

Affirmative Action Policies: The Sri Lankan Experience

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Abstract

Affirmative action policies or preferential policies came to Sri Lanka in the 1970s with the left of centre United Front government, and were confined to university admissions. Beginning as preferential policies designed to benefit the Sinhalese students they were transformed in the late 1970s to a regional quota system cutting across ethnic and religious identities. The introduction and implementation of preferential policies in Sri Lanka's university system, and the impassioned resistance to modifying them, much less to reversing them, provide an excellent introduction to the complex nature of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, and the political ramifications of rivalries between Muslims and Tamils, divisions among Tamils, and, of course, rivalries between Sinhalese and Tamils.

Despite appearances to the contrary language policy changes effected in the mid 1950s, were not affirmative action policies. Nor was any element of officially sanctioned ethnic preference in employment in the state sector.

I Introduction

In a well-known book on *Preferential Policies - An International Perspective*,¹ published in 1990, Thomas Sowell, of the Hoover Institution in Stanford, California, a black American scholar and a strong critic of affirmative action policies, treated Sri Lanka as a prominent example of the damaging impact of the introduction of such policies on a multi-ethnic society and polity. He identified the language policy changes effected in the years 1956-58 as heralding the introduction of such policies to Sri Lanka, while the controversial university admissions policies of the 1970s are treated as the second phase in the growth of affirmative action policies in Sri Lanka. Professor Robert Oberst, a political scientist at Nebraska Wesleyan University, who has a much longer acquaintance with Sri

Ethnic Studies Report, Vol. XV, No. 2, July 1997

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Lanka studies -- over the last 15 years or more -- than Sowell, goes further back than the mid 1950s to trace the genesis of the introduction of affirmative action policies in Sri Lanka -- in state-sector employment. Having first made this point in a wide-ranging, if tendentious, chapter "Policies of Ethnic Preference in Sri Lanka" in a book on *Ethnic Preference and Public Policy in Developing States*, published in 1986,² where he dealt with issues such as language policy and university admissions as well. He returned to these themes in 1996, very briefly, in the course of an article on "Tigers and the Lion: The Evolution of Sri Lanka's Civil War".³

In contrast to Thomas Sowell's references to Sri Lanka in his book, Robert Oberst's often quoted article published in 1986, is an inadequately researched essay in which conclusions are reached on very flimsy evidence. It lacks a historical perspective and more to the point is very selective in its use of sources. For someone who regards himself as an expert on Sri Lankan affairs, and is treated as such in the US, his essay on "Policies of Ethnic Preference in Sri Lanka," falls far short of the exacting standards of scholarship that should generally go with expertise.

His comments on such policies in his 1996 "Tigers and the Lion: The Evolution of Sri Lanka's Civil War" extracts of which are quoted below are even more tendentious than his longer article published ten years earlier.

"Without anti-majoritarian safeguards, the Sri Lankan government had taken a number of actions which benefitted only the majority community. Most significant of these is the Sinhala Only policy in 1956 which required the government to operate only in the Sinhala language. In the 1970s the government created a quota system to increase the number of Sinhalese to a level equivalent to their percentage in the population. This policy simultaneously reduced the number of Tamils admitted to the universities, and the issue of university admissions issue [sic] became a focal point.

"Even more insidious was the exclusion of Tamils from public sector employment. At the time of independence, Tamils were over-represented in the public service, creating a sense of resentment among many Sinhalese. The government moved to address the imbalances, and by the late 1970s very few Tamils were being allowed into public service jobs, the most desirable positions in Sri Lanka..."⁴

These two paragraphs may have been excusable in the case of a journalist -- on a hurried visit -- trying to explain to a not very well-

informed readership, at home, the essence of the problem in Sri Lanka, as he saw it. In the case of a man who claims expertise in the affairs of Sri Lanka they are a deplorable mixture of half-truths, inaccuracies and distortion of facts. The short cuts he indulges in, as for example the reference to “the Sri Lankan government” are inexcusable, because Sri Lanka has been well-known for changing its government through the ballot – on 6 occasions from 1956 to 1977, the incumbent government was defeated at the polls – and a scholar of Oberst’s standing should have indicated *which* government introduced the policies he refers to and, more to the point, show that these policies were often changed. Instead his comments convey the mistaken impression that a policy was converted to a legal enactment or an administrative regulation, and implemented in that form, without subsequent modification.

The second of the paragraphs quoted here is a collection of distortions of the truth. The fact of the matter is that there was no policy of *excluding Tamils from public sector employment*, nor is it correct to say that by “the late 1970s very few Tamils were *being allowed* (italics are by the present author) into public service jobs ...”

Thomas Sowell who makes no claim to expertise on Sri Lankan affairs, provides a refreshing contrast to Oberst in his approach to affirmative action policies in Sri Lanka. Even where one has reason to fault his judgement on some issues or disagree with his interpretations, one has to concede that he reaches his conclusion on the basis of a careful examination of the data he has gathered. His conclusions are judicious, and his assessments are always fair. Above all, an examination of his endnotes in the references to Sri Lanka will show that his reading has been much wider than Oberst’s and there has been much greater care in the search for evidence, and far greater discernment in the assessment of that evidence.

