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India's Influence on Sri Lanka's Language Issue and Linguistic Nationalisms in the Late 1940s and 1950s

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Abstract:

The aim of this research was to examine the influence and impact of India's language issue on determining the characteristics of Sinhalese and Tamil linguistic nationalisms and the commencement of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The research, which was based on secondary data, used interpretive approach for the analysis. It found that the language issue of India influenced both the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils in Sri Lanka to adopt inflexible and radical stances on language. On one hand, while the arguments and policies of Hindi language loyalists of North India encouraged Sinhalese to justify their demand to make Sinhala the sole official language, the radical Tamil linguistic nationalism prevalent at that time in South India ignited fear among Sinhalese that led them to be uncompromising on language issues. On the other hand, South Indian Tamil linguistic nationalism provided Tamils with both ideology and inspiration for a radical stance and activism, and profoundly influenced the development of a Tamil group identity that was solely based on language in Sri Lanka. The study proves that the conditions for the development of such an identity were largely unavailable domestically at that moment. Hence, it is clear that the influence and impact of India's language issue was very deterministic in characterising the two nationalisms; Sinhala and Tamil in Sri Lanka which later on collided with each other and resulted in an ethnic conflict.

Keywords: Sinhala nationalism, Tamil nationalism, Sinhalese linguistic nationalism, Tamil linguistic nationalism, Sri Lankan ethnic conflict

1. Introduction

The Indian influence and impact on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict during the 1980s is well-known. It is widely assumed that unless India had decided to train and arm the militants, a military uprising would have never been possible for the Tamil Eelamist separatists. Apart from direct and active involvements of that nature, India's internal developments and political dynamics indirectly impacted on the commencement and subsequent developments of the ethnic conflict. For example, the creation of Bangladesh with the military help of India ignited the hope among Tamil youth for a similar intervention for them, to have a separate state for Tamils in Sri Lanka and it eventually led them to initiate an armed struggle. The impact and influence of India at the beginning and during the military phase of the conflict is, therefore, well-known and adequately studied.

However, India's impact on the initial stages of the ethnic rivalry, particularly for the events during the late 1940s and 50s, has not been sufficiently investigated. This paper aims to study the probable causal relationship between India's political developments and Sri Lanka's conflict during that period. This study particularly investigates the impact of India's language issue and subsequent political developments in Tamilnadu for the commencement of the conflict as well as the construction of the features of it. This paper proposes that the impact of India's language issue probably transformed the ethnic antagonism between Sinhalese and Tamils into an ethnic conflict.

2. Ethnic Rivalry before the Language Issue in Sri Lanka

It was around the issue of legislative representation that the ethnic rivalry between Sinhalese and Tamils started to evolve in the early 20th century. Despite the Tamils being the minority group of people in Sri Lanka (12% against 70% of Sinhalese), they had been given parity status with Sinhalese in the legislative council by the British colonial rulers for nearly five decades after 1833 reforms. Even after that, Tamil representation was disproportionately high. Tamil leaders intended to maintain this ratio in any reform (Wilson 2000, 59). Yet with the introduction and expansion of voting rights, Sinhalese representation was all set to increase. However, to Tamils' dismay, the pledge made to allocate the Western Province seat in the legislative council to Tamils was broken by the Sinhalese leaders in 1921. This led the Tamils' withdrawal from the Ceylon National Congress in 1921, hence, marked the beginning of the ethnic rivalry between Sinhalese and Tamils. Such a pledge was believed as necessary to console the Tamils and to bring them into a common organisation for national independence. Yet, as Sinhalese could not keep the promise, Tamils broke away and they later formed their own, Ceylon Tamil League. Gunasingam (1999, 218) asserts that it was the beginning of Tamil nationalism. Since then, the issue of representation was the determining factor of ethnic rivalry till mid 1950s. It was particularly evident during major constitutional reforms in 1931 and 1947. In both occasions, the intention of Tamil leaders was to

maintain the parity status with Sinhalese in the legislative council. For today's democratic standards and norms, it might look irrational that Tamils, a minority of 12% of the population, sought such a parity with Sinhalese. However, it is understandable that they desperately wanted to retain the privileged status that they had been enjoying for nearly a century under the British. Tamil leaders even opposed the Donoughmore Commission's proposal to introduce universal franchise on the grounds that it would establish a rule of the majority community (Withanawasam 2007, 56). Their opposition was so strong that the renowned Tamil leader, P. Ramanathan travelled all the way to London to persuade British authorities in vain to reverse the decision (62). In 1939, G. G. Ponnambalam, the leader of the Tamil community at the time, demanded 50:50 or balanced representation. According to the proposed formula, 50% of the seats in the Legislative Council must be allocated for minorities, in which Tamils would certainly hold the decisive power. He was so determined and 'inflexible' that he did not even agree to a compromised formula of 60:40 proposed by the Sinhalese (Wilson 2000, 68).

Tamil leadership had been maintaining such a serious and rigid stance on the issue of representation, when the worst in that regard happened. The Sinhalese dominant government of the newly independent Sri Lanka deprived almost the entire Indian Tamil community in Sri Lanka of voting rights in 1948. Indian Tamils comprised of more than a half of Tamils in Sri Lanka at the time and hence it reduced Tamil representation in the legislature dramatically. Although it might have been the spontaneous turning point for radical Tamil nationalist political activism, it did not turn out to be so. Instead, G. G. Ponnambalam joined the same government and interestingly, his decision was overwhelmingly endorsed by Tamils in the election, several years later. Tamils voted for him against the newly formed Ceylon Tamil State Party (ITAK) - a group of dissidents who held that Ponnambalam had betrayed the Tamil cause by joining the government that had disenfranchised Indian Tamils.

It is noteworthy that the voting rights of a section of Tamils were suddenly denied in a context where Tamil leaders were demanding a scheme of equal representation. Therefore, it can be said that the conditions were set for a radical agitation among Tamils. Yet, the ACTC leadership became even more collaborating with the government. However, if we examine the characteristics of the ethnic rivalry during that period, we would find that the willingness of both parties to reach a compromise at some stage of an issue was not uncommon. It effectively prevented a spiral escalation of the prevailing ethnic rivalry and antagonism into a fully fledged ethnic conflict. Even though the ITAK was purposely founded to radicalise Tamils on the issue of disenfranchisement of Indian Tamils, which was the gravest of all issues of Tamil representation, it desperately failed in its ambitious attempt.

However, the political scene started to change dramatically in the mid 1950s with the emergence of the official language issue. Both ethnic groups abandoned their flexible and compromisable policies within a few years and their new hardline positions were endorsed overwhelmingly by their respective communities in the 1956 general election.

3. Original Positions of Each Community Regarding Language

The demand to replace English as the official language with Sinhalese and Tamil was first made in the 1920s (de Silva and Wriggins 1988, 152). Interestingly, a Tamil organisation, Jaffna Youth Congress, took the lead in this regard. First, the demand took the form of educational reforms that sought the use of mother tongue in education (153). However, this enthusiasm did not last for a long time. Tamils soon became indifferent towards the *Swabasha* demand, as they did not like to abandon their advantageous position, which they had obtained as a result of the English education provided by missionary schools in Jaffna (Sivarajah 2007, 22). Conversely, the language issue started to take the centre stage among Sinhalese politics, especially after the introduction of universal suffrage. In 1935, Ceylon National Congress demanded the use of Sinhalese and Tamil as the media of instructions in schools. Marxists moved a resolution in the legislative council in 1936 to allow Sinhalese and Tamil to be used in proceedings in the law courts and entries in police records (de Silva and Wriggins 1988, 153). In 1939, Ceylon National Congress passed a resolution to make Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages in the country (154). J. R. Jayewardene, who played the leading role to pass that resolution, moved a similar motion in to the State Council in November, 1943. Although it became controversial since it had excluded Tamil, an amendment was then moved by a Tamil member to include Tamil as well in 1944 and it was passed (155). By that time, Sinhalese nationalists had already started an agitation to make Sinhalese the only official language and its influence was seen even among the mainstream politicians to a certain extent. However, it was not so powerful to alter the two language policy in the council altogether at that moment (156, 158).

4. Language Issue in India

Years before the language became divisive and controversial in Sri Lanka, India had been experiencing it. Although, religion was the main source for conflict in India, language too became a contentious issue in the early 20th century for two reasons. Firstly, the Hindu-Muslim religious conflict had a linguistic aspect, that the two groups identified Hindi and Urdu respectively as integral parts of their religious identity. The two languages had much in common to the extent that they were mostly considered a single language despite the two different writing systems and minor differences in their vocabulary. However, the two communities were more concerned about those differences than similarities, as the religious conflict was looming. Secondly, linguistic minorities such as Tamils were concerned about the emerging Hindi domination, which, they believed, would eventually wipe out their cultural identities.

The beginning of the language issue in India was quite unnoticed. It started with the proposal to make Hindi the lingua franca one day in a free India. As early as 1917 in a conference held in Gujarat, Mahatma Gandhi emphasised the need for a common national language as the official language of the country to unite the nation. Enlisting five criteria for a language to become the national language, Gandhi concluded that it was Hindi and not English that would be qualified for

the purpose (Sengupta 2020). He founded *Hindi Prachar Sabha* in 1918 and it was later renamed as *Rastra Bhasha Prachar Samiti*, or the *State Language Propagation Society* (Sengupta 2018, 104).

From the beginning, Gandhi was concerned about the religious sentiments of Muslims. Therefore, he soon started to use the term *Hindustani* in the place of Hindi. His intention was to introduce an infusion of Hindi and Urdu (Teli 2012, 138). The spoken forms of the two languages were almost identical to each other at the village level. However, there was a considerable gap between Sanskritised Hindi and Persianised Urdu while the written forms were completely different from each other, which used Devanagari and Persian scripts respectively. In that context, such an infusion was practically quite hard to achieve. Therefore, although Gandhi was certain on discarding English, he was uncertain about the real features of the language he himself proposed (139).

As the ethno-religious consciousness of both communities grew and the gap between the two groups widened, the possibility to develop a common language became increasingly more difficult. The religionization of the language manifested as Sanskritisation of Hindi and Persianisation of Urdu. Gandhi, who had been seeking for similarities, was troubled and voiced against the trend (Sengupta 2018, 105). However, the linguistic aspect was eventually overshadowed by the intensity of the real religious conflict. With the secession of Pakistan, of which the official language happened to be Urdu, the need for such a difficult and complicated effort to accommodate Urdu disappeared. Thus, the decades long effort of creating a common language, combining Hindi and Urdu, came to an end, with the triumph of Hindi. Yet, Gandhi had to pay the price. He was assassinated. The assassin proclaimed in the trial courts that one reason for the assassination was Gandhi's attempt to pollute 'the charm and purity of Hindi language ... to please the Muslims' (Kumar 2017).

Although, the Hindu-Urdu controversy practically ended there, with the clear prospects of Hindi becoming the sole official language, the anti-Hindi campaign in South India intensified. Tamil nationalist ideology and activism against the Brahmanical and Aryan dominance was not new. From the late 19th century, it had been developing. The pioneers of that ideology argued that Dravidians including Tamils had settled in North Indian regions before the arrival of Aryans and 'the ancient Dravidian culture and literary works were purer when compared with the contemporary state of Tamil language, literature and culture which had been corrupted by Brahmanical culture' (Vaithees 2015, 31). As far as the religious aspect is concerned, Tamilnadu Saivite Hindu revivalism was only developed decades later than Sri Lankan Tamil Saivites began such a revival in Jaffna to face the Christian missionary activities (21). However, Tamils in India pioneered the linguistic revivalism.

Ramaswamy (1997, 6) asserts that the Tamil language started to be transformed into an object of devotion, *Tamilpparru*, since the late 19th century and it produced 'the modern Tamil subject – *Tamilan*, the *Tamilian* – an entity whose subjectivity merges into the imagined self of Tamil'. The Tamil language was identified as divine in the religious sense, while classical in secular sense – one of the oldest of languages – by Tamil linguistic nationalists (245). While such a language loyalty was growing among Tamils, they were first troubled by the Brahminic dominance that denied their rights, dignity and opportunities. For instance, even though Brahmins were only 3% and non-Brahmins were 90% of the population of Madras Presidency, 4,074 Brahmins graduated during the first ten years from 1901 from Madras University, while the figure was only 1,035 for non-Brahmins (Gandhi 2018). As a result, the *Justice Party* was founded in 1916 by several educated Tamils, who were inspired by liberal ideas. Later in 1925, Periyar Ramasamy founded the *Self-Respect Movement*. Language acquired the centre stage of the anti-Brahminic politics eventually.

The anti-Hindi ideology transformed into a political campaign in 1937, when Hindi was made a compulsory language in schools in Madras by newly elected chief minister of Indian National Congress (INC). Tamil leaders such as Periyar Ramasami and Pannirselvam started a mass agitation against the perceived subjugation of Tamils by North Indians. A year later, Ramasamy introduced the concept and slogan of *Tamil Nadu*, a separate state for Tamils (Jeyaraman 2013, 44-47). It soon developed into a mass protest; thousands were arrested; two died in police custody; Ramasamy and Annadurai were jailed. Even though, the situation returned to normalcy, after the decision was reversed by the Governor, in the aftermath of INC's resigning of the government, the anti-Hindi agitation would have a lasting impact (36-43).

In 1940s, as Sanskrit was being glorified in the North, a campaign for the purity of Tamil language started in the South. Tamil language loyalists urged the authorities to coin technical terms using ancient Tamil in classics and pure Tamil root words, instead of Sanskrit (Venkatachalapathy 1995, 122). It should be noted here that although Gandhi discouraged the Sanskritisation of Hindi in the North, he praised and encouraged the Sanskritisation of Dravidian languages, believing it would help to reduce the gap between Indian languages (Teli 2012, 139, 140). During the formation of the constitution, Ambedkar even proposed to make Sanskrit the official language of the country, considering it as the mother of all other Indian languages (Kosalendradas 2018). In such a context, it is understandable to see a revival of Tamil linguistic nationalism. The campaign was not entirely limited to a language purification effort, 'but was closely tied to the forging of a new identity based largely on language' (Venkatachalapathy 1995, 126). The most vital aspect of this language identity and nationalism was its emphasis on equality among Tamils regardless of their castes (Price 1996, 366).

