of varying quality and economic potential. They differ widely from each other in terms of the prospects they offer for economic growth and social well-being. They range from mini-irrigation schemes with low productivity to multi-purpose projects with assured sources of water for highly efficient agriculture. In the national policy framework for settlement, national projects such as the Mahaweli which fall into the highest category in regard to facilities offered and the potential for productivity and income and which cannot be replicated in other areas should be treated independently. In these projects an equitable share should be provided for all the ethnic groups even if the projects are located in areas where some of the ethnic groups have no presence, at all, or a very insignificant presence. This implies that the Tamil and Muslim communities should have an entitlement in the national projects in predominantly Sinhala areas and *vice versa*.

Finally, some commitments in principle could be given regarding the availability of the resources of the Mahaweli for the development of some of the available land in the North. This would have to await the full development of the phases already undertaken and a realistic assessment of the water resources available for future development. Although there are many imponderables in such a forecast, the possibilities regarding more efficient use of water as well as changes to cropping patterns with less consumption of water can create positive conditions for the future development of Mahaweli. Such a development programme could be a major unifying factor in Sinhala-Tamil relationships. It should be considered as part of the agreement as a set of national policies and goals for land development in the framework of the solutions to the ethnic problems.

Table 14

**Ethnic Composition of Districts in the North and East
in which Sri Lankan Tamils are the largest Group**

District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Muslim	Indian Tamil	Others
1. Jaffna (including Kilinochchi)	0.5	95.3	1.6	2.4	0.2
2. Mannar	8.1	50.6	26.6	13.2	1.5
3. Vavuniya	16.5	56.9	6.9	19.4	0.3
4. Mullaitivu	5.1	76.0	4.9	13.9	0.1
5. Trincomalee	33.6	33.8	29.0	2.6	1.0
6. Batticaloa	3.2	70.8	24.0	1.1	0.9
7. Share of total population in districts 1-6	7.7	75.3	12.1	4.3	0.6
8. Share of population in ethnic group outside Districts 1-6	98.8	31.6	80.5	91.0	98.1

ANNEXE

FUTURE SETTLEMENTS AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

1. Land distribution among ethnic groups

Assumptions

- i. The proportion of the new land to the Sinhalese will be 25 per cent in Mannar, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu; 50 per cent in Amparai.
- ii. The population density in the new land areas will be 100 persons/sq. km. at the end of ten years.
- iii. The population growth rate over this period is 2.5 per cent per year.

2. Ethnic composition after settlement

The resulting proportion of new land for Sinhalese in the eight districts where new settlements will take place will be 60.9 per cent, vide Table 13.

If all eight districts have a new settler population of average density of 100 persons per sq. km., the total population of settlers would be **1,189,800** persons at the end of ten years. The proportion of Sinhalese in these eight districts in 1981 was 63.0 or 1,295,437. Under the assumptions mentioned earlier, the proportion of Sinhalese in the new areas would be 60.9 per cent (*i.e.*, based on a particular ethnic mix into the new settlement) resulting in a Sinhala population of 2,0**20,025**

If the population in the eight districts is assumed to grow at an average annual rate of 2.5 per cent over ten years, at the end of the period the (eight districts) population would be 2,632,174. The total population of the eight districts at the end of ten years would then be 3,821,974 persons. The resulting population density would be 125.6 persons per sq. km. For the purpose of the calculation, a time span of ten years is taken for the full

settlement. On past performances, this is unrealistic, but for the purpose of estimating the relevant magnitudes and changes in ethnic composition, it provides a working hypothesis.

Table 15

Population projection and resulting density for eight selected districts

	1981	1991
Total population	2,056,250	3,821,974
Land areas (sq. km.)	30,426	30,436
Density P/sq. km.	67.6	1,25.6
Percentage of Sinhalese	63.0	60.9
Number of Sinhalese	1,295,437	2,020,025

If under assumption (i) the Mannar, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu districts are considered, at the end of ten years with an average annual growth rate of 2.5 per cent the 1981 combined Sinhala proportion would increase from 10.1 per cent to 17.7 per cent.

Assuming a population density of 100 persons/sq. km. at the end of ten years, these three districts would have a new settler population of 373,000.

The existing population in 1981 totalled 280,356 persons (with 10.1 per cent Sinhalese).