The purpose of this present article is to examine the scope and impact of affirmative action policies on Sri Lanka, and to do so through an examination of three themes, university admissions policies, language policy, and employment in the state sector, in that order. It will be shown how affirmative action policies first came to Sri Lanka as late as 1970, with the left of centre United Front (UF) coalition that won power at the general election of that year, and that from the outset they were limited to university admissions alone. Because of the world-wide attention Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict has received, analyses of the causes of the spread and growth in intensity of this conflict often treated the changes in University admission policies introduced in the early 1970s as a key factor in this, sometimes as a triggering factor and more often as an aggravating

factor. As the discussion below will show it is neither a key factor, nor a triggering factor; it was certainly an aggravating factor.

II University Admissions Policy

At the very outset of this part of the present article I need to make two points. First of all, I have had considerable personal knowledge of university admissions, first as a critic of the policies introduced in 1970 and then as a policy maker at the official non-political level, as a member of the University Grants Commission (UGC), and its Vice-Chairman. In this latter capacity I chaired an official committee in 1987 which investigated the impact of these policies on the Sri Lankan university system, and again in 1993 after I had left the UGC (I left in 1989) I chaired another official committee appointed for the same purpose.⁵ On both occasions the committees recommended a radical reform of the system and the gradual elimination of these preferences. The recommendations of these committees, especially those of the committee of 1987, are reviewed later in this article.

The second point I wish to make is that an examination of the introduction and implementation of preferential policies in Sri Lanka's university system, and the impassioned resistance to modifying them, much less to reversing them, provide an excellent introduction to the complex nature of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, and the political ramifications of the rivalries between Sri Lanka's minorities, Muslims against Tamils, divisions among Tamils, quite apart, of course, the wider theme of the rivalries between the Sinhalese and Tamils. It is not without significance that a Muslim Minister of Education, Badi-ud-din Mahmud was one of the prime movers in the introduction of these policies, and another Muslim Minister A C S Hameed successfully prevented the implementation of the reform of these policies in 1987 at the tail-end of J R Jayewardene's second term as Executive President.

Sri Lanka's politicians had long regarded university admissions as too important to be left to university administrators and teachers to handle on their own. Since the mid-1960s university places, i.e. the number of students to be admitted, and the basis of admission have been settled at the highest political level—the cabinet, no less. So it was in the 1970s, and so it is today. But it was in the 1960s, when Sinhalese and Tamil replaced English as the medium of instruction in the higher classes of the secondary schools, that political and ethnic pressures on the universities began to build up. The rapid growth of secondary education

resulted in intensified competition for entry to the universities, especially to the most esteemed of them, the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya. Such political pressure as there was in the 1960s had been for the expansion of the universities to accommodate ever-increasing numbers of students. The procedure for admission became a political issue from 1970 onwards with the victory of the United Front coalition. It then led to an acrimonious struggle among the main ethnic groups. The crux of the problem was that the indigenous Tamils who constituted 11.1% of the population—as distinct from the Indian Tamils of the plantation areas—had for years enjoyed a predominant position in the faculties of science, engineering and medicine of the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya and Colombo. This was partly a result of their higher rate of literacy in English and of the excellent facilities for education in science in the schools of the Jaffna district from which many of them entered the universities. In 1970, for instance, the Tamils had just over 35% of the admissions to the faculty of science; in engineering and medicine it was as high as 45%. With the changeover to *swabasha*—the indigenous languages, Sinhalese and Tamil—there were, in effect, two distinct streams of students seeking admission to the university, one educated in Sinhalese and the other in Tamil. In addition, a small group of students of almost all ethnic groups continued to be taught in English in the secondary schools and took the university examinations in English; they were mainly of British, Dutch or Portuguese extraction or the offspring of mixed marriages between Sinhalese and Tamils. Muslim students were also entitled to enrol in English medium classes. Since examiners graded answer scripts in one language stream only, it was a matter of time, before the superior performance of the Tamils was attributed to deliberate favouritism and grade inflation on the part of Tamil examiners. Late in 1970 the government introduced a lower qualifying mark for students who took the examinations in Sinhalese, in order that a politically acceptable ratio of Tamil to Sinhalese students could be admitted to the science, engineering and medical faculties of the University of Ceylon. Admissions to the humanities and social science courses did not present any great difficulty.

This fundamental and unilateral change in university admissions policy heralded the abandonment of the merit principle and the introduction of a system of affirmative action. Entrance to universities had hitherto been on the basis of academic achievement tested through rigorous competitive examinations.⁶ When Badi-ud-din Mahmud⁷ committed the UF government to a fundamental change in policy, to a system of standardisation by language media at the university entrance

examination, he was setting in motion a train of events which contributed to exacerbating Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. All marks were reduced to a uniform scale so that the number of students qualifying in each language became proportionate to the number sitting the examination in that medium. It was a device to neutralise the superior performance of Tamil medium students in science subjects, as depicted by raw marks. The result was that Tamil students had to obtain higher aggregate marks than their Sinhalese counterparts to gain admission to the science, engineering and medical faculties of the university. Not only was this system maintained for a few years after 1970, but other changes were introduced, all of which departed from the practice of selecting students on the basis of marks obtained at an open competitive examination. Among the changes was the district quota system, ostensibly involving a balance in favour of rural areas and backward communities. In fact it gave a decided advantage to the Sinhalese and—as we shall see—the Muslims.

