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Mládež tzv. Tamilů z vysočiny na Šrí Lance: hodnoty, aspirace a  
formování nové elity

***Malaiyaka Tamil Youth in Sri Lanka: Values,  
Aspirations, and the Forming of a New Elite***

Disertační práce

vedoucí práce - PhDr. Stanislava Vavroušková, CSc.

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## **Preface**

*“During the colonial period, superintendent walked on plantations in the morning to monitor workers whether they work properly. If they chatted instead of working, he hit them with a stick. As soon as he left, the pluckers started to talk again, and the work slowed down. That’s why the superintendents got used to install a bar with a hat behind bushes so that the workers thought that the superintendent was close by. Simply, he put a hat on. And since these times this town has been called Hatton.”<sup>1</sup>*

Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup> has been well known as a country with a highly developed educational system. However, a community - *Malaiyaka Tamils*<sup>3</sup> - that contributed to a large extent to economic growth of the country was denied the high educational standards. Moreover, the *Malaiyaka Tamils*, especially the part that have lived and worked in the so-called Hill Country,<sup>4</sup> were deprived of their basic civil rights, such as the citizenship and universal suffrage,<sup>5</sup> and they became a group with the lowest socio-economic status within the Sri Lankan society with slim prospects for escaping from this position.

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<sup>1</sup> I was told this rumour by several people around the town of Hatton.

<sup>2</sup> The country’s official name used to be Ceylon which was changed into “Sri Lanka” in 1972. I will employ both terms interchangeably, however mostly in reference to the historical development.

<sup>3</sup> The term “*Malaiyaka Tamils*” will be used to designate members of the Sri Lankan ethnic group usually called as Indian or Plantation Tamils. “*Malaiyakam*” was originally a Tamil word consisting of the stem *malai* (mountain, hill) and the suffix denoting the region or area (of sth.) - *akam* (Dictionary of Contemporary Tamil. Chennai: Cre-A, 2001, 3). *Malaiyaka tamilar* (final “m” is reduced due to the sandhi rules) is an ethnonym, which they employ most frequently in their native language, Tamil. This term has been usually translated as Up-Country and occasionally Hill Country Tamils. Both terms imply the geographical locality where the majority of these people live - the Hill Country, which rises in the south-central part of the island.

The transliteration of Tamil words into English follows the system used in the Tamil Lexicon in Six Volumes (University of Madras, 1936). Tamil proper names are transcribed according to the usual standard of scientific literature in English.

<sup>4</sup> The central highland part of Sri Lanka, also known as Up-Country.

<sup>5</sup> The Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948, the Indian and Pakistani Residents’ (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949, the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949. [http://www.immigration.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=132&Itemid=59&lang=en](http://www.immigration.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=132&Itemid=59&lang=en), retrieved 12.3.2011

The ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils<sup>6</sup> consist of several subgroups, but this work deals especially with the plantation part - also called as coolies<sup>7</sup> - while the urban and rural parts are only mentioned. The plantation part is related to descendants of the Tamils who were brought by the British from South India during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century to work on the coffee and later tea plantations<sup>8</sup> in Sri Lanka. Several changes, which significantly influenced future development of this ethnic group, occurred during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was a gradual process for granting the citizenship, state take-over of the plantation schools, growth of educational opportunities, and growth of civic and political awareness. Despite the fact that the plantation workers were by far the largest part of their ethnic group, they lacked educated middle class elite which would be able to struggle more effectively for their interests. The elite of the ethnic group originated from their urban part whose interests were different. However, due to the above mentioned changes, before the end of the millennium a new generation of the young Malaiyaka Tamils started to form in the plantation area. It is the first generation that have had an opportunity to acquire better education and subsequently employment, and thus to increase their social and economic status. Moreover, the death of a long-time undisputed political leader of the Malaiyaka Tamils-Saumiya moorthy Thondaman<sup>9</sup>-in 1999 has opened wide space for the new political representation. Thondaman was succeeded by his grandson Arumugam Thondaman<sup>10</sup> in the leadership of the Ceylon

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<sup>6</sup> A more detailed description of the Malaiyaka Tamil community will be in Introduction and, especially, in the chapter History.

<sup>7</sup> manual workers

<sup>8</sup> In Sri Lankan English the term “tea estates” is also widely used.

<sup>9</sup> ceḷamiyamūrtti toṇṭamān

<sup>10</sup> ārumukaṇ

Workers' Congress,<sup>11</sup> but the Tamil plantation workers still lack new political leaders from among their own ranks and call for them.

This work attempts to describe the process of upward social mobility of the Malaiyaka Tamils youth from the Hill Country by investigating their opportunities, skills, aspirations, values, and attitudes.

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<sup>11</sup> The main political party that has represented interests of the Malaiyaka Tamils. Further details concerning this party are mentioned below.

## **Introduction**

Extending scholarly interest in the historical developments of the Malaiyaka Tamils started to advance in the period after Ceylon had gained independence. It focused especially on the field of providing and interpreting statistical data about their migration and character of settlement, and commenting on the legislative measures. The Malaiyaka Tamils were gradually scientifically recognized as an ethnic group although their minority position and civil rights have been occasionally disputed. The socio-economic development of the Malaiyaka Tamils has started to be scientifically analysed in depth only recently.

The case of the Malaiyaka Tamils as an immigrant group that settled in the proximity of their homeland as “free labourers,” adapted there, and formed a new ethnic group with their own distinct identity, is very unique in some aspects, but in others resembles other cases over the world.

After the slavery was abolished in the British colonial empire in 1833, the British replaced the slaves with so-called indentured labourers. Yet, the labour and living conditions stayed very similar to those during the slavery period. The recruits were transported mostly to work on sugar plantations in Mauritius, Fiji or Caribbean with a contract for a period of five years, renewable for further five years. Then they were free to work elsewhere within the colony. Most of them settled permanently there.

The migration of workers to tea, coconut and rubber plantations in Sri Lanka and Malaysia was regulated through a relatively free so-called Kangani system. The kanganis were recruiters and supervisors of Indian origin, who periodically travelled to India to search for new workers. They were also brokers between the workers and the estate staff, which resulted in developing a strong patron-client relationship



between the kangani and his gangs of workers. Furthermore, in the 1940's most of the Malaiyaka Tamils in Ceylon were deprived of their civil rights. These two factors contributed greatly to the fact that most of the workers, initially recruited as "free labours," were tied up with their plantations. As they could not move away, they were socially isolated, prevented from integration into local population, and became the most marginal group within the Ceylonese population.

During their colonial era the British sent Indians to work on plantations to many crown colonies, such as Malaysia, Burma, Singapore, South Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, Trinidad, or East Africa. After the Indians had reached the destination, they had to adapt to a new environment and new ethnic, social and language composition of the local population. As the labourers often originated from various parts of India, they also had to adapt to their own new social composition. In the new environment the caste system was losing its impact on daily life. However, it has been argued that in spite of it, the basic principles of the caste system, such as hierarchical order or the opposition between pure and impure, adapted to the new conditions.<sup>12</sup>

In Sri Lanka the situation was different. The workers were almost exclusively Tamils, and most of them originated from the lowest castes or from among untouchables. Furthermore, in Sri Lanka a sort of caste system had also existed before the plantation workers arrived, but its rules were shifted and differed in some ways from the one of India. As concerned the occupation position<sup>13</sup> in the new place, the workers were actually unified because, except for a few plantation staff and labour recruiters, all of them worked as manual labourers on the plantations. Nevertheless, even in the case of Sri Lanka, the original

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<sup>12</sup> Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour*, xxiv.

<sup>13</sup> Occupation status plays a determining role in the caste hierarchy.

caste system has changed, but persisted and adapted to the new environment.

Although diasporas next door are quite common all over the world, the case of the Malaiyaka Tamils as a diaspora next door is unique in several aspects. First, an ancestral country of migrants is usually in a subordinate position in relation to a new country. But India has been a regional power,<sup>14</sup> and moreover, the Tamil areas are located in the southern India, several kilometres from Ceylon coast. When the Malaiyaka Tamils were deprived of their citizenship rights in the 1940's,<sup>15</sup> one from among the arguments of the Sinhalese political elite in relation to that was a fear of spreading Indian hegemony in the region. The Sinhalese argued that although the Tamils are a minority in Ceylon, from the global point of view they are a majority.

Second, on the island another Tamil group had settled long time before the plantation workers arrived. These so-called Ceylon or Sri Lankan Tamils form a specific ethnic group that differ from the Tamils of Tamil Nadu, and even from the Malaiyaka Tamils in many aspects.

Furthermore, when the conflict between the Sri Lankan Tamil organization of Tamil Tigers (LTTE)<sup>16</sup> and the government started, the Malaiyaka Tamils were accused of joining the separatist struggle. As they were surrounded by the majority population in the Hill Country when the conflict escalated, they were vulnerable to violence from the side of the Sinhalese extremists despite the fact that they had not joined the LTTE separatist struggle. Paradoxically, the Sri Lankan

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> The Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948, the Indian and Pakistani Residents' (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949, the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949.

[http://www.immigration.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=132&Itemid=59&lang=en](http://www.immigration.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=132&Itemid=59&lang=en), retrieved 12.3.2011

<sup>16</sup> The Tamil Tigers were the most prominent and militant Tamil separatist organization in Sri Lanka. The organization was established in 1973 as the Tamil New Tigers; it was renamed in 1976. Since then the official name was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The organization was led by Velupillai Prabhakaran. They fought for an independent Tamil state in the East and North of Sri Lanka.

Tamils consider themselves, due to historical, language, caste system and other factors, as a group of higher social status, and look upon the Malaiyaka Tamils as a subordinate group. As I was told, if a Sri Lankan Tamil has to hold out his hand, he would prefer a Sinhalese over a Malaiyaka Tamil.<sup>17</sup> Despite the conflict, the Sri Lankan Tamils have remained an integrated part of the Sri Lankan population, but the Malaiyaka Tamils have still been sometimes considered as recent immigrants or as aliens, who should have returned to India. Their emancipation and integration into the island's population is an unfinished issue.

### Division of the Thesis

This work is divided into six main parts - Preface, Introduction, Theoretical and Terminological Framework, History, Field Work, and Conclusion.

In the Preface the problem is outlined in brief. In the Introduction the case of the Malaiyaka Tamil community is presented in the context of other communities of Indian manual workers in former British colonies, and it is also presented in the context of its specific position as a diaspora next door. Further, hypotheses, main question, and aims of the thesis are stated. Then, I present details concerning the field research and the target group, methodology, and the main secondary literature sources.

In the third part, I describe the theoretical concept by means of Barth's theory of changing ethnic boundaries. I employ the terms of class stratification, underclass, structural vertical mobility, and elite. By means of these terms I finally propose to introduce the terms of "agents of change" and "new elite" in relation to the investigated

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with a Sinhalese retired politician, Kandy, 12.3.2006.

problem. I also point to the differences in social stratification systems between “the West” and “the East.”

The historical part is subdivided into two main chapters. The first one deals with the history of the ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the beginning, basic characteristics and numbers about the Sri Lankan population are presented. In the second “historical” chapter, I examine the development of the Malaiyaka Tamil going back to history of their permanent settlement on the island. I also describe the current living and working conditions in the Up-Country; then I focus on the political representation of the Tamils, and interrelation between their apathetic attitudes, rising political awareness, and socio-economic changes. I conclude this part with a summary of the most important points of the Malaiyaka Tamil identity.

In the main part, outcomes of my field research are analysed. It is subdivided into three blocks - Social Isolation, Activities, and Aspirations, Expectations; Education and Parental Interest; and Ethnonyms, Collective Ethnic Identification and Ethnic Boundaries. Each block includes its own introductory overview of the topic, collected data overview, and an analysis.

In the last part, I present the partial conclusions in relation to the hypotheses, and I try to state the overall conclusion and to consider how it corresponds to my assumptions. I also suggest questions upon which I have stumbled, and which could be further examined.

### Hypotheses and Questions

The findings of previous research projects <sup>18</sup> indicate that the Malaiyaka Tamils have been undergoing a process of considerable

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<sup>18</sup> For instance Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 6; or Daniel Bass, *Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, 13.

social change, which has been launched especially by granting the citizenship and by the growth of educational opportunities. Progress in the education system is primarily an opportunity for the young people, and simultaneously the educated youth are generally destined to become members of the so-called new elite of their own ethnic or alternatively defined group in the future. In this way, they become agents of the subsequent changes. It seems that the young Malaiyaka Tamils of today have an opportunity to become the first relatively well-educated generation of their ethnic group. Therefore, the main hypotheses are:

The process of socio-economic changes within the Malaiyaka Tamil community will reach such a large extent and shape that the target group of this research - the bellow defined part of the young Malaiyaka Tamils from the estate sector - will undergo a process of structural upward social mobility. They will move structurally into the middle class. Acknowledged by the plantation part of the ethnic group as their new elite, they will gradually replace the current political elite. Further, they will act as agents of change, which will lead to a significant shift in their socio-economic status and demarginalization and emancipation of the Malaiyaka Tamils within the Sri Lankan society.

In relation to the hypotheses, I address the main questions to be answered:

1. Owing to the set of the described attitudes, values, conditions, qualifications, and aspirations, can we assume that the target group will become the new elite of the ethnic group, which will significantly influence the marginal socio-economic status and position of the Malaiyaka Tamils within the Sri Lankan society?
2. What impacts, as we could assume, would this development have in the all-national context?

The secondary questions are related mostly to particular chapters that deal with selected factors determining the analyzed process.

3. Do the young students aspire to reach higher education? Do the parents support education of their children? Do the students have enough education opportunities?
4. What are employment opportunities for the educated youth?
5. What is the degree of the social isolation of Malaiyaka Tamil youth in relation to the country's society?
6. Are the youth interested in politico-economic life? Do they participate in the politico-economic life?
7. What are their ideas concerning their future lives?
8. What are their attitudes towards the lifestyle of their ancestors? How do they perceive the conflict of tradition and modernity?
9. How do they identify themselves? How do they perceive their collective and individual identity?

### Aims

There are three main aims of this thesis. First, I will describe the process of social changes within the Malaiyaka Tamil community both in general, and with a special reference to the educated youth. The aim is to understand better the current, but mainly the subsequent development that could lead to wider changes in the social structure of the group, but also of the whole society. On the basis of the field research analysis, it would be possible to consider subsequent social and political development of the community of Malaiyaka Tamils.

The second aim is to point to obstacles that could obstruct the process in further development, as suggested in the hypothesis. If the tendency towards the emancipation of the Malaiyaka Tamils is obstructed, it could lead to certain security threats. The most discussed problem is a lack of secondary continuity in certain fields of the development. For

example, the people that have recently obtained the citizenship and other related civil rights still have to face various problems while exercising it as it happened during the elections in 2006. Another example is the case of the educated youth who lack enough employment opportunities corresponding to the degree of their education, and have to return to the monotonous manual work on the plantations. Therefore, the aim is to point to tensions within the community, which could be created by discontinuity of the process and by a lack of interest from the side of the political leaders in the affaires of the Malaiyaka Tamils. Frustration and consequent radicalization of the youth could possibly cause threats to the national security.

The third aim - minor, however, very important and contemporary - is to draw attention to still very poor living and working conditions on the Sri Lankan tea plantations. Therefore, the described development is considered as a positive process that should lead to emancipation of the people that have been living in conditions comparable with serfdom in the country that has been denominated as a democracy. Moreover, the plantation workers are still widely known more according to romantic sunny pictures from guidebooks rather than according to the reality.

### Methodology and Field Research

The field research was conducted in Sri Lanka, Central Province, Nuwara Eliya District in 2006. It was divided into two phases. In the first place, I spent several weeks in Colombo and Kandy searching for secondary sources in libraries. As a part of pilot study, I visited several institutions there where I found the informants - politicians, NGO workers, and scholars, who were willing to be interviewed and to provide me with some contacts in the Up-Country. I thus gained actual

information about the environment and situation in the Hill Country. It also helped me to choose the research methods and techniques.

The second part of the research - the survey - was conducted in two areas in the Hill Country - around the towns of Nuwara Eliya and Hatton where density of the Malaiyaka Tamil population was the largest. In the beginning I had to specify determinants for the structural social mobility that were most relevant in relation to the research project. Therefore, I conducted preliminary research with several young people to test the questionnaire and interview questions. The research methods included primarily quantitative techniques. I visited several schools - so-called *maha vidyalayam* - in the area where I employed the questionnaire survey for data collection, and I also interviewed the teachers using semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire comprised mostly standardized, but sometimes even open-ended questions. Furthermore, I interviewed various experts, scholars, NGO workers, labour union leaders, politicians, plantation staff and management, but also common people. In some cases I employed a qualitative technique of unstructured interview. I visited several plantation villages where I attended some cultural events. The qualitative techniques also served as a controlling mechanism so as to reach a high level of validity.

The analysis is conducted within the disciplines of history and sociology. It has primarily comparative and descriptive character. I specify several fields especially relevant for objectives of the research. I focus on description of the recent and current development in these fields within the Malaiyaka Tamil community as a whole. Afterwards, I compare the general situation with the data of the target population acquired with the survey.

The target population comprises young Malaiyaka Tamils between 15 - 19 years of age, studying at Senior Secondary Education level in the



Nuwara Eliya District. According to the last census in 2001, the total population of the Malaiyaka Tamils in Sri Lanka numbered 855,888 people.<sup>19</sup> Nuwara Eliya was a district with the highest concentration of the Malaiyaka Tamils in Sri Lanka, with a population amounting to 359,386 people.

In the Nuwara Eliya district there were 518 government schools, with 294 Tamil medium schools in 2003. From among the 89 schools covering up to the 13<sup>th</sup> grade - the *maha vidyalayam*, there were only 30 Tamil medium schools. The survey was conducted in 9 schools, which is 30 %. The sample numbered 124 persons of the Malaiyaka Tamil origin between 15 - 19 years of age, and was selected by means of multistage random sampling. Unfortunately, I was not able to find out any exact figure for the target population.

75 % of the respondents stated that their parents worked in the estate sector, 25 % do not work in the estate sector; 61 % of the respondents lived in the estate sector, 26 % lived in the urban sector, and 13 % in the rural sector. Male respondents were 48 % and female 52 %. Only 14 % of the sample students stated that they also had a job.

### Literature Review

Recent most insightful works focusing on the Malaiyaka Tamils are books *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon* by Patrick Peebles, *Labouring to Learn* by Angela W. Little, and *Bonded Labour* by Oddvar Hollup. The Little's book provides readers with a deep analysis of the educational development and progress on the plantations. Peebles deals with all aspects of history of the community, however, he ends in the 1940's with a very brief mention about the development over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hollup discusses various aspects of the Malaiyaka

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<sup>19</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2001*. Sri Lanka: [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk), retrieved 18.5.2006. The census was incomplete on account of the conflict in the North and East.

Tamil life and identity from an anthropologist's point of view. The gist of his study is in the chapter about changes in the caste system on the plantations.

Concerning the modern, especially the post-independence period of politico-economic development of Sri Lanka in general, I used mainly *Indo-Ceylon Relations since Independence* by S. U. Kodikara and *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* by W. Howard Wriggins. However, these two authors seem to be often in contradiction in certain issues. Other interesting and relevant secondary materials about the history of the Malaiyka Tamils are *Trade Unions and Leadership among Estate Workers in Sri Lanka* by Oddvar Hollup, *Kanganies in Sri Lanka and Malaysia* by Frank Heidemann, and *Estate Tamils, the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and Sri Lankan Politics* by Amita Shastri.

Many social scholars focus on identity of Malaiyaka Tamils nowadays. Among the most influential studies could be counted works by E. Valentine Daniel *Chapters in Anthropology of Violence, Tea Talk and Three Dispositions towards the Past: One Sinhala, Two Tamil*, and by Daniel Bass *Malaiyaha (Up-Country) Tamil Identity, Politics in the Twenty-First Century and Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, and his PhD thesis *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*.

Several other studies based on field works have appeared recently; such as *The Impact of Time and Environment upon Students in Plantation Area, Youth and Development, Child Labour, or Alcoholism in the Sri Lankan Plantation Community*. They were especially published by the Centre for Plantation Studies of Satyodaya Centre of Kandy. I found as very helpful a publication *Sri Lankan Youth* by a collective of German and Sri Lankan scholars that presented an analysis of nationwide survey about problems of the youth. This book inspired me especially while devising my questionnaire.

As concerns the ethnicity theories, I took into special consideration publications by Frederik Barth *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, its review *The Anthropology of Ethnicity* edited by Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers, and studies written by Thomas Hylland Eriksen *Tensions between Ethnic and Post-Ethnic*, and *Ethnicity and Nationalism*.

## **Theoretical and Terminological Framework**

In this chapter I introduce the most important sociological terms that are used in this work, and I explain the context in which they are set. Although some of these terms are of a routine nature, it is useful to mention them for the purpose of analysing the concept of the work.

### **Ethnic Boundaries and Identity Change**

Owing to the recent socio-political development, it seems that the Malaiyaka Tamils, especially the young people, are currently undergoing a process of change in relation to their attitudes and values. As a suggested interpretation of one aspect of this process - the change of identity, Barth's ethnicity concept<sup>20</sup> is used as an analytical tool, and ethnonym variants and various attitudes towards them serve as indicators.

In general, Barth's ethnicity concept changed the previous perception of an ethnic group as a static unit into a more dynamic model. He emphasized the subjective view of reality as the most important criterion for ethnic group ascription, and he described collective ethnic identity as an unsettled process of changing ethnic boundaries. The Barthian theory has been challenged and reconsidered many times since it was published, but, basically, it is still valid and very influential. I shall follow its basic ideas.

Frederik Barth formulated the principal points of his concept of ethnic boundaries as follows: "*Ethnicity is a matter of social organization above and beyond questions of empirical cultural differences: it is about 'the social organization of cultural difference'*";

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<sup>20</sup> In 1969 the Norwegian Frederik Barth edited the book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, which was devoted to the theoretical concept of ethnicity and supported by several case studies.

*ethnic identity is a matter of self-ascription and ascription by others in interaction, not the analyst's construct on the basis of his or her construction of a group's culture;*

*the cultural features of greatest import are boundary-connected: the diacritica by which membership is signalled and the cultural standards that actors themselves use to evaluate and judge the actions of ethnic co-members, implying that they see themselves as 'playing the same game.'*"<sup>21</sup>

The Malaiyaka Tamils live in a poly-ethnic society, and they may be divided into two main sections with different levels in relation to the extent of their interactions with the surrounding society. A small section of the Malaiyaka Tamils, mostly traders, reside in towns, and maintain very strong and vital interactions with the surrounding society, so it could be said that they live in permanent, or at least economical, interdependence with the majority ethnic group of the area - the Sinhalese. On the contrary, the absolute majority of the Malaiyaka Tamils reside and work in relative isolation from the tea estate villages in the Hill Country, with very limited opportunities for interaction with the members of other ethnic groups. However, as a consequence of various political and social factors, opportunities for development of the interaction outside the traditional living space have recently started to increase.

In poly-ethnic systems the ethnic belongingness and affiliation acquire greater importance and almost imperative status, particularly owing to the strongly ethnic stereotyped patterns of behaviour. In reality, it means that actors from different ethnic groups can often recognize practically invisible anthropological or cultural characteristic features of others, and accordingly they look on them, evaluate them and

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<sup>21</sup> Frederik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 6.

anticipate their particular model of behaviour in conformity with the ethnic stereotypes.

However, the existence of stable cultural distinguishing characteristics does not paradoxically prevent actors in poly-ethnic social systems from crossing ethnic boundaries:

*“Though the emergence and persistence of such systems (complex poly-ethnic systems) would seem to depend on a relatively high stability in the cultural features associated with ethnic groups - i.e. a high degree or rigidity in the interactional boundaries - they do not imply a similar rigidity in the patterns of recruitment or ascription to ethnic groups... Examples of stable and persisting ethnic boundaries that are crossed by a flow of personnel are clearly far more common...”<sup>22</sup>*

Intricacy and instability of ethnic boundaries in the Sri Lankan poly-ethnic system in the Hill Country could be presented by means of two examples. First, the Malaiyaka Tamils have sometimes been considered by the Sinhalese to be members of the other Tamil ethnic group on the island, Sri Lankan Tamils. Alternatively, the two Tamil groups have been considered as one common ethnic group. Second, some Malaiyaka Tamils no longer identify themselves simply as Malaiyaka Tamils, but they tend to prefer identification with other ethnic groups, or non-ethnic kinds of identification in certain situations where one would expect a preference for ethnic identification.

The latter case of identity shift is considerably observable among the Malaiyaka Tamil youth, especially in the slightly increasing group of relatively educated young people, who are likely to become elite members of the group, i.e. the agents of change. According to Barth:

*“The agents [of change] ... are the persons normally referred to somewhat ethno-centrally as the new elites: the persons in the less*

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

*industrialized groups with greater contact and more dependence on the goods and organizations of industrialized societies. In the pursuit of participation in wider social systems to obtain new forms of value they can choose between the following basic strategies: (i) they may attempt to pass and become incorporated..., (ii) they may accept a 'minority' status, accommodate to and seek to reduce their minority disabilities..., (iii) they may choose to emphasize their ethnic identity."*<sup>23</sup>

## Youth

Youth is mostly defined as a group of people between the age of 15 and 30 years. However, this research was conducted mostly among the people of the age between 15 and 19 with other mentioned specific characteristics, therefore, the results of this thesis should not be generalized further above these limits.

In general, young people play a very important and specific role in any society. With the growth of social dynamics, the significance of the youth increases, especially during breaking-periods. Socio-political participation is a form of social control by which the youth could be made to conform with the status quo, thereby ensuring their conformity to the goals and patterns of life determined by the national elite. But simultaneously, for youth movements, the participation entails self-determination and the role of a transformative and challenging force<sup>24</sup> because young people do not adopt new values mechanically but differentially, thus retrospectively modifying and innovating a system of social values. However, this process of innovating social standards is structural; values can be adopted by whole generations or by different socially defined parts of the youth only.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Sangaran Vijesandiran, *Youth and Development*, 2.

Changes in the patterns of youth behaviour, aspirations, values and needs affect socio-economical development of the whole society.<sup>25</sup>

### Problems

Any democratic society is based on people who are able to take actively part in socio-political life of the country - to protect their legal claims, to produce their own legitimate ideas, to enforce them with logical arguments, and to control political elites. In the case of the Malaiyaka Tamils, it is rather problematic. First, it is questionable if the Sri Lankan political system can be classified as democratic, or more generally if actually any non-Western political system can be described by means of the Western political terminology. Second, the Malaiyaka Tamils have occupied the lowest rank of the Sri Lankan social hierarchy, and they have not been able, with minor exceptions, to form their own intellectual and economical elite that would protect their rights. Moreover, there is no base that would produce these socio-political elite since the absolute majority of the Malaiyaka Tamils rank among the underclass while the middle class is nearly absent. In the following paragraphs I will discuss this issue.