This population would grow to 358,879 at the end of ten years at an assumed average annual rate of 2.5.

Therefore, on this basis, at the end of ten years, these three districts would have a total population of 731,879 persons.

On the basis of the above assumptions, the three districts would have an average population density of 108.0 persons/sq. km. at the end of the ten-year period. Vide Table 16.

Table 16

Ethnic composition in predominantly Tamil Districts after settlement

District	Existing Population		Population in 1991 at 2.5% increase p.a. ¹		New Settler Population			
	Total	Sinhala	Others	Sinhalese	Others	Sinhala	Others	
Mannar	106,940	8,710	98,230	11,148	125,734	28,000	84,000	
Mullaitivu	77,512	3,948	73,564	5,053	94,188	37,750	113,250	
Vavuniya	95,904	15,876	80,028	20,321	102,435	27,550	82,500	
Total	280,356	28,534	357,822	89.9	36,522	322,357	93,250	279,750

Population in 1991			
Total	Sinhala	Others	
Mannar	39,148	15.7	209,734
Mullaitivu	42,803	17.1	297,396
Vavuniya	47,821	20.5	184,935
Total	129,772	17.7	602,065

¹ Between 1971 and 1981 the total population in these three districts increased from 173,000 to 278,000—an annual rate of approximately 4.8 per cent. This includes both migration and natural increase.

VI

Devolution of Power

The two positions on devolution

The developments around the ethnic conflicts during the past ten years indicate that the key to the solution of many of the problems lies in a political system which can offer a genuine development of power in which the Tamil minority can participate effectively. It is now clear that the Tamil leadership is prepared to abandon their demand for Eelam if a viable alternative is available. Although as yet no definite positions have been formally taken by the TULF leadership it would be seen from statements made by them that the acceptable alternative has to approximate as closely as possible to a federal form of devolution. This has implications both for the territorial unit as well as the form and content of the devolution of power. First, the preferred alternative is apparently a system which treats the Tamil areas as a single entity. This will mean that the Tamil-speaking districts—Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee and Batticaloa—would constitute the Tamil region for the purpose of devolution and will have one set of legislative, executive and judicial institutions for the entire region. In regard to the content of devolution, under a full federal system, the region will be responsible fully for the management of all its internal affairs excepting those functions normally reserved to the central government in a federal system. These include national security and defence, foreign policy, national finance and a few other areas which require planning, coordination and administration at a national level. Finally, a federal system will have constitutional safeguards for the autonomy of its constituent units by requiring that any changes in the system will need to secure the agreement of all the constituent units.

At the outset, however, it has to be recognised that the federal solution, as envisaged above, has all along remained unacceptable to the Sinhala majority. In the official statements made by the Government so far, it has not been prepared to go beyond the full implementation of the Development Councils Act. What exactly is offered in the form of full implementation has not yet been clearly defined. The main features of the existing District Development Council system are set out in the annexe to this document. It would be useful to consider the basic elements of the present District Development Council system and inquire why it does not satisfy some of the basic conditions of autonomy sought by the Tamil community.

The limitations of the present system of District Development Councils

The District Council as it is at present constituted is a fully elected body—one part consisting of elected Members of Parliament and one part of members elected directly to the Council. The Members of Parliament are normally in a majority in the Council. There is an attempt to ensure a degree of harmony between representation at the national level and district representation through the composition of the Council and the weightage given to the Members of Parliament. In itself, this can be a positive feature and establish a smooth relationship between the two levels. The District Council has an Executive Committee, the head of which is the District Minister who is appointed by the President from the Centre. Under this arrangement, the Chairman of the Council himself cannot be the head of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee consists of the Chairman of the Council and two other members who are appointed by the District Minister in consultation with the Chairman. It is this Committee which wields all the executive powers of the Council. Its functions include the preparation of an annual development plan, the preparation of the annual budget for the plan and the implementation of the plan.

The financial resources for the Development Council are available through a development fund which is established for the Council. This fund will receive the revenues which the Council is empowered to raise from taxes, duties and other charges, the revenues which are made over to the Council by Parliament, any grants such as the electoral allocations, and all

appropriations allocated to the Council by the appropriate Minister of the central government for activities within the district under that given ministry. Under the present Act, the Council has the power to levy taxes, rates and other charges subject to the approval of the Minister of Finance.