Those who suffered most from the change were undoubtedly the Tamils of the north, although the Sinhalese in the city of Colombo and the crowded Colombo district fared badly too. The new university entrance policy of the 1970s made entry to scientific and technical education more difficult for the Tamils than it had been before. Thus the new policy on university admissions became an important factor in the deterioration of ethnic relations in the island in the 1970s, because it contributed to the alienation of Tamil youth of the north and east of the island. The new scheme of admissions was seen as a grossly unfair system, deliberately devised to place them at a disadvantage in the increased competition for admission to science-based faculties.

Although the Tamil political leadership protested strongly against the differential "qualifying marks" for Sinhalese and Tamil candidates the immediate effect of the change in terms of the number of Tamil students admitted to the science-based faculties was merely marginal,

“...a drop from 35.3% to 33.6%, and an actual increase in the aggregate from 337 to 359 ... [The] real significance of the change in 1971 [did] not lie in these figures. It marked the ascendancy of a group of Sinhalese [officials, and advisers] in the Ministry of Education, a group which firmly believed that some adjusting mechanism was necessary to give Sinhalese students a chance in competing for the coveted places in science-based courses at the University. It was this group which came up with the suggestion for media-wise standardisation for [the 1973 admission].”⁸

"Media-wise standardisation," to use the jargon of administrators, was a device to weight the marks of the candidates so that those qualifying for admission from each language group would be proportionate to the number who sat the examination in that language. The proponents of the measure argued that the difference in performance between Sinhalese and Tamil students must be attributed to qualitative differences in facilities, teaching or marking, and that "standardisation" was merely a way to mitigate the effect of such inequality. This was a baseless argument since there were as many such inequalities within each linguistic or ethnic group as there were between them.

However, as we have seen, the immediate effect on the numbers of Tamils entering the university was marginal, and far less damaging to Tamil interests, than the acrimony caused by the change suggested. Professor C R de Silva, a leading expert on the subject of the political agitation about university admissions policy in Sri Lanka, has pointed out that: "The Sri Lankan Tamils, though they constituted just 11.1% of the population provided about 30% of the science students in the secondary schools and the scheme of [media-wise] standardisation ensured that this proportion of places in the university accrued to them."⁹

In the next year a modification of the scheme was introduced, the "district quota" system. Clearly it was intended to satisfy two interest groups, the rural Sinhalese in general and those in the Kandyan areas in particular, and the Moor-Malay group. Both groups regarded themselves as "educationally backward"; neither was content with the changes in admissions policy after 1970; both had powerful sources of influence within the principal party in the UF coalition, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Since the Moor-Malay group were educated mainly in Tamil, "standardisation" pitted them against the Tamils in the intense competition for places in that medium of instruction, and they saw the contest as an intrinsically unequal one. Mahmud, leader of the Islamic Socialist Front within the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, was always mindful of their interests. The "district quota" system was designed to allocate university places in proportion to the total population resident in each district. The scheme benefited the Kandyan region, and the rural areas generally, as well as the Moors-Malays. A refinement of the system was devised to benefit this latter group. The criterion generally used in determining a student's district for purposes of this quota in the case of Sinhalese and Tamil students was the location of the schools from which they sat the examination. In the case of Moors-Malays, it was the district of birth. Thus a Sinhalese or Tamil student from an educationally

backward district who had won a scholarship to a Colombo secondary school and sat the examination from Colombo would be treated, for purposes of admission to the universities, as a student from the Colombo district. In contrast a Moor-Malay in the same circumstances would qualify for admission through his home district where the qualifying mark was substantially lower than for Colombo schools.

For the Tamils, the district quota system was a heavy blow: the percentage of university places in the science-based disciplines they held fell from 35.3% in 1970 to 20.9% in 1974 and 19% in 1975. In 1974, for the first time, there was a substantial fall in the absolute number of Tamils entering scientific courses, despite a continued expansion in the total intake of those courses.

The Sinhalese, on the other hand, gained substantially, although those resident in Colombo—and to a lesser extent in other urban areas—also suffered a drop in admissions; in scientific courses they constituted 75.5% in 1974, and this figure rose to 78.0% in 1975. Since they had over 86% of the places in the humanities and social sciences, Sinhalese students were in the same privileged position in the universities by this time, as were their politicians in the national legislature in terms of seats—an accurate measure of how the universities reflected the thrust of Sinhalese national politics. The Moors-Malays saw their number of admissions to scientific courses double between 1970 and 1975, even though they were still well below the ethnic proportion of 6-7% of the total population which some of their political leaders advocated as their due.