### Class Stratification

In general, people tend to gather into different groups on the basis of social, economic, educational and other inequalities, which is called social stratification. There have been four basic systems: slavery, caste, estates and class. In contemporary Sri Lanka, all the four systems could be found in some way, however, only the class stratification will be discussed in details herein.

The class system is not as rigid as the other systems. The membership is not inherited. In fact, a born child comes into a certain class, but

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



the membership is very variable and can be changed. Movement among the classes is called social mobility. Social mobility is much more common in the class system than in the others. The more simply an individual can reach a higher class, the more is the class system open. Economic differences play a more significant role in the class system while in the other systems the stratification depends principally on non-economic factors; though even here the economic factors are relevant.

It could be said that classes are large groups of people who share similar economic resources and type of occupation. In Western countries the classes are usually termed as an upper class (employers and top management), a middle class (white-collar workers and professionals), and a working class (manual workers). Sometimes a fourth class - peasants - is distinguished.

In Western societies the number of members of the upper class is relatively small (around 1 %) while amount of property owned by them is, on the contrary, very high.

The majority of Western population fall into the middle class. The type of occupation varies significantly. The middle class is usually divided into three parts. The old middle class is made up of small businessmen, owners of small shops and small farmers. The upper middle class consists of specialists and middle-rank managers. The lower middle class consists of people of different positions - all the non-manual lower-status occupations, such as clerks or teachers. Since the middle class is the largest class, its members are theoretically in the middle of the left-right political spectrum, and are often the least decided voters; the middle class is the most important electoral base for political parties.

The working class is subdivided into the upper and lower working class. The former one is mainly made up of skilled workers, and the latter one of less skilled or unskilled workers.<sup>26</sup>

### Underclass

The underclass is a special segment of the working class. Members of the underclass mostly originate from a minority deprived group. Their living and working conditions are below the standards of members of the working class coming from the majority population. In Western countries the underclass is primarily made up of the immigrants from African and Asian countries.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the definitions coincide in an opinion that being a member of the underclass means something more than being poor: "*Low income may be a necessary condition for membership in such a class, but it is not sufficient.*" Jencks distinguished three dimensions of the underclass - economic, moral and educational.<sup>28</sup>

One of the possible attitudes to explanation of the underclass emergence is a connection of the underclass with race and segregation issues. The underclass is seen as a result of discriminatory housing and employment policy against minorities of different races.<sup>29</sup>

On the other side, Oscar Lewis found a social explanation. He introduced a term "culture of poverty." It means that members of the underclass have a specific value system. Individuals born into this environment adopt it so strongly that they are unable to escape it.<sup>30</sup>

The problem of the underclass have mostly been investigated in Western countries and in multi-racial environment, however, attempts

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<sup>26</sup> More to the class stratification in: Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, 205 - 221. There are also many other class divisions, and many other concepts from among which the most influential are those described by Karl Marx and Max Weber.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, 221.

<sup>28</sup> C. Jencks, "What is the Underclass - and is it Growing?," 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ruth Lister, "Introduction: In Search of the Underclass," 2.

<sup>30</sup> For further explanation see D. S. Massey, N. A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, 3.

to define it have even occurred in different localities and contexts. Social scholars from the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies consider the Malaiyaka Tamil urban workers as an example of the underclass community originating from the caste rules: *“The complex interplay between outcast status and ethnic and class marginalization in Sri Lanka is demonstrated by sanitary labour communities of Indian origin... As members of an urban outcaste underclass community also considered as an enclave of some kind, people ... experienced a number of hereditary disadvantages.”*<sup>31</sup>

I propose to consider the plantation section of the Malaiyaka Tamil community as a specific underclass community as it corresponds to the most of the criteria of this concept. Their status is connected not only with their economic position, but it is also socially defined. It is a minority group with low social status; most of the Tamils work as unskilled manual labourers, and they live in very poor conditions. In general, the underclass is often connected with deviant and criminal forms of behaviour and unemployment. The unemployment rate has never been significant in the plantation sector, however, the wages are extremely low. It has always been a certain social problem revealed as alcoholism and home violence.

### Western and Eastern Class System

It is necessary to mention the question of implementing the concept of social classes in the Non-Western world as it was invented by Western scholars and applied to the Western societies.

Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the economic situation of the working class has rapidly changed in the Western societies. At present, many of the manual workers can not be counted among the poor. Class boundaries are more permeable, and they have disappeared in many spheres.

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<sup>31</sup> K. T. Silva, P. P. Sivapragasam, P. Thanges, “Caste Discrimination and Social Justice in Sri Lanka,” 10-11.

However, there are other factors, such as different values, needs or activities, on whose basis the class membership can be ascribed.

The social stratification systems in the Eastern and Western societies differ to a large extent. In the Indian subcontinent, the class system mingles together with the caste system. There are some points in which the two systems are similar. *“There is another point of contact between caste society and modern society which allows a modern continuity to be set up between the two. This is the division of labour or professional specialization, the more accessible to the Westerner in that he can take it, in part, as separate from religion.”*<sup>32</sup> In essence, social classes are also groups of people of similar occupations. But unlike the case of castes, classes are not defined by any religious rules. Caste membership is inherited, and one can not change his caste (however it sometimes happens). Class membership is open for social mobility and for intermarriages. Classes are defined by economic differences much more than castes.

Another difference between the Eastern and Western social system is in their historical experience and social, political and economic development. Most of the Eastern countries were released from the colonial hegemony only in the half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and they are still taking the economic consequences of the European colonialism. Some Eastern countries managed to extricate from the economic underdevelopment. *“The new class system which has emerged in the course of rapid industrialisation is most open in Taiwan, followed by Japan and then South Korea.”*<sup>33</sup> However, this is not the case of Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka the caste system plays a very significant role, and strongly influences the class stratification there; existence of the caste system prevents the class system to be open. Economic inequality

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<sup>32</sup> Luis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Young-Min Yun, “Class Structure and Class Mobility in East Asia,” 257.

between “the poor” and “the rich” is much deeper than in the Western countries; the most numerous class in Sri Lanka is the working class, or more precisely the peasant class, followed by the underclass. Therefore, the working class is, in political terminology, the largest electoral base. Hence, from the Western point of view, in Sri Lanka there is no real rightist political party; orientation of both strongest parties (SLFP and UNP) is more or less leftist.

According to the percentage table of employed population by district and major occupation groups of the census of 2001, the class percentage in Sri Lanka and in the Nuwara Eliya district is as follows:

	Upper Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Sri Lanka	1,6	22	71,6
Nuwara Eliya District	0,7	11,6	82,5 <sup>34</sup>

However, numbers released from the survey conducted among the Sri Lankan youth show a different model as it is evident from the following table. The information is based on subjective views of the interviewed persons:

	Upper Class	Middle Class	Working Class
All Groups 15-29 years of age	2,3	61,8	31,1
Urban	3,4	69,6	23,4
Rural	1,9	63,1	30,1
Estate	4,2	19,6	70,8 <sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> [www.statistics.lk.gov/PopHousSat/PDF/Population](http://www.statistics.lk.gov/PopHousSat/PDF/Population), retrieved 9.7.2010. The balance to 100% is “unidentifiable or inadequate” information. (percentage)

It is evident that the middle class percentage in the urban and rural environment is extremely exaggerated at the expense of the working class; the upper class percentage is also excessive, especially in the estate sector. It reflects the confusion when implementing a Western concept on the Eastern society.

6,4 % of the students interviewed in herein presented survey stated that their mother holds an occupation related to the middle class, and 12,8 % of the students stated that their father holds an occupation related to the middle class. The rest should be classified as members of the working class as no one is a member of the upper class.<sup>35</sup> However, it is necessary to mention that class classification is a more complicated issue which should also include other factors.

Despite the fact that no overall reliable statistics of class and ethnicity are available, it is evident that most of the Malaiyaka Tamils are ranked among the working class on both objective and subjective methods of investigation. It is also evident that the class difference between the Malaiyaka Tamil estate workers and the rest of the Sri Lankan population is extreme, which supports the argument that the Malaiyaka Tamil estate workers could be classified as underclass.

In this part I have foreshadowed some problems that are emerging when the class stratification concept is being implemented on a non-Western society. One should be aware of the fact that the implementation of the class stratification concept on the Sri Lankan society is to a certain extent contentious and problematic. Nevertheless, the traditional class stratification scheme is used in this work because it serves best to analyse the discussed problem by means of generally known tools, and thus makes the research work more comprehensible.

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<sup>35</sup> S. T. Hettige, *Markus Mayer, Sri Lankan Youth*, 20. The balance to 100 % is "other or do not know" information. (percentage)

<sup>36</sup> Based on my field work conducted in 03 - 05/2006.

## Social Mobility

Social mobility is a movement of individuals and groups among different socio-economic positions. Vertical mobility can lead upwards or downwards. Social mobility can be further divided into individual and structural mobility. Structural mobility is often strongly connected with wider social changes. The most important factors for determining mobility are changes in employment, economy, and education.<sup>37</sup>

The rate of vertical mobility in society shows the degree of its openness, which means how easily an individual can move upwards (or fall downwards) the social hierarchy, or, in other words, it indicates the balance between talent, skills and efforts of an individual and limits given by the surrounding society for increasing socio-economic position. *“The extent of mobility evident within a society may be taken as a significant factor of the prevailing balance of advantage and power in class relations and, further, of characteristic modes of class action.”*<sup>38</sup>

The case of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth is related especially to the upward structural social mobility; therefore, questions of the missing middle class, and role of the elite and agents of change will be discussed further.

## Elite

Despite the gradual official recognition of the Malaiyaka Tamils as equal citizens of Sri Lanka during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century,<sup>39</sup> some members of different interest groups<sup>40</sup> have been challenging,

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<sup>37</sup> More to the social mobility for instance in: Anthony Giddens, “Sociology and Social Mobility,” 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> John H. Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> The Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Act No. 14 of 1967; the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act, No. 5 of 1986; the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act, No. 39 of 1988; the Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Act, No. 35 of 2003; the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, No. 16 of 2003.

<sup>40</sup> In concrete terms, the groups are especially owners of the tea estates and factories, and the Sinhalese political elite. This question will be mentioned later.

predominantly for ideological reasons, the social status of the Malaiyaka Tamils and its various aspects, such as the question of permanent settlement or civil rights.

Two factors, which are especially relevant to the topic of this work, have been contributing to this situation. First, there has been a relatively open arena for such challenges since the cultural definition and ethnic identity of the group has been rather ambivalent and unclear, and, moreover, the Sri Lankan society still very strongly perceive the identity of the Malaiyaka Tamils in terms of the old ethnic heterostereotypes. Furthermore, the whole group consists, in a simplified fashion, of two parts, each with its distinct set of interests - the plantation workers and the urban part. The latter one is numerically weaker but economically relatively successful, and therefore politically more important. The low-level political leaders of the former group are, in fact, local trade unionist while the highest leaders mostly originate from the urban part of the ethnic group, and thus they sometimes take political strategies that are rather questionable in relation to the interest of the plantation workers. Accordingly, these two sub-groups do not often proceed uniformly on the political scene.

Second, due to socio-historical reasons, the Malaiyaka Tamil plantation workers have lacked an educated intellectual base - the elite, who would be able to fight for the interests of the plantation workers more effectively.

The term elite is characterized mainly by three features - superiority, prestige and power.<sup>41</sup> Members of elites are formal and informal decision-makers. Generally, an elite is acknowledged not only because of its power, but also because of its ethical qualities. This is an ideal pattern which does not often work. Elite is structured according to

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<sup>41</sup> Thom Kerstiens, *The New Elite in Asia and Africa*, 3.



various fields of the society, such as political, academic or intellectual, military, civil service, business or journalist.<sup>42</sup>

It is necessary to distinguish between elites in the so-called developed and developing world. In the former one the elites have been operating and developing continuously since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But the developing countries mostly underwent the colonial experience. Before the colonialism, in most Asian and African countries, basically, two classes existed - aristocracy and absolute majority rural population. After the colonization, the middle class started to rise and produce, together with the almost non-existent upper class, a new elite very quickly.

In Asian developing countries, especially after the gain of independence and during the period of new state consolidation, the primary role in state governance was played by the political elite. This was often interconnected with the military elite, but in particular, it was at the same time the intellectual elite having originated from the not numerous educated urban middle class members. Education is a very important factor in formation of elites, and in the developing countries this factor was stronger because high-quality education was accessible only to a few privileged, therefore, education often entailed admission into the elite class: *"...the few with education are practically predestined to be looked upon as the future leaders."*<sup>43</sup>

With rapid industrialization and modernization during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in European countries the middle class started to become established, to take gradually over the role of clergy and aristocracy, and to constitute itself, next to the upper class, as a source of persons for the new elite.

In the developing countries development has been delayed but compressed since the need for new elite, when the beginning of decolonization started to be expected, was naturally enormous,

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<sup>42</sup> Michall Brecher, *Political Leadership in India*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Thom Kerstiens, *The New Elite in Asia and Africa*, 12.

especially in the field of politics. This new elite started to constitute itself, however, in a different socio-economic environment than it happened in the case of the developed countries - the middle class was not so developed, and the educated base was scarce. It brought some difficulties in establishing the administration of new sovereign states. When the new governments were not sufficiently stable, their role was often taken over by the military elites.

### Agents of Change

With gradual recognition of civil and political rights to the plantation part of the Malaiyaka Tamils in the course of the last three decades, their social structure has begun to change. Bass writes that in recent decades the middle class together with new identification has developed in the Up-Country. This new middle class consisting of teachers, NGO workers, politicians, and other educated people is important for the vibrating Up-Country Tamil society.<sup>44</sup> However, the middle class is still in the very beginning and its members are only single individuals whose agency is, in a broader perspective, almost slight. The case of the elite formation within the plantation Malaiyaka Tamils corresponds, to a certain degree, to the formation of new elites during the decolonization period in the developing countries. The community lacks a broader middle class base and more educated persons. Old elites are replaced by a few people that have reached higher education. But these individuals are mostly from the urban sector.

In fact, the middle class of the estate sector Malaiyaka Tamils has been made up by the so-called cultural workers,<sup>45</sup> who have endeavoured to draw the general public attention to the problems of the Malaiyaka

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<sup>44</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 379.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

Tamils, and to set the community's consciousness in motion. But these are not the characteristic features of a political elite.

Nevertheless, the Malaiyaka Tamil society seems to be in the process of significant social change; a specific part of them is undergoing the structural upward mobility that can result in emergence of the agents of change and the new elite. *"Elite groups do not remain stable and it is their mobility which can often give an insight into the changes that are taking place on the socio-economic and political levels."*<sup>46</sup>

Agents of change are usually members of a minority disadvantaged group, who acquire skills and qualifications for closer contact with the majority population. These people act as interface articles between their community and the surrounding society that is usually more advanced, and they thus innovate and modernize their own community. They are often young and have acquired education at the majority population institutions.

In the last years an increasing number of the young Tamils directly or indirectly connected with the estate sector have been acquiring senior secondary education, or even entering universities, and their parents have been significantly supporting their children's education. Higher achievement in education is the primary precondition for upward social mobility, and it is directly connected with shifts in employment and economy. As I suppose, it can lead to the demarginalization of the Malaiyaka Tamil society and a decrease in social, economical and political inequalities between them and the rest of the Sri Lankan population.

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<sup>46</sup> Thom Kerstiens, *The New Elite in Asia and Africa*, 4.

## **History**

The purpose of this chapter is not to present a detailed description of the history of the Malaiyaka Tamils' ethnic group, but to outline briefly and chronologically some of the most important features of the ethnic group's socio-political development. There are two reasons for that.

First, many books and articles dealing with the history of the Malaiyaka Tamils, as monographs or a component of the history of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), have been already published, especially during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Second, the central point of this study, which will be focused on the analysis of data acquired in the course of my field research, will be subdivided into several monothematic parts or lines of development. These subchapters will be introduced with a more comprehensive insight only into particular chosen features of the socio-political development of the Malaiyaka Tamils. Therefore, someone can probably lack certain items of the history of the Malaiyaka Tamils. However, especially as regards the issues of the "tea plantation economy" or the citizenship and franchise for the Tamils, a considerable number of information can be found in specialized literature.

### **Historical Developments before Independence**

The population of Sri Lanka consists of many ethnic or semi-ethnic groups, which is often hard to define. The main groups are usually designated as Sinhalese, Sri Lankan (Ceylon) Tamils, Indian (Plantation, Estate, or Malaiyaka) Tamils, Muslims (or Moors), Malays, Burghers, Veddhas, and others. In fact, only the Veddhas can be counted among the original, more exactly first, inhabitants of the island, whereas the others, starting with the Sinhalese, began to settle on the island 2500 years ago.

Sri Lankan population by ethnic group (in thousands)<sup>47</sup>

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1946</b>	<b>1953</b>	<b>1963</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>2001+</b>
<b>Total</b>	2760	3008	3566	4106	4499	5306	6657	8098	10582	12690	14847	
<b>Low-Country Sinhalese</b>	1847*	2041*	1458	1717	1927	2216	2903	3470	4470	5426	10974*	13816*
<b>Kandyan Sinhalese</b>	-	-	873	999	1089	1257	1718	2147	3043	3706	-	-
<b>Sri Lankan Tamils</b>	687	734	952	528	517	599	734	885	1165	1424	1887	730
<b>Indian Tamils</b>	-	-	-	531	603	819	781	974	1123	1175	819	856
<b>Sri Lankan Moors</b>	185	197	228	234	252	290	374	464	627	828	1047	1351
<b>Indian Moors</b>	-	-	-	33	33	36	36	48	55	27	**	**
<b>Europeans</b>	5	5	6	7	8	9	5	7	**	**	**	**
<b>Burghers</b>	18	21	24	27	29	32	42	46	46	45	39	35
<b>Malays</b>	9	10	12	13	13	16	23	25	33	44	47	48
<b>Veddahs</b>	2	1	4	5	5	5	2	1	0,4	**	**	**
<b>Others</b>	8	8	10	13	22	27	41	32	20	16	28	30

\* Low country Sinhalese and Kandyan Sinhalese are combined.

\*\* Included under others.

+ Data are given only for 18 districts where the Census of Population and Housing 2001 was carried out completely.

The Sinhalese are the majority group; according to the last complete census of 1981,<sup>48</sup> they formed 74 % of the total population. They speak Sinhala, which is a language of the Indo-European language family; they are mostly Buddhists. They are divided into two parts - Low Country Sinhalese living in the provinces along the sea in the South

<sup>47</sup> Department of Census and Statistics. *Census of Population and Housing 2001*. Sri Lanka: www.statistics.gov.lk, retrieved 18.5.2006.

<sup>48</sup> Because of the conflict the last census of 2001 was carried out only in 18 districts out of 25.

and West, who traditionally keep stronger contacts with Europeans, and the Kandyan Sinhalese, who inhabit the central hilly parts of Sri Lanka. They had maintained the last independent part of the island - the Kandyan Kingdom - before Ceylon was completely conquered by the British in 1815. Their orientation is generally more traditional; they consider themselves to have higher social status than the other Sinhalese part.

The largest minority group of Sri Lanka (almost 12,7 % of the total population in 1981) are the Sri Lankan (Ceylon) Tamils. They are mostly Hindus, and speak Dravidian language Tamil. They inhabit the northern parts of the island with Jaffna peninsula, and the north-western and eastern coast; a small but significant section resides in the highly urbanised Colombo district, employed in business. Despite many similarities between the Sri Lankan and Malaiyaka Tamils, such as in language and religion, the two groups differ in the spheres of territory, caste structure and social system, origin, profession, history, ethnonym, and also language and religion variations. But the most significant difference lies in their distinct ethnic consciousness, and the principle of exclusion and inclusion.

The Muslims (7,4 % of the total population in 1981) of Sri Lanka could be divided into many groups, such as descendants of Arab traders, who started to settle in the beginning of the second millennium, descendants of Indian traders, or Malays - descendants of Indonesian soldiers. They are spread over the whole country with the largest concentration in the East. They mostly speak the language of the majority population in their region.

The last wave of migrants - Tamils - began their journey across the Palk Strait from South India to Ceylon in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The absolute majority of them were brought by the British colonialists to work on their coffee, later tea plantations. They speak a Dravidian

language Tamil, and most of them are Hindus of the lower castes or untouchables. There are no reliable statistics, but probably only a minority of between 5 and 20 % are Christians,<sup>49</sup> to whom they often convert to escape from their caste position, and thus to secure social upward mobility. The Tamil labourers work on the tea, rubber, and coconut plantations in and around the Hill Country.<sup>50</sup> They accordingly also live in the lowlands, but the core live and work on the tea estates<sup>51</sup> in the highlands of central Sri Lanka. According to the census of 1981, there were 818,000 Malaiyaka Tamils in Sri Lanka, which was 5,5 % of the island's population, but the number was not reliable, which will be discussed below. The real number was probably higher.

#### Division of the Ethnic Group of the Malaiyaka Tamils

Although the ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils is often considered as a homogeneous unit comprised of only the tea estate labourers, three specific minority sections within it have appeared over time - traders from Colombo and other larger towns sometimes incorrectly referred to as *ceṭṭiyār* (or Chettis, Chettiyars) together with a not numerous group of upper class businessmen and company owners; refugees who escaped from the Hill Country to the northern parts of the island in consequence of the ethnic riots in 1970's and 1980's; and urban workers employed in menial occupations. These parts will not be in direct focus of this thesis; however, it is useful to incorporate them into the context of this thesis at this point.

Since the beginning of the Tamil plantation workers' migration to Ceylon, Tamil traders started to come to run their business activities on the island. Some of them settled in Colombo, the others in smaller

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<sup>49</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 54.

<sup>50</sup> Hill Country is a translation of the Tamil term "malaiyakam" which means "highlands."

<sup>51</sup> In Sri Lankan English the term "estate" is sometimes used instead of "plantation."

towns mainly in the Hill Country. As a trading community, they have prospered very well, and their social status in the Ceylonese society has not been as low as the one of the estate labourers.

The term Chettiyar is a name for an originally Indian trading caste. In Sri Lanka the whole urban part of the Tamils of recent Indian origin are sometimes incorrectly called by this term, but, in fact, it refers to Chettis who migrated from India to Ceylon in the early colonial times, but nowadays they mostly speak Sinhala, live in Colombo and are petty traders. They consider and portray themselves as a special group different from the Malaiyaka Tamils, and the fact that the last census of 2001 classified them as a distinct ethnic group in the number of several thousands indicates that they could be a very influential group.<sup>52</sup> Although they dissociate themselves aloud from the group of estate workers, it is said that they maintain economic contacts with the Hill Country traders, and have a strong word in the Malaiyaka Tamil political parties' policy.<sup>53</sup>

Relations of the Tamil trade community towards the plantation majority part have traditionally been rather contradictory. On the one side, they have often disassociated from the estate workers and denied to be identified as members of the same ethnic group. On the other side, members of the urban trading community have often been leaders of the trade unions and political parties which have represented interests of the plantation workers, and have usually been considered as the social, political and economic elite of the ethnic group. The question whether the urban Tamil traders and the plantation workers should be incorporated into one common ethnic unit is not in the focus of this work, but it would deserve more extended research and discussion.

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 111.

<sup>53</sup> I cannot quote from any reliable source, but I heard it many times during my travelling in Sri Lanka.



Also a small number of other Indians, predominantly from the southern Dravidian states, came to Ceylon. They are mostly traders, and live in towns where they pursue their business activities. They often travel between Ceylon and India. They are sometimes included in the urban trading part of the Malaiyaka Tamil ethnic group.

Furthermore, there was another part of Tamils in Colombo and its suburb employed in various services, mainly harbours. They were mostly unskilled labourers and pursued menial tasks. The Tamil urban workers could not even take advantage of the relative labour and social security that was given to the plantation workers by the legislation, especially during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They thus faced poor living and working conditions.<sup>54</sup> Despite the cultural and linguistic links to the plantation workers, these two groups did not maintain frequent contacts.

According to the Ceylon Census, in 1946 there were 780 000 of the Indian Tamils in Ceylon. Out of this amount, the non-estate workers and traders were estimated at approximately one fifth.<sup>55</sup> Since 1939 the Tamil urban workers started to be replaced by the Sinhalese, and after Ceylon attained independence only a small part of them stayed working in the lowest-status occupations such as street cleaning.<sup>56</sup> The major factor was that the urban workers were considerably struck by the restrictive legislation in 1948 and 1949<sup>57</sup> aimed at the Malaiyaka Tamils.

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<sup>54</sup> K. M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 409.

<sup>55</sup> 160 000 in 1943. S. U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations Since Independence*, 6. Less than 200 000. W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, 214.

<sup>56</sup> W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, 214.

<sup>57</sup> The Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948; The Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949; the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949.

### “Coffee period”

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the British replaced the Dutch in Ceylon, and in 1802 Ceylon was proclaimed a British crown colony. The British gained control over the whole island after they had conquered the last independent part - Kandyan kingdom - in 1815. In the mid 1830's the British established coffee plantations, which created a demand for labour force.

The Sinhalese labour probably participated in the land clearing in the beginning, but later they withdrew from the estates. Most of them were originally peasant villagers with relatively independent schedule whereas cultivation of the tea required rather strict schedule. Moreover, the lofty Kandyan Sinhalese highlanders considered the British as usurpers who confiscated their land by declaring all unoccupied forests as a Crown Land in Crown Land Encroachment Ordinance 12 of 1840. This made the framework for private ownership of land and capitalist agriculture in Ceylon.<sup>58</sup> Previously the Sinhalese peasants utilized the highland jungles for cultivation of vegetables, collecting firewood, etc.

As the local labour force was reluctant to accept permanent jobs on and around the estates, the British had to seek the workers in South India. Tamil Nadu was periodically hit by droughts and famine, the Tamils did not know real labour and living conditions on the island, and therefore these mostly low-caste workers were ready to travel to nearby Ceylon to secure a better-paid job. But the reality in this period was harsh - many workers had died during the walk from the coast through the malaria-infested forests before they reached the estates in the south-central part of the island.

The Tamil workers started to migrate in 1839, and during the “coffee period” almost all of them reached the island as temporary and casual

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<sup>58</sup> Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour*, 18.

labourers. Their first task was to establish infrastructure between the sea harbours and the central hilly part of the island where they subsequently founded the first coffee plantations. In this stage their contracts of employment were linked to the vegetation period of plants, and then they had to search for another employment, or travel back to India. Because the work was not adequate to women, the migrants were almost exclusively men. In the 1870's and 1880's the coffee plants were infected with fungus disease, which led to the collapse of the coffee industry in 1886.