The President has the power to dissolve the Executive Committee and remove all or any of the elected members of the Council. The Minister of Local Government also has the power to remove the Chairman or dissolve the Council in the case of mismanagement, abuse of power and similar irregularities, but such power can be exercised only after a full judicial inquiry duly instituted by him. Therefore, within the present set-up the President, the Minister of Local Government, the District Minister, and through the District Minister the Ministers of the central government, retain overriding power over the activities of the Council. The approval of the specific plans, and the allocation of resources have to go through an elaborate process in which the Minister of Local Government and the central government Ministers can all overrule the decisions of the Council. The most recent decision of the Government has been to delegate more powers to the District Minister. The Government would argue that this in effect means extending the powers of the Council as the annual development plan itself has to be approved by the Council and the Development Council has to be consulted in the exercise of the newly delegated powers. Within the present framework, however, the District Minister is appointed and effectively controlled by the central government and his primary responsibility is to the central government. Neither is his political authority derived from the District Council nor is he fully responsible to it. It is in this area that some fundamental changes are required if genuine political responsibility is to be handed over to the District Council and through it to the people of the district.

The Act as it stands, empowers the Council to deal with fifteen subjects which in fact include all the important development activities of the district. They cover subjects which pertain to the management of the major part of the district's administration and economy such as agriculture, education, health, fisheries, housing, irrigation, land use and land settlement, and small and medium-scale industries. The scope of the Council's activities as defined by the Act is extensive enough to cover all

important economic and social areas and to give the Council near full responsibility for the development of the district. Although legally the scope of the Council is as described, in reality it can operate only on a very marginal segment of all these activities. First, its annual development plan in all these areas is confined to the resources which are made available to the Council. These consist almost entirely of the electoral allocations available to the district. The District Council has therefore little effective control of all the major activities that are taking place in the district through the programme of the central government ministries. If the Council is to have such control, both the activities which central government ministries undertake in the district and the budgetary resources allocated for such activities would have to be made over to the District Council. A genuine devolution of power would require that the major part of the district administration and the development activity would have to be the responsibility of the District Council and its Executive Committee. Briefly, the Executive Committee and its Chairman would have to function much in the manner of a District Cabinet with the district component of each ministry under it. The present system is of course very far from such a form of autonomous government.

In the relationship between the District Minister and the District Development Council, the present system attempts to replicate some of the features of the Presidential system at the district level. A District Minister is the chief political executive appointed from among Members of Parliament but independent of the Council. The Council functions as the elected body which provides the Executive Committee. This again is selected by the District Minister in consultation with the Chairman of the Council. Although these features may resemble some aspects of the Presidential system, in effect the structure that is established at the district level is very different from the system established at the Centre. The District Minister, who is an elected Member of Parliament, normally belongs to the party in power and is nominated by the President. This party may be in a minority in the district to which the District Minister is assigned. Such a situation exists at present in the Tamil areas. He can also be selected from any district and therefore need not be an elected representative of the district in which he serves as District Minister. The relations between the District Development Council and the office of the District Minister pose serious

problems in the case of districts in which the Government party is in a minority. These require solutions very different from what is available in the present system under which a District Minister has full power and control over the elected assembly of the district. This aspect would be considered later when the elements of a viable alternative are examined.

The territorial unit for devolution

The two alternatives, the Federal and District Development Council system, would represent the maximum and minimum positions taken by the Tamil and Sinhala communities—the maximum to which the Tamil leadership aspires, short of Eelam, and the minimum position from which the Government is prepared to begin negotiating. The approaches taken by each community to the problems of devolution are unnecessarily hampered by the negative connotations that the terms “federal” or “district development council” have come to signify to the common people in each community. It is, therefore, best to set aside the terms themselves and examine what ought to be included in the content of the devolution of power that might eventually find acceptance by both communities. We can begin by considering the territorial issue. The Tamil leadership has already shown some willingness to move one step below the maximum position. They have informally considered the feasibility of two units for the Tamil-speaking areas, one in the North consisting of four districts, and another in the East consisting of Trincomalee and Batticaloa. The appropriate territorial unit for regional autonomy raises a number of issues which deserve careful consideration. First, the distribution of the Tamil community among the Tamil-speaking districts and the ethnic composition within them is not uniform. In the six districts as a whole 75 per cent of the population is Sri Lankan Tamil, the balance 25 per cent belongs to other groups, largely Sinhala and Muslim, with a small Indian Tamil community. The two districts which have a high degree of homogeneity are Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, where the non-Tamil population is less than 7 per cent. The ethnic composition of the six districts is given in Table 17. It will be seen that Muslims and Sinhalese account for 23 per cent in Vavuniya, 35 per cent in Mannar, 62.5 per cent in Trincomalee and 27 per cent in Batticaloa. In all these districts, the ethnic minority as a proportion of the total population is considerably more than the share of the Tamil population in