Opposition to these changes came swiftly and strongly. It came from the Tamils naturally enough, and, more effectively, from the Sinhalese of the urban areas of the south-west coast, but especially Colombo and its suburbs. The question came before a cabinet sub-committee—the sectoral committee on social overheads, mass media and transport of the National Planning Council—which, in a report submitted early in October 1973, recommended the abolition of "media-wise standardisation," and commented adversely on the district quota system and the rationale behind it. Nevertheless, the committee did not carry its criticisms to their logical conclusion and recommend the abandonment of the district quota system. Eventually, it did recommend a complicated modification of the admissions system: 70% on "raw marks" and 30% on a district basis, of which half or 15% was to be reserved for what were termed educationally backward areas. When these proposals were submitted to the cabinet, only a modified district quota system was adopted—district quota places were granted to Jaffna and Colombo along with other districts, but "standardisation" was retained.

Figure I
University Admissions Policy

Prior to 1965
- Universities conducted their own entrance examinations.
1966 – 1970
- Admissions were centrally controlled through the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE). They were based on aggregates of marks from 4 subjects at the GCE (A/L) examination. The criterion was the order of merit only.
1970
- Standardisation by media introduced. Students to science-based courses were admitted on the basis of separate pre-determined minimum mark levels applicable to each of the three language media.
1971
- The principle of standardisation of marks was extended from language medium to subjects as well.
1974
- The principle of district quotas was introduced for the first time. Eligible students were classified according to the administrative districts from which they had taken the GCE (A/L) examination. Students were selected in the order of merit of standardised marks. The number of places available for each course of study was allocated to the districts in proportion to their general population.

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1976											
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 70% of the places in each course were filled according to the order of merit on an all island basis as determined by the standardised marks obtained at the GCE (A/L) examination. The remaining 30% were filled on a district basis. - The concept of “educationally under-privileged districts” was introduced in this year and one-half of the places to be filled on the district basis i.e. 15% of the total number of places was reserved for students from 10 districts classified as being “educationally under-privileged”. 											
<p>These districts were:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">1. Ampara</td> <td style="width: 50%;">6. Monaragala</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Anuradhapura</td> <td>7. Nuwara Eliya</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Badulla</td> <td>8. Polonnaruwa</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Hambantota</td> <td>9. Trincomalee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Mannar</td> <td>10. Vavuniya</td> </tr> </table>		1. Ampara	6. Monaragala	2. Anuradhapura	7. Nuwara Eliya	3. Badulla	8. Polonnaruwa	4. Hambantota	9. Trincomalee	5. Mannar	10. Vavuniya
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A Three-tier Admissions Policy, 1977 and After

The reversal of the controversial university admissions policy of the UF government was announced on 4 August, 1977 by a new government, just after it had taken office. Given all that had happened in regard to university admissions between 1970 and 1977, this was a bold decision, even for a government that had inflicted overwhelming defeat on its opponents and now commanded an overwhelming majority in parliament.¹⁰ It took several months, however, to reach even an untidy compromise, a matter of makeshift and expedience rather than of strict adherence to abstract principles. Before it could set about this complicated and time-consuming business, the government had to cope with the communal riots that erupted unexpectedly in August 1977 a few weeks after it came to power. At the time admissions to the universities for 1977 were being dealt with, the country had hardly recovered from the communal riots.

It was necessary therefore to step warily through the minefields of "university admissions." Professor C R de Silva has summarised the main features of the problem confronting the government:

"When the marks were processed it became clear that if district quotas and standardisation were not applied, the Tamils would considerably outnumber the Sinhalese in the much sought after faculties of Medicine and Engineering. Some inkling of this situation reached the members of Sinhalese nationalist groups. Assertions were made by them that Tamil examiners had inflated marks. A one-day strike by all Sinhalese secondary school children in protest against government policy was planned [in February 1978] and indeed, this was only averted by the closure of all government schools for the day and by taking into custody several of the alleged organizers."¹¹

Among the latter were a few of the leading lights of the *Sinhala Tharuna Sanvidhanaya*, (literally, the Sinhala Youth Organisation) a politically influential activist group who had agitated for the change in admission policy in 1970 and succeeded in their agitation, and who had helped organise opposition to the United Front government's decision to move away from the rigid district quota scheme that had prevailed from 1975.

The new government honoured its mandate by abandoning "standardisation" on the basis of the language in which students sat the examination for entry to the university. But it decided nevertheless that all students who would have gained admission had there been standardisation should be admitted. The 3,700 students originally admitted on the basis of "raw marks" were now joined by nearly 900 others, many of them Sinhalese. Subsequently, a third set of over 250 students, from what were called educationally underprivileged districts, were admitted to the universities.

This awkward but perhaps more prudent decision brought advantages to everyone. The Tamil political leadership tacitly accepted the compromise. They had good reason for satisfaction, for the number of Tamil entrants to the medical and engineering faculties rose by over 250% compared to the previous year. Indeed on the basis of this change, the proportion of Tamil students who entered scientific courses equalled or exceeded the 35-40% under the system of open competition in 1969-70 and 1970-71.¹² Those who had been agitating for an increase in total admissions to the universities had reason to be satisfied: admissions were up by 25%. The number of Sinhalese entering the universities also increased, especially from the rural areas.

From this stage onwards Sri Lanka's university admissions policy changed from one of ethnic preferences to one of regional

preferences in favour of rural areas --without regard to ethnicity or religion. A modification of the scheme of district preferences first introduced in the early 1970s was now elevated to the position of the central feature of university admissions policy, a position it retains to the present day.