### Introduction of Tea Plants

First experiments with tea were made by a Scottish planter close to Kandy in 1867. The tea industry was established on the grounds of the coffee industry; shortly afterwards it expanded rapidly. The new plant required a new system of cultivation which resulted in the change of the social situation on the estates. Many Tamil workers occasionally continued to travel to their native villages in Tamil Nadu, mainly for cultural reasons, but the tea crop cultivation demanded continuous care, and therefore permanent and extended labour force. Moreover, a demand for female labour increased, and therefore complete families started to migrate to Ceylon. In 1924 the estate population consisted of 34 % men, 34 % women, 32 % children,<sup>59</sup> and it increased from 146 000 in 1877 to 457 765 in 1911.<sup>60</sup> Such an expanding industry required even larger supply of capital, which resulted in transformation of small individual owners of the estates into large corporations.

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<sup>59</sup> S. U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations Since Independence*, 17.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

### Kangani system

Unlike the recruitment of labour to some other British colonies, the system of recruitment and labour migration to Ceylon was relatively free and was a matter of private subjects. It was provided by means of the so-called Kangani <sup>61</sup> or Head Kangani system. The head kangani was the most essential element of this system; he travelled frequently to South India on the request of a plantation owner and was paid in advance; he chose new immigrants, and was a leader of the gang of labourers recruited from villages in South India in order to work on a particular estate. At the beginning the workers had to borrow some advances from the kangani to cover their travel expenses, which made them indebted. Moreover, they needed the kangani's services as a broker between themselves and the estate staff. Thus, the workers were to a large extent dependent on the kanganis, and a strong paternalistic relationship of patron-client gradually developed between them. This relationship continued similarly even after the Kangani system was abolished, and, in fact, the kanganis' rights and duties were undertaken later by the trade union leaders.

First the head kangani recruited workers from his own caste, which were mostly small landowners, peasants, and workers belonging to cultivator and shepherd castes, like Vellalan, Kallan, or Ambalakkaran.<sup>62</sup> When the kangani lacked his fellows, he had to recruit anybody who was willing to work on the tea plantations in Ceylon. Consequently, approximately half of the plantation workers belonged to the Harijan <sup>63</sup> castes, such as Paraiyan, Pallan and Chakkiliyan.<sup>64</sup> Members of some specialist castes were also recruited for special purposes - like barbers or temple priests. The workers often

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<sup>61</sup> In Tamil *kaṅkāṇi* - supervisor

<sup>62</sup> In Tamil *veḷḷāḷan*, *kaḷḷan*, *ampalakkāran*.

<sup>63</sup> Harijan means the children of God. This term was popularized by Gandhi, and it refers to untouchables or Dalits.

<sup>64</sup> In Tamil *paraiyan*, *paḷḷan*, *cakkiliyan*.

originated from the dry zone of Tamil Nadu where work opportunities were very scarce and instable. Therefore, it was not difficult to convince them of going to Ceylon. The Kanganis promised potential workers abundance of work and higher wages.

The workers, who reached plantations, were formed into sub-groups under the head called sub-kangani,<sup>65</sup> usually according to their caste and kinship affiliation. These sub-groups then formed one larger unit under the leadership of the head kangani. The workers on the Ceylonese tea plantations lived in so-called line rooms, or barrack-like line rooms, which were small shacks, usually each for one family, arranged into joint lines.

Opinions are divided on the matter of how the caste principles of living and working segregation were kept after the arrival of the Tamil plantation workers from India to Ceylon. Hollup writes that the workers initially worked and occupied the lines in conformity with their caste belongingness, at least segregated into lower and higher castes.<sup>66</sup> On the other side, Daniel mentions that, *“from the very beginning, the structure of the society of these immigrants was to be different from that of village India... Caste distinctions... often effaced as all workers were compelled to live in identical barrack-style line rooms...”* But he also adds that *“even though many other cultural changes followed, the culture of estate Tamils never lost its sense of continuity with village India.”*<sup>67</sup>

The head of each cluster of plantations was a white superintendent called *P. D.*, or *periya dorai*,<sup>68</sup> who controlled the workers directly through the head kangani. The *periya dorai* was a symbol of the English colonial power in the plantation villages that were, in fact,

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<sup>65</sup> In Tamil *cilla* (*cillare*) *kaṅkāṇi* - small supervisor

<sup>66</sup> Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> E. Valentine Daniel, “Tea Talk: Violent Measures in the Discursive Practices of Sri Lanka’s Estate Tamils,” 571.

<sup>68</sup> A Tamil word which means “big master”.

rather isolated units with their own system of medical and educational institutions. Despite the above-mentioned problems and inauspicious conditions that the workers had to face on the estates, Hollup writes that *“these white planters... were both feared and loved... The Tamil staff and labourers considered the white planter as hardworking and rough men, but fair with a sense of justice... What people also seem to remember about the time when white planters ruled was the fact that both food and cloth were cheap, though the wages were very poor... The managers visited the workers settlement, the lines, inspecting the sanitary conditions and ordered buildings to be repaired.”*<sup>69</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the colonial government enacted several laws aimed at keeping social welfare of the plantation workers. These were Medical Wants Ordinance of 1912, Education Ordinance of 1920, Minimum Wage Ordinance of 1927, etc.<sup>70</sup> The real reason for the introduction of these steps was probably not the well-being of the estate workers itself, but to win the favour of the Indian government in order to supply the Ceylonese estates with sufficient amount of workers.<sup>71</sup> It was relevant especially after 1922 when the government of India regulated the emigration of unskilled labourers by enacting the Indian Emigration Act No. 7. Ceylon and Malaya got an exception to the rule on condition that they would meet some other requirements, in particular the establishing of certain institutions that should control emigration of Indian workers.

### Growing Political Awareness

After the introduction of the legislative measures in favour of the Tamil estate workers, some Sinhalese politicians started to complain about it; they claimed that the unskilled workers were privileged, and required

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<sup>69</sup> Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour*, 33 - 36.

<sup>70</sup> S. U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations Since Independence*, 8.

<sup>71</sup> K. M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 410.

the same benefits for the Sinhalese. Despite certain political resentment between the leaders of the Sinhalese and Malaiyaka Tamils,<sup>72</sup> the representatives of the Indian workers from Colombo and its suburbs joined the trade unions under the leadership of Alexander Ekanayake Goonesinha - a Ceylonese trade union pioneer.

Although this alliance was not too successful, it brought some political awareness and inspiration with the person of K. Natesa Aiyar (Iyar), who was originally a colleague of Goonesinha, but later on he withdrew and represented the interests of Tamil workers not only from Colombo, but also from the Hill Country. In 1939 the first trade union of the plantation workers, the Ceylon Indian Congress, was founded. After the ban on emigration of workers from India in 1939, the institution of kangani started to disappear, and the privileged status of kanganis was gradually succeeded by union leaders. Nevertheless, many kanganis adapted their strategies to the new political environment, took over the new role and became union leaders; some old kanganis were tolerated even after their abolition.

In 1928 the British colonial authorities recommended, in the Donoughmore constitutional report, a gradual transfer of power to Ceylonese hands, and required a guaranty of all civil rights for all the ethnic minorities in Ceylon. On the basis of the new Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 the universal franchise was introduced, and the British transferred some political powers to Ceylonese legislatures. However, in the case of the Malaiyaka Tamils the franchise was limited. They had to pass a literacy test, and to give evidence of continual residence on the island of at least five years. The procedure of obtaining the documents discouraged many Tamils from going to the polls, and therefore they considered these measures as ethnic discrimination. Despite it, the number of Tamil estate voters reached

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<sup>72</sup> In fact, in this period the Malaiyaka Tamil estate workers had almost no political leaders, at least not comparable with the Sinhalese.

148 000 in 1936, and 225 000 in 1939, which was reduced by new applications to 168 000 in 1943.<sup>73</sup>

Although the Malaiyaka Tamils had certain political rights, their political mobilization was still very limited since they lacked numerous politically active and economically strong middle class in the Hill Country; and political awareness of the plantation workers was very low. The few significant political leaders of the Malaiyaka Tamils originated mainly from the urban upper and middle class section of the ethnic group.

Economically most visible and influential from among them was a merchant subcaste of Nattucottai Chettiyars,<sup>74</sup> who lived mainly in Colombo. They maintained, through the caste and kinship connections, strong contacts with the head kanganis and other small Tamil traders from the Hill Country, which helped them to establish a productive business net. Besides, they controlled, to a certain extent, the cash flow between British banks and “local” population since the banks were not willing to lend money to the local population directly.<sup>75</sup>

As unemployment rates of the Sinhalese were growing, especially among the Kandyans surrounded by the tea estates, the situation was opportune for developing some ethnic stereotypes; in Sinhalese eyes - one segment of the unsettled and alien Malaiyaka Tamil population controlled a large part of the commerce and financial market, and another segment, in principle, participated in confiscating the fertile land in their own country. The Malaiyaka Tamils were thus increasingly perceived as a subject that prospered at the expense of the Sinhalese population, and caused their growing economical backwardness.

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<sup>73</sup> W.Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, 221.

<sup>74</sup> nattukkoṭṭai ceṭṭiyār

<sup>75</sup> Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour*, 40.



Therefore, as the Sinhalese were the most numerous and powerful group in the Ceylonese legislatures, with the gradual transfer of political power from British to Ceylonese hands, new discriminatory measures were introduced against the Malaiyaka Tamils including the urban trading segment. As concerns economic rights, these were namely the Moneylending Ordinance of 1918, Land Development Ordinance of 1936, the Pawnbrokers Ordinance, and the Income Tax and Estate Duty of 1942; and as concerns political rights, these were Village Communities Ordinance of 1938, which disqualified them from voting on a local level,<sup>76</sup> and finally the new Citizenship Law of 1948. The Indian Government responded by stopping further emigration of labourers to Ceylon in 1939.

#### Historical Developments after Independence

After Ceylon had attained independence in 1948, the Malaiyaka Tamils were indirectly deprived of their citizenship and franchise by the new legislation in 1948 and 1949. The most significant factor, which led to the implementation of this measure, was probably the Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamil political elite's fear of the growing political power of the Malaiyaka Tamils whose numbers had reached nearly 12 % of the population<sup>77</sup> of Ceylon in 1946. Moreover, the major political party of the Malaiyaka Tamils - Ceylon Indian Congress - gained seven seats, and helped other leftist parties to win fourteen seats at the Parliamentary election in 1947.

The question of citizenship and other civil rights has been a key issue, which has, to a large extent, determined the position of the Malaiyaka Tamils in the Sri Lankan society up to the present. This issue is sometimes considered to evoke even more far-reaching consequences:

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>77</sup> Department of Census and Statistics. *Census of Population and Housing 2001*. Sri Lanka: [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk), retrieved 18.5.2006.

*“This had a crucial bearing on the political and electoral possibilities for coming to power in the following period, with fateful consequences for ethnic relations within the polity as a whole, ultimately contributing to the tragic civil war of the 1980’s...”*<sup>78</sup>

The new administration of the independent Ceylon enacted the Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 in 1948, which introduced two sorts of citizenship - by descent and by registration. The law was restrictive and discriminatory against the Malaiyaka Tamils. To acquire the citizenship by descent they had to prove that at least two male generations had been born in Ceylon; the citizenship by registration obtained those who could prove that the person had been married and had resided on the island for seven years, alternatively ten years if unmarried.<sup>79</sup> Although it was evident that most of the Malaiyaka Tamils, especially the plantation workers, had been settled permanently for generations in Ceylon,<sup>80</sup> most of them, often illiterate, could not present these documents, and therefore obtain the citizenship.

The Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949, in fact, specified under which conditions the Malaiyaka Tamils could obtain the citizenship by registration. And finally, the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949 disqualified from the right of suffrage those who had not obtained the citizenship. Therefore, as non-citizens, most of the Malaiyaka Tamils lost their basic civil rights after these three laws had been put into effect.

Don Stephen Senanayake, the new prime minister of Ceylon and the leader of the governing United National Party (UNP), solved many problems that he had to face by the implementation of these measures.

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<sup>78</sup> Amita Shastri, “Estates Tamils, the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and Sri Lankan Politics,” 2 (of the Proquest print).

<sup>79</sup> Ivor Jennings, *The Constitution of Ceylon*, 40. The provisions of the Acts are much more complicated, see pages 40 and 41.

<sup>80</sup> This question will be discussed below.

He strengthened his position within his party; he adversely affected the potential strong cooperation between the political representations of the Malaiyaka and Ceylon Tamils, which would be even more considerable threat to interests of the Sinhalese majority; and finally, constituencies formerly won by the Malaiyaka Tamil candidates were open for UNP candidates to take over.<sup>81</sup>

The processing of citizenship applications took many years, and many applications were dismissed because often illiterate workers were not able to present requested documents. Therefore, only around 140,000 Malaiyaka Tamils obtained the citizenship by registration by 1964<sup>82</sup> while the rest - almost one million of people - remained stateless.

### Indo-Ceylon Agreements

The Government of India tried to get involved in the Ceylonese policy towards the Malaiyaka Tamils, and thus to influence their position. Both states signed several accords which divided the Malaiyaka Tamils at a certain ratio between India and Ceylon, and moved the process a little forward.

Before that several talks were held, such as the one between Dudley Senanayake and Jawaharlal Nehru in London in 1953, and between Nehru and John Kotelawala twice in 1954 that resulted in signing the Nehru-Kotelawala Pact, which did not, however, resolve the issue.

In 1964 both states signed an agreement generally known as Sirima-Shastri Pact, which was enacted as the Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Act No. 14 of 1967 in Ceylon. This Pact specified that 300,000 persons with their natural increase would be granted Ceylon Citizenship by registration, 525,000 persons with their natural increase would be regarded as Indian citizens and repatriated to India

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<sup>81</sup> Amita Shastri, "Estates Tamils, the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and Sri Lankan Politics," 9 (of the Proquest print).

<sup>82</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 226.

in the course of 15 years, and the fate of the remaining 150,000 persons would be negotiated in 1974. Another agreement signed by Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Indira Gandhi in 1974 divided them equally between both countries.

Therefore, Ceylon agreed to grant the citizenship to 375,000 Malaiyaka Tamils. But when the period of the Pact from the 1964 finished in 1981, out of 630,000 people who had applied only 162,000 people “of Indian origin” were registered as Sri Lankan citizens. Over the same period 373,900 people acquired the Indian citizenship, and 284,300 were repatriated to India.<sup>83</sup> In 1986 there were still 356,258 stateless people plus their natural increase from the year 1964.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, in this period the political representation of the Malaiyaka Tamils, which was, in fact, the Ceylon Workers Congress led by the state minister Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman,<sup>85</sup> managed to submit the citizenship question on political agenda, and to urge the majority parties to resolve it. In 1986 the government decided to grant the citizenship to all the remaining stateless Malaiyaka Tamils, and the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act, No. 5 of 1986<sup>86</sup> and the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act, No. 39 of 1988<sup>87</sup> were enacted.

However, the long and complicated legislative process of granting the Sri Lankan citizenship to the Malaiyaka Tamils was successfully finished only in 2003 when the last section of this ethnic group became official citizens, through the enactment of the Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Act, No. 35 of 2003<sup>88</sup> and the

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Caspersz, *A New Culture for a New Society*, 55.

<sup>85</sup> ceḷamiyamūrtti toṇṭamān

<sup>86</sup> Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act, No. 5 of 1986*.

<sup>87</sup> Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act, No. 39 of 1988*.

<sup>88</sup> Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Act, No. 35 of 2003*.

Citizenship (Amendment) Act, No. 16 of 2003.<sup>89</sup> A part of these last stateless Tamils had been granted Indian citizenship before, but the ship transport between the North of the island and India was stopped after the conflict broke out in 1983, and they had to stay on the island.

### The Conflict and Involvement of the Malaiyaka Tamils

Shortly before Ceylon attained independence, the hitherto relatively united Ceylonese political elite had started to diverge on ethnic and later linguistic lines because the Ceylon Tamils blamed the Sinhalese for denying their rights. During the 70's and 80's the young Tamils, predominantly from Jaffna, formed several extremist organizations that started to struggle for a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka. The Tamil Tigers was the most well-known organization from among them. Owing to their fundamentally different interests, the Malaiyaka Tamils have never, except during the period between 1972 and 1976, become involved in the separatist movement as a whole. However, there has probably always been a relatively insignificant number of individuals who had chosen to cooperate.

When the ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils intensified in 1977, 1981, and 1983, often initiated by the Ceylon Tamil extremists, the Malaiyaka Tamils were paradoxically very affected since they resided in the middle of the Sinhalese South where they were in a minority position. The most relevant factor that contributed to this state of affairs was the propaganda campaign created by the so-called Buddhist politician monks, the Sinhalese political elite, and the Tamil separatist organizations.

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<sup>89</sup> Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Citizenship (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2003*.

The Tamil Tigers' propaganda<sup>90</sup> has occasionally sought to depict all Tamil-speaking people of Ceylon, including the Malaiyaka Tamils, as one integrated unit in order to enhance their arguments for the founding of the separate Tamil state, and to enlarge its potential borders. *"An important but abortive link between the hill-country peoples' struggle and the North-Eastern struggle was formed by the [most left] militant groups EROS and EPRLF in the late 70's and early 80's. Although this link was received enthusiastically by many among the plantation youth, it remained mostly artificial, with little understanding of the diversity in historical experience as well as interests, particularly with regard to the effects of the Eelam struggle on the Hill Country community."*<sup>91</sup> The issue of the incorporation of Malaiyaka Tamils into the struggle for the Tamil separate state further promoted the negative stereotypes held towards them by Sinhalese society, and it sharpened the Sinhalese elite's negative policy in relation to the Malaiyaka Tamils.

The attitudes of the Ceylon Tamils towards the Malaiyaka Tamils, despite their already-mentioned cultural affinities and artificial unification, have never been too warm. The Ceylon Tamils, especially from Jaffna, have always considered themselves to be leaders of all Tamil-speaking groups in Sri Lanka, based on their belief in the exceptional nature of their culture, history, education, language, and caste position. Caste is, especially here, a very relevant factor because both groups of Tamils are mostly Hindus, and most of the Malaiyaka Tamils rank among the untouchables, or the lowest castes of the caste system.

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<sup>90</sup> The Tamil Tigers were the most prominent and militant Tamil separatist organization in Sri Lanka. The organization was established in 1973 as the Tamil New Tigers; it was renamed in 1976. Since then the official name was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The organization was led by Velupillai Prabhakaran. They fought for an independent Tamil state in the East and North of Sri Lanka.

<sup>91</sup> University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), *Sullen Hills: The Saga of Up Country Tamils*, 5.

## **Current Developments**

This chapter deals with socio-political developments of the ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils during the period of last approximately twenty years with some references to the whole second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I shall outline some of the most relevant social, educational and political changes and their mainsprings that touched the society of Malaiyaka Tamils and that started the process of emancipation and “demarginalization” of this ethnic group. The major topic of this thesis - the Malaiyaka Tamil youth and their new opportunities, challenges and aspirations, and especially, their new potential role of agents of change and new elite of their ethnic group - is just a natural product and implication of the developments within this period. But before I start with description of the modern development, it is helpful to delineate circumstances under which the identity of the Tamil plantation workers has been shaped since their migration to Ceylon, and to refer to the subjects that have most significantly influenced their identity. I shall also touch upon the issue of the settlement character of the Malaiyaka Tamils in the colonial period.

### **Shaping Ethnic Identity**

In spite of some cultural similarities and intersection with the other Tamil ethnic group of Sri Lankan Tamils - people who had settled on the island many centuries earlier,<sup>92</sup> the Malaiyaka Tamils formed their own ethnic group on the basis of their consciousness of collective identity different especially from the one of the Sri Lankan Tamils, with whom they are sometimes lumped together into one common ethnic group.

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<sup>92</sup> The period of their arrival from India to Ceylon is a frequent subject of ideological quarrels between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, but it has been usually stated that they started to settle permanently in Ceylon several centuries BC, and the main wave probably arrived several centuries after Christ.

Generally speaking, ethnic identity is shaped by various internal and external factors. Many scholars who are concerned with the issue of shaping ethnic identity of the Malaiyaka Tamils tend towards the opinion that it “*have largely been shaped by the voices of those not from the community.*”<sup>93</sup> Among the most relevant external subjects which have influenced the formation of the identity of the Malaiyaka Tamils in the colonial and early postcolonial period were the interests of the plantation owners, the colonial administration of Ceylon and India, and the Sinhalese politico-economic elite. These groups had a common goal to maximize production at the lowest possible operating cost.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the poor and uneducated workers found themselves among several interest groups, all of whom aimed at affecting the image of the Malaiyaka Tamils by means of legislative and political strategies.

Therefore, many current and fundamental heterostereotypes related to the Malaiyaka Tamils originate from the colonial period when the administration of Ceylon sought to justify and defend its aggressive policy towards the plantation workers, in order to maintain them in a subordinate and dependent position.<sup>95</sup> The Malaiyaka Tamils were depicted as strangers with no claim to be treated as equal citizens of Ceylon with all the incumbent civil rights, owing to the supposed connection with their mother country, India. However, since at least the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been evident that the absolute majority of the recent Tamil immigrants had settled permanently on the island, and that they had formed a new ethnic group defined on the basis of common ethnicity, which is distinguishable from the one of the Ceylon Tamils.

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<sup>93</sup> Ann Kingsolver, Sasikumar Balasundaram, „Walking with Amman: Young Malaiyaha Tamils’ Views of Their Identity in Practice,” 31.

<sup>94</sup> For further explanation see Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 7.

<sup>95</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 16.



The Sinhalese attitudes towards the Malaiyaka Tamils could be generally characterized as contradictory. On the one hand, the Malaiyaka Tamils, or more precisely their work have been indispensable to the Sri Lankan economy, since the export of tea has significantly contributed to the overall prosperity of the country, and other ethnic groups have not been much interested in this sort of manual work. On the other hand, the Sinhalese look down on the Malaiyaka Tamils, and consider them as low-class subordinate people. The negative attitude of the Sinhalese towards the Malaiyaka Tamils was further extended during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, linked to the development of the ethnic clashes, in this particular case between the Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils, which only rarely occurred before the independence.

#### The Question of Permanent Settlement

With the change of labour and social conditions after the introduction of tea crop, the Malaiyaka Tamils gradually settled permanently, but their presence was embraced by the Ceylonese society with a lot of misgivings; it would be rather daring to talk about their integration. On the contrary, most of these plantation workers remained in social isolation in the plantation villages of the central hilly part of Ceylon.

One of the key factors that influenced and determined the development of the Malaiyaka Tamils' society as a part of the island's population was the question of permanent settlement, which was frequently challenged. Currently, scholars rarely query this issue, but especially during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Sinhalese political elite created a stereotype that the plantation workers were temporary and casual labour force, and they misused this argument for disfranchisement of the Malaiyaka Tamils in 1948. This stereotype paradoxically stigmatized the Tamils as undesirable aliens with no

interest in the country's social stability and economic growth, even though most of them resided permanently in Ceylon, and the island's economy was, to a certain extent, dependent on their work. The tea production was the highest net foreign exchange earner,<sup>96</sup> and almost no members of other ethnic groups were willing to work in auspicious conditions that were on the tea plantations.

Several commissions established by the British colonial administration confirmed that at least some percentage of the Malaiyaka Tamils settled permanently in Ceylon, and accordingly they were an integral part of the island's population. In 1928 the Donoughmore Commission estimated that 40-50 % of the Malaiyaka Tamils were settled permanently; in 1938 the Jackson Report estimated at 60 %; and in 1944 the Soulbury Report estimated even 80 %.<sup>97</sup> On the other side, Kodikara criticizes these conclusions and writes that "*no reliable estimates of the degree of permanent settlement of immigrant Indian estate labourers can be made from migration statistics alone; but they certainly do not support the view that any large majority of such labourers had become settled permanently on the Ceylonese plantations at any time during their migration in the past.*"<sup>98</sup>

Peebles agrees that the statistics were not really reliable in times of colonial Ceylon since the British administrators confused the Indian origin plantation workers with Indian origin merchants and Indian origin urban workers; furthermore, the British also used other different terms for the Malaiyaka Tamils since no exact definition of this group existed.<sup>99</sup> In fact, the issue of unified official name for this ethnic group has not been satisfactorily solved yet. It frequently causes many discrepancies not only among scholars, but also among the

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<sup>96</sup> W. W. D. Modder, "To Draw Workers Back," 1.

<sup>97</sup> S. U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations Since Independence*, 11.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> See more in: Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 7 - 11.

Malaiyaka Tamils themselves even nowadays, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Before the period of independent Ceylon, the Malaiyaka Tamils kept certain contacts with their broader families in India, but they were probably more of cultural and religious character. Some workers of the middle castes probably intended to come back to India after having saved some money, but most of them were not able to escape from the circle of indebtedness to kanganis, which forced the workers to stay on the plantations. Even if the worker desired to visit India more frequently and was not indebted, the journey took a long time and was expensive. It could have cost up to one monthly wage. This argument also disturbs the myth of the strongly seasonal character of labour migration during the “coffee period.” Before the infrastructure in the Hill Country and the road connection between the sea coast and the Hill Country was completed in the 1880’s, up to one-quarter of the Tamil workers had died on the way to the plantations across the island. Moreover, the way through the tropical rain forests lasted several weeks in one direction, and then back once more the same time, and the migrants had to walk.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, it was, for a common worker, practically impossible to travel regularly between India and Ceylon in the colonial period of the island.

Moreover, as early as in 1891 the ratio between men and women of the estate population was 593 to 407,<sup>101</sup> which indicated that most of the plantation workers of that time were in Ceylon with their nuclear families. More probably, these were the Indian origin merchants who frequently travelled for business purposes to India, and they thus increased the statistical number of Tamil migration across the Palk Strait. Wriggins writes that “*the number of individuals who go back and*

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<sup>100</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 25.

<sup>101</sup> E. B. Denham, *Ceylon at the Census of 1911*, 493. In S. U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations Since Independence*, 16.

*forth is impressive... Proponents of restricting the movement of Indians cited such figures to content that the Indians were merely transients... But it is a fact that only about one-fourth of those who passed back and forth between India and Ceylon were estate laborers... The other Indian travellers not from the estates are from among the estimated 200,000 engaged largely in commerce and in service trades in Colombo.”*<sup>102</sup>

The question of permanent settlement is not feasible to answer definitely, especially owing to the unreliable method of gaining statistical numbers. Moreover, from the theoretical point of view, it is not possible to specify limits when one settled permanently in a new country because it is more a question of personal feelings. But to conclude this question, it is more than probable that in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most of the Malaiyaka Tamils were already permanent residents of Ceylon. However, in the present the permanent settlement is not any serious issue anymore.