the total national population. Another important fact which has relevance to the territorial issue is that in these six districts the Sri Lankan Tamil population is only 68 per cent of the total Sri Lankan Tamil population of the country. The other 32 per cent, approximately 600,000 are distributed in the Sinhala-speaking areas with large concentrations in Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts. In Colombo and Gampaha districts, the total number of Sri Lankan Tamils is in the region of 210,000. A system of regional or local autonomy has to be responsive to both the internal variations in the Tamil areas as well as be sensitive to the situation of the Tamil minority in the Sinhala areas.

The Tamil leadership has argued that the solution offered by the District Development Councils, which is the pattern of decentralisation available to the entire country, does not respond to the special needs of the Tamils as an ethnic group. They say that the form of devolution that is acceptable to the Tamil community has to be such that they can develop their territorial base as a whole and protect their rights as a minority acting together. They point out, for example, that any development plan for the Jaffna District, which is densely populated and has a very poor natural resource base, will have to take into account the development potential in the most sparsely populated districts contiguous to it, such as Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. The Jaffna peninsula itself which contains 42 per cent of the total Sri Lankan Tamil population is one of the most densely populated areas in the country with a constant outflow of migrants to the majority Sinhala areas. It would be difficult to consider the development of the Jaffna District in isolation from the districts contiguous to it.

At the same time we need to balance these considerations against another set of problems. First, several of the Tamil-speaking districts we saw have a heterogeneity and a multi-ethnic composition which make it difficult to put them together with other districts in a single unit. More important, the demarcation of a separate territorial unit on clearly recognisable ethnic lines have negative consequences both for the majority community as well as for the minority community. The pattern of devolution should be such that while it enables the Tamil minority to assume responsibility for the development and the management of internal affairs in the areas where they are in a majority,

it should not push the ethnic character of this devolution to the forefront so that it stands out sharply at the national level.

In a system of devolution for Sri Lanka, the basic territorial unit which can look after both these aspects satisfactorily is the territorial unit of the district. First, under-developed districts such as Mullaitivu in the Tamil-speaking areas, or Moneragala in the Sinhala areas, will receive attention for itself without being submerged in a larger unit together with a highly developed district. Second, districts such as Trincomalee or Mannar, which have a different ethnic composition will evolve its own pattern of development and form of accommodation appropriate to its special characteristics. Third, the district as a territorial unit is small enough to enable the people themselves to participate more actively in the processes of decision-making, plan formulation and plan implementation. A model from which Sri Lanka can draw some lessons is the cantonal model of the Swiss federal system. There are 23 cantons for a population of just over six million, each canton with its own government. The German-speaking Swiss who account for over 75 per cent of the population are the overwhelming majority in 16 of these cantons; the French-speaking Swiss are the majority in six cantons and the Italians in one. The union of a large number of small cantons, each with its own responsibility for the administration of its affairs and pride in its own development has created a system which gives maximum visibility to the divisions on a majority-minority basis.

In Sri Lanka, the territorial basis of the district can be put to good purpose in which the ethnic divisions do not constantly emerge in terms of the majority and minority, but in which the guiding principle becomes the devolution of genuine power to the people so that they can take responsibility for the development of their area. A pattern of devolution of this kind which applies to the entire country and which creates units of self-management both in the Tamil-speaking areas as well as the Sinhala areas, will have a different set of motivations from a system in which the autonomous parts are related to each other as majority and minority and as distinct ethnic groups. Attention will be directed away from the perception of development in ethnic terms to the perception of development in terms of the full use of local resources, both human and material, and to the full participation of the people in the locality. The system of

autonomy of this kind, if it provides for adequate decentralisation and transfer of responsibility, will fulfil the primary objective of enabling the Tamil community to assume responsibility for the development of those areas in which they are in a significant majority. The self-managing units in the Tamil areas themselves will form part of a self-reliant participatory system which applies to the whole country. In this matter it will provide a stable case for strengthening national unity and promoting the Sri Lankan identity.