By mid-1978 the whole question of university admissions had once more become a matter of acute political controversy, because many Sinhalese supporters of standardisation, distinctly unhappy with the compromise of 1978, were intent on upsetting it. They repeated the contention that the Sri Lankan Tamil minority of 11% could consistently obtain such good results—35-40% of medical and engineering entrants to universities—only by unfair means. They alleged that examiners in Tamil had been partial in their grading of scripts at the national examination through which entrance to the universities was determined.

In persisting with these criticisms, the proponents of standardisation were bent on persuading the government to reconsider the recent change in policy. Soon they found a champion of their cause within the cabinet itself, the minister for industries and scientific affairs, Cyril Mathew, then beginning his controversial role as the outspoken champion of Sinhalese-Buddhist interests, and the most vociferous critic of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the principal Tamil political party at this time. At an acrimonious parliamentary session, he produced examples of examination scripts submitted in one of the science subjects at the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) examination of 1977, and used them as evidence that Tamil examiners had deliberately and consistently given Tamil students higher marks than they were entitled to. In making these accusations, Mathew touched a raw nerve. The evidence he produced was inadequate to substantiate his charge of widespread partiality in grading of examination scripts, but enough to confirm the suspicions of those who were already inclined to doubt the impartiality of Tamil examiners.

The arguments of the proponents of "standardisation" were in fact a part of a larger drive on behalf of a new and allegedly foolproof mechanism for university admissions: namely, quotas for ethnic groups corresponding to their percentage in the population. There was no official support for this policy from the government as a whole, but many politically active Sinhalese Buddhists urged its adoption, and it was taken up enthusiastically and persistently by the Moor-Malay group who would benefit most if such quotas were introduced, and by representatives of the Indian Tamils.

The new institutional framework for higher education adopted in 1979-80 helped to stabilise the formula introduced in 1978, which was a combination of a new national "merit quota," regional "merit quotas," and a special allocation for eleven educationally backward districts. These quotas were all based on aggregates of marks, referred to in technical language as "raw marks." (The concept of educationally backward districts had been introduced in 1976 with 10 such districts being identified). It was, in short, a three-tier admissions policy. With the establishment of the University Grants Commission and the creation of a Ministry of Higher Education, and above all in placing these directly under the president of the republic, university admissions policy was protected from the worst political pressures.

From 1979 changes in admissions policy were much less frequent than in the early 1970s. There was also relative stability of ethnic proportions in university admissions, with the Tamils' share remaining consistently higher than the proportion of Sri Lankan Tamils in the population, and much higher than that in regard to the scientific disciplines, especially medicine and engineering. They have seldom been lower than 35% in these disciplines since 1978, and this percentage was maintained for 10 years or more. The Indian Tamils had yet to gain their "ethnic quota" in university admissions, but there was a distinct improvement in the position of the Moor-Malay group.

The compromise of 1978 was kept under constant review. Once more a committee was appointed for this purpose. Among the problems attracting attention was the special allocation of 15% of places to eleven "educationally disadvantaged districts." Under pressure from parliamentarians the number of such districts was increased to twelve in 1979. With the addition of Puttalam to this list, in 1980, more than half of the country's 24 administrative districts at the time – the number of districts was raised to 25 later on – became beneficiaries of this special allocation of places.¹³ Of these districts Batticaloa, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya were Tamil majority areas; Indian Tamils were a significant minority in Badulla and Nuwara Eliya, while Muslims were, similarly, a significant minority in Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Ampara, Mannar and Puttalam. In most of these districts the minimum marks required for university admission was lower than those for students from Colombo and Jaffna, where the competition was keenest, by as much as 100 out of a total of 400. In a situation where a single mark could make a crucial difference between admission to medicine and engineering, for which competition was keenest and performance levels at their highest, and admission to agriculture or science for example, this practice was grossly

unfair. There were additional disadvantages, especially the growing clamour from politicians in other rural districts to share the benefits conferred on the fortunate "disadvantaged" districts. It was an agitation based on the argument that by any standard of assessment their districts were only slightly better off in terms of schools, equipment and teachers than those that were benefiting from the prevailing policy.

In late 1981 a new formula was announced for 1982-83. The principle recommended was a two-tier system in which 40% of all students were chosen on the basis of the highest aggregates attained at the examination on a country-wide basis; a second tier was to be chosen on the highest aggregates achieved at a district level. The 60% of students so chosen would come in at a lower level than the 40% who were on the wider "merit list"—the aggregates of the former category of students varied greatly from district to district. The 15% special allocation for educationally backward areas was to be eliminated. The proposal to abolish the latter allocation was received with relief by critics of the system who argued that the pendulum had swung too far towards the "underprivileged" districts. However, Ministers and MPs representing the latter districts put up a spirited defence and succeeded in preventing the introduction of the new scheme.

In the election years of 1982 and 1983, the government preferred to let the existing system continue rather than persist with a change which had brought together, in defence of the 15% allocation, an extraordinary coalition of forces. Naturally, Sinhalese from rural areas led the campaign, but they had the support of the Tamils from the districts of Mannar, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Ampara—in short, all Tamils except those from the Jaffna district—and the Muslims as a whole. Thus the system of district preferences, introduced originally as a temporary device, survived into the late 1980s, and indeed to the present day.