### Living Conditions

In comparison with the socio-economic developments of other ethnic groups of the Ceylonese society, the working and living conditions of the Malaiyaka Tamils did not change significantly within the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That was particularly related to the above mentioned problem of granting the citizenship, but also other factors - such as plantation economy or lobbying of some interest groups - played an important role.

Despite improvement in the infrastructure quality in the Hill Country region, the Malaiyaka Tamil plantation labourers continued to live not only in geographical, but also relative social isolation, even during the period of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They resided mostly in villages consisting of barrack-like line rooms, which were attached to

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<sup>102</sup> W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, 219-220.

the plantations rather far away from the surrounding villages and towns. The plantation villages usually provided basic medical care facilities, crèches, and primary schools available free of charge, and some shops. Despite the very poor quality of these institutions, the plantation workers had no choice but to use their service.

### Isolation

Contacts between the plantation residents - mostly the Malaiyaka Tamils, and the village or town residents - mostly the Sinhalese - were not very frequent, which was, in addition to the geographical and economic factors, also a result of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices. The Sinhalese often continued to hold the stereotypes that had been created within the colonial period, and considered the Malaiyaka Tamils to be aliens whose aim, in particular, was to exploit the country's natural riches, and then to return to India. Doubts about the nature of their settlement gradually almost disappeared, but instead of them new negative stereotypes about the Malaiyaka Tamils appeared and spread within the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The most remarkable and influential one was their alleged linking to the separatist movement of the organization of Tamil Tigers led by the Sri Lankan Tamils. However, it resulted not only in persecution of the estate workers from the side of the state forces, but also in ethnic clashes launched by the Sinhalese against the Malaiyaka Tamils in 1977, 1981 and 1983. These were examples of extreme deterioration of relations between the Malaiyaka Tamils and the Sinhalese, but the ethnic stereotypes and certain ethnic animosity have existed on both sides even in routine life. While the Malaiyaka Tamils often consider

the Sinhalese as arrogant and lazy people, the Sinhalese consider the Malaiyaka Tamils as filthy, uneducated and uneducable people.<sup>103</sup>

However, the stereotypes are usually based on some real facts, and in this case, unfortunately, it is a reality that the educational system and living conditions on the plantations were very poor and below the national standard.<sup>104</sup> Hollup writes that *the poor living conditions among plantation workers also create stereotypes in which Tamil estate labourers are stigmatised.*<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, most of the Malaiyaka Tamils belong to the untouchables or low castes, and therefore they are generally termed as the lowest-status group in the peculiar caste hierarchy of Sri Lanka, which has become deeply rooted also among the Sinhalese, who are predominantly Buddhists.

Language barriers also contributed to the isolation of the plantation residents. Both languages - Sinhala and Tamil - belong to different language families, and the members of both ethnic groups rarely know the language of the other group; the Tamils generally speak Sinhala more frequently. English as a potential lingua franca of the plantation area hardly ever works because of the low standards of the Malaiyaka Tamils' education.

Further on, the plantation villages functioned, to a large extent, as autonomous units with most of the necessary institutions within reach; therefore, the plantation residents did not use service of the urban area or the nearby non-plantation villages, which were, moreover, expensive and hardly accessible.

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<sup>103</sup> Based on my accidental conversations with different Sri Lankans during my stay in Sri Lanka in 2001 and 2003.

<sup>104</sup> It will be demonstrated by statistics in the chapter dealing directly with education on the plantations.

<sup>105</sup> Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour*, 55.

All the mentioned factors contributed to the social isolation of the plantation residents and their ousting to the edge of the Sri Lankan society and social marginalisation.

### Apathy

After the introduction of the Citizenship laws in 1948 and 1949,<sup>106</sup> *the immediate reaction of the Malaiyaha Tamils was weak... Internally within the island they could not mount an effective campaign to regain their vote.*<sup>107</sup> As a consequence of continual social and political marginalisation of the Malaiyaka Tamils in the late colonial and early postcolonial period, the plantation workers became frustrated and resigned to the existing social order. In fact, they gradually adopted negative ethnic stereotypes, which were held towards them by the majority society. As many of the Tamils were still remaining stateless in the 1960's and 1970's, and could not vote, the impact of their political representation on the political scene of Ceylon was necessarily weak within this period. Moreover, almost no middle class existed among the Tamil plantation workers, and the urban part of the ethnic group, who were politically and economically more powerful, took rather ambiguous attitudes towards them. Consequently, in this situation, the Malaiyaka Tamils were practically unable either to change their low social status, or successfully strive for improving their living and working conditions. It resulted in a gradual adoption of their own specific attitude, which could be characterized as apathy.

Bass writes that “*many estate staff, politicians and NGO workers ... see Malaiyaha Tamils as suffering from a sort of dependency syndrome, where they do not work to better their lives since they are used to*

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<sup>106</sup> The Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948; The Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949; the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949.

<sup>107</sup> Bertram Bastiam Pillai, *Survey of Conflicts among Communities in Sri Lanka in Modern Times*, 24.

*everything, such as housing and employment, being given to them within the estate system. I believe that this view is misguided, and is often propagated by people whose own positions of power depend on Malaiyaha Tamils' lack of agency. Malaiyaha Tamils do not lack agency; they have just been frustrated and stymied every time they have tried to make changes, and have given up on the system. Apathy does not mean a lack of agency, just a refusal to exercise it."*<sup>108</sup> Kingsolver supposes that *"Hill-country communities have not been without agency, but have been without both state and cultural citizenship, being doubly disenfranchised by the Sinhala-dominated state and at times by Tamils in Colombo, Jaffna, and on the east coast because of the perpetuation of class (and caste) differences in labour relations."*<sup>109</sup>

### Political Representation

The political representation of the Malaiyaka Tamils has been concentrated in trade unions-cum-political parties. These institutions have specific features different from the concept of a political party as it is usually perceived not only in the "Western", but also Sri Lankan political and scientific environment. In particular, the Malaiyaka Tamil politicians primarily focus on achievements in the field of labour conditions on the plantations. Conventional political aims are minor as most of the workers appreciate, in the first place, progress in their microworld. Many Malaiyaka Tamil lower politicians are, in fact, trade union leaders and former kanganis.

In 1939 a plantation workers' trade union, the Ceylon Indian Congress, was founded. It was later renamed as the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), which was headed by Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman. When the kangani system was abolished in the 1960's, the trade union leaders

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<sup>108</sup> Daniel Bass, *Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, 15.

<sup>109</sup> Ann Kingsolver, Sasikumar Balasundaram, "Walking with Amman: Young Malaiyaha Tamils' Views of Their Identity in Practice," 35.



took full control of the head kangani role. The patron-client relationship has thus continued, although in different manner and under different circumstances, and the dependency of the uneducated poor workers has been preserved. Over time, the CWC has split several times, owing to personal rivalry within the leadership.

At present, the interests of the plantation workers are still represented and defended by these trade unions that, in fact, simultaneously function as ethnically based political parties, since no conventional political party exists in the Hill Country politics. This conflict of interests has, to a large extent, caused the slow progress of these union-parties in political negotiations over the rights and socio-economic situation of the Malaiyaka Tamils.

Although the CWC still remains the most dominant trade union in the Hill Country, its position has been challenged. The emergence of the Up Country People's Front (UCPF) in 1988, as a splinter group of the CWC, demonstrated the limits of the dominant union-party compromises with state strategies.<sup>110</sup> The UCPF was formed as a more radical alternative to the CWC. While Thondaman still spoke of the Indian Tamil estate workers, the leaders behind this new party saw themselves as Malaiyaka or Up-Country Tamils with no significant connection to India.<sup>111</sup> This rivalry outlines the role of ethnonym in the ethnic identity politics of the Hill Country trade union-cum-political parties.

When the Up-Country People's Front (UCPF) was formed, many plantation labourers were convinced that they had been provided with a more honest alternative in comparison with the highly opportunistic political strategies of Thondaman. The UCPF was growing quickly and

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<sup>110</sup> Janaka Biyanwila, "Trade Unions in the Sri Lankan Tea Plantations: Women Worker Struggles and Ethnic Identity Politics", 1.

<sup>111</sup> Daniel Bass, *Malaiyaha (Up-Country) Tamil Identity and Politics in the Twenty-first Century*, 3.

in 1994 its leader, Chandrasekhar,<sup>112</sup> copying Thondaman, secured a ministerial post for himself. However, many plantation workers felt that he was, as in the case of Thondaman, corrupted and that he had forgotten the people he represented.<sup>113</sup>

However, the most important, and essentially until 1990's the only political party of the Malaiyaka Tamils with a potential political influence and power to protect and advocate interests of the plantation workers vis-à-vis the majority political parties was the Ceylon Workers Congress with its long-standing leader Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman.<sup>114</sup> Thondaman was a very unique person of Sri Lankan politics and his political strategies were many times challenged, discussed and criticized. During his life he held inconsistent posts; he was an owner of tea plantation estates and concurrently the trade union leader; he was a minister of central governments led by both Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and also United National Party (UNP) - the main and rival political parties of Sri Lanka - and at the same time he led protest campaigns against the governments whose member he was.

He was often criticized for his dictatorial manner in leading the CWC whose leader he stayed for 45 years. It is difficult to evaluate his achievements. Although he finally attained the citizenship and civil rights for the Malaiyaka Tamils, it lasted more than 50 years. During this period the social status of the Malaiyaka Tamils remained very low, their living and labour conditions did not change significantly. It is questionable whether Thondaman was just a politician willing to do anything to attain his goals, or his primary aim was to concentrate political power and influence in his hands, even if it was at the

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<sup>112</sup> cantiracēkkaran

<sup>113</sup> Haakon Aasprong, *Making a Home Away from Home: On Up-Country Tamil Identity and Social Complexity at a Sri Lankan University*, 53.

<sup>114</sup> Thondaman was born in 1913, and died in 1999. He served continuously in several Sri Lankan governments from 1978 until his death.

expense of the Malaiyaka Tamils' welfare. On the one side, he is a very reputable personality among the Tamils, and the new leader of the CWC - his grandson Arumugam Thondaman<sup>115</sup> - strongly further promotes his grandfather's glory. On the other side, not only the Sinhalese, but also many Tamils tend to undervalue his political results, and consider his behaviour as unprincipled. In general, most do not feel the CWC represents the full community's concerns, although it organizes many strikes and negotiations.<sup>116</sup>

### Changes

Since the 1980's and, in particular, since the 1990's the socio-political situation of the Tamil workers on the tea plantations has begun to change. These developments could be generally described as a gradual replacement of the feelings of apathy for feelings of self-confidence, which resulted in series of new activities and certain social shifts. These developments seem to launch a process of demarginalization and emancipation of the ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils.

In 1988 the political representation of the Malaiyaka Tamils secured the granting of the Sri Lankan citizenship and other basic civil rights for a part of the remaining stateless Tamils during the pre-election negotiations. However, this issue was completely closed in 2003 when the last group of approximately 168,000 stateless Tamils were granted the Sri Lankan citizenship.

This successful completion of the civil right granting to the Tamils was a result of the Malaiyaka Tamil political representation's long-term effort, and it was also a significant stimulus for further continuation and continuity of the process of social changes. Ordinary Tamil plantation workers could observe substantial tangible evidence of the

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<sup>115</sup> He became the head of the CWC after his grandfather had died in 1999.

<sup>116</sup> Ann Kingsolver, Sasikumar Balasundaram, "Walking with Amman: Young Malaiyaha Tamils' Views of Their Identity in Practice," 33, also supported by many voices I heard during my field work.

progress in negotiating their political and social rights after decades of political effort, whereas until this time the progress had been mainly visible in the sphere of labour conditions.

Changes in the field of education have been a further impulse for larger social and intellectual activity within the Tamil plantation workers' community. Since the early 1980's opportunities for the estate children's formal schooling have increased, and therefore the chances of gaining employment outside the plantations have also increased, which has been also linked to the granting of the citizenship.<sup>117</sup>

Over the 1970's and 1980's the electoral base of the Malaiyaka Tamils increased to the degree that every government had to calculate on them, and therefore some educational and social reforms were introduced.

The Estate schools were excluded from the national system of education after the attainment of independence, but, in fact, they had not been considered as a part of it even during the colonial period. *"As the lands and assets of the estates themselves became nationalised in the 1970's, the justification for a segregated system of estate schools weakened. Ultimately it was political expediency - the anticipation of votes in an impending general election - which appears to have prompted the take-over of plantation schools..."*<sup>118</sup> The nationalisation of the plantation schools started in 1977, which brought them dramatic growth.

### Leaving Plantations

These developments disturb the essence of some ethnic stereotypes referred to the Malaiyaka Tamils, who see new opportunities and tend to change apathy for agency. In particular, the youth are aiming for

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<sup>117</sup> Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

extricating from the strongly rooted life on the tea plantations, from which the past generations were not capable of escaping. Most of the Malaiyaka Tamils spent their whole lives working on the tea estates.

Basically, there are four groups of the young Tamils trying to leave the tea estate environment. The first group leaves for towns where they see new occupation opportunities. They do not aspire to attain a higher education; their main goal is to secure a better-paid occupation, which is mostly as unskilled as on the tea plantations, however, it is more socially reputable.

The second group is formed by young girls who go to work in garment factories. The third group of the fugitives from the tea estates leaves for the Middle East. They are predominantly women who go to work as domestic servants or get other menial occupations there.

### Changes in Education

Members of the fourth group commute or move to towns where they try to enhance their education in various educational institutions. The quality of education on the tea estates is, despite certain improvements, still considerably under the national standard. In 1991 the all-island literacy rate was 87% while on the estates it was 66%, out of which females had only 53%. In 2001 the literacy rate changed up to 91% for all-island population, and 77% on the estates.<sup>119</sup>

In towns new institutions of the secondary education, such as Thondaman Vocational Training Centre in Hatton and Sri Pada Institute of Education near Talawakelle, have been established to meet the new demands of the young Tamils. The youth, who were not enrolled in a university, and have higher ambitions than basic education, concentrate here. Unfortunately, proportional

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<sup>119</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2001, Literacy Rates by Sector and Sex*. Sri Lanka: [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk), retrieved 18.5.2006.

representation in the civil service and white-collar work positions in the Hill Country does not seem to have changed significantly.<sup>120</sup>

Therefore, observers comment on the situation with warning that these conditions are opportune for escalation of social discontent and tensions. The Tamil youth are becoming more educated, but they can not fulfil their ambitions and aspirations. The warnings were often linked to reports about infiltration of the LTTE among the Malaiyaka Tamil youth and their recruitment. Although the LTTE was defeated, it is still too early to claim that ideas of this organization have lost all supporters among the Tamil population of Sri Lanka. Anyway, if the young Malaiyaka Tamils are not enabled to successfully transform their efforts, the danger of social tensions persists. But, on the other hand, another question arises then. If more and more young people go to work off the tea industry, who will replace them?

### Economic and Social Motives

In all the four cases of the young Tamils' migration, the motives are not only in economic but also in social terms. In other words, these young people are leaving their natural environment not only in order to earn more money, and thus to improve their economic situation, but also to change their social status, which is to a certain extent dependent on the status of their occupation. Sometimes, as in the case of the garment factory workers, the social factors are more important because their wage is often the same as on the tea plantations, or even lower as it is without workplace benefits. Working in a garment factory is considered to be "modern," and it is not stigmatized as the estate work.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> I did not find any statistics concerning this issue, but it is based on my interviews and for example: Nirupama Subramanian, "For Greener Pastures," 5.

<sup>121</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 243-4.

People naturally evaluate other people according to the heterostereotypes they hold towards them. By changing their long-term traditional lifestyle, the young Tamils are likewise changing the stereotypes concerning their ethnic group. Therefore, they are changing not only their own social status, but also the social status of their ethnic group. The two sorts of motives for leaving tea estates - economic and social ones - are strongly interrelated and both are consequently very important for the process that is being described here. But while the economic dimension can have a very fast impact upon the process protagonists' lives, manifestations of the social dimension will be visible in the longer term as the ethnic stereotypes are very stabile means of human perception.

### Housing and Working Conditions

The migration has entailed several consequences. One of the most challenging for the tea industry is a lack of workers on some<sup>122</sup> estates. More precisely, there is chronic absenteeism of registered workers.

Many workers are registered on the estates, but they do not work regularly. *"More and more youth are demanding registration, but only 60 % of the registered workforce turns up for work. They go to work outside, but continue to get benefits of registration, such as housing and medical care."*<sup>123</sup> If at least one member of a family is a registered worker, and fulfils prescribed amount of working days, his family can live in a plantation village. Therefore, men often cultivate their small vegetable plots, or work at stores in towns, women work in garment factories; the purposes of the youth migration were already discussed. *"Given the country's reliance on tea exports, this is a matter of*

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<sup>122</sup> I wrote only "some" estates because several interviewed supervisors stated that they had a slight surplus of workers. Anyway, most of them confirmed a lack of them.

<sup>123</sup> Nirupama Subramanian, "For Greener Pastures," 5.

*immediate national concern,”* the director of the Tea Research Institute of Sri Lanka Dr. Modder alerted.<sup>124</sup>

Vegetable cultivation is also an example of the changing situation on the estates. Earlier the workers were not allowed to use any land to grow vegetables for their own needs. Unavailability of land served only as a distraction from the real reason. It was the fact that the estate owners wanted to eliminate any activity that could divert their employees from the estate work.<sup>125</sup>

There is a sexual division of work on the estates. Women mostly pluck tea leaves, and men do other manual tasks, such as pruning or weeding. While women must work whole days, and their work ends between 4 and 5 p.m., men can go home when they finish their daily tasks, which can be early in the afternoon. Many of them devote their spare time to drinking alcohol, but others use it for additional economic activities. Nowadays, cultivation of vegetables is a common activity of male estate workers. I was surprised how many new fields and plots had emerged around the estate villages when I visited the Hill Country after two years in 2006. The cultivators use the vegetables for their own supplies, but they also sell it in small groceries or in wholesale trades in towns. This interaction is also contributing to the reduction of the tea estate workers' social isolation.

The working conditions have been remaining more or less the same for many decades. Many women walk among the tea bushes barefoot; they have their baskets for picked leaves on their backs tied by a rope around their heads. The full baskets weigh up to 20 kilos which, causes them serious health problems.

Almost all the workers are members of the trade unions where they have to pay a membership charge. The trade unions constantly

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<sup>124</sup> W. W. D. Modder, "To Draw Workers Back," 1.

<sup>125</sup> E. Valentine Daniel, "Tea Talk: Violent Measures in the Discursive Practices of Sri Lanka's Estate Tamils," 571.



negotiate for improvement of the working conditions and wages with the Employers' Federation of Ceylon. In the Plantation Workers Collective Agreement of 2002 it was stated that the minimal daily wage including the price share supplement and the daily attendance incentive was 147 Rupees,<sup>126</sup> while two years later it was 185 Rupees.<sup>127</sup> It seems to be a considerable progress, but according to the current exchange rates, the wage is still less than 2 USD per day.

Most Malaiyaka Tamils complain about these results; they do not believe that the unions struggle for the community's concerns well, and they mean that the union leadership are corrupt and misuse their power. However, several interviewed plantation workers stated that the living and working conditions had been slowly improving.<sup>128</sup> Some smallholders offer better wages and additional food to take home;<sup>129</sup> some estates have introduced new equipment, such as nylon tea baskets that are more lightweight and ergonomically designed,<sup>130</sup> new buildings are under construction - usually with support of foreign capital and NGO's. These houses will replace the line rooms, and the workers will become partners in maintenance of the houses and their facilities<sup>131</sup> while hitherto the housing was exclusively owned by the estate owner.

### Contemporary Identity Form

Not only Sri Lankan but also foreign intellectuals discuss who the Malaiyaka Tamils, actually and exactly, are and are not, how to denominate this ethnic group, and how to incorporate them firmly into the Sri Lankan society. On the one side, some Malaiyaka Tamils call

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<sup>126</sup> *The Plantation Workers Collective Agreement of 2002*, 1.

<sup>127</sup> *Wages Rates of the Plantations Workers*, 1.

<sup>128</sup> Based on my interviews in the Hill Country, 02-05/2006.

<sup>129</sup> Ann Kingsolver, Sasikumar Balasundaram, "Walking with Amman: Young Malaiyaha Tamils' Views of Their Identity in Practice," 33.

<sup>130</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 57.

<sup>131</sup> W. W. D. Modder, "To Draw Workers Back," 2.

for their social and political emancipation, which indicates that they are aware and proud of their ethnicity. On the other side, in terms of Barth's ethnicity concept, other of them are changing ethnic boundaries, or prefer non-ethnic forms of identifications in situations where the ethnic identification would be normally expected. The contemporary young Malaiyaka Tamils increasingly tend to dissociate themselves from the social status of their previous generations. They declare themselves more and more as Sri Lankans, or propagate the idea of new form of the Malaiyaka Tamil identity.

But before I start with the analysis of the youth, it would be useful to resume the most important points of the Malaiyaka Tamil identity of the previous generations, which, in the conclusion of this thesis, I shall compare with subjective views and attitudes of the contemporary generation towards these points:

1. First of all, it is the strong connection to the tea plantation units in many aspects of every day's life, such as housing, labour, education, or catering. The Malaiyaka Tamils have been largely dependent on these institutions. They share a history of exploited labour force.
2. Since their migration to Ceylon, the Malaiyaka Tamils have been considered by the local population as undesirable aliens. They have been stigmatized with a low social status, which, actually, has corresponded to their low living and educational standards.
3. They have been identified according to their connection with India, and considered to be neither Indians nor Ceylonese. It was even reflected in everyday life when most of the Malaiyaka Tamils were stateless persons for over several decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To this point I would add the issue of unclear ethnic boundaries, and especially the continuing debates about their proper ethnonym, which is a unique problem, even in global context.

4. As an original and separated ethnic group, the Malaiyaka Tamils share their peculiar cultural features and characteristics, such as their special form of native language, different caste system, or special activities, among which the Amman festival is the most well-known.

## **Social Determinants**

This chapter is divided into three main parts - Social Isolation, Activities, and Aspirations, Expectations. The main aim of this chapter is to present, especially, individual needs and desires of the target group of the research, from their subjective point of view. The main questions are as follows:

What is the intensity of social isolation of the target group members?

To what extent is the social isolation a limiting factor for the target group members to interact with the members of other ethnic groups?

Do the target group members have qualifications to overcome the social barriers and do they endeavour it?

Do the activity rates indicate that the target group members are interested in the politico-economic life in their region? What is their participation in the politico-economic life?

What is the conflict between modern challenges and old traditions in their case?

What are their economic and social aspirations?

How do they imagine their future?

## **Social Isolation**

Social isolation is a separation of a group or an individual, which results in a lack of social contact with a majority society. It has essentially three dimensions - social, geographical and psychological. In the chapter dealing with the history of the Malaiyaka Tamils in Sri Lanka, I have already mentioned the most relevant factors that led to the social isolation of the estate units and their residents; these were the language barriers, ethnic stereotypes, geographical locality, social hierarchy, self-sufficiency of the estate units in many fields. However, scholars are not absolutely in agreement about this issue; they vary in their opinions about the level of separation.

Most of the scholars incline to the opinion that the estate units were to a large extent isolated, both during the colonial period and during the post-colonial period. Wriggins writes that *“the Indian laborers are isolated in their estate enclaves, living in “company towns.”*<sup>132</sup> Kingsolver reports that *“some members of tea-plucking families, still, have lived their entire lives within the confines of a single estate division.”*<sup>133</sup> Hollup describes the situation on the plantations: *“The fact that almost all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same authority, where most services and needs related to the production and social life are provided within the plantation, make it appear as a ‘self-contained’ unit, though it is not completely closed and absolute.”*<sup>134</sup>

Many see the main cause in behaviour of the British colonial authorities, who thus pursued their own economic and politic interests, and in behaviour of the local elite, who *“used the ideology and rhetoric of nationalism to isolate them while strengthening their own position.”*<sup>135</sup> However, some scholars challenge this issue and consider the claims about the strong social isolation of the Malaiyaka Tamils as unsupported. For example, Bass writes that *“this mistaken view of coffee era migrants as temporary, seasonal laborers in Sri Lanka is also tied into another myth that has persisted, that of the absolute isolation of Sri Lankan estates... Plantations in the colonial era were never totally isolated communities.”*<sup>136</sup> He sees the term of social isolation mainly as impossibility of changing ideas and information, and he argues that

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<sup>132</sup> W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, 21.

<sup>133</sup> Ann Kingsolver, Sasikumar Balasundaram, “Walking with Amman: Young Malaiyaha Tamils’ Views of Their Identity in Practice,” 33.

<sup>134</sup> Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour*, xvii.

<sup>135</sup> Amita Shastri, “Estate Tamils, the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and Sri Lankan Politics,” 3.

<sup>136</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 26.

the Malaiyaka Tamils gained information about the outside world from merchants, pilgrims and other arriving workers.<sup>137</sup>

Peebles points out that “*the Indian Tamils were segregated on the plantations, but it is not correct to think of them as isolated. Laborers had a number of contacts with the world beyond the plantations.*”<sup>138</sup>

Especially in the coffee period, when workers travelled between the two British colonies - India and Ceylon - according to agricultural season, they had contacts with people who had recently arrived from India and who could have informed them. Furthermore, the estate workers were officially allowed to move among plantations. As high indebtedness to kanganis limited their moving, many probably travelled only with their kanganis. Another argument that challenges the theory of social isolation, according to Peebles, is that the Malaiyaka Tamils were in contact with other Indians in Ceylon and members of other ethnic groups that were working on plantations, although it was not probably frequent.<sup>139</sup>

I take the view that the Malaiyaka Tamils, having worked in the highlands of Sri Lanka, stayed most of the time in a relatively strong social isolation. Arguments for that appear to be more convincing than against it. The workers on the highland tea estates were always almost exclusively Tamils, therefore contacts with other ethnic groups were negligible on the plantations; the workers' wages were very low, and thus travelling was very expensive for them. In the beginning, before the infrastructure was established, the coffee and tea estates have been surrounded by deep forests; therefore, the locality itself was rather isolated.

As mentioned, the living conditions in the estate sector were deep below the national standards, and many workers were indebted to

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>138</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 41.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

their kanganis; the workers usually stayed on one plantation, and did not move frequently. The movement to another plantation was sometimes permanent - due to marriage, or occasional - due to other cultural events. If some workers sometimes moved from estate to estate following their kangani, it only indicates that the tea plantation sector was a very closed institution in relation to the outside world. It was very difficult to move out of the plantation sector and to become independent.