The need for co-ordination above the District level

Within this framework it is possible to conceive of arrangements which meet some of the main objections the Tamil leadership would have to a district set-up which they perceive as fragmentation of the Tamil community. First, the main unifying factor among the groups of districts would have to be the political party. If the system of devolution is such that the machinery of district government will be primarily responsible to the District Council, then the political party can perform its due function of implementing unified policies and programmes in the districts in which it has been able to assume responsibility. This would apply to the political parties representing the Tamil community as well and would enable such parties to promote coordinated development policies within a group of Tamil-speaking districts. Second, it may be necessary for developmental reasons alone to have a higher level of coordination and development planning above the district. Such governmental machinery could take the form of a zonal development council and a zonal coordinating committee of district councils. Such a council or committee could undertake the coordination of the development activities of several districts which for a variety of factors concerning their natural resource base, agro-climatic conditions and socio-economic potential need to be taken together for the purpose of development planning and for making best use of the development potential in each district.

If the principle of a zonal council is accepted, then a variety of options could be explored in regard to the form that it should assume, its composition and its functions. The grouping of districts will have to follow some commonly accepted development criteria. It is very likely that many of the groupings will coincide with the old provincial boundaries. Such a demarcation

would provide Zonal Councils for the North and East. In composition these bodies will have to be adequately representative in character and consist mainly of members who represent the District Councils in the areas. Its main function will be the coordination of both district planning and plan implementation. We could envisage such a council having its executive committee supported by a secretariat to perform such functions. These ideas contain only the barest of outlines. There are many other structures for such a council. The feasibility of the different options would have to be examined in much greater detail than could be done within the scope of this paper.

The scope and content of devolved powers

The acceptability of any of these structures whether they are based eventually on a territorial unit such as the district or on a larger territorial unit, will ultimately depend on the substance of responsibility and power which the territorial units enjoy under the system. A system of genuine and substantial responsibility and self-management at the district level cannot be established within the present structure of District Development Councils without some very fundamental modifications and changes. First, it is essential that the responsibility for the major part of the development activity and administration should be in the hands of the District Council and its organs. Theoretically, there are two possible alternatives of providing an effective form of decentralisation in which elected representatives of the district assume responsibility. One would be a model somewhat on the lines of the Presidential system in which the Chief Executive of the district is elected for that position (somewhat in the manner of the State Governor in the USA). The District Minister could hold such an office but then he has to be elected to that office by the majority of the voters in that district, similar in manner to the election of the President at the national level. An elected District Minister would then call upon the leader of the majority party in the District Council to form the Executive Committee which would run the district administration.

The second alternative would be a mini-replica of the British type where the President calls upon the leader of the majority party in the District Council to function as the Chairman of the Council and to form the Executive Committee. In the second alternative, the central government would have its direct repre-

sentative at the district level outside the District Council. Such a representative will be the main link between the district administration and the central government and will be responsible for the central government functions in the district. Such a representative could be an elected Member of Parliament or any other political appointee selected by the Government. Of these two alternatives, the second would seem more appropriate in the Sri Lankan context.

Devolution would have real content only to the extent in which the district has control of the revenues and resources required for its administration and development. The present sources of funds for the national budget are derived largely from import and export revenues, the indirect and direct taxes accruing mainly from the developed urban areas and the local and foreign loans and grants received by the Government. The contribution which the different districts make to the national revenue will vary widely depending on the composition of its product, the size of its population, its per capita income and expenditure and its share of imports and exports. Even if we were to regard this contribution as being potentially the revenue base of a district and divert a significant part of it to finance the Government expenditure in a district, we would find that in most districts this revenue base is very small and limited and quite insufficient to finance the current Government expenditure and the capital development of the district. This would be true of the Tamil-speaking areas which do not have any significant share of the major revenue-yielding components of the economy such as plantation crops, activities providing excise revenues and high personal and corporate incomes. Under the present structure of taxation and mode of collection, all districts, including the Tamil-speaking areas, will be heavily dependent on the central government budget, as the capacity to raise revenue within the district itself or to divert the revenues now originating from the district to the district budget is limited.