In 1944, the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) or Dravidian Federation was founded to protect the Dravida Tamil heritage, which was perceived to be secular and egalitarian. Five years later, the younger leadership broke away from DK to form Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) or Federation for the Progress of Dravidians to face the new challenges and to take the advantage of new opportunities after independence (Price 1996, 363, 364).

After the independence with partition, Hindi language loyalists did not see any obstacle to impose Hindi as the sole official language. Moreover, they wanted to have a Hindi-Hindustan in the face of Urdu-Pakistan. However, Tamils were not ready to accept this 'Hindi imperialism' forced on them and they intended to work for a separate Dravidistan or Dravida Nadu for the Dravidian people (Fazal 2012, 167). Price (1996, 368) asserts that Tamils started to 'see themselves

as a nation with a specific history and culture, like other peoples. DMK supporters argued that the Tamils constituted a major nation in the world, or should become one'.

One important development in anti-Hindi agitation was the introduction of self-immolation as a method of protest. When the Congressman M. Bhaktavatsalam became the Chief Minister of Madras, the protests intensified as it appeared that Hindi would again be included in school curricular (Sriram 2014). The devotion to Tamil as well as the resentment to Hindi dominance among Tamils were so high at the time to the extent that one man set himself on fire in 1964, shouting 'death to Hindi, may Tamil flourish', and another five men followed his example a year later (Ramaswamy 1997, 1). These martyrs have been remembered ever since.

5. The Influence on Sri Lanka's Language Issue

The language issue in India influenced both Sinhalese and Tamils to form their positions as well as their activism in the 1940s and 50s.

As has been mentioned earlier, Sinhalese leaders were not only the supporters but also the movers of the proposal to make both Sinhala and Tamil the official languages of the country in the 1930s. By 1954, the two leading Sinhalese political parties, however, changed their original stances to a Sinhala-only policy. As de Silva and Wriggins (1988, 152) observe the beginning of Swabasha movement in Sri Lanka itself was impacted by the similar movement in India several decades earlier. Therefore, it can be assumed that the impact continued to shape the contents and characteristics of the Sinhalese language loyalty thereafter as well. When the main features of the Sinhalese stance on official language in the 1950s is examined, the evidence of such an influence could be seen.

Both S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and J. R. Jayewardene, the most prominent among the mainstream political leaders who propagated for making Sinhala the official language, were great admirers of the Indian National Congress and its leaders, particularly Mahatma Gandhi. Bandaranaike's political campaign for indigenization was directly influenced by Gandhi's ideas. He even replicated the main feature of Gandhi's Swadeshi Movement, the use of Charkha or the spinning wheel, in various forms in his propaganda. Bandaranaike widely used a photograph of him that happened to be identical to that of Gandhi with his famous spinning wheel. He published a book in 1933, *The spinning wheel and the paddy feild*, which wholeheartedly agreed with Gandhi's critique of modern industrialisation and endorsed his alternative economic model (Bandaranaike 1933). Bandaranaike's self indigenization process had clear hallmarks of Indian leaders' similar efforts, such as adopting national attires and admiring native cultures. Thus, Bandaranaike carefully followed Gandhi and INC for modeling his organization, formulating the ideology and building his public image.

J. R. Jayewardene's admiration of Gandhi and INC was more remarkable since he was attached to a pro-Western and conservative political camp. He was inspired by Gandhi, from his young age. As a student of Law College, he unveiled a portrait of Gandhi in the campus to protest the imprisonment of the Indian leader (de Silva and Wriggins, 1988, 63, 64). Jayewardene's affinity with the INC greatly impacted to shape his political views (78) and he aspired to transform the Ceylon National Congress to 'a replica of the powerful Indian organisation' (103). As a joint-Secretary of the Ceylon National Congress, Jayewardene even participated in an INC session in Ramgarh in 1940. He replicated it when he organized CNC's annual sessions, several months later (119). Jayewardene was unique among other leaders in his political camp for his strong advocacy of indigenization.

It was these two leaders, the greatest admirers of the INC and Gandhi at the time, who eventually became the champions of the Swabasha course in the 1940s and 50s.

Sinhalese leaders seemingly borrowed the arguments of Gandhi and others in INC. As has been mentioned earlier, Gandhi argued in favour of making Hindustani the sole official language for two reasons, to build national identity and national unity. Accordingly, English must be replaced with a native language to build national identity; and a single official language was needed to uphold national unity. When these two criteria were applied to the Sri Lankan context, it is Sinhala that must be made the official language. Gandhian arguments on language broke the ideological barriers of the Sri Lankan political elite to accept the demands that the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists had been making so far. Therefore, it can be said that the example of India was instrumental to bring the *Sinhala Only* demand to the political mainstream. Bandaranaike and Jayewardene's speeches in the State Council over the official language in 1940s echoed the ideas of Gandhi on the crucial importance of language with regard to building national identity and unity (de Silva and Wriggins 1988, 157). By the 1950s, India became the most cited example in Sri Lankan debates on language. Sinhalese politicians, Buddhist monks and nationalist political activists argued in favour of a single native language as the official language, citing India as the example (Coperahewa 1996, 136-146).

However, it was the fear generated by the aggressive, radical Tamil linguistic nationalism in South India that impacted more on the shaping of Sinhala linguistic nationalism than the ideological encouragement from the North. Many researchers regard Sinhalese as 'a majority with a minority complex' (Tambiah 1986, 92, Coomaraswamy 1984, 176). The main reason to develop such a complex was the existence of a large Tamil population in India that made Sinhalese a small minority in a South Indian context. Apart from that, the history of the country was full of invasions from South India. Moreover, Sri Lankan Tamils were considered a privileged, higher ranked and a strong community. For these reasons, when the country was approaching independence, Sinhalese feared that India would either annex the country or assist Tamils to dominate over them after the British leave. To intensify fear, some Sri Lankan Tamil leaders as well as Indian diplomats advocated a federation of India and Sri Lanka (Wilson 2000, 58, Amarasinghe and Jayawardane 2020) and some South Indian Tamil leaders even proposed a Greater Dravida Nadu that would include parts of Sri Lanka (Jeyaraj 2017). In such a setting, when Sinhalese saw an increasingly radical Tamil linguistic nationalist campaign spreading throughout South India, they grew anxious. J. R. Jayewardene's following statement demonstrates the fear among Sinhalese at the time.

The great fear I had was that Sinhalese being a language spoken by only 3,000,000 people in the whole world would suffer or may be entirely lost in time to come if Tamil is also placed on an equal footing with it in this country. The influence of Tamil literature, a literature used in India by over 40,000,000 and the influence of Tamil films and Tamil culture in the country, I thought, might be detrimental to the future of the Sinhalese language (Hansard 1944, Vol. I, Column 748, quoted in de Silva and Wriggins 1988, 157).

The above statement is about the situation in 1943. Within the next ten years, Tamil agitation grew rapidly and intensely in India, so did the Sinhalese' fears of them. For Sinhalese, the only barrier that could stop a probable Tamil dominance would be their domestic political power. The proponents of *Sinhala only* policy widely used the situation in India to justify their cause. On one hand, they explained the danger of having two official languages, referring to the aggressive nature of Tamil linguistic nationalism in India. On the other hand, they used North Indian arguments to establish the necessity and viability of a single official language. A leading Buddhist monk, Rev Bambarende Siri Seevali, questioned why Sri Lanka could not make Sinhalese the sole official language, if India had done so with Hindi while it was spoken only by 40% of the people (Coperahewa 1996, 142). Advocates of *Sinhala only* frequently cited the example of India to prove that national unity could better be achieved with a single official language (136, 145).

Impact of India's linguistic conflict on Sri Lankan Tamils was more visible than on Sinhalese. Owing to its size and the historical significance for Tamils, South India always had the eligibility to be the centre of Tamil politics. However, until the language problem emerged, Sri Lankan Tamils seemingly had looked at India as a whole for political inspiration rather than South India alone. When Tamils in India entered into collision course with the North over the language, Tamils in Sri Lanka then realized their similarities with the South. Moreover, they found that the claims and ambitions of the North were similar to those of Sinhalese. Therefore, the conditions were set for Sri Lankan Tamils to closely observe the developments in India as well as to follow their offshore kins.

South Indian influence on Sri Lankan Tamil politics is clearly evident. For example, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which was founded to fight for a separate Tamil state, adopted DMK's party symbol *udaya suriyan* (rising sun) as its symbol. The *Udaya Suriyan* had a history. DMK chose it after M. Karunanidhi's stage play with the same title in 1950, which was banned later. The rising sun symbolised the 'rising spirit of Dravidian people' (Isaac 2016). Interestingly, the other Tamil group in Sri Lanka, Tamils of Indian origin or Upcountry Tamils, adopted *rooster* as the symbol of their political organization - the Ceylon Workers Congress. As the DMK was not registered yet, many members of the party had to contest for the 1957 elections under a different symbol, the *rooster* (Isaac 2016). However, the influence was indeed far greater than that. It particularly became vital with regard to uniting as well as radicalizing Sri Lankan Tamils.

As has been mentioned above, South Indian Tamils forged a new ethnic identity based on language, disregarding caste differences. Further, DK and DMK leaders including Ramasamy, Annadurai and Karunanidhi were all atheists and those organizations strictly adhered to egalitarianism and secularism (Jeyaraman 2014, Venkatesh 2015, Deccan Chronicle 2018). Apart from their intention to bring the much needed reforms to the traditional Tamil society, Tamil nationalist leaders used secularism and egalitarianism to achieve two other objectives as well: to discredit Sanskrit and Brahminical Hindu hegemony and to unite Tamils against it. As Brahminical Hinduism propagated social hierarchy and stratification, egalitarianism and secularism became necessary features of the antithesis of it. These two principles were instrumental to unite all Tamil sub-groups around an identity solely based on language.

Tamil politics of Sri Lanka had been different to that of India until Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) was formed. It was dominated by the majority Hindu Vellalas of Jaffna, the privileged community in every sphere in Sri Lankan Tamil society. They wished to maintain the status quo. Although they were challenging Sinhalese dominance and entitlement claims, they relied heavily on contemporary social status and origin myths of Jaffna Tamils to justify their counter claims rather than on uniting of all Tamils, for their combined strength. By the time of independence while all the Sinhala speaking people became united as Sinhalese, subduing internal divisions, Tamils failed to do so. Tamil speaking Muslims and Tamils of Indian origin were not regarded as Tamil and they even established their own political organizations. Further, Christians, low caste Tamils and Tamils outside of Jaffna were all considered as lower status. They tolerated dominance of Jaffna Vellalas in Tamil politics, but did not actively participate in it. This was evident in 1947 elections. All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), the leading Tamil party at the time, performed exceptionally well in Jaffna, while they lost in Vanni and did not even contest for Batticaloa and Mannar districts as well as Up-country Indian Tamil areas (elections.gov.lk).

In such a context, ITAK founder S. J. V. Chelvanayagam could have been identified as a person ahead of time, if the South Indian influence on him had been neglected. He introduced egalitarianism and secularism along with an ethnic identity, that was solely based on language, into Tamil politics, at a time people did not see it as necessary. There is little doubt that Chelvanayagam closely followed South Indian Tamil politics at the time and was inspired by it. As has been mentioned above, although secularism and egalitarianism were needed for South Indians to fight with Brahminic Hindu dominance, there was no such a necessity of those principles for Sri Lankan Tamils to fight with Sinhalese.

This was particularly true regarding secularism. As South Indian Tamils were ranked lower within the same religion, they had to be secular to get rid of that stratification and repression. Conversely, Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils predominantly belonged to two different religions. At the same time, Sinhalese were promoting Buddhism as one of the two major components, along with Sinhala language, of their ethnic identity. Under those circumstances, Hinduism should have been a prominent part of Sri Lankan Tamil identity as a means of highlighting their ethnic distinctiveness. Had it been so, it would be seen as the natural progression of Arumuga Navalar's revival movement as well as the Tamil political culture so far. It should be noted here that even British regarded the representative of the Tamils in the Legislative Council

must be a Hindu. While Christians were continuously appointed as the Sinhalese representative, a Christian was rejected to be appointed for the Tamil seat, on the grounds that he was non-Hindu. Moreover, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, the most beloved and respected Tamil politician in his time, along with his contemporaries, had constructed a variety of Tamil politics that emphasized Hindu values (Vythilingam 1971). If these factors had had the greater impact on Chelvanayagam, he would not have propagated secularism. Therefore, it can be concluded that the probable cause for introduction of secularism was the influence of ideological and political impact of South India.

As was mentioned above, unlike in South India, the favourable structural conditions for emergence of egalitarianism were not sufficiently available in Sri Lankan Tamil society. As the majority of Tamils were high-caste Vellalas and were dominant in Tamil politics, the recently introduced universal franchise did not demand a social reform. Equally, the introduction of egalitarianism would have even made the majority of Tamils unhappy and thereby would have decreased popular support. Therefore, the only plausible explanation for introducing egalitarianism into Sri Lankan Tamil politics is the influence from South India.

The desired ethnic identity for Tamils by ITAK was an identity solely based on language. Therefore, the party started to use the term 'Tamil speaking people' instead of *Tamil*, as the latter referred to only one of three Tamil speaking communities, the Sri Lankan Tamil. When Tamils of Indian origin, otherwise referred to as Estate Tamils or Up-country Tamils, were disenfranchised and decitizenised in 1948, Chelvanayagam and several others perceived it as a grave injustice against Tamils, which should be dealt with seriously. However, not only the leadership of the ACTC, but also the majority of Sri Lankan Tamils did not even recognise *Tamils of Indian origin* as Tamils. The reality was that Jaffna Tamil Vellalas were not prepared to accept those poor, low-caste, uneducated, recently migrated slave-like labourers as their kins. For them, such an inclusion would diminish the pride of the community. This perception might have led the Tamil elite to accept (or most probably to be happy about) the categorisation of Indian Tamils as a separate group from 1911 census, which had been a single group called *Tamil* till then. Interestingly, Sinhalese and Muslims, who had been divided as Up-country and Low-country Sinhalese and Sri Lankan and Indian Muslims respectively, became single ethnic groups, while Tamils turned out to be divided. Therefore, when ACTC joined the same government that had decitizenised Indian Tamils just a few months ago, it did not surprise or annoy Tamils. Under such circumstances, the decision made by Chelvanayagam to break away from ACTC was a testimony to his seriousness and dedication to the idea of a single Tamil ethnicity based on language that would necessarily include Tamils of Indian origin. Sri Lankan Tamils obviously lacked such a consciousness at the time as evident through their overwhelming endorsement of ACTC in the next election.

Thus, there is little evidence for favourable conditions in Sri Lankan Tamil politics in the late 1940s for the development of secularism and egalitarianism as well as the idea of Tamil identity based on language. Therefore, the only probable cause could be the ideological influence from South India. The fact that the influence was from India, thus an outside influence, could have been the reason that prevented the formation of a unified ethnic identity based on language for Tamils, by including Tamils of Indian origin and Tamil speaking Muslims. However, it succeeded in uniting the already existing Sri Lankan Tamil ethnicity, subduing caste, regional and religious divisions to a great extent, at least for the Tamil nationalist campaign. As a result, even though the ACTC had been confined into Jaffna peninsula, ITAK was able to become the dominant force in all predominantly Tamil areas after 1956. Further, despite its limits, egalitarianism opened the path for non-Vellalas to come to the leadership positions in politics to the extent that a Karaiyar, Velupillai Prabhakaran, became the undisputed leader of Tamils.

Apart from uniting Sri Lankan Tamils, the South Indian politics influenced radicalization of Tamil politics in Sri Lanka as well.

Founding of ITAK marked the beginning of radicalization of Tamil politics. Interestingly, the party was formed by a breakaway group of ACTC in December 1949, merely three months after Annadurai left Dravida Kazagam (DK) to found DMK. Although Chelvanayagam might have been influenced by Annadurai's decision to leave the party to form a new one, he along with his party was evidently inspired by Periyar Ramasamai as well, for radical Tamil nationalist ideas.

Sri Lankan Tamil radicalism comprised of two aspects; separatist ideology and radical methods. Anti-Brahminicism had soon developed into a Tamil separatism in South India. Tamil leaders such as Periyar Ramasamy and Annadurai feared that a *Swaraj*, a free India, would certainly become a Brahminic, Aryan and Hindi dominant state. Therefore, they opposed *Swaraj* and demanded a separate state for Tamils. Their argument was based on the fact that India was a colonial construct. Hence, they had the right to rule themselves, as they had done for centuries before the Western colonialists included their lands into a single political unit called *India*. Moreover, some Tamils even argued that there had been a Dravidian civilization before the arrival of alien Aryans, who replaced the more egalitarian Dravida system with a caste system that have been discriminating Tamils ever since (Jeyaraj 2017). For these reasons, South Indian Tamil leaders at the time held the view that demanding a separate state for Tamils was historically and politically correct. With the imposition of Hindi in 1938, Tamil leaders came up with their demand more openly. First they aspired for a separate province with Tamil as the administrative language. However, it quickly grew into a more radical nationalism. T. P. Vedachalam, a leader of Justice Party, formed *Tamil Thesa Viduthalai Sangam* (Tamil Nation Liberation Society) to campaign for a separate state (Jeyaraj 2017). The following years saw an ever increasing yearning among Tamils for Tamil Nadu, which was later modified as Dravida Nadu to include other South Indian linguistic groups as well. In *Dravida Nadu Secession Conference* in 1940, Periyar Ramasamai displayed a map of future Dravida Nadu and a few months later they declared that the Dravida Nadu should be an independent state (Jeyaraj 2017).

Before the ITAK was formed, Sri Lankan Tamils had been seeking for *sharing power in the centre*, as evident through their demand of communal representation, their opposition to universal franchise and demand for balanced or 50:50 representation. It was the ITAK that changed it into territorial politics that demanded *self rule* for areas of Tamil

speaking people, either in the form of a separate state or a federal unit. Even though the leaders preferred to identify their party as 'Federal Party' in both Sinhala and English, the actual meaning of *Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi* was *Lanka (Ceylon) Tamil State Party*. Given the geographical and demographical conditions, a separate state for Tamils would neither be viable nor practical. Moreover, Sri Lankan Tamils at the time were certainly not ready to consider such a radical demand. Particularly, Sinhala was not made the sole official language yet, which would be considered the turning point of Tamil nationalist campaign. Despite all those adverse and unfavourable conditions, the ITAK continued to use its Tamil name, which 'had definite emotional undertones since it referred to a Ceylon Tamil state' (Wilson 1966, 118). Chelvanayagam once responded to the criticisms of using different party names in different languages, emphasizing that 'Tamil Arasu meant Tamil State, whether sovereign or autonomous' (Gunasingham 2016, 502).

At least at the time of its inception, the idea of a nation and a state of Tamil speaking people in Sri Lanka was driven by ideology rather than an outcome of contemporary domestic conditions. That ideology or at least the main ingredients for such an ideology certainly came from South India. Its alienness was proved by the fact that it would not be a reality in Sri Lankan Tamil politics. For example, although the ITAK introduced the term and concept of *Tamil speaking people* particularly to persuade Tamils of Indian origin (Indian or Up-country Tamils) to join them, they would never identify themselves within such an ethnic identity. They continued to regard their recent migration from India and common occupation (as plantation workers) as deterministic for their identity rather than language. Similarly, Muslims considered their religion as the sole factor of their group identity.

Apart from that, the South Indian influence could be seen in supportive ideological constructs of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. Particularly, the ITAK claimed Tamils as a distinct nation and sons of soil of the North and the East. For the purpose, they utilized similar constructs by South Indians, such as Dravidas were the original inhabitants of India while Aryans were late comers and invaders.

Radical tactics that had been used by South Indian Tamil language loyalists were seemingly imitated by the ITAK along with their linguistic nationalist ideology. During the protests against the decision to make Hindi compulsory in Schools in Madras in 1937, Stalin Jagadeesan started a fast unto death for the sake of Tamil language. Annadurai vowed to follow him, if he died. Even though he did not die, he became a role model among Tamils. Later, two protesters died in police custody. They had refused to accept the conditions set by police for their release. Their sacrifice and martyrdom would be remembered ever since (Sriram 2014). During the Kallakudi protests in 1953, Karunanidhi introduced railway blockades to South India, by lying down on tracks to stop the train movements. When he was arrested, several other batches followed him and the protest soon became uncontrollable. Two people were killed by police firing at the end (Rao 2018). In 1956, Sankaralinganar fasted unto death demanding to change the name of Madras to Tamilnadu (Sriram 2014). As has been mentioned earlier, Tamil language loyalists used self-immolation as a means of protests in later years. From its inception, Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist campaign was increasingly radical. Apart from the fact that their tactics had the hallmark of South Indian Tamil linguistic nationalist movement, the very decision to radicalize Tamils on language issue itself indicated the probable causality. It must be noted here that the Tamil politics before the ITAK was not mass based and radical.

Tamil nationalism in India started to recede, after the Indian government's decision to recognise linguistic states and to retain English too as a national language. Even though, the nationalist sentiments would be preserved in Tamil politics in a different form (Fazal 2012, 168), the breakaway groups, who had resented the DMK for its 'betrayal of Tamil cause', failed to attract popular support. Conversely, the battle between Sinhalese and Tamil linguistic nationalism spirally developed into a full-scale military conflict.

6. Conclusion

Although the vitality of Indian impact and intervention on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict in the 1980s was well-known and adequately researched, the impact and influence of India's language issue on initiating and shaping Sri Lanka's ethnic rivalry during the 1940s and 50s were not sufficiently studied. At least from 1937 to 1965, India had witnessed one of its greatest crises in modern history, the linguistic conflict between Sanskrit-Hindi loyalists of the North and Dravida-Tamil loyalists in the South. As North Indians emphasized the suitability of making Hindi the sole official language of the country, South Indians launched a mass-based radical campaign against the perceived Brahminic-Aryan-Hindi dominance. They developed a comprehensive Tamil linguistic nationalist ideology that propagated separatism. Further, their activism was radical to the extent that it included secular martyrdom as well. Both Sinhalese and Tamils were influenced by the contemporary political developments of its neighbour. Sinhalese became frightened of Tamils on one hand as they saw the aggressiveness of Tamil linguistic campaign in South India, while, on the other hand, they borrowed the ideas of the Hindi loyalists to justify their intention of making Sinhalese the sole official language. These made Sinhalese inflexible. At the same time, Tamils were inspired by Tamil linguistic nationalist ideology as well as radical activism in South India. That deterministically impacted Sri Lankan Tamils with regard to developing a radical nationalism among them. As has been mentioned above, these two nationalisms collided with each other and eventually resulted in an ethnic conflict.

7. References

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