In reality, the workers, who were officially allowed to move freely within Ceylon, could not move so freely, and were tied to the plantation sector by the mechanism of patron-client relationship and the circle of debts. It is certainly true that the Malaiyaka Tamils kept even on the tea estates some contacts with people from the outside world, however, these people were also mostly Tamils; the Sinhalese traditionally did not seek any opportunity to communicate with the Tamil workers, except for business reasons. In any case, interactions between the Malaiyaka Tamils of the Hill Country and the outside world have always been much lower than interactions among people in any other part of the island.

### Approach

*“The formation of social and cultural identities among youth and their attitudes towards other communities and cultures is the result of a range of circumstances. In this regard, whether youth have opportunities to interact with communities and cultures other than their own is a critical factor.”<sup>140</sup>*

Social isolation is a basic influencing determinant in relation to the topic of this study. Questions about intensity of the social isolation of the Malaiyaka Tamil educated youth were used in the pilot study; I

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<sup>140</sup> S. T. Hettige, Markus Mayer, *Sri Lankan Youth*, 28.

tested by means of indicators related to this determinant whether the intended research was meaningful in general. Conditions for these young people, in order to become the agents of change and to achieve demarginalization of their ethnic group, would be insufficient if the target group were at a high level of social isolation, or if they did not actively aspire to decrease the level of their ethnic group's social isolation.

### The General Study of 1999/2000

For the purpose of comparison with the overall Sri Lankan young population, I will use a study of a German-Sri Lankan sociological team, who conducted their research about the Sri Lankan youth in 1999/2000.<sup>141</sup> I was also inspired by some question that had been used in the questionnaire of this study. However, direct comparison between the results of the German-Sri Lankan sociological team's study and herein presented study is not possible since no target group used in the former study corresponds to the definition of the target group of the latter study.

Findings of the general research about the Sri Lankan youth are as follows:

- Most of the youth are socially segregated and have no opportunity to interact with the youth from other ethnic groups. The main factors are regional segregation, segregated school system, inability to speak other languages.
- 91 % of the Sinhalese, 81 % of Tamil, and 74 % of Muslim youth state that all their friends originate from their ethnic group.
- 35 % of the Sinhalese youth are interested in other cultures, among the Tamils the number is 70 %, among the Muslims 46 %. As concerns

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*



the residence division, 53 % of the urban youth are interested, in the rural environment it is 37 %, and in the estates 53 %.

- The ethnic segregation increases with the increasing level of education, which could be attributed to the segregated school system; on the other side, interest in other cultures also increases with better education.<sup>142</sup>

Therefore, the relatively high number of interest in other cultures among the youth from the estate sector does not correspond to other findings because the young people from the estate sector achieve higher education still very rarely in contrast with the youth from the urban and even rural sector. This is not, however, so surprising because it reflects trends among the Malaiyaka Tamil youth, which will be demonstrated below.

### Present Situation

I measure the level of social isolation and interaction of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth by means of two main indicators. I have defined social isolation in two aspects; in the geographical aspect as a measure of frequency of travelling, and a place of living in comparison with a place of schooling; in the social aspect as a measure of “friendship” with members of other ethnic groups, interest in other cultures in Sri Lanka and language skills. The third - psychological - aspect will be mentioned in the conclusion.

I have used two main and four secondary questions.

The main questions are:

- 1. (question no. 16 in the questionnaire) Which ethnic group are your best friends from? (Sinhalese, Jaffna Tamil, Up-Country Tamil, Muslim, others)

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 - 29.

Malaiyaka Tamils	81 %
Also Sinhalese	10 %
Also other ethnic groups	9 %

- 2. (19.) Are you interested in other cultures in Sri Lanka? (Sinhalese, Up-Country Tamil, Jaffna Tamil, Burgher, Christian, Muslim, other)

Not interested in other cultures	28 %
Jaffna Tamil culture	22 %
Christian culture	15 %
Sinhalese culture	13 %
Muslim	4 %
More than 1 item	19 %

28 % are not interested in other cultures, 72 % are interested.

The secondary questions are:

- 3. (13.) Can you speak Sinhala?

I can speak	73 %
I can not speak	27 %

- 4. (17.) Where do you live?

Village	13 %
Town	26 %
Estate	61 %

- 5. (18.) How often do you travel from your home to other places?

Every day	55 %
Several times a week	18 %
Several times a month	8 %
Less	10 %

Not at all	2 %
Do not know	7 %

- 6. (31.) Where is your school?

Village	5 %
Town	51 %
Estate	44 %

### Results

Questions 4, 5 and 6 are related to the geographical aspect of measuring the social isolation of the target group. Crosstabulation of the question 4 and 6 says that at least 25 % of the Tamil youth travel to school to a different environment than they reside. Besides, 77 % of the interviewed young people attend a night school or a private tuition which is not often in the surroundings.

51 % of the youth and at least 17 % of the youth living in the estate sector attend a school in town. In general, schools in towns are at a higher level than estate schools. This is a very significant number since formerly most of the Malaiyaka Tamils could not afford to pay daily public transport for their children, not to mention that the infrastructure in the Hill Country was very poor, which also hindered them from attending a school in town. Therefore, it indicates that the Malaiyaka Tamils are nowadays more able, and mainly willing to pay for better education of their children. This will be also supported by numbers of parental involvement in the educational development of their children.

55 % of the target group state that they travel every day, but some of them probably interpret the term travelling as walking a relatively short distance from their homes; nevertheless, the number is high.

Questions 1, 2 and 3 are related to the social aspect of measuring the social isolation. The number of the youth who can speak at least a little bit Sinhala is considerably high. However, people usually tend to exaggerate when asked about their skills. In any event, it is usual that members of minority groups can speak the language of a majority group better than vice versa as they are often made to adapt to the natural environment of the majority group; they have to interact with local authorities, who are usually from the majority group. In this case, many questioned youth live or attend a school in town where the society is more multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, which pushes them to learn the language of the majority group. I assume that the number of the Malaiyaka Tamils - as a whole ethnic group - who can speak Sinhala is much lower in comparison to the target group.

The number of the Tamil youth who are friends with members of other ethnic groups is very low. Nevertheless, the ethnic segregation in Sri Lanka reaches relatively high degree. Ethnic belongingness in multi-ethnic Sri Lanka is very delimiting in the sense of its importance for social ascription and communication. It could be also illustrated by the example from the general research where the number of young Sinhalese was even lower. Moreover, the Tamil youth from the estates have scarce opportunities to find friends from among other ethnic groups. On the other side, the young Tamils are very interested in other cultures.

## **Activities**

Four questions out of the questionnaire present activities of the target group members that are especially relevant to the aims of this study.

- 1. (11. in the questionnaire) Basically, what type of activities are you involved at the moment?

Permanent employment	0 %
Casual employment	11 %
Studying only	89 %

The low number of working youth is very positive since it was common practice that the Malaiyaka Tamils children had to work from an early age. Many interviewed people state that it is still a big problem on the tea plantations. The target group students mostly do not know child labour, which means they have opportunities to utilize more time for activities related to their studies. It also implies that their parents mostly try to enable their children to study, and that they can afford it financially which will be supported by other numbers in the chapter dealing with education and parental involvement.

- 2. (20.) Do you use the Internet?

Very much	15 %
Somewhat	23 %
Not at all	62 %

The low number of students that use the Internet was predictable. When asked about most serious problems at schools, the interviewed people very often state a lack of computers and consequently internet connection.

- 3. (21.) How often do you read newspapers?

Every day	29 %
Several times a week	55 %
Several times a month	7 %
Less	5 %
Not at all	2 %
Do not know	2 %

Questions no. 3 and 4 were chosen as indicators of interest in public affairs and politico-economic life. Reading newspapers is the main source of gaining information in the estate sector since possession of TV sets is not so usual there.

In 1998 two Sri Lankan social scholars published a study<sup>143</sup> concerning the impact of time and environment on students in the plantation area. The field work was conducted at secondary schools in the districts of Nuwara Eliya and Kandy; age of the respondents was approximately between 12 and 19 years, which does not correspond, in addition to other less significant differences, to the target group of the herein presented research, and hence it is not absolutely possible to compare the outcomes of the two studies. However, this study can at least serve as a control mechanism here, and therefore it is used more times for this purpose.

The outcomes of this study in the Nuwara Eliya district were as follows: 12 % of the students read newspapers every day, 42 % at weekends, 16 % once in a way, and 30 % did not read at all.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, 70 % of the students read newspapers at least occasionally.

As concerns my field research conducted in 2006, 84 % of the students allege that they read newspaper at least several times a week, which is

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<sup>143</sup> S. Maria Anthony, A. R. Indra Fernando, *The Impact of Time and Environment upon Students in Plantation Area Secondary Schools in the Districts of Nuwara Eliya and Kandy*.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

a very high number, especially owing to the low age of the respondents. Yet, we have to be aware of a certain misunderstanding whose value is impossible to specify since it would be necessary to define quantitatively the reading of newspapers. Some students could classify it as reading, even when they skim father's newspaper for a while.

- 4. (25.) Do you participate in any social or political organization?  
(valid percentage)

#### Social Organization

Yes	40 %
Partially	32 %
No	28 %

#### Political Organization

Yes	12 %
Partially	19 %
No	69 %

In the study about the Sri Lankan youth, S. Vijesandiran uses the rate of participation in the social, political and trade union organizations as the indicator of socialization of the youth. He writes that “*socialization and leadership have emerged as a given direct factor in human development....socialization should be the focal point in the lives of young people and in improving their prospects in the plantation sector.*”<sup>145</sup>

The percentage of participation was 48 % in the social, 4 % in the political, and 14 % in the trade union organizations. He concludes that, on the one side, this low participation limits the development of their

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<sup>145</sup> Sangaran Vijesandiran, *Youth and Development*, 43-44.

leadership skills, but, on the other, the low rate of interest also reflects that the structure of these organizations is not based on egalitarian pattern,<sup>146</sup> which discourages the youth from active participation.

However, the percentage of “without response” was 20, 76 and 63 % respectively, which indicates some problems with understanding the questions. If the numbers are reliable, and if the age of the respondents, which was between 15 and 29, is taken into account, the rates could be evaluated as low.

Yet, the numbers in here presented study have to be considered in a different context. The age of the respondents was between 15 and 19, therefore, their participation in political organizations of 31 %, even if 19 % out of it is partial, should be evaluated as high.

72 % of participation (full and partial together) in a social organization represent an abnormally high interest, yet, probably most of the youth attend scout meetings which are very popular in Sri Lanka.

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<sup>146</sup> Sangaran Vijesandiran, *ibid.*



### **Aspirations, Expectations**

Nine questions present aspirations and expectations of the target group members.

- 1. (15.) Has either of your parents or grandparents worked on tea estates or in a tea factory?

Yes	75 %
No	25 %

- 2. (15 a.) Would you like to do the same job?

Yes	4 %
No	69 %
Already doing	6 %
Do not know	21 %

- 3. (49.) What do tea estates represent for you?

Hard job	38 %
Ancestors	21 %
Happiness	11 %
Home	11 %
Nothing	10 %
Future	7 %
Prison	7 %

- 4. (23.) Imagine your future. What do you long for?

To have a good job	74 %
To have a good education	60 %
Just to be happy	21 %
To be rich	7 %
To get married to a good	6 %

man/woman	
No desires	1 %
To have a good job or to have a good education	92 %

- 5. (33.) Would you like to go in for some further education?

Yes	88 %
No	4 %
Not sure	8 %

In the Vijesendiran's study on the youth and development, 68 % of the respondents wished to continue their schooling, 30 % did not wish to continue and 4 % did not answer.

- 6. (34.) What kind of job would you like to do? (open question)

Teacher	19 %
Manager	15 %
Doctor	11 %
Lawyer	8 %
Accountant	7 %
Engineer	4 %
Civil service	4 %
Estate stuff	3 %
Do not know yet	30 %

In Anthony and Fernando's study,<sup>147</sup> 41 % of the respondents wished to become a teacher, 23 % a doctor, 4 % a nurse, 3 % an engineer, 3 % an estate stuff, and other numbers were below 3 %.

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<sup>147</sup> S. Maria Anthony, A. R. Indra Fernando, *The Impact of Time and Environment upon Students in Plantation Area Secondary Schools in the Districts of Nuwara Eliya and Kandy*, 62.

- 7. (40.) Many people migrate to other places nowadays. How about you? Would you like to live somewhere else?

Yes	77 %
No	23 %

- 8. (40a. in relation to 40.) What are your reasons for migration?

	Main reason	Secondary reason
New experience	68 %	32 %
Unemployment	43 %	47 %
Higher wages	40 %	44 %
To get out of plantations	40 %	21 %

- 9. (41.) What would be your favourite region to live in Sri Lanka?  
(open question)

Colombo	18 %
Nuwara Eliya	17 %
Kandy	15 %
Up-Country	15 %
Jaffna	5 %
Hatton	4 %
USA, UK	4 %
India	3 %
Do not know	18 %

## Results

61 % of the youth live on the estates, 75 % of their parents work on the tea estates, and 69 % of the youth do not want to work there and thus to follow their parents. They know the housing and working conditions, they know the history of the Malaiyaka Tamils, but only 7 % of the respondents regard the plantations as a prison, which is even less than the association of plantation life with happiness (11 %). Connection with ancestors is preferred by 21 % of the respondents.

77 % of the respondents would like to migrate from their homes, but most of them wish to stay somewhere in the Up-Country, and only 18 % wish to go to Colombo. Among the reasons for migration, the desire for new experience and the economic problems acquired higher percentage than the desire to escape from the life on the plantations.

A local social scholar said that the youth are definitely moving because of the education and employment. However, there is a certain social aspect; for example they want to invite their friends to their homes, but they can not do it as they are ashamed of the living conditions in their line rooms; moreover, they are sometimes ashamed of being a poor Malaiyaka Tamil in general.<sup>148</sup>

Kingsolver presents two examples reflecting the division of the youth concerning the question of migration. One group is not satisfied with the conditions, facilities and opportunities on the estates, and therefore they want to leave their homes and experience the outer world. The members of the other group want to move away from their community just to improve their education and skills, and then to return because they feel a sense of responsibility and opportunity to do something for their community.<sup>149</sup> This is a highly mature attitude; it

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<sup>148</sup> Interview. Kandy, 27.4.2006

<sup>149</sup> Ann Kingsolver, Sasikumar Balasundaram, "Walking with Amman: Young Malaiyaha Tamils' Views of Their Identity in Practice," 35-36.

is an indispensable precondition for any community to advance and emancipate. However, this attitude is still very rare, but it is noticeable. When looking at table 4, the youth prefer what could be marked as social aspirations (good education and job) not only to the family aspirations (to be happy, to get married to a good man/woman), but also to the economic aspiration (to be rich), which is very surprising in the case of this economically disadvantaged group. It could be partially explained by the fact that the families of many respondents probably do not belong to the economically lowest parts of the ethnic group, otherwise the families would not be able to afford the senior secondary education for their children.

It is evident from tables no. 5 and 6 that the majority of the youth aspire to achieve a higher education and to secure a socially respectable and non-manual employment. However, the first place of the position of a teacher (in Anthony's and Fernando's study first place even by a wider margin) is not probably a reflection of high responsibility of the youth towards their community; the position of a teacher is one of the very few positions that are available even in practice since there are pedagogical institutions and a high demand for Tamil teachers in the Up-Country.

## **Education and Parental Involvement**

Besides factors like employment, economy, and social characteristics, formal education is one of the key factors in determining social vertical mobility. People who obtain advanced education have higher chances to secure a higher-social-status occupation, which enables them to climb up the ladder of social stratification. Countries that have significantly invested in education experience high rates of social mobility, which often results in decreasing social inequalities. If the rate of social openness is high, which means that even people with a lower socio-economic status have high chances to study and to secure a high-level occupation, the society is more equal. However, in some specific cases, education system can also play a role in reinforcing social inequalities.<sup>150</sup>

Education provides individuals with knowledge that enables them to become agents of developmental change in their communities.<sup>151</sup> „*The environment in which children live and study, the time allocated for different activities and the facilities available for education both at home and school determine the educational performance of any identifiable group of students.*“<sup>152</sup>

In this chapter<sup>153</sup> I will examine the development of education on the plantations, the current situation together with the most significant changes that have occurred in this field within the last decade, and mainly the problems the students face in the field of education at

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<sup>150</sup> Anthony Giddens, “Sociology and Social Mobility,” 1-2.

<sup>151</sup> Sangaran Vijesandiran, *Youth and Development*, 104.

<sup>152</sup> S. Maria Anthony, A. R. Indra Fernando, *The Impact of Time and Environment upon Students in Plantation Area*, 1.

<sup>153</sup> The terminology of the structure of educational institutions in Sri Lanka will be employed according to the publication Treasures of the Educational system in Sri Lanka published by the World Bank, Human Development Unit, South Asian Region, Colombo Office, 2005. Grades 1-5 are Primary Education, 6-9 Junior Secondary Education, Senior Secondary Education GCE O/L Cycle are grades 10-11 or Vocational Training and Technical Education, Senior Secondary Education GCE A/L are grades 12-13. Schools providing 13 grades are called maha vidyalayam. Tertiary education consists of universities, Professional and Non-university Tertiary Education, Advanced Technical Education and Postgraduate Education.

present. The role of parents in educating the youth and aspirations of both parents and students will be also discussed.

### Education on the Plantations

With the transformation of coffee into tea plantations in the second half of the 19th century, the educational system on the estates started to expand. Kanganis promoted establishing schools in plantation villages, and missionaries promoted schooling in towns close to the estates. Over the first half of the 20th century, the plantation schools were spread over the plantation area.<sup>154</sup>

At the turn of the 20th century, the colonial governments of India and Ceylon started to intervene in favour of the Malaiyaka Tamils to improve their living and working conditions. The Tamils were included in some educational projects, but these projects were provided by English planters. Although the educational system was developing in Ceylon in general - Sri Lanka's educational system has been marked as one of the best in Asia - it had a little impact on the plantation sector, and the school attendance of the young Malaiyaka Tamils was very low.<sup>155</sup> As there was no interest to educate the estate workers, the plantation schools were generally neglected in spite of the fact that the Ordinance No. 5 of 1951 was enacted with the intention to compel the estate management to improve conditions on the estate schools. On the basis of this ordinance, the Director of Education could act against the estate owners in case of evading their duties.<sup>156</sup>

The plantation schools remained excluded from the national educational system until the 1970's when a large part of the estate sector was "nationalized," and the schools were gradually integrated

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<sup>154</sup> Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 3.

<sup>155</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 99.

<sup>156</sup> Sithamperam Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People*, 286.

into the national system. It brought them a rapid growth in many aspects.

In this period the language as a means of instructing was a political issue as the new nationalist-oriented government advocated Sinhala as the only medium of education in Sri Lanka. Finally, the system stayed to be divided into Sinhala and Tamil sections, and the Malaiyaka Tamil children continued to be thought in Tamil.<sup>157</sup>

In 1974 the estate schools which were not part of the state educational system were attended by 31971 pupils in the District of Nuwara Eliya. In 1987 the number decreased to 1627, and a year later the estate schools were fully integrated.<sup>158</sup>

#### Changes in the 1980's and 1990's

In 1980's and 1990's the plantation school system further expanded, which Little ascribes to the effect of several factors. First, it was the state take-over of the plantation schools and their integration into the state system. Second, there was a labour force surplus as the prices of tea were declining in the 1980's, therefore the children could attend schools instead of working on the plantations. Third, many Tamils newly acquired the citizenship, which was followed by intensification of social demands. Fourth, many young people were involved in the Plantation Sector Teachers' Programme organized by the government, and became qualified as teachers. Fifth, foreign capital highly contributed to the improvement of the conditions in the plantation schools.<sup>159</sup>

The increasing opportunities in education and employment concerned even girls, which was also attributed, to a large extent, to the resolution of the citizenship question. Little states that parents and

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<sup>157</sup> Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 6.

<sup>158</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, 2001. [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk), retrieved 18.5.2006.

<sup>159</sup> Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 7.



teachers were speaking of new opportunities in employment outside the estate sector, especially as teachers in government schools.<sup>160</sup>

However, the changes were becoming evident very slowly. The difference between the urban and rural sector on the one side, and the estate sector on the other side continued to be significant. For instance, in 1991 the literacy rate in the urban environment was 92 %, in the rural 87 % and in the estate 66 %.<sup>161</sup> In 1992 the teacher/pupil ratio in Nuwara Eliya district schools was 1:19 in Sinhala schools, 1:22 in Muslim schools and 1:44 in Tamil schools. The proportion of untrained teachers was 32 % in Sinhala schools, 27 % in Muslim schools and 65 % in Tamil schools.<sup>162</sup>

The educational situation on the plantations was also manifested by under-representation of the Malaiyaka Tamils in civil services:

	Population Ratio %	State Services %	Provincial Services %	Semi-govt. Services %
Sinhalese	73,9	91, 2	87,7	88,1
SL Tamils	12,7	5,9	7,1	8,2
Malaiyaka Tamils	5,5	0,1	0,2	0,5
Muslims	7,0	2,0	4,6	1,0 <sup>163</sup>

Over the 1990's, other changes occurred. One of the most important was that the children and their parents started to consider education as a means for socio-economic mobility, and started to develop aspirations in regard to advanced education. *"In contrast to many of those from economically poor home backgrounds in many school systems in the West, children from poor home backgrounds in Sri Lanka view schooling as a way out of poverty and as a passport to jobs*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>161</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, 2001. [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk), retrieved 18.5.2006.

<sup>162</sup> P. P. Manikam, *Tea Plantation in Crisis*, 54.

<sup>163</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, 1992. [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk), retrieved 18.5.2006.

*different from those of their parents.*"<sup>164</sup> Between the years 1987 and 1992, the number of enrolled students in the estate sector schools in grades 1-5 increased by 29 %, and in grades 6-11 it was by 40 %.<sup>165</sup>

Over the last years the estate educational system has been further developing. In the 1980's it was usual that the plantation schools had 5 grades, which was primary education, nowadays the number of grades is often increased up to the secondary education.

It is very important because the distance between the estates and the schools is a very limiting factor in school attendance. Road infrastructure around the tea estates is insufficient, and the poor workers are not able to pay for everyday transport of their children; therefore, the children have to finish their schooling with primary education available in the proximity of their homes. When a secondary education is in the surroundings of the village, more workers are able to secure a better education for their children.

In addition to the expansion of education opportunities, the ongoing process of granting Sri Lankan citizenship and the enforcement of the new rights also cause shifts on the labour market in the estate sector. However, it is still more in terms of future opportunities than real current occupational mobility. The Malaiyaka Tamils are officially allowed to be employed in the state services, which still happens rarely as it is evident from the table above. They can also go abroad, which happens especially in the case of women who go to work as domestic servants in the Middle East. However, this is not without problems. As I was told during my interviews, the women often become victims of another form of exploitation, and return home without desired saved finances.

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<sup>164</sup> Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 6.

<sup>165</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, 1992. [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk), retrieved 18.5.2006.

### University Education

Tertiary education of the plantation youth is a special separated phenomenon since between the 1960's and the 1980's they had almost no chance to be enrolled in a university.

In 1950 the share of the Malaiyaka Tamils at universities was 1,4 % while their share in the overall population was around 12 %. It was shortly after the disenfranchisement of the Malaiyaka Tamils; therefore, the impact of these laws was not so deep yet. However, in 1967 it was already 0,1 % (10,6 % in the overall population in 1963), and in 1977 there were only two university students of the Malaiyaka Tamil origin in Sri Lanka. There are probably no exact statistics available about the share of the plantation youth at universities in the 1980's and early 1990's because they were included in the category of Sri Lankan Tamils.<sup>166</sup> But it could be estimated that the number was gradually increasing after the Malaiyaka Tamils were granted the citizenship by the new legislative measures.

In 2000 there were 220 Malaiyaka Tamil students at universities, which is 0,5% out of the total number of Sri Lankan university students.<sup>167</sup> When a student is admitted to a university, it is a special event not only for his family, but also for the whole estate. One teacher told me that in 2004 three children from tea plucker families from a plantation close to Nuwara Eliya were admitted to a university, and the estate residents celebrated this success for two days.

### Shortcomings in the Education System at the Turn of the Millennium

However, Tamil schools in the plantation areas still do not bear comparison to the situation in other parts of the country. The schools in the plantation sector have the lowest standard, far below the national average.

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<sup>166</sup> M. A. Vamdevan, *Plantation Youth, Higher Education and Social Implications*, 2-3.

<sup>167</sup> Nirupama Subramanian, "For Greener Pastures," 4.

T. Kalaimagal addressed the main education problems in the plantation areas of the 1990's such as under-representation of Tamil administrative officers, a shortage of teachers both in general and graduated, a shortage of space in schools, a low number of university students and other specific problems.<sup>168</sup> The worst problems for teachers were their transfer to schools and housing conditions; they marked teaching conditions in the classrooms as cramped and noisy.<sup>169</sup>

In 1994 Hollup wrote that many of the children did not attend school at all, and the rest finished maximally the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He reasoned that this was not caused by a low interest of their parents, but by low incomes of the estate workers, who were dependent on the help of their school-aged children with smaller siblings and in the households. However, he concluded that the educational system was improving, and that the estate workers increasingly considered education as a way out of their low socio-economic status. He credited the trade unions and Christian institutions for the growing awareness about education among the Malaiyaka Tamils.<sup>170</sup>

As concerns the senior secondary education, in 1992 in the District of Nuwara Eliya, 83 % of the GCE A/L schools were Sinhalese, who constituted only 43 % of the total population, and only 17 % GCE A/L schools were Tamil while Malaiyaka Tamils made up 51 % of the total population.<sup>171</sup> Therefore, as the successful completion of the senior secondary education is a necessary precondition for applying for university studies, the Malaiyaka Tamils were disadvantaged in enrolling in universities.

Bass states that the parents' attitudes have been rapidly changing. They tend, instead of securing work for their children on the estate, to

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<sup>168</sup> T. Kalaimagal, "Options for the Plantation Trade Unions," 13-16.

<sup>169</sup> Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 183.

<sup>170</sup> Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour*, 212 - 214.