However, within these limits the first task will be to strengthen the financial base of district autonomy. The central government would have to identify and earmark present revenue sources which could be retained by the district for financing the district budget. The second source of revenue would be the per capita allocation to each district. This may have to be calculated on a

formula which takes into account both the present per capita government expenditures in sectors which will in future be the responsibility of the District Development Council. Such a formula would have to consider both the present expenditure in a given district as well as the national average. Thereafter, with these two assured sources of revenue as the base, the Council will have to prepare its annual budget and development plan. We could visualise this part of the Council's activity somewhat in the following manner. These tasks are likely to be three-fold. First, it would prepare the annual budget for the district which will include both the current and capital expenditure on the basis of on-going activities and thereafter include the new component for both current and capital expenditure on the basis of plans formulated at the district level in response to the needs of the district. This process will be governed by national policy directions and targets determined for the district by the national planning bodies and central government ministries, in consultation with the District Councils. Second, it will take account of the assured sources of revenue available to the district and negotiate with the Government for the balance funding of the district budget, taking into account the past annual expenditures of the central government in the district concerned. Third, following such negotiations, it will assess the resources available from the central budget and from the revenue which the Council is empowered to raise, identify the deficit and examine ways and means of mobilising additional resources to cover the deficit.

Finally, the framework for resource allocation to the district would have to take account of several criteria. First, allocations will depend on the different levels of development of different districts. While maintenance and current expenditures on the more developed districts will be high the allocations required for the development of less-developed districts would have to be more generous. The baseline for resource allocation would be the national average. The allocations for development would to some extent depend on whether the districts are below or above the national average.

This budgetary process will have several advantages. It will reveal to the districts their links with the central government, the extent of the net financial transfers and the support they receive from the Government. The process will also motivate

districts to strengthen and improve their own revenue base as these resources will now be seen as directly benefiting the districts themselves. In this way it will create the incentives for greater financial self-reliance on a decentralised basis and reduce the pressure on the central government budget itself. The decentralised system of financing of this kind will have the effect therefore of promoting both self-reliant participatory development and national unity.

In all that has been said so far it has been assumed that the District Council will take over responsibility for all the fifteen subjects that have been listed. Under these subjects the central government's presence in the district will be minimal and will be maintained only for the purpose of ensuring that district policies are consistent with national policies and for administering those activities of the district which are clearly national in character. In defining this set of activities which are retained for the central government we need to reverse the present process of decentralisation where we begin by asking what activities can be delegated from the centre to the district. We have to start the other way round by asking what are the activities in those areas now assigned to District Councils which are national in character and cannot be undertaken as district activities and which therefore have to be reserved for the central government. Such activities may include, for example, agricultural research stations, multi-purpose projects which benefit more than one district, large-scale State enterprises. The central government will also be responsible for those activities in the district which are now not assigned to District Councils. These include such subjects as transport, communication, power, and so on. However, in the areas which are reserved for the central government in regard to the activities of the district, there would be need for an effective system of coordination between the district administration and the central government administration within the district. Many of the activities reserved for the central government provide important parts of the infrastructure for the district such as highways, power, posts and telecommunication. In all these areas the District Council should have some well-defined functions relating to the assessment of needs of the area, decisions regarding future improvements and developments and the monitoring of the delivery of services and performance.

Given the dependence of the district on the central government, the level of its infrastructure and its manpower resources

and the capacity it possesses for a large measure of self-reliant development, in practice the degree of decentralisation may vary in relation to the level of development. The less-developed districts which have to depend heavily on the central government for both resources as well as for manpower and other technical support may have to go through a phase in which its self-governing responsibilities may have to be more-limited than those which can be assumed by the more developed districts. The system could be made flexible enough to accommodate such variations and gradations. It is possible that some District Development Councils, after examining the full financial implications of various levels of autonomy may opt initially to manage a limited range of activities with a smaller budget, somewhat on the lines of the present District Development Councils. In some other less-developed districts, it might not be possible in the initial phase to establish a self-contained administrative system within the district to support full-scale autonomy. For example, at present some districts may not have a district head for several of the activities which are assigned to Councils, and many of these activities may be administered by divisional heads outside the district. It may therefore, be necessary to develop the system of district autonomy as a phased programme in which some of the more-developed districts acquire the highest level of district autonomy straightaway while other less-developed districts progress in steps. This need not alter the fundamental character of the District Development Councils as set out in the alternative framework outlined in the preceding paragraphs, nor would it require any modifications of designation and nomenclature. In the system as outlined it should be possible to accommodate these modifications.