The next attempt to grasp the nettle of university admissions came in 1984 when a committee of university academics, educationists and public figures interested in education, chaired by the chairman of the UGC made yet another analysis of the problems involved in university admissions. The committee concentrated on the least troublesome nettle, and succeeded in eliminating most of its sting—the nettle of educationally underprivileged districts—it proposed that these districts be reduced in number from 13 to five, and that the number of places available to them be reduced from 15% to 5%. The more formidable nettle of district preferences or quotas was not touched at all; the committee

recommended that the percentage of places in the district quota be increased to 65%, while the merit quota would remain at 30%. There was still some resistance to this attempt to modify the formula devised in the late 1970s, but the political pressures were less effective than in 1982. The new formula came into operation from the academic session of 1986-87. It represented a minor victory for academic opinion over political pressures, but it was not a lasting victory.

These continuing controversies over the formula on university places took place against the background of a rapid expansion of the universities. The number of universities increased by two and the Open University was founded. The places available in the universities, and especially in medicine and engineering for which the demand was greatest, also increased, as did those in other higher educational institutions under the Ministry of Education. The number of students admitted annually to undergraduate courses increased steadily from 3,500 in 1976 to nearly 6,000 in 1985-86. The two main areas in which the pressure from the better students was greatest, medicine and engineering, saw a substantial expansion in the number of places available. In medicine, two new faculties were established in this period--in Jaffna and Ruhuna--while the two older faculties at Colombo and Peradeniya admitted a much larger number of students than in the sessions of 1970-71. While the number of places available in the medical faculties nearly doubled between 1971 and 1985, places in the faculty of engineering at Peradeniya and the University of Moratuwa—a technological and engineering university—trebled during the same period. The expansion has been most rapid since 1979-80. The Open University, for its part, was soon admitting large numbers of students. By 1985, the numbers enrolled there reached 10,000.

Figure II
University Admissions Policy

1978												
<p>- Standardisation was abandoned and the new government decided that admission would be on the basis of raw marks as was the practice prior to 1970. It also decided that a student who would have gained admission to the University had there been a standardisation of marks should not be deprived of such admission owing to the abolition of standardisation. The number of underprivileged districts was increased to 11 with the inclusion of the Batticaloa district to the category.</p>												
1979												
<p>- Government decided that admission should be made only on the basis of raw marks and that the places available in 1979 should be filled according to the following formula:</p> <p>(a) 30% of the places in each course of study were to be filled on an all island merit basis.</p> <p>(b) 55% of the places in each course of study were to be allocated to the 24 administrative districts in proportion to their respective populations and filled on a district merit list.</p> <p>(c) The remaining 15% of the places in each course of study were to be allocated, in proportion to their respective populations, to 12 administrative districts deemed to be "educationally underprivileged". These students were also chosen on a district merit list.</p>												
<p>These districts were:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">1. Ampara</td> <td style="width: 50%;">7. Monaragala</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Anuradhapura</td> <td>8. Mullaitivu</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Badulla</td> <td>9. Nuwara Eliya</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Batticaloa</td> <td>10. Polonnaruwa</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Hambantota</td> <td>11. Trincomalee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6. Mannar</td> <td>12. Vavuniya</td> </tr> </table>	1. Ampara	7. Monaragala	2. Anuradhapura	8. Mullaitivu	3. Badulla	9. Nuwara Eliya	4. Batticaloa	10. Polonnaruwa	5. Hambantota	11. Trincomalee	6. Mannar	12. Vavuniya
1. Ampara	7. Monaragala											
2. Anuradhapura	8. Mullaitivu											
3. Badulla	9. Nuwara Eliya											
4. Batticaloa	10. Polonnaruwa											
5. Hambantota	11. Trincomalee											
6. Mannar	12. Vavuniya											

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continued

1980
- The number of underprivileged districts was increased to 13 with the inclusion of the Puttalam district.
1985
- The government decided to change the district and underprivileged district quota as follows:
(a) the national merit quota to remain at 30%
(b) to increase the district quota from 55% to 65%, and
(c) to reduce the under-privileged district quota to 5% from 15% and also to reduce the number of such districts to 5 from 13.
The underprivileged districts were:
1. Ampara
2. Badulla
3. Hambantota
4. Mannar
5. Mullaitivu

Admissions Policy: An Abortive Attempt at Change

In 1987 the UGC appointed a review committee to investigate and report on possible changes in university admissions policy. The report of the review committee on admissions which I chaired was published in December 1987. By this time parliament itself had appointed a select committee¹⁴ on the situation in the universities, and that select committee also examined the problems relating to university admissions policy. The publication of the select committee's report preceded publication of the UGC review committee's report by a few days. The "principal recommendation" of the UGC review committee was that "the merit element in the admissions formula should be given greater emphasis than it has at present and that a corresponding and progressive reduction be made in the district quotas as well as in the quotas for educationally-underprivileged districts till they were eliminated over a 6 or 7 years period beginning [at the end of 1987]." The quota for "underprivileged"

districts was to be abolished by the end of 1991 and the "district quotas" themselves by the end of 1995. There was to be an immediate increase in the merit quota to 40% by the end of 1987, and a progressive increase in the merit quota, 10% at a time, till the "district quotas" were eliminated by the academic year 1994-95. The committee reported that the time span of 6 to 7 years for the elimination of these district level quotas was deliberately chosen. These district quotas, originally introduced as a temporary measure would then have survived for a quarter of a century, time enough and more for the elimination of the imbalances in educational resources, especially in the rural districts and more isolated areas in the country, the prevalence of which provided the justification originally for the introduction of the system and subsequently for its continuation. There was evidence from authoritative sources that these imbalances had been reduced to a large extent, and it was felt that an additional six to seven years would be quite adequate to complete the process of reducing such imbalances as existed in 1987.