<sup>171</sup> M. A. Vamdevan, *Plantation Youth, Higher Education and Social Implications*, 5.

keep them off the estate. *“Increasing understanding of the value of education for upward mobility has fueled this change throughout the estate sector.”*<sup>172</sup> However, the higher educational achievements have caused other problems. National examination A/L is still unattainable for a high proportion of the students. Therefore, they are not qualified enough to secure white-collar jobs, but they are overeducated for work on the estates. On the plantations a model of the over-educated but under-employed youth may emerge potentially as a significant threat. Frustration resulting out of this model could grow into violent forms of behaviour.<sup>173</sup>

### Survey

The factor that chiefly influences upward social mobility is the reached level of education. Therefore, it is necessary to find out if the respondents aspire to continue their education, if the parents agree with that, and what the obstacles are that hinder them from continuing. These indicators that determine continuing education are measured by means of six questions.

-1. (question no. 32 in the questionnaire) What are the main problems you have faced in your education?

finances	45 %
teachers	21 %
facilities	20 %

- 2. (33.) Would you like to go in for some further education?

yes	88 %
no	4 %

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<sup>172</sup> Daniel Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 248.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

not sure	8 %
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- 3. (35.) How have your parents supported your education development?

Semantic differential	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
very much - 1	61 %	61 %
2	15 %	77 %
3	21 %	98 %
4	2 %	100 %
not at all - 5	0 %	100 %

- 4. (36.) Have you been also attending another kind of school like private tuition or night school?

yes	77 %
no	23 %

- 5. (37.) Would your parents like you to go in for some further education?

yes	83 %
no	7 %
not sure	11 %

- 6. (39.) What has changed in the educational institutions in your region within the last 5 years?

Access to education

better	55 %
no change	24 %
worse	4 %
do not know	17 %

#### Educational facilities

better	53 %
no change	29 %
worse	8 %
do not know	10 %

#### Quality of teachers

better	49 %
no change	23 %
worse	7 %
do not know	22 %

#### Quantity of teachers

better	19 %
no change	44 %
worse	15 %
do not know	23 %

### Results

The main results of the herein presented survey are the following:

88 % of the respondents wish to continue their education, and 77 % attend some extra education courses. 83 % of the respondents think that their parents wish them to continue the education, and 77 % evaluate their parents' support as very good or good.

Among the educational problems, the respondents mentioned most frequently shortage of finances, problems with teachers and facilities. On the other side, according to the respondents, these problems tend to diminish, except for the quantity of teachers.

### Schools and Teachers' Opinions

During the field research I was visiting schools in the Nuwara Eliya District, mainly around the main centres of the area - Hatton and Nuwara Eliya. The more I was moving away from the urban areas towards the plantation areas, the quality of schools seemed to be decreasing.

There was a vast difference between the state and private schools.<sup>174</sup> The teacher/pupil ratio was 1:30 in the former ones while in the latter ones it was 1:16. The proportion of teachers with a university degree was 15 % in the state schools while in the private schools it was 25 %. Some of the teachers were usually students of the Sri Pada College of Education, which was an institution established in order to educate young Tamils to become teachers in the plantation schools.

One of the private schools - Republican International School in Magasthota - was founded in 1990. Its teacher said that many of his students originated from the plantation areas, but their parents had moved to a town after they had made some fortune by farming. Like in the state schools, even in the private schools the teachers complain about a shortage of teachers of English.<sup>175</sup>

The road infrastructure is considered as a significant obstacle in the progress of education in the plantation area. In some remote plantations people lack direct bus connection with the surroundings. The people have to walk long distance to reach bus stops. As the schools in these places have no permanent staff, and the teachers visit them only occasionally, the children often have to study at home. Their parents want to help them, but they are uneducated, and can not send

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<sup>174</sup> According to the Department of Census and Statistics in NED there are 523 schools in total while only two of them are private schools. [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk) (retrieved 30.9.2010).

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Tamil teachers, Magasthota, 4.5.2006.



them to private tuitions as people do in the towns or the plantation areas closer to the towns.<sup>176</sup>

The teachers usually regard highly their students' progress and achievements. For example, in Ragala in 2005 60 out of the 75 students succeed in GCE A/L examinations, and 9 of them were enrolled in a university.<sup>177</sup>

The teachers generally agree that the substantial role in supporting education in the Hill Country has been played by foreign non-governmental organizations. They are especially helpful in establishing and running private tuitions, night schools and other educational centres because official educational institutions take too theoretical approach, and they do not prepare their students for the transition to practice.

They further say that up to the 1980's most of the teachers in the plantation schools came from among the Jaffna Tamils. On the one side, it was positive that there were at least some teachers in the plantation schools; on the other side, the Malaiyaka Tamils were deprived of their nearly sole higher-status occupation, and occasional tensions appeared because of the socio-cultural and language differences between the Jaffna and Malaiyaka Tamils. But since the 1990's the Jaffna teachers have mostly moved away and have been replaced, in consequence of the mentioned socio-economic changes, by the local teachers, which is considered as a very positive change.<sup>178</sup>

However, despite all the changes and progress, it is still very difficult to find a job beyond the plantation system in the Hill Country. The teachers sometimes give exceptions, such as a boy whose parents were

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<sup>176</sup> Interview with a Sinhala chairperson of a NGO, Kandy, 27.4.2006.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with a Tamil teacher, Ragala, 3.5.2006.

<sup>178</sup> Interviews with teachers in the NED, 03 - 05/2006.

very poor and worked on the plantations, but he managed to find a position in the Central Bank in Colombo.<sup>179</sup>

Most of the teachers consider the educated Malaiyaka Tamil youth competent to search for employment in the state sector as teachers, policemen or doctors. But some teachers see the future prospects for their pupils in the private sector rather than in the state one. They say that the government discriminate the Tamils; they rarely give them opportunity to work in the civil service while in the private sector they stand a better chance to find a job.<sup>180</sup>

The lack of employment opportunities for the educated young Tamils is generally considered a big problem by the teachers. Many students who have passed A-level examination have to come back to work on the plantations. But, on the other hand, they can be helpful to other plantation residents as many educated young Tamils teach as volunteers in the plantation schools.<sup>181</sup>

A teacher from Kotagala terms the situation relating to the lack of employment opportunities as “bleak.” He states that *“the only opportunity for young educated Tamils is to study at Sri Pada College to become teachers. But only 200 people can be enrolled there every year while eight or nine thousand students pass A-levels every year.”* As concerns the use of their language, he says that *“Tamil students are disadvantaged. Most of the forms and applications are only in Sinhala, although they should be written in both languages. We tried to complain, but it didn’t help... With the police, in hospitals, the Sinhalese are everywhere, but they do not understand Tamil... I had an extraordinarily talented student. He ended up in Colombo as a salesman. When I was watching him, I started to cry. But I told him ‘whatever you do, do your best. Work on yourself.’... Indian Tamils can*

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<sup>179</sup> Interview with a Tamil Muslim teacher, Hawa Eliya, 6.4.2006.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with a Tamil teacher, Nuwara Eliya, 7.4.2006.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with a Tamil teacher, Magasthota, 4.5.2006.

*find a job of good quality only in places where people speak English and Sinhala; therefore, they have to study languages primarily... Within several years there will be a lack of plantation workers. The youth don't want to do it. They accept whatever work far from the plantations. But there is no point in driving them out. Tea is the backbone of our economy. It is necessary to bring dignity to this job, to increase its social status, to make it attractive.”<sup>182</sup>*

### Conclusion

Findings of recent research works, which concern attitudes of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth and their parents towards education, indicate certain trends in terms of increasing interest in education.

A research conducted in NED in 1996 shows that 50,6 % parents send their children to private tuition, and 95 % are somehow interested in their children's education.<sup>183</sup>

In Little's study of 1999 it was stated that the superintendents had recognized increasing employment opportunities off the estate sector for the young people as a consequence of the expansion in the field of education. Together with the interviewed teachers, they ascribed it to the increased parents' interest in their children's education. They further considered smaller financial costs on education and general surplus of workers on the estates as other factors determining increasing employment opportunities.<sup>184</sup> More than two thirds of the interviewed parents wished their children to reach at least GCE O/L cycle while the students' aspirations were even higher.<sup>185</sup>

The results of the herein presented survey show that despite some long-term problems, the Malaiyaka Tamil students, and even their

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with a Tamil teacher, Kotagala, 10.5.2006.

<sup>183</sup> S. Maria Anthony, A. R. Indra Fernando, *The Impact of Time and Environment upon Students in Plantation Area Secondary Schools in the District of Nuwara Eliya and Kandy*, 37 - 38.

<sup>184</sup> Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 182-183.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

parents aspire to continue their education, which is a critical precondition for upward social mobility, and according to the development it can be considered as a tendency.

## **Ethnonyms, Collective Ethnic Identification, and Ethnic Boundaries**

The main aim of this chapter is to describe the development of ethnonym variants of the Sri Lankan ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils throughout their “ethnic history”, and to present a part of my field work which is concerned with attitudes of the young Malaiyaka Tamils towards the ethnonym issue. The chapter aims at addressing the following main questions:

Which ethnonym do the Malaiyaka Tamils prefer at present?

What is the attitude of the young people towards the ethnonym issue?

Based on the attitudes of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth, can we assume that this indicates some shift in their perception of their collective ethnic identity?

### **Ethnonym**

An ethnonym is a common denomination of people of the same ethnicity. Owing to the subject of denomination, two variants can emerge. An *exonym* is the ethnonym used by another group towards the subject, whereas an *autonym* is used by the subject itself. Exonyms can be sporadically quite offensive as is shown in the often-used example of *Gypsy* next to the autonym *Romany*.<sup>186</sup>

In general, language is a system that serves as a tool for describing reality or non-reality; in fact, it is nothing but an agreement among people about how to designate something so that others are able to classify it. Words and their classification, in turn, simplify the processing of information around us, which is absolutely vital. Every individual creates his own system of stereotypes assigned to these words. The classification and form of words and stereotypes around it

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<sup>186</sup> I am aware of the fact that even some Romanies use the term “Gypsy” as an autonym, but this example is generally well-known, and it is very difficult to find an unproblematic example.

influence, to a large extent, how we perceive our surroundings, and vice versa. Since language is a very unstable system whose components can be changed or modified not only naturally but also artificially and intentionally, ethnonyms, as very specific and significant ethnic signs, can play an important role in the social and political field as a means of political manipulation and communalist propaganda.

Discussions about the appropriate ethnonym for the Malaiyaka Tamils reflect discussions about the identity and status of the Malaiyaka Tamils in Sri Lankan society nowadays. In addition, the term ethnonym is quite easily definable so that it can be simply used as an indicator. These are the reasons why I have focused on this seemingly unimportant subject, while being aware of the fact that problems related to ethnic identity shift are much more complex and complicated.

In recent decades, several papers and articles dealing with the contemporary process of the changing identity of the Malaiyaka Tamils have emerged. V. Suryanarayan notes that *“a passionate debate is on among the ‘Indian Tamils’ in Sri Lanka about the need for the community to assert its separate identity and to achieve for itself a respectable place as an integral part of Sri Lankan society.”*<sup>187</sup> Daniel points out that *“the identity of the ‘Estate Tamil’, more than that of any of the others, is caught in the throes of change; a change that implicates both a history and heritage.”*<sup>188</sup>

This process is interconnected with discussions about the ethnonym change of this ethnic group - *“in the current national context, young Tamils in estate communities are identifying more with a newly invented*

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<sup>187</sup> V. Suryanarayan, “In Search of a New Identity,” 1.

<sup>188</sup> E. Valentine Daniel, “Three Dispositions towards the Past: One Sinhala, Two Tamil,” 22.

*Malaiyaha identity than the migration-related Indian Tamil identity.*<sup>189</sup> Suryanarayan mentions that *“Ilanchezhiyan and the late R. R. Sivalingam were the pioneers to use the term Children of Malaiham.*<sup>190</sup> *The term Malaiham (Hill Country) is an expression of righteous indignation and also of self-assertion.*”<sup>191</sup>

The process of forming a new ethnonym can seem to be a rather irrelevant or marginal issue, especially when viewed alongside the Sri Lankan conflict and its consequences. But from another point of view, the Malaiyaka Tamils were officially deprived of their basic rights in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, in many cases, they still have to face semi-hidden suppression in many aspects of their everyday lives. The process of forming a new identity and ethnonym is not only the subject of sociological analyses but also of political ideology. Bass notes that *“while this [the mentioned process] may seem like just a semantic game, in the context of ethnic conflict, discrimination, and war, these concerns are interconnected with appeals for recognition, autonomy, and even territory. The process of naming is also a political process, and the politics of identity in contemporary Sri Lanka are a tangled web,”*<sup>192</sup> which has been influenced and affected by the conflict on the island, particularly its main participants - the Tamil separatist organizations and the predominantly Sinhalese political elite of the state.

### Ethnonyms before Independence

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils was not scientifically described and defined. The colonial

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<sup>189</sup> Ann Kingsolver, and B. Sasikumar, “Walking with Amman: Young Malaiyaha Tamils’ Views of their Identity in Practice.”

<sup>190</sup> *Malaiham* is another form of transcription of this Tamil word. There can sometimes emerge other forms such as *Maleiyakam*, *Maleiyaham* or *Malaiyaham*. The system of transcription from the Tamil into the Latin script has not been standardized yet.

<sup>191</sup> V. Suryanarayan, „In Search of a New Identity,” 4. More reference to the use of the term *malaiyakam* will appear further in the chapter.

<sup>192</sup> Daniel Bass, *Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, 2.

administration had no exact records of the figures of the Malaiyaka Tamils arriving on the island because there was no exact administrative recognition of this ethnic group, perhaps also an unwillingness to define it and to recognize its existence. Moreover, the Malaiyaka Tamils had neither political leaders nor intellectuals during this period; those who would have been able to campaign for their recognition.

Many different denominations were used to refer officially to the group of Malaiyaka Tamils. The records included various terms such as Malabars, coolies, Indians, immigrants, Estate Labourers, and Indian Tamils.<sup>193</sup> The confusion was multiplied by the fact that, on the one hand, people of various occupations, intentions, and even ethnicity such as South Indian traders and bankers, Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamil labourers, or shopkeepers from plantation areas were registered under these denominations. On the other hand, the Malaiyaka Tamils who left the tea estates to work in towns were registered under other denominations.

Bass writes that in the early nineteenth century the most used name was “Malabar coolie,” or simply “Malabar” which was at the end of this century replaced by “Tamil” or “Tamil coolie.” But the term “Malabar” refers to people from the south-western coast of India, who speak a Dravidian language - Malayalam. It could be explained by the fact that the Dutch and English adopted the terminological confusion having been introduced by the Portuguese, who put all the South Indians under one category. Another name for Tamil immigrants was “Ceylon Indian” which was, however, used as an autonym mostly by non-coolie immigrants of higher social and occupational status, who wanted to be distinguished from the estate workers.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 7.

<sup>194</sup> Daniel Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 99.



The Ceylon census statistics in the years 1881, 1891, and 1901 did not recognize any category referred to the Malaiyaka Tamils, but instead they were registered predominantly as, or more precisely among, Ceylon Tamils. Starting in 1911, the census recognized the Malaiyaka Tamils as Indian Tamils, but the figures certainly included many mistakes since the instructions to enumerators were not based on scientific research, and the purpose of the task had also other intentions, not always in line with the recording of the real state of affairs.

Accuracy of the records concerning the Malaiyaka Tamils started to improve in 1922 when the Indian Emigration Act No.7 was enacted. In the act it was required, among other things, to control and intensively canalize the flow of labourers, and thus to keep more accurate records of their migration. Nevertheless, the terminological confusion “Indian Tamil-plantation labourer-Ceylon Tamil-Indian trader” continued.

There has been, almost certainly, no detailed paper regarding the denominations used by the ordinary Sinhalese to refer to the Malaiyaka Tamils in the period before independence. However, it can be assumed that the denominations were descriptive rather than ethnic in character; that they corresponded more or less to the forms used in official documents, thus sinking into the collective awareness of the masses; and that, generally speaking, the ordinary Sinhalese had, from their point of view, no reason to seek any new “politically correct” form.

### Ethnonyms after Independence

The problem of the appropriate ethnonym for the Malaiyaka Tamils is rather ambiguous since, in addition to the other mentioned factors, two possible directions of interpretation of the term “ethnonym” emerge. One is the interpretation of the ethnonym in the real meaning

of this word; it means as a name for the ethnic group which features the ethnicity of this ethnic group and the identity of its members. Another interpretation uses the ethnonym as a descriptive term for various parts of the ethnic group according to their place of residence, prevailing occupation and so on.

As no overall unproblematic consensus concerning the ethnonym for the Malaiyaka Tamils has been reached, confusion of these two attitudes is a frequent phenomenon in discussions about this topic. Especially, while talking to the local people of Sri Lanka, including the Malaiyaka Tamils themselves, they tend to confuse it, and prefer using the ethnonyms in the sense of the descriptive term. In any event, it is not possible to absolutely separate these two directions in examining the history of the ethnonyms variants. Therefore, before I focus on the description of the development of the ethnononym variants in their sociological meaning, I will mention some of the most used terms of descriptive character in order to manifest how interlaced the two directions of interpretation are.

The term “Estate Tamil” is used for the Tamils who work on the tea estates, and sometimes even on the rubber and coconut estates where proportion of the Tamils to other ethnic groups is more balanced than on the tea estates where the absolute majority of the Malaiyaka Tamils work. The alternative term is “Plantation Tamil.” The Tamils who live in towns and villages around, but outside the plantation sector, and the Tamils from other parts of Sri Lanka are not classified as “Estate Tamil.”

The term “Up-Country” is used for the Tamils who live in the so-called Up-Country where most of the Sri Lankan tea plantations are located. The alternative could be “Hill Country Tamil” or “Malaiyaka Tamil.” This term is sometimes used even for the Sri Lankan Tamils who work and live in the Up-Country, but do not work on the tea estates.

The term “Indian Tamil” is often used not only for the Malaiyaka Tamils, but also for Indian tourists of Tamil or South Indian - Dravidian - origin and for Tamil merchants, who do not live permanently in Sri Lanka.

However, the aim of this chapter is to discuss the ethnonym problems for the ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils from the sociological perspective.

The ethnonyms “Indian Tamils” and “persons of Indian origin” have been the official designations for the ethnic group of Malaiyaka Tamils hitherto. As Daniel wrote, based on his field works conducted in 1970’s and 1980’s, the term “*Indian Tamils was the most popular unofficial designation.*”<sup>195</sup> But he did not mention whether the term was most popular as an exonym or autonym. “Indian Tamils” was probably used on most official or semi-official occasions, such as in conversation with civil servants or foreigners, and also in communications between members of different ethnic groups. But was the term “Indian Tamils” similarly popular as an autonym in routine communications in Tamil among the Malaiyaka Tamils themselves? It is not very likely; at least some Malaiyaka Tamils, if not most of them, must have resented the ethnonym “Indian Tamil” since it held some confusing connotations. Firstly, it could evoke the impression of old colonial times when this term had emerged to bolster the “alienism” of the Malaiyaka Tamils. Secondly, it excessively emphasized the connection with the country from where their ancestors had arrived. But the ethnic identity of the Malaiyaka Tamils was more strongly connected with Ceylon as most of the labourers who arrived in Ceylon after the 1870’s, when coffee was replaced by tea, settled in the plantation areas permanently. Probably, most of the Malaiyaka Tamils had settled permanently in Ceylon for many decades before 1947 and

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<sup>195</sup> E. Valentine Daniel, “Three Dispositions towards the Past: One Sinhala, Two Tamil,” 24.

perhaps had hardly ever visited India. Thirdly, when the term “Indian Tamils” was employed, many people would have thought of the Tamils from Tamil Nadu in South India.

Consequently, several variants of “Indian Tamils” such as “Tamils of Indian Origin”, “Tamils of Recent Indian Origin”, or a Tamil equivalent “*intiyā vamaṇvaḷi tamilar*” were created, and appeared even in specialized literature. These terms, on the one hand, still highlighted the Indian origin, but, on the other, differed from the former ethnonym, and demarcated somehow the line between “Indian Tamils” and “Tamils from India”. However, these alternatives were not widely accepted either by the Malaiyaka Tamils, or by the Ceylon Tamils, who resented them because, from their point of view, it seemed that the alternatives challenged their own Indian origin. Ideologists of Tamil militant groups especially liked to refer to Indian motives and ancient Tamil literature and history in their propaganda campaigns. However, these alternatives were preferred by the urban middle-class section of the Malaiyaka Tamils. They wanted to be distinguished from the low-status estate workers so that they could move economically and socially upwards.<sup>196</sup> This urban section is a special part of the ethnic group, and, considering some of their objective and most importantly subjective forms of identification, they have many characteristic features of, if not an ethnic group, at least a sub-ethnic group.

Daniel presented another example in his brief summary of ethnonyms - “New Tamils” which, in turn, labelled the Ceylon Tamils as “Old Tamils.”<sup>197</sup> Since I have not found this variant in any other paper, nor heard directly from any Sri Lankan, it is not absolutely obvious as to whether “New Tamils” is Daniel’s invention, something he offered to the respondents for evaluation during his interviews, or just one more ethnonym invented by the people of Sri Lanka. Daniel wrote that many

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<sup>196</sup> Daniel Bass, *Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, 2-3.

<sup>197</sup> E. Valentine Daniel, “Three Dispositions towards the Past: One Sinhala, Two Tamil.” 24.

of the interviewed Tamils of both groups expressed dissatisfaction with these complementary terms. Reasons for their attitudes varied along ethnic boundaries, and illustrated the differences in education and history between the two groups.

The Ceylon Tamils judged the terms “Old” and “New” as English words, whereas the Malaiyaka Tamils evaluated the terms through reference to their Tamil equivalents. The word “Old” has a very different connotation in English in comparison with Tamil. The Ceylon Tamils objected to the fact that the English word “Old” evoked an impression of old fashioned and stagnant, something which did not correspond to the modern and progressive nature of the Ceylon Tamils. On the contrary, some Malaiyaka Tamils desired to emphasize the connotation of antiquity of their culture as their roots: *“How can one call them (Jaffna Tamils) ‘Old Tamils’? We who come from tamīlakam (the heart of Tamil country or Tamil Nadu) are the ones who are the true paṇṭaittamīlar (Tamils of antiquity or the members of an ancient race).”*<sup>198</sup>

In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the ethnonyms “Up-Country” or “Hill Country” (in Tamil *malaiyakam*) and “Estate” or “Plantation Tamils” (in Tamil *tōṭṭa tamīlar*) started to be widely used instead of “Indian Tamils” in periodicals, specialized literature, and even in ordinary conversation.

The term “Estate Tamils” refers to the prevailing occupation of the Malaiyaka Tamils. They reside, work, and pursue their religious activities on the estates; even their representatives behave as labour unionists rather than politicians. However, since the work on the estates in Ceylon has always been perceived as a menial occupation, suitable only for low-class people; such an overall connection is not too complimentary. Moreover, many Malaiyaka Tamils do not continue to

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

work on the tea estates. Apart from the urban section employed in business, whose ethnic identity is rather ambivalent, some Tamil estate workers have managed to find new employment in towns of Sri Lanka or in the Middle East where they work mostly as domestic servants or manual workers. Many Malaiyaka Tamils also fled the plantation area towards the North, East or North-West of Sri Lanka during the ethnic riots, especially in 1977, 1981 and 1983. Unfortunately, it seems that the low-class status of the Malaiyaka Tamils has not changed in the new locations. This issue would deserve further research.

The term “Up-Country Tamils” emphasizes the geographical locality where the absolute majority of the Malaiyaka Tamils reside. But similarly as in the case of the term “Estate Tamil,” many Malaiyaka Tamils also live outside the Hill Country. Some of them have worked, since their arrival, on the rubber or lowland tea estates, which are located in other parts of the Sinhalese South. Many Malaiyaka Tamils live in Colombo, and other towns of the South, and also in the northern Ceylon Tamil provinces.

In spite of the fact that living conditions in the plantation villages have been very poor, some Malaiyaka Tamils from other parts of the island occasionally return to the Hill Country mainly for three reasons: to visit their relatives; to live there while still working in town, since the accommodation has been traditionally free in the plantation villages if at least one member of a family has been working on the tea estates; because the plantation area represents a secure refuge since the Malaiyaka Tamils, when living in towns, have often been confronted with the ethnic stereotypes held by the urban society towards them in the form of discrimination and distrust.

### Recent Development of the Ethnonym Variants

Through reference to two studies, the first one written by Daniel based on his fieldwork conducted in the 1970's and 1980's, and the second one written by Bass in 2001, I shall explore how the attitudes towards these ethnonyms have developed and formulated during recent decades.

In his study Daniel<sup>199</sup> attempted to identify the name that would make the most perfect sense to the Malaiyaka Tamils. He stated that the very ethnonyms, or more precisely autonoms which they kept using when they wanted to designate themselves, were "Estate Tamils" (*tōṭṭattu tamilar*) or "Hill Country Tamils" (*malai nāṭṭu tamilar*). These two variants were seen as semantic equivalents because most of the tea estates were to be found in the Hill Country. Nevertheless, I observed that despite the fact that the respondents were employing the term "Estate Tamil" in ordinary conversation, they objected to appointing it as an official designation when mentioned in a particular discussion concerning this issue. Daniel concluded that the Malaiyaka Tamils' identity was so strongly defined by life on the plantations, which was corroborated even by the members of the urban section of the ethnic group, that the ethnonym "Estate Tamils" made the greatest sense regardless of some objections.

Bass in his recent study<sup>200</sup> concerning the ethnic identity stated that most of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth did not desire to work on the plantations where their parents had worked, nor did the parents desire their children to follow the same lives they had followed; the parents did, however, prefer their children to live in the plantation villages. These findings essentially indicated that the connection between the

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<sup>199</sup> For further details, see E. Valentine Daniel, "Three Dispositions towards the Past: One Sinhala, Two Tamil," 23-25.

<sup>200</sup> For further details, see Daniel Bass, *Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, 1-7.

Malaiyaka Tamils and their work on the plantations was strong, but not deep.

Furthermore, although the old generation of the Malaiyaka Tamils considered Tamil Nadu as their *ūr* (home town, native place), and the tea estates as their *kirāmam* (village, residence), the Malaiyaka Tamil youth started to increasingly consider the estates as their *ūr*, but no more *kirāmam*. Bass concluded that the Malaiyaka Tamils preferred to use “*malaiyaka tamilar*” - the Tamil equivalent of the ethnonym “Up-Country” Tamils - rather than “*tōṭṭa tamilar*” - the Tamil equivalent of the ethnonym “Estate Tamil” because the latter form was considered as extremely derogatory.