The main features of the proposed alternative

The system which has been described above is an alternative which lies between the full federal form of autonomy and the District Development Council with the limited power and responsibility as assigned to it within the present legal framework. The main elements of this alternative are depicted in the diagram which is annexed. The differences between this alternative and the federal alternative, on the one hand, and the present District Development Council, on the other, are also set out briefly in the annexes. This alternative tries to meet some of

the objections which the Sinhala majority has had to the federal form of autonomy on distinctly ethnic lines, mainly on the ground that it has inherent dangers in the Sri Lankan context and is a step towards separation. At the same time, it provides the substance of autonomy which would satisfy the main objective of the Tamil minority in regard to the management of the internal affairs and development of the Tamil-speaking areas. On the question of the territorial unit, while adopting the district as the territorial unit for the reasons set out, it provides for a higher tier of coordinating organs at the provincial or zonal levels in which the representatives of the constituent District Councils can play a leading role in coordinating the development and administration of a group of districts which have to be considered together on development criteria. This will enable the Tamil minority to coordinate the development activities of the Tamil-speaking areas in the North and in the East.

The acceptance of a viable alternative by both the Sinhala and Tamil communities will depend a great deal on the effort made by the leadership of each community to dispel misconceptions and false fears that each may entertain regarding the alternative. In the case of the Sinhala community these misconceptions relate to the danger of any system which confers a high degree of local or regional autonomy on the Tamil minority. These fears are linked to a notion that autonomy will be a step leading towards separation and division of the country. There are two convincing arguments which should demonstrate that these apprehensions are entirely unfounded. First, in any system of autonomy, even federal autonomy, the central government retains the main and decisive instruments of military, financial and political power. An autonomous unit in the normal context has no capability to confront the central government and defy it. In any situation where there are serious problems of order and security, and where an autonomous unit tends to work against the national interests, the central government could always intervene effectively. In certain circumstances it can impose its own role over an autonomous unit. We have seen how this has happened in the case of India. The framework of autonomy in Sri Lanka will have all these safeguards. Secondly, most multi-ethnic societies, as stated in the Introduction, have been able to resolve their ethnic conflicts only through a system of genuine autonomy. Such a system has

helped to bring the ethnic groups together rather than take them apart. It has brought out more clearly the interdependence of the groups and also enabled them to accommodate one another in a framework of self-management which will avoid continuing friction, contact and competition which create conflicts. There is every reason to expect that this will happen in the Sri Lankan case as well.

The objections of the Tamil community, on the other hand, relate to the insufficiency of power and autonomy. This has to do partly with the territorial unit adopted for the system and partly with the control of power exercised by the central government. These issues have been discussed at some length. Both sets of problems could be dealt with adequately within the framework of the alternative that is suggested.

If the main features of the alternative are found acceptable in principle then there would have to be several major amendments to the District Development Councils Act. Given the level of autonomy and the scope of District Development Councils, as envisaged in the alternative, it might be necessary to provide certain constitutional safeguards for district autonomy. The portfolios concerning District Development Councils in their modified form would have to come under the President himself and the powers for appointment and dissolution of Councils will have to be exercised by the President. The leader of the group with the largest membership in the Council should be called upon to form the Executive Committee of the Council. The leader of the group forming the Executive Committee should be the Chief Political Executive for the District. The office of the central government representative who is responsible for the residual central government functions in the district and for the liaison between the district administration and the central government should be distinguished from that of the Chief Political Executive for the district administration. The basic principles governing the allocation of responsibilities to the district, the residual functions of the central government and the control exercised by it and the financial base for district autonomy will all have to be defined, and agreed upon. When the legal framework and the broad principles have been agreed upon, the implementation of the system and the details in the adminis-

trative and financial components of the system require intensive negotiations at the political level and a great deal of professional work to establish the system and make it operational. These tasks may have to be performed by an ad hoc national negotiating body supported by a secretariat working continuously over a considerable period of time.



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