The special quota for "educationally underprivileged" districts found little support in the memoranda received by the committee or in the oral evidence given by delegations or individuals. Indeed only two delegations, one representing Muslim interests, and a delegation representing the views of the Indian Tamil community, advocated its continuation. Quite clearly they believed that it helped students from their communities to enter the university system in larger numbers than they would if such a quota did not exist. It was their contention that this quota had been in existence only since 1985/86 and that it was therefore too early to eliminate it. There was little merit in this argument for in fact the principle of a special quota for "educationally underprivileged" districts had been in existence since 1976 and what happened in 1985/86 was that it was narrowed down to five districts and five percent of places. The committee felt that this quota could and should be eliminated three years from the end of 1987 without any serious harm being done to the educational interests of the districts concerned, or to those of the ethnic and religious minorities who advocated their continuation.

The committee's proposals were adopted by the University Grants Commission, with just one change. The commission recommended that a further review be made in 1992 to consider the impact of the proposed changes. In recommending adoption of the report, the commission was encouraged by the brief comment in paragraph 16 of the parliamentary select committee's report, referred to earlier, which appeared to suggest that the committee itself shared the concerns of the academic community about the "scheme of selection to the

universities [compounding] the problem . . . [of the] wide gap between the standards of secondary education and the standards of university education. . ."

The review committee on admissions had strongly urged an increase in the minimum mark a candidate needed to apply for admission to the universities. It recommended that the minimum mark be raised to 200, out of a total of 400, from 180, out of a total of 400, with effect from the academic year 1988-89. The minimum mark had been increased steadily from 140 to 180 over the period 1978 to 1984,, in keeping with the general improvement in performance standards at the General Certificate Examination (Advanced Level) over the years. Research conducted by the University Grants Commission and in the universities had shown very clearly that students who entered the universities with less than 200 marks generally performed very poorly in university examinations; in addition, the improvement in levels of performance had been very substantial since 1984, and it was felt that this should be reflected by raising the minimum mark to 200.

Figure III
Minimum Requirement for Admission

1965-1979
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidates should have sat four approved subjects and passed in at least <i>three</i> of them with not less than 25% marks in the fourth subject. <i>The minimum aggregate required was 145 marks out of 400.</i> <p style="text-align: center;">In addition to the above, an applicant should have completed the prescribed (faculty or course) requirements at the GCE (A/L) examination.</p>
1980
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidates should have passed in at least three approved subjects and obtained a mark of not less than 25% in a fourth approved subject <i>at one and the same occasion at the GCE (A/L) examination and</i> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>They should have obtained an aggregate of not less than 160 marks out of 400 for the four subjects.</i></p>
1982
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum mark requirement was increased to 165 out of 400.

1983
- The minimum mark requirement was increased to 170 out of 400.

continued overleaf

continued

1984
- The minimum mark requirement was increased to 175 out of 400.
1985
- The minimum mark requirement was increased to 180 out of 400.
<i>The minimum mark requirement remains at 180 to the present day since 1985.</i>

Above all, it was found that, by 1987, some students securing an average of A-minus in their examinations and scoring an aggregate of between 260 and 279 marks, were being rejected by the faculties of engineering and medicine under the existing three-tier system. These students came not only from the so-called privileged districts of Colombo and Jaffna, but also from other areas such as Galle and Matara in the south, Kandy in the central region, Kalutara in the western region, and Kurunegala and Puttalam in the north-west. Puttalam had been classed as an educationally underprivileged district until 1985-86. The gap between the highest mark achieved by a student not securing admission to a particular faculty, and the lowest marks at which students were admitted, had widened by 1987; the gap was as high as 191 marks in engineering, 154 in medicine, and 135 in physical science, out of a total of 400 in each case.

The decision to raise the minimum mark for admission to 200 with immediate effect attracted sharp criticism, some of which came from the radical students within the universities. Much of the criticism stemmed from a confusion between the minimum mark at which students were entitled to apply for admission, and the actual marks at which they were admitted. In most cases there was a large gap between the two. Thus, if this minimum mark of 200 had been adopted in 1986 for those seeking admission to the universities in 1987, less than 3% of the 6,143 actually admitted that year would have been left out; only one student out of 493 who secured admission in medicine would have been excluded, a mere eight out of 465 in engineering, one in law, and none at all in arts, commerce and management studies. The percentage excluded would be

relatively higher in biological and physical sciences, but that was because the policy of the University Grants Commission was to take into the universities as many students as were necessary to fill the places available in the laboratories in these disciplines.

The opposition to this increase in the minimum mark was seized upon by the left-wing and nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), as a means of linking radical students in the universities with radical students in the secondary schools whom they were actively encouraging at this time. They contended that raising the minimum mark was evidence of the government's deliberate reduction of the opportunities for students from rural areas to enter the universities. Very soon opposition also emerged from other sources, especially from the Muslim educationists who felt that their students would be affected.¹⁵

This opposition notwithstanding, the University Grants Commission set in motion the legal procedure for securing the approval of the Ministry of Higher Education for the execution of the decision. University admissions policy was one of three main areas of activity on which the minister was empowered to issue written directives to the commission. A letter from President Jayewardene to the chairman of the UGC on 27 January 1988, informed the commission that they could proceed to give effect to changes outlined in the report of the committee reviewing university admissions. The vice-chancellors and deans of faculties welcomed the changes outlined. There was satisfaction that, at last, a start was being made in halting the deterioration of academic standards at the stage of admissions to universities. A meeting of all non-academic members of the university councils, together with vice-chancellors, was called by the University Grants Commission on 26 March 1988, to discuss the situation in the universities, and in particular to see how some of those which were closed because of student agitation could be reopened. The new university admissions policy was one of the main themes under discussion. There was overwhelming support for it from the nearly 100 persons present. There was a single dissentient voice, a Muslim educationist who strongly opposed the decision to raise the minimum mark and drew attention to the criticism it had evoked from many sections of the population. He argued in favour of retaining the three-tier system of admissions unchanged, and urged that the principle of "district quotas" and quotas for "educationally-backward" districts should also be retained. He received no support from anyone in the audience.¹⁶

However, within four days of this meeting, the government reversed its position on the changes to admissions policy approved in

President Jayewardene's letter of 27 January. A terse communiqué issued by the cabinet office announced that the new policy and the recommendations of the University Grants Commission's admissions review committee had been discussed at a meeting of the cabinet on 30 March through the initiative of Minister Hameed and that it had been decided to return to the *status quo ante*.¹⁷ No reasons were given. This sudden reversal of a change announced in January 1988, a few weeks earlier, provides further evidence of the operation of a sort of Gresham's Law in regard to university admissions policy in Sri Lanka; at every critical moment, political considerations would drive out arguments based on proven academic needs. In this instance, a Muslim Cabinet Minister's perception of potential damage to the interests of his community in regard to university admissions took precedence over the general academic good of the community at large.

The rest of the story is briefly told. Another review committee on university admissions was appointed in 1993. Its report endorsed the conclusions reached by the review committee of 1987. But on this occasion the report was not published—the change of government in 1994 accounts for that—and it is very likely, gathering dust at the UGC. The system that had evolved in the 1980s remains unchanged, a three-tier system of a national merit quota, a district quota, and a quota for educationally background districts.

The latest refinement of this came in 1996-97 when the Tamils from the Jaffna peninsula, hitherto the most vocal critics of the system joined in asking for the status of a disadvantaged district for Jaffna itself. This claim was first made before the UGC review committee of 1993: on that occasion it was rejected by the committee. With the change of government they succeeded in securing this advantage. It remains to be seen whether this reversal of the position taken by Jaffna politicians from being the most vigorous advocates of a merit system to the somewhat low-key claimants for the benefits of district quotas will be purely temporary or become permanent. More important, it illustrates the significance of the change that has occurred in the university admissions policy. It had ceased to be affirmative action on an ethnic basis in support of the Sinhalese majority and even politicians from the Jaffna district were comfortable with it as a form of regional, i.e., district, preferences.

Figure IV
University Admissions Policy

1990	
- In 1990 the number of “educationally under-privileged” districts was increased to 12	
1. Ampara 2. Anuradhapura 3. Badulla 4. Hambantota 5. Kilinochchi 6. Mannar	7. Monaragala 8. Mullaitivu 9. Nuwara Eliya 10. Polonnaruwa 11. Trincomalee 12. Vavuniya
1996/97	
- Jaffna was added to the list of under-privileged districts	

Figure V
Educationally Under-privileged Districts

Ampara	Since 1976
Anuradhapura	1976 – 1985; 1990 -
Badulla	Since 1976
Batticaloa	1978 – 1985
Hambantota	Since 1976
Jaffna	Since 1996/97
Kilinochchi	Since 1990
Mannar	Since 1976
Monaragala	1976 – 1985; 1990 -
Mullaitivu	Since 1979
Nuwara Eliya	1976 – 1985; 1990 -
Polonnaruwa	1976 – 1985; 1990 -
Puttalam	1980 – 1985
Trincomalee	1976 – 1985; 1990 -
Vavuniya	1976 – 1985; 1990 -

III Language Policy

In this part of the present article we examine the view advanced by analysts such as Thomas Sowell and political scientists such as Robert Oberst that the change in language policy introduced in Sri Lanka in the mid and late 1950s could be treated as part of a policy of affirmative action in favour of the Sinhalese majority. Neither Sowell nor Oberst provide any evidence to substantiate this contention.

A review of the debate on language policy in the