According to the survey directed at the use of ethnonyms in Tamil daily newspapers, “Malaiyaka Tamils” was used in 93%, “India Origin Tamils” in 6%, and “Estate Tamils” just in 1%.<sup>201</sup>

Therefore, as Bass wrote, “Malaiyaka Tamils” was accepted as an autonym in Tamil, but there was no general consensus in relation to a similar English term as an exonym accepted even by the Malaiyaka Tamils themselves. This could have been a consequence of a lack of social scholars’ interest and English-speaking people of Sri Lanka in relation to the Malaiyaka Tamils.<sup>202</sup>

A less important but also very interesting, aspect of the discussion about the ethnonym is based on the dichotomy of the official term “Sri Lankan (Ceylon) Tamil.” This expression might raise the question: Is he a Tamil from the North or East of Sri Lanka, or just a Tamil from Sri Lanka?

On the one hand, the ethnonym “Sri Lankan Tamils” could be used generally for all Tamils in Sri Lanka, regardless of their ethnic identity. The Malaiyaka Tamil repatriates who returned to India as a result of

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<sup>201</sup> Quoted according to the survey conducted by B. A. Kader for Ceylon Workers Congress in 1981. Daniel Bass, *Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, 19.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*



the Indo-Ceylonese accords, were designated by the Tamils of Tamil Nadu as “Sri Lankan Tamils”.<sup>203</sup>

On the other hand, most of the Sri Lankans would not naturally choose to use the term “Sri Lankan Tamils” at all, but “Jaffna Tamils” instead. In fact, the ethnic group of Sri Lankan Tamils consist of several sections or subethnic groups, classified mostly according to their geographical allocation as Eastern (sometimes Trincomalee and Batticaloa), Wanni, Jaffna, and Northwest (or Mannar) Tamils. Jaffna was historically the main base of Tamils on the island. The Jaffna Tamils have traditionally considered themselves, owing to the historical, linguistic, and cultural reasons, to be the leaders of the island’s Tamil-speaking population, and consequently have considered the Malaiyaka Tamils to be a group with a lower social status.

To underline these not very warm relations between both groups, the Ceylon Tamils sometimes refer to the recent arrival of the Malaiyaka Tamils and their connection with India by designating them as “*vaṭṭakkattayān*” - Northerner.<sup>204</sup> Paradoxically, the Ceylon Tamils from Jaffna are sometimes as well denominated as northern Tamils, owing to the geographical position of Jaffna in Sri Lanka.

Of course, there have also emerged some openly abusive terms, such as *kaḷlattōṇi* (“illicit boat-person”) or *tōṭṭakkāṭṭān* (“plantation-jungle man”),<sup>205</sup> that were used in reference to the social status of the Malaiyaka Tamils.

To conclude this confused and tragicomical ethnonym development summary, the official statistics show a significant fall in the Malaiyaka Tamil population figures and a small, but somewhat unnatural rise in the Sri Lankan Tamil population figures between the censuses of 1971 and 1981. The amount of the Sri Lankan Tamils in 1971 was

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<sup>203</sup> Oddvar Hollup, “Ethnic Identity, Violence and the Estate Tamil Minority in Sri Lanka“, 16.

<sup>204</sup> E. Valentine Daniel, *Chapters in Anthropology of Violence*, 18.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

1,424,000 and in 1981 1,886,900; while the amount of the Indian Tamils in 1971 was 1,174,900 and in 1981 818,700.<sup>206</sup> The main reason for this was the repatriation of 326,520 Malaiyaka Tamils to India.<sup>207</sup> However, another reason was that many Malaiyaka Tamils designated themselves as “Sri Lankan Tamil” during the census in 1981.<sup>208</sup> Several explanations or interpretations can be suggested. They might have simply been confused by the requirements of the census. However, since many of them had only recently obtained the citizenship, they might have thought that they should have enrolled themselves in another category. As many of them had moved to other parts of the island during this period, they might have also changed their ethnic identity, and crossed ethnic boundaries.

### The Present Situation

This section consists of two parts. The first one is more of a general nature; its objective is to establish the approach of the Malaiyaka Tamils to the ethnonym question. The second part is focused directly on the target group of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth.

In order to provide a complete overview, I propose to present three typical approaches in relation to the people of the Sinhala-speaking ethnic groups from the area:

1) *“The Tamils that arrived to work in Ceylon are Indian Tamils, but the Tamils that work on the plantations now we call “Estate Tamils.”*<sup>209</sup>

2a) *“There are three kinds of Tamils in Sri Lanka: Jaffna Tamils, Tamils from the East and Estate Tamils... They call themselves “Up-Country*

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<sup>206</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, 2001. [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk), retrieved 18.5.2006.

<sup>207</sup> Collective, *The Sri Lankan Repatriates in South Asia*, 6.

<sup>208</sup> Daniel Bass, *Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, 2.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with a Burgher teacher, Nuwara Eliya, 7.4.2006

*Tamils” or “malaiyaka tamilar,” and they consider the terms “Estate” or “Plantation Tamils” as abusive.”<sup>210</sup>*

*2b) “We call them “Estate Tamils,” but it doesn’t catch their present situation. Many of them are changing jobs, and going to private vegetable farmers or founding their own vegetable fields.”<sup>211</sup>*

*3) “It is a big issue. They are definitely an ethnic group different from the Sri Lankan Tamils. Today people say “Up-Country Tamils” rather than “Indian Tamils”... Formerly, they were designated mostly as “Plantation Tamils,” but nowadays everything is changing, young people leave the plantations for towns, they don’t want to work on the plantations anymore, so why to call them according to it... the term “Plantation Tamils” isn’t apropos; “Up-Country Tamils” is more appropriate... Up-Country Tamils designate themselves in Tamil as “malaiyaka tamilar.”<sup>212</sup>*

The Malaiyaka Tamils are still considered by others to be persons of the lowest rank in the Sri Lankan society, closely associated with their work and life on the plantations. This situation has been reflected in the use of the ethnonyms; Sinhala-speaking ethnics often utilize opportunities to demonstrate their own social and economical superiority over the Malaiyaka Tamils by using the term “Estate Tamil,” in spite of the fact that they, in most instances, know that it has some derogatory connotations for the people referred to, and that they would, on the contrary, prefer the term “Up-Country Tamils.”

To sum it up, the first statement illustrates the confused approach resulting from the ambiguous definition of this ethnic group’s boundaries, and this is a very frequent occurrence; but the second

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<sup>210</sup> Interview with a Sinhalese owner of a guest house, Kandy, 19.3.2006

<sup>211</sup> Interview with a Sinhalese taxi driver, Nanu Oya, 24.3.2006

<sup>212</sup> Interview with a research worker and member of non-government organization, Kandy, 27.4.2006

approach prevails: Sinhala-speaking people usually respond that they designate them “Indian” or “Estate Tamils,” even though they are aware of the fact that it is not “politically correct.”

At this point, it is necessary to mention some specific problems that have arisen, or could arise, from an inaccurate understanding of the specific social science terminology, especially in this multilingual setting where the sense of a particular word can shift after being translated (as exemplified in the case of “old and *paṇṭai*”). Despite the fact that most of the poor estate workers do not speak English, they know many English denominations used in reference to them; they, of course, do not usually use them in ordinary conversation, and perhaps do not understand their proper meanings and connotations. They naturally use these terms or ethnonyms in Tamil, but the question is in relation to the extent to which these terms correspond to their English equivalents, and how the respondents understand the interrelation between these different language variants. On the other hand, a small section of the ethnic group, mostly students of senior secondary grades and other relatively educated people, can speak at least a little English, and thus they can better understand the meanings of the English ethnonyms and their connotations, and are, therefore, more able to participate in this discussion in English.

It is a well-known fact that the translation of some specific words can result in considerable confusion since the new word or neologism very often comprises a somewhat shifted meaning. This can be well illustrated by an example of the word “secularism,” which has been translated into Urdu as “unreligiousness.”<sup>213</sup> Moreover, irrespective of the chosen language, no research worker can be sure how an ordinary respondent perceives the sense of these terms, not to mention the ability of the respondent to explain his view back to the research

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<sup>213</sup> Stanislava Vavroušková (ed.), *Náboženství a společnost v jižní a jihovýchodní Asii*, 238.

worker when discussing such indistinct and vague terms as ethnicity or identity. Therefore, the problem lies in the question: who is talking about what? Very often the way out of the dilemma is through intuition, or a firm belief that the research worker and the respondents are using the same nomenclature, so that they are talking about more or less the same idea.

### Statements of Malaiyaka Tamils

Four main types of attitudes towards the ethnonym issue can be traced among the Malaiyaka Tamils in general. These are supporting illustrations:<sup>214</sup>

1a) *“You have to distinguish between ‘Estate’ and ‘Indian’. Indian Tamils are all around the island, you know - traders, tourists, estate workers, and so on. But Estate Tamils are only on the plantations. But the most correct expression is “Up-Country” or “Malaiyaka Tamils.”*<sup>215</sup>

1b) *“We call ourselves Indian Tamils, Up-Country Tamils, malaiyaka tamilar, or Estate Tamils. All the ways. But the difference is that 99 % of the Estate Tamils are the Indian Tamils.”*<sup>216</sup>

These statements illustrate a situation when some terms are used as ethnonyms, and the others are connected with miscellaneous groups defined according to various implications. This state of puzzle is most frequent among less educated workers, but it is interesting that even many educated individuals do not understand the difference between an ethnonym and a term of descriptive character.

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<sup>214</sup> Most of the interviews were in English, some in Tamil, some ethnonyms were stated in Tamil even during the English interviews and vice versa. The ethnonyms are always stated in the original version.

<sup>215</sup> Interview with a high-ranking member of the regional office of Ceylon Workers' Congress, Nuwara Eliya, 5.4.2006

<sup>216</sup> Interview with a Malaiyaka Tamil teacher, Nuwara Eliya, 7.4.2006.

2) *“I say “Indian Tamils” or “Tamils of Recent Indian Origin” in English, and “intiyā tamīlar” or “intiyā vancāvaḷi tamīlar” in Tamil. Some people say “malaiyaka tamīlar.”*<sup>217</sup>

This is not too frequent attitude. It seems to emerge in most cases as a setting distortion in the atmosphere of educational or other institutions. I have practically never recorded the term “Indian Tamil” or *“intiyā tamīlar”* in ordinary conversation, in which at least one Malaiyaka Tamil has participated. These findings seem to correspond to the observation of Haakon Aasprong who conducted field research among the Malaiyaka Tamil students at the University of Peradeniya: *“...Tamils did, however, often employ this term [Indian Tamil] themselves. Arguably, this has to do with ‘Indian Tamil’ being used by the university administration, and that the students wished not to confuse the visiting anthropologist...”*<sup>218</sup>

3a) *“We call ourselves simply just tamīlar or malaiyaka tamīlar. We use malaiyaka tamīlar or intiyā tamīlar mostly in some specific cases.”*<sup>219</sup>

3b) *“Maybe Up-Country Tamil. I don’t know. We don’t distinguish much, nor in Tamil.”*<sup>220</sup>

3c) *“They use the term “Indian Tamil” only when they need to fill in a form. Otherwise they don’t speak much about different kinds of Tamils. Sometimes they say malaiyaka tamīlar.”*<sup>221</sup>

These statements represent the most usual and typical attitude of The Malaiyaka Tamils. When asked about the ethnonym, they reply that they most frequently use, on official occasions, “Indian” and “Up-Country Tamil” in English, and *intiyā* or *malaiyaka tamīlar* in Tamil.

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<sup>217</sup> Interview with a Malaiyaka Tamil teacher, Hatton, 8.5.2006.

<sup>218</sup> Haakon Aasprong, *Making a Home Away from Home: On Up-Country Tamil identity and social complexity at a Sri Lankan university*, 70.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with a Malaiyaka Tamil Christian priest, Nuwara Eliya, 5.5.2006.

<sup>220</sup> Interview with an office worker of a tea factory, Boralanda, 19.4.2006.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with a Tamil speaking Muslim teacher, Nanu Oya, 2.5.2006.

But the attribute “Indian” is a relic of the past. They consider the ethnonyms “Estate” or “Plantation Tamils,” even in Tamil, to be very derogatory. Most of the respondents concur in the fact that, in conversation with a foreigner or a member of other Sri Lankan ethnic groups, they would employ the English term “Up-Country Tamil,” but in ordinary conversation among themselves they use, or would use, only the term *tamīlar*, while *malaiyaka tamīlar* is less frequently used. However, the former term does not refer to all the Tamil-speaking population of the island. The respondents state that they are aware of being members of a unique ethnic group, which is clearly distinguishable from the Jaffna Tamils, a label by which the Sri Lankan Tamils are often denominated. It seems that in ordinary conversation among Malaiyaka Tamils it is simply not necessary to use the attributive combination because the object of conversation is evident from the context; “they are Jaffna Tamils and we are just Tamils, and we know who we are talking about.” But “Tamil” can be considered as only an autonym abbreviation, and not as a complete ethnonym.

4a) *“People don’t care much about it. They call themselves just tōṭṭattu tamīlar, and they don’t mind that they abase themselves, they don’t have self-respect... The Malaiyaka Tamils are inferior, some work in Colombo as domestic servants... like serfs. When you go to the cinema or theatre, the Malaiyaka Tamils always play servants there. We need to have our pride, to get better education and go out of the plantations. We are not merely “Estate Tamils,” we can do more, but we were born in malaiyakam, so we are Malaiyaka Tamils.”*<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Interview with a Malaiyaka Tamil teacher, Kotagala, 10.5.2006.

4b) „...but tōṭṭa tamilar is not good. Who can say it? I say malaiyaka tamilar or just tamilar.”<sup>223</sup>

Some respondents occasionally express criticism of the attitude of their fellows, who, instead of fighting for ethnic emancipation, submit to their low-class position with all its implications. This is even emphasized by the use of some inappropriate and derogatory ethnonyms.

### The Youth

Attitudes of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth towards the ethnonym issue were measured by means of two half-closed questions:

- 1. (question n. 47 in the questionnaire) What do you call the community of the Tamil tea estate workers?
- 2. (22.) How would you identify yourself?

The respondents could choose from 8 options in relation to the first question. The second question was accompanied by a list including several options, generally corresponding to the most employed and familiar options from the first list. In addition, it also included ethnic, religious, and national identity options, such as Sinhala, Jaffna Tamil, Asian, Hindu, Muslim, Sri Lankan, Christian, Burgher, and others.

The aim was to find out which ethnonym alternative the target population used most frequently. The aim was also to monitor how the responses to the second - personal - question corresponded to the responses to the first - ethnonym - question. If the responses to both questions more or less concurred, one could presume that the ethnic consciousness and identity of this population was relatively strong and stable. If the responses to both questions did not concur, then it could be presumed that the ethnic consciousness had been somewhat shifted.

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<sup>223</sup> Interview with a Malaiyaka Tamil worker, Dessford, 2.5.2006.



### 1. What do you call the community of the Tamil tea estate workers?

Up-Country Tamils	50 %
Indian Tamils	29 %
Estate Tamils	10 %
Tamils of Recent Indian origin	6 %
Plantation Tamils	4 %
...	...

As stated above, the use of the term “Indian Tamil” had been probably somewhat distorted in most cases. This is corroborated by the fact, coming back to the Bass concept of *ūr*, that the affinity and connection with India is absolutely weak among the Malaiyaka Tamil youth, nowadays.

Table 1 shows that the Malaiyaka Tamil youth prefer the use of the ethnonym linked to their current residence, rather than to their prevalent occupation or connection with India.

### 2. How would you identify yourself?

Sri Lankan	35 %
Indian Tamil	25 %
Up-Country Tamil	21 %
Asian	12 %
Sinhalese	6 %
...	...

Except for “Indian Tamil”, quite surprisingly, the correspondence between the results from tables 1 and 2 is very low. Table 2 shows a relatively high preference for the non-ethnic national identity “Sri Lankan”; the percentage of “Asian” is also quite significant, but it is

questionable as it is possible that the respondents chose this option to define themselves in relation to the European origin of the interviewer. On the other hand, only 21 % of the surveyed youth consider themselves as Up-Country Tamils, and other ethnonyms practically fail to appear.

A very interesting fact is that some respondents actually identify themselves as Sinhalese. There are two potential explanations. These respondents did not understand or comprehend the question at all. The second explanation is the confused relationship between the ethnic and national identity in Sri Lanka, a situation that has been influenced by the ideological conflict between the Tamil separatist leaders and the state administration (in an attempt to avoid labelling it with the misleading term “ethnic conflict”). In this context it seems that the conflict should have rather been branded as “conflict of misguided ethnic groups.” I have already mentioned the confusion between the Tamil identity and ascription. To continue, being Sri Lankan has been equated with being Sinhalese in Sri Lanka<sup>224</sup> during the last two decades. Therefore, the respondents who identified themselves as Sinhalese in this survey, in reality, were identifying themselves as Sri Lankans - they preferred the national identity to the ethnic one.

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<sup>224</sup> In the words of Daniel Bass, *Landscapes of Malaiyaha Tamil Identity*, 2, but it is a relatively well-known fact.

### 3. Combinations of the responses to questions 1 and 2

<b>Question 1 (percentage from table 1)</b>	<b>Question 2 (percentage from table 2)</b>	<b>Percentage of combinations</b>
Up-Country Tamil 50 %	Sri Lankan 35 %	UT - SL 25 %
Indian Tamil 29 %	Indian Tamil 25 %	IT - IT 21 %
Up-Country Tamil 50 %	Up-Country Tamil 21 %	UT - UT 18 %
...	...	...
Up-Country Tamil 50 %	Sinhalese 6 %	UT - S 5 %
...	...	...

Table 3 shows that despite the low correspondence between the responses to questions 1 and 2, the correlation between them is quite strong, especially in relation to the continuity of the term “Indian” as the proposed ethnonym, being used concurrently as a personal view of collective identity. Furthermore, this table shows that the non-ethnic national identity is preferred over the ethnic identity, to a large extent, by the same respondents. On the premise that the cells “Sri Lankan” and “Sinhalese” express the same kind of identity, the number of respondents who prefer the national identity over the ethnic identity reaches a relatively high rate. Regardless of the problem about which of the cells should include the “Indian Tamil” respondents, it seems that at least within the framework of the defined group of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth, the ethnic identity is declining in importance whereas the shift to the national identity appears to be an indicator of significant social change.

### Discussion

Many official and unofficial ethnonyms for the Malaiyaka Tamils have appeared during the period from the beginning of their migration up to the present day, but so far no overall consensus has been reached. The

socio-political development in the last two decades indicates that the Malaiyaka Tamil society has been undergoing a process of identified social change. In parallel, there has emerged an intensifying discussion about the Malaiyaka Tamils and their ethnonym among scholars and politicians. However, it seems that the people that are most concerned - the members of the ethnic group themselves - have not been involved in this discussion to an adequate extent.

This is evidenced by the fact that the term “Indian Tamil” is still widely used in official situations, but the use of this term does not conform to the outlook of the Malaiyaka Tamils, and it no longer reflects the nature of the Malaiyaka Tamils’ orientation. This state of affairs helps to maintain, if not intensify, the negative ethnic stereotypes held by other ethnic groups, especially the Sinhalese living in the Hill Country, towards the Malaiyaka Tamils. Members of the majority group still denominate them through the use of exonym terms which the Malaiyaka Tamils consider to be of a derogatory nature, thus demonstrating their social and economical supremacy over the Malaiyaka Tamils. This is one of the factors that still prevent the Malaiyaka Tamils from escaping from their low-class status and unfortunate reality.

A general question arises here - who possesses the right to have the primary voice in determining the ethnonym for an ethnic group: political representatives of the state, members of the ethnic group, economic elite of the ethnic group, educated intellectual elite of the state, or scholars?

I take it for granted that, at least in this specific case, the “artificial” ethnonym term should be based on the opinions of the people to whom it refers; in other words on the autonym. English has been the language of scientific nomenclature, the language traditionally used in official intercourse, and even as the lingua-franca in Sri Lanka, the

language which an increasing number of the Malaiyaka Tamils possess besides their native tongue. Therefore, it is unfortunate that the official ethnonym for the Malaiyaka Tamils in English (and Sinhala) has not been accepted yet in conformity with their own ideas. In the native language of Malaiyaka Tamils - Tamil - a more or less overall consensus in relation to the ethnonym has already been reached. Unfortunately, this is still only in the form of autonym.

Generally speaking, the Malaiyaka Tamils prefer to use the ethnonym linked to the place where they live. In ordinary conversation they mostly employ the abbreviation *tamīlar* or the autonym *malaiyaka tamīlar*, and in English settings they use “Up-Country Tamil” and sometimes “Indian Tamil.”

When comparing these findings with the previous research, they correspond more or less to the outcomes of the above mentioned study written by Bass, but do not correspond to the outcomes of Daniel’s study. Daniel stated that the variants “Hill Country (Up-Country) Tamil” and “Estate Tamil” were seen as semantic equivalents, and suggested “Estate Tamil” as the name with the greatest meaning. This is no longer accurate, and the change illustrates the developments of the last two three decades. On the contrary, the Malaiyaka Tamils consider the latter term as abusive, reflecting their longing for ethnic emancipation in the sense of disconnection from their low-class ethnic status.

As stated earlier, some sections of the ethnic group would not agree with the use of the attribute “Up-Country” because they do not reside in the Up-Country. Therefore, the English-Tamil hybrid “Malaiyaka Tamil” seems to be the most meaningful ethnonym term in English because the majority of the ethnic group usually use its Tamil alternative, and because, to accommodate the Malaiyaka Tamils living

in other areas of Sri Lanka than in the highlands, the Tamil part of this lexeme would imply the ethnic identity, distinctiveness and roots.

On the other side, the middle-class urban part of the Malaiyaka Tamils often strongly dissociate themselves from the poor low-class workers and highlight their higher social status. Therefore, this ethnic division is based on the economic and political power rather than on the ethnicity-related distinctions. However, since ethnic identity is a matter of, especially, self-ascription and personal feelings, I suggest that the middle-class urban section of the Malaiyaka Tamils should be given a scope for a separate ethnic category.

Moreover, the development described in this work seems to lead up to it because the plantation workers are increasingly dissatisfied with the fact that many of their political leaders originate from the urban middle-class section. The workers are also dissatisfied with the results their political leaders have achieved in the struggle for their interests. And in addition, the new young generation of the plantation-workers' community aspires to move socially upward and become the coming elite, for which suitable conditions have been gradually created, especially as regards the education opportunities.

The term "Malaiyaka" is the accurate transliteration of its original Tamil recording, but it does not correspond to the Tamil pronunciation, and thus it is not very practical and useful for non-Tamil speakers. The second alternative in relation to the rendering from Tamil script to Roman type is a modified phonetic transcription. Here the most employed form is "Malaiyaha Tamils," which is, however, a combination of transliteration and a modified phonetic transcription. Therefore, it seems to me that the variant fully rendered from the Tamil script by means of the modified phonetic transcription - "Maleiyaha Tamils" - makes the greatest sense, especially for practical

reasons, even though this ethnonym term has been a rarely used form hitherto.

In relation to the young Malaiyaka Tamils, table 1 confirms that they would also prefer the term “Up-Country” (in Tamil version *malaiyakam*). Table 2 shows that 53% of the young people, when asked about their identity, prefer the identity of different degrees than ethnicity - Sri Lankan, Asian, Sinhalese (which, as discussed, corresponds to the category of Sri Lankan), while only the remainder prefer the identity based on their ethnicity. But it probably does not signify that the respondents from the former group deny their ethnic identity. More probably, it simply indicates that the ethnic identity among the young people is declining in importance and is being superseded by the non-ethnic identity<sup>225</sup> that I have been terming, so far, as “national”. However, in this context it would be more apt to term it as “citizen identity” because it is related directly to the acquiring of the citizenship, therefore the official status of being the citizens of Sri Lanka.

The issue of ethnonym is interconnected with the problem of ethnic identity. In this context, the term “Malaiyaka” has also one more important connotation. In recent years scholars have started to write about the Malaiyaka Tamil identity as about a new invented phenomenon. For example, Ann Kingsolver and Sasikumar Balasundaram write that “*Malaiyaha Tamil identity, especially for young people, is an identity in a new moment of construction,*” and that “*Malaiyaha identity is also a political project.*”<sup>226</sup> Bass states that “*this new identity as Up-Country Tamils, and the corresponding sense of the*

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<sup>225</sup> For more information in relation to the problem of tensions between the ethnic and non-ethnic forms of identification, see Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Tensions between the Ethnic and the Post-ethnic,” 10.

<sup>226</sup> Ann Kingsolver, Sasikumar Balasundaram, “Walking with Amman: Young Malaiyaha Tamils’ Views of Their Identity in Practice,” 40.

*Up-Country as malaiyakam, a place of their own, arose in the 1970's as part of a greater cultural and political renaissance in the Up-Country.*"<sup>227</sup>

The late 1970's is the period when the plantation schools were included in the national system, which rapidly improved the plantation educational system, and it brought the Malaiyaka Tamil youth better education opportunities. In the 1980's an increasing number of the Malaiyaka Tamils acquired the citizenship, which brought them more political power and also stronger feelings of self-confidence.

In the second half of the 1980's many Malaiyaka Tamils returned from the North and East to the Hill Country, which was a safer place to live because it was a period when the conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the state army fully escalated. On the other side, the conflict and the Sri Lankan Tamils' fight for their homeland inspired the Malaiyaka Tamils, who longed for a secure place which they were in relation to - their own homeland, although not in the sense of a separate state, but more in the sense of self-determination.<sup>228</sup>

The term "Malaiyaka Tamil" started to be widely used as an autonym by the Malaiyaka Tamils in the 1980's and 1990's, which implies that they started to identify themselves with this term and adopted it as a sign of their ethnic identity. I would not call it a new invented identity because the Malaiyaka Tamils have always been strongly connected with the Up-Country. But since the 1980's the term "Malaiyakam" in connection with their identity has started to have rather different connotations - connotations with shifted meanings. It has reflected the aspirations for the social and political emancipation.

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<sup>227</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 119.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.



## **Conclusion**

In the “History” there was presented ethnic composition of the Sri Lankan population and divisions within the Malaiyaka Tamil community. Further, basic points of the Malaiyaka Tamil history were outlined; starting in the “coffee period,” across the introduction of tea crop and related social changes, up to the disfranchisement and political negotiations that led to the gradual regaining of their civil rights. It was demonstrated how their ethnic identity had been shaped. Then I described their living and working conditions, political representation, socio-economic changes, and most important points of their identity.

In the following part of the study I focused on special aspects of the Malaiyaka Tamil community related to the structural upward mobility of the educated youth, and I analyzed the data collected in the course of my field research. I discussed the problems of social isolation - what its intensity is, and how it limits the opportunities of the youth in interaction with the majority population. Further, I concentrated on the activities of the youth, especially their participation in the social and political organizations, and on their aspirations, desires and image of the future. I discussed the progress in education on the plantations; if the students aspired to continue their schooling, what role was played by their parents, and teachers’ opinions about the contemporary situation. I also addressed the question of ethnonym and identity. I tried to investigate what ethnonym the youth used, and which group they identified with.

Within the almost two centuries, the Malaiyaka Tamils have become strongly connected with the plantations where they have been living and working since they started to arrive in Ceylon. Geographical and social isolation have contributed to this sort of connection. Despite the

fact that the living and working conditions on the estates have been unsatisfactory and below the national standard, dependency on the estate institutions and impossibility to escape from the estate sector resulted in a specific relationship between the estate units and their residents. Little writes that “*estate workers of all grades, from labourer to PD [plantation superintendent], share a deep sense of loyalty to ‘their’ estate.*”<sup>229</sup>

On the other side, however, many Malaiyaka Tamils have always desired to escape from this vicious circle of life on the tea estates. When asked about the contemporary situation among the youth, a Sri Lankan social scholar said that “*the youth demand more changes. They have more opportunities, they go against traditions, they do not want to work on the plantations any further and that’s why they are escaping to towns. They have higher aspirations, and therefore they are looking for employment with higher social status. If they dislike something, they protest against it, they use satjagraha.*”<sup>230</sup>

These are two positions of ambivalent attitudes of the contemporary Malaiyaka Tamil youth which are reflected in the results of the field work. On the one side, there are traditions and autostereotypes handed from the adults on the youth; on the other, there is modernity represented by challenges, opportunities, changes, ambitions and desires of the youth. This is demonstrated by several findings:

1. The majority of the respondents desire to move from their homes, but most of them wish to stay in the Hill Country.
2. As the most relevant reasons in relation to the migration, they state economic problems and desire for new experience more frequently than desire to escape from the life on the plantations.
3. When asked about what connotations the plantation area represents for them, surprisingly only 7 % marked the “prison” answer despite the

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<sup>229</sup> Angela W. Little, *Labouring to Learn*, 54.

<sup>230</sup> Interview. Kandy, 27.4.2006.

negative attitudes they hold towards the work and life within the plantation area. They mostly prefer connotations of “hard work” and “ancestors.”

4. Many young Malaiyaka Tamils identify themselves with both the “Up-Country identity” and “citizen identity.” I expected larger dissociation of the youth from the “plantation history” of their ancestors. It is obvious that importance of the ethnic identification is declining in the case of the target population, and it is being replaced by different forms of national identification. It indicates emerging consciousness of equality and engagement in civil affairs, which is supported by activity indicators that reveal relatively high interest in civil and political affairs, and community involvement of the target population.

As concerns further results, the results in the sphere of education and parental interest reveal that both parents and their children tend to have high aspirations, which is supported by extra-schooling. Although the youth aspire mostly to achieve higher education in order to secure better employment, and therefore to move economically upwards, they also strongly aspire to achieve social upward mobility. However, there are also individuals that tend to achieve higher education because they intend to come back to their community and to provide also other youth with education of higher standard.

Most of the students state that they do not work on the plantations, and they can thus devote some time to studying. Child labour was a common practice in the Hill Country; therefore, it is also a positive mark.

The level of social isolation was measured in relation to its three aspects. Findings of the survey show that the geographical aspect is not yet so limiting factor for successful development in the fields of

educational and occupational competitiveness in the case of the target group. Although in comparison with other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka the Malaiyaka Tamils still live on a higher level of geographical isolation, the geographical aspect is gradually declining in importance; members of the target group often travel, many of them live in towns or attend schools in towns.

The social aspect of social isolation still lingers as a significant barrier for social interaction, however, even in this field positive developments are evident. The youth have better qualifications for interacting with people from other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka and from different environments than the previous generations. Many of them can communicate in Sinhala, some also in English, which is a result of the progress in the field of education and also of the decreased level of geographic isolation. In any event, what I consider as the most important and positive fact is the interest in other cultures reflecting that members of the target group want to interact with other cultures and to understand them, and that they aspire to become equal members of the Sri Lankan society.

Yet, the last aspect of social isolation is the psychological aspect manifested in the form of stereotypical behaviour and ethnic prejudices which are held in both directions. Despite the fact that even negative stereotypical behaviour of the Malaiyaka Tamils towards other ethnic groups hinders them from integration into the Sri Lankan society, it is mainly the behaviour of other ethnics towards the Malaiyaka Tamils - the stereotypes and myths about them - that does not allow the Tamils to integrate.

Many Malaiyaka Tamils express their dissatisfaction with political steps of their political leaders and call for their alteration. On the one side, they acknowledge what was achieved in the field of education and civil and political rights; on the other side, the progress is very slow

and in some fields almost negligible. Moreover, most of the political representatives do not originate from among their lines, which is considered as a limiting factor for further changes and progress in social, political and economic affairs concerning the community. The death of the long-term and almost undisputed leader Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman in 1999 opened hitherto very limited space for other politicians.

To summarize the partial conclusions, response to the main question is that considering the presented facts we can assume that the target population will undergo a process of structural upward social mobility, and will become the new elite of the Malaiyaka Tamil ethnic group. They will gain potentiality to influence the marginal socio-economic status of the ethnic group, which could possibly lead to a certain degree of emancipation within the Sri Lankan population. This all, nevertheless, is valid only providing some measures are implemented. A large part of the majority population still perceive the Malaiyaka Tamils in terms of old ethnic stereotypes as unclean and immoral aliens, people who are uneducated and are not able to become educated. This is reflected in the use of the exonyms that are considered by the Malaiyaka Tamils as abusive. It has further intensified the not very good relations between the Tamils and the surrounding population. Diminution of the Malaiyaka Tamils' social isolation and their social integration into the Sri Lankan society depends to a large extent on reduction of the negative ethnic heterostereotypes. These are, however, very stabile, and are often partially based on real facts and situation. Unless the economic and social conditions of the Malaiyaka Tamils are improved, it is not possible to expect any significant changes in the perception of the Tamils in their neighbours view. The two shifts are strongly connected

so that one can not exist without the other one. The state involvement is absolutely necessary. As the conflict with the LTTE is over, the government should be able to redirect financial flows, at least partially, from the military to the disadvantaged groups of the population.

It is necessary to take measures to remove certain obstacles in education, such as to bring more qualified teachers to the plantation area, especially teachers of languages; to enable the students from low-economic-status families to study by introducing a grant system for talented and skilled students; or to initiate some reforms in the remote plantation areas too.

It is also necessary to provide the educated young people with sufficiency of employment opportunities. In the Hill Country the young Tamils still lack middle-class employment opportunities, apart from the positions of teachers and estate staff, which are very limited. If the educated youth have no other possibility than to return to the monotonous and hard work on the plantations, it can result in apathy and frustration, and further in deviant and aggressive forms of behaviour.

On the other side, if the young people leave the plantations on a large scale, it could result in a shortage of labour force. Therefore, it would be necessary to take measures in order to increase the social status of the plantation work.

In this place I return to the most characteristic points of the Malaiyaka Tamil identity. I attempt to generalize the attitudes of the target population and to compare it.

1. They are gradually losing the feeling of being the exploited labour force. Although many are still strongly connected with the estate sector, they are dissociating from the plantation lifestyle. They aim at moving to towns to attain advanced education and middle-class occupation,

and accordingly to increase their socio-economic status. They see an opportunity to lose dependency on the plantation units; however, they feel a sense of belongingness and interconnection with the Hill Country area.

2. They feel that they are still stigmatized by the low social status, yet, they believe they are able to change it. I consider the newly emerging sense of self-confidence as one of the most significant changes.

3. Identification with India plays almost negligible role. This new generation uses it mostly only verbally and not mentally.

4. They naturally share socio-cultural features connected with their ethnicity, as the language, caste system, and so on. However, I have recorded certain shifts in their identification.

But the question remains: why, to what extent, and in what situations is the identity shifting? I attempt to suggest a possible explanation which is connected with the proposed term of the citizen identity.

Following the Barthian concept of ethnic boundaries, the persistence of poly-ethnic systems depends, to a large extent, on relatively stable cultural characteristics of their ethnic units, but it does not prevent the actors from crossing ethnic boundaries or boundaries of different degrees. Furthermore, generally speaking, identity has many variants that reflect its relational and situational character. Ethnic identity is just one kind of identity that can be naturally replaced by other kinds, depending on the situation and relation to the individual or individuals to whom the identity refers.<sup>231</sup>

There is the already mentioned example of how variable and confused the situational identification could be in the case of the Malaiyaka Tamils. In the census of 1981 many Malaiyaka Tamils probably identified themselves as Sri Lankan Tamils since they had attained Sri

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<sup>231</sup> It refers back to the chapter Theoretical and Terminological framework.

Lankan citizenship.<sup>232</sup> It was once again a terminological confusion as it had happened many times in the history of this ethnic group. It was pointless for the Malaiyaka Tamils to be registered as Indian Tamils, which was the official term appointed to them, when they were citizens of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, many Malaiyaka Tamils, who migrated to the North and East after ethnic riots, acted alike<sup>233</sup> since they lived in the areas with the majority population of Sri Lankan Tamils.

To return to the case of the Malaiyaka Tamil youth, it seems that they often identify themselves through reference to the ethnic key in situations related to the past, and to the non-ethnic key in situations related to the future.

This state of affairs is connected with the socio-political developments in Sri Lanka, especially the growth of educational opportunities on the plantations and the achievement of civil rights. Young people see an opportunity to integrate into the surrounding society, to be recognized as equal citizens of their country, and to enjoy all the attained civil rights in everyday life. It is this status that used to be denied to their parents in the past.

The ancestors of the contemporary young generation of the Malaiyaka Tamils considered themselves to be an inseparable part of Ceylon, however, they were not allowed to consider themselves to be an inseparable part of the Ceylonese society. Even the contemporary young generation have not fully integrated into the Sri Lankan society yet. Considering the many social, terminological and political confusions, the Malaiyaka Tamils are a special case of ethnic anomaly. Normally, immigrants of a distinct ethnicity in relation to the original population become ethnic anomalies in their new country in the second or third generation. It means that they can be considered as

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<sup>232</sup> Daniel Mark Bass, *A Place on the Plantations: Up-Country Tamil Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, 105.

<sup>233</sup> V. Suryanarayan, "In Search of a New Identity," 2.



‘neither-nor’ or ‘both-and,’ they may consider themselves as an adapted and integrated part of the majority population,<sup>234</sup> although they show their ethnic diacritical marks, and do not deny their origin. However, they are usually considered by the majority population as a component of the overall society even though they can be disliked due to their cultural distinctiveness.

Since the Malaiyaka Tamils started to migrate to Ceylon, they were considered to be undesirable aliens. After two hundred years it is still a reality in a reduced extent.

Even if the contemporary young generation effectively struggle for further emancipation of the Malaiyaka Tamils, full integration and emancipation, if actually possible, will be a very slow and gradual process that can last for many following generations. Above I mentioned some obstacles that can obstruct the process of emancipation, but the most important one is the caste system. Although the caste system is able to adapt into new settings, it is, on the other side, a very persisting system. Most of the Malaiyaka Tamils will remain as dalits in the eyes of the majority population which can be annulled neither by processes of modernisation, nor by cultural homogenization or globalization. However, the emancipation process of dalits in India could serve as an inspiration.

The educated young Malaiyaka Tamils are a group that is in the state of tension between tradition and modernity, tension between the ethnic identity developed during the lives of their ancestors and the new citizen identity in relation to equality of rights and opportunities. However, as I have argued, these two sorts of identification do not have to be necessarily in contradiction. In order to achieve demarginalization and emancipation, the new elite will probably use a

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<sup>234</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 62.

strategy based on accepting their minority status and preservation of their ethnicity in the framework of the Sri Lankan society.

In the course of this study I propounded several issues that were only mentioned, but that would be worth consideration and more insightful research.

First, it is the economic situation of the Malaiyaka Tamil family units and its determinants in relation to the social changes and occupational mobility, especially as concerns farming and leaving the plantation sector to the urban environment and abroad. It would be also very interesting to investigate the correlation between the economic situation of the plantation Malaiyaka Tamil families and the parental interest in their children's education.

Second, it is the question whether the two main parts of the Malaiyaka Tamil ethnic group - the plantation workers and the urban middle-class part - should be incorporated into one common ethnic unit. There are vast differences between them, and, what is most relevant, it seems that the members of both parts hold disrespectful attitudes towards each other, and often do not ascribe the other part to their ethnic community.

Third, I initially intended to devote a whole chapter to analysis of the role of ethnic auto- and heterostereotypes between the Malaiyaka Tamils and the rest of the population, which was not unfortunately possible due to a lack of space and time; nevertheless, this point would be very interesting.

Fourth, I also intended to write a chapter about the present political leadership, the trade union leaders, and the urban elite, but again I was not able to do so. The issue is at least mentioned in several places, which is sufficient for basic needs of the study. However, for future

research I would suggest to investigate into the collision between the old and the new generation of the educated elite of the group.

## **Appendix**

### **Questionnaire**

1. Are you male (man) or female (woman)?

- *man*            - *woman*

2. How old are you?

*age:*

3. Which ethnic group do you belong to?

- *Up-country Tamil (of recent Indian origin)*

- *Eastern Tamil*

- *Jaffna Tamil*

- *Muslim*

- *Sinhalese*

- *Burgher*

- *Malay*

- *other*

### **Social Categories**

4. How would you agree with the following statements?

4a. Sinhalese people are:

<i>good workers</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>bad workers</i>
<i>moral</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>immoral</i>
<i>intelligent</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>unintelligent</i>
<i>generous</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>miserly</i>
<i>friendly</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>unfriendly</i>
<i>good for the whole society</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>bad for the whole society</i>
<i>clean</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>dirty</i>
<i>modest</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>proud</i>
<i>educated</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>uneducated</i>

4b. Up-country Tamils (of recent Indian origin) are:

<i>good workers</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>bad workers</i>
<i>moral</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>immoral</i>
<i>intelligent</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>unintelligent</i>
<i>generous</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>miserly</i>

<i>friendly</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>unfriendly</i>
<i>good for the whole society</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>bad for the whole society</i>
<i>clean</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>dirty</i>
<i>modest</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>proud</i>
<i>educated</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>uneducated</i>

4c. Jaffna Tamils are:

<i>good workers</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>bad workers</i>
<i>moral</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>immoral</i>
<i>intelligent</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>unintelligent</i>
<i>generous</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>miserly</i>
<i>friendly</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>unfriendly</i>
<i>good for the whole society</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>bad for the whole society</i>
<i>clean</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>dirty</i>
<i>modest</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>proud</i>
<i>educated</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>uneducated</i>

5. Do you think that nowadays the Up-country Tamils (of recent Indian origin) have the equal civil and political rights as the rest of the Sri Lankan society?

YES 1 2 3 4 5 NO

6. Do you think that the Up-country Tamils (of recent Indian origin) have the equal work opportunities as the rest of the Sri Lankan society?

YES 1 2 3 4 5 NO

7. Do you think that the Up-country Tamils (of recent Indian origin) have been assimilated into the Sri Lankan society?

YES 1 2 3 4 5 NO

8. Do you think that the Up-country Tamils (of recent Indian origin) are the inferior (low-status) community in regard of their position in the Sri Lankan society?

YES 1 2 3 4 5 NO

9. Do you consider the Up-country Tamils (of recent Indian origin) to be immigrants?

YES 1 2 3 4 5 NO

10. Do all Tamils in Sri Lanka make up one ethnic group or you can divide them into more ethnic groups?

- *one ethnic group*
- *more ethnic groups (please, specify)*

### **Individuals**

11. Basically, what type of activities are you involved at the moment?

- *permanent employment*
- *casual employment*
- *studying*
- *other*

12. Do you have TV at home?

YES                      NO

13. Can you speak these languages?

- |                                    |                                       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| - Sinhala                          | <i>very good/good/poor/not at all</i> |
| - Tamil                            | <i>very good/good/poor/not at all</i> |
| - English                          | <i>very good/good/poor/not at all</i> |
| - other languages (please specify) | <i>very good/good/poor/not at all</i> |

14. Which education level have you reached?

- *no school*
- *primary*
- *secondary*
- *passed G.C.O. O/L*
- *passed G.C.O. A/L*
- *graduate*

15. Has either of your parents or grandparents worked on tea estates (plantations) or in a tea factory?

YES                      NO

15a. If YES, would you like to do the same job?

YES                      NO                      ALREADY DOING                      WANT ESCAPE                      OTHER

16. Which ethnic group are your best friends from?

- *Sinhalese*

- *Jaffna Tamil*
- *Up-country Tamil (of recent Indian origin)*
- *Muslim*
- *from other ethnic group*

17. Where do you live?

- *village*                      - *town*                      - *estate*

18. How often do you travel from your home to other places?

- *every day*
- *several times a week*
- *several times a month*
- *less*
- *not at all*
- *do not know*

19. Are you interested in other cultures in Sri Lanka?

YES

*NO*

- *Sinhala culture*
- *Up-country Tamil (of recent Indian origin) culture*
- *Jaffna Tamil culture*
- *Burgher culture*
- *Christian culture*
- *Muslim culture*
- *other*

20. What do you do in your leisure time?

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| - sports    | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |
| - cinema    | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |
| - music     | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |
| - reading   | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |
| - TV, video | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |
| - studying  | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |
| - gardening | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |
| - Internet  | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |
| - other     | very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know |

21. How often do you read newspapers?

- every day
- several times a week
- several times a month
- less
- not at all
- do not know

22. How would you identify yourself? Please, underline maximum 2 possibilities.

- |                    |                |
|--------------------|----------------|
| - Sinhala          | - Muslim       |
| - Tamil            | - Sri Lankan   |
| - Indian Tamil     | - Christian    |
| - Jaffna Tamil     | - Burgher      |
| - Asian            | - Estate Tamil |
| - Up-country Tamil | - other        |

23. Imagine your future. What do you long for? What are your desires? Underline maximum two possibilities.

- |                                      |                          |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| - to be rich                         | - no desires             |
| - to be educated                     | - just to be happy       |
| - to have a good job                 | - other (please specify) |
| - to get married to a good man/woman |                          |

24. During the last 5 years has financial situation of your family:

improved    1    2    3    4    5    worsened

### **Politics**

25. Do you participate in any social, political or trade union organization?

- |                          |                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| - social organization    | YES / PARTIALLY / NO |
| - political organization | YES / PARTIALLY / NO |
| - trade union            | YES / PARTIALLY / NO |

26. Compared to 5 years ago, what is the relationship among the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka at the moment?

- |                     |                               |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| - the same          | - better towards my community |
| - better in general | - worse towards my community  |
| - worse in general  | - other (please, specify)     |

27. People hold different opinions about struggle. What do you think - is struggle (war) leading to violence good, or bad method for fulfilling people's wishes?

good    1    2    3    4    5    bad

28. Does your vote have any effect on how things are running in this country, or your vote makes no difference?

has an effect    1    2    3    4    5    has no effect





- other (specify)                      better / no change / worse / do not know

## **Migration**

40. Many people migrate to other places nowadays. How about you? Would you like to live somewhere else?

YES

NO

40a. If YES, what are your reasons for migration?

- unemployment	YES / A LITTLE BIT / NO / DO NOT KNOW
- desire for new experiences	YES / A LITTLE BIT / NO / DO NOT KNOW
- desire for higher wages	YES / A LITTLE BIT / NO / DO NOT KNOW
- desire to get out of the plantations	YES / A LITTLE BIT / NO / DO NOT KNOW
- other (please, specify)	YES / A LITTLE BIT / NO / DO NOT KNOW

41. What would be your favourite region to live in Sri Lanka? (please, name the region or place)

42. How would you describe an ordinary Sinhalese in several words of characteristic features?

43. How would you describe an ordinary Up-country Tamil (of recent Indian origin) in several words of characteristic features?

## **Changes**

44. Do you know anybody who has attained the Sri Lankan citizenship during the last 15 years?

YES

NO

44a. If YES, do you think it has influenced this person's life in:

- better access to education	very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know
- access to social and medical care	very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know
- feelings of bigger self-confidence	very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know
- access to better employment	very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know
- decision to move to other place	very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know
- feelings of being real Sri Lankan	very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know
- other (please, specify)	very much/somewhat/not at all/do not know

45. What are the most important things that have happened in your ethnic group during the last 15-20 years?

46. Every ethnic group or nation occasionally undergoes a process of large cultural, political and social changes called revival. Do you think that your ethnic group has been undergoing such a revival nowadays?

YES

NO

47. What do you call the community of the Tamil tea estate workers?

- *Up-country Tamils*
- *Estate Tamils*
- *Tamils of recent Indian origin*
- *Maleiyaha Tamils*
- *Plantation Tamils*
- *Indian Tamils*
- *New Tamils*
- *Old Tamils*
- *other (please specify)*

48. Do you think that economic situation of the Up-country Tamils (of recent Indian origin) has improved during the last 5 years?

YES    1   2   3   4   5    NO

49. What do tea plantations (estates) represent for you?

- *ancestors*
- *future*
- *happiness*
- *hard job*
- *prison*
- *home*
- *nothing*
- *other (please, specify)*

50. What are your parents' jobs?

- *mother:*
- *father:*

## **Glossary of Terms**

Chetti, Chettiyar - a member of a trading caste

CWC - Ceylon Workers Congress, a political party

dalit - an untouchable

harijan - an untouchable

Hatton - after Nuwara Eliya the second largest town of the Hill Country

Hill Country - the central highland part of Sri Lanka

kangani - a native labour supervisor on the plantations

Jaffna - the peninsula in the North of Sri Lanka, traditional homeland of the Sri Lankan Tamils

maha vidyalayam - a school providing senior secondary education

Malaiyakam - a Tamil expression for the central highland part of Sri Lanka

NED - Nuwara Eliya District

Nuwara Eliya - the main centre of the Hill Country (except for Kandy which is not actually located in the real highlands)

periya dorai - a plantation superintendent

satyagraha - a non-violent protest

UCPF - Up-Country People's Front, a political party

Up-Country - the central highland part of Sri Lanka

vidyalayam - a school

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## **Abstract:**

Radek Novotný

### *Malaiyaka Tamil Youth in Sri Lanka: Values, Aspirations, and the Forming of a New Elite*

Malaiyaka Tamils are a minority and lowest-status group within the society of Sri Lanka. A majority of them were brought by the British colonialists from India to work on their coffee, later tea plantations in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were deprived of their basic civil rights in 1940's. However, the Malaiyaka Tamils have been undergoing a process of considerable social-economic changes over the last three decades, which was launched especially by the attainment of citizenship, growth of educational opportunities, and growth of civic and political awareness. The young Malaiyaka Tamils have an opportunity to become the first relatively well-educated generation and new elite of their ethnic group. This work attempts to analyse the prospects of the Malaiyaka Tamils youth's upward social mobility process by investigating their aspirations, values, and attitudes. I conducted field research in the so-called Hill Country of Sri Lanka, and I collected data by using methods, especially, of semi-structured interviews and questionnaire survey.

We can assume that the target population will undergo a process of structural upward social mobility, and will become the new social-economic elite of the Malaiyaka Tamil ethnic group. They will gain potential to influence their marginal socio-economic status, which could possibly lead to a certain degree of emancipation within the Sri Lankan population. This all, nevertheless, is valid only providing some measures are implemented. It is primarily necessary to remove certain obstacles in education, and to provide the educated young people with sufficiency of employment opportunities. If the educated youth have no other possibility than to return to the monotonous and hard work on



the plantations, it can result in apathy and frustration, and further in aggressive forms of behaviour. The educated young Malaiyaka Tamils are a group that is in the state of tension between tradition and modernity; tension between the traditional ethnic identity and the newly developing citizen identity in relation to equality of rights and opportunities. However, I argue that these two sorts of identification do not have to be necessarily in contradiction. In order to achieve demarginalization and emancipation, they will probably use a strategy based on accepting their minority status and preservation of their ethnicity within the Sri Lankan society. Even if the contemporary young generation effectively struggle for further emancipation of the Malaiyaka Tamils, full integration and emancipation will be a very slow and gradual process, especially owing to the persistence of the caste system.

#### Radek Novotný

#### Mládež tzv. Tamilů z vysočiny na Šrí Lance: hodnoty, aspirace a formování nové elity

Tamilové z vysočiny tvoří minoritní skupinu s nejnižším sociálním statusem v rámci šrilanské společnosti. Většina z nich sem migrovala v 19. a 20. století z Indie během britské koloniální nadvlády za prací na kávových a později čajových plantážích. Ve 40. letech 20. století byla Tamilům z vysočiny upřena občanská a politická práva. Během posledních tří desítek let začalo uvnitř této etnické skupiny docházet k významným sociálně-ekonomickým změnám. Hlavními faktory, které tyto změny vyvolaly, jsou udělení občanství a volebního práva, zlepšené podmínky v oblasti vzdělávání a zvyšující se občanské a politické povědomí. Mladí Tamilové mají příležitost stát se první relativně vzdělanou generací, a tím i jakousi novou elitou své etnické skupiny. V této práci se pokouším analyzovat možnost vzestupné strukturální

mobility mladých Tamilů, a to především na základě specifikace jejich aspirací, hodnot a postojů. Provedl jsem proto terénní výzkum v tzv. Hill Country (vysočině) na Šrí Lance. Použil jsem zejména dotazníkové šetření a polostrukturovaná interview.

Na základě zjištěných skutečností lze předpokládat, že v rámci cílové populace dojde k procesu strukturální vzestupné sociální mobility, v jejímž důsledku se tato skupina stane novou sociálně-politickou elitou celé etnické skupiny a bude moci významně ovlivnit sociálně-ekonomické postavení Tamilů z vysočiny. Tento proces bude možný pouze za předpokladu, že dojde k některým krokům - zejména v oblasti vzdělávání. Posun je dále závislý na podpoře vzniku nových pracovních míst. Pokud nedostanou tito mladí Tamilové možnost najít si pozici odpovídající dosaženému vzdělání, případná apatie a frustrace pramenící z této situace může vyústit v agresivní formy chování. U skupiny mladých Tamilů z vysočiny se v současné době objevuje tenze mezi tradicí a modernitou; konkrétně tradiční etnickou identitou se všemi svými atributy a nově se vyvíjející občanskou identitou ve smyslu rovnosti práv a příležitostí. Nicméně tyto dvě formy identifikace nemusí být nutně v rozporu. Strategie nové elitní skupiny bude založena na akceptování minoritního postavení v rámci majoritní společnosti při současném zachování vlastní etnicity. I za předpokladu, že Tamilové z vysočiny zvolí efektivní metody boje za svou další emancipaci, plná integrace a zrovnoprávnění etnika bude, zejména vzhledem k charakteru kastovního systému, dlouhodobý a velice pozvolný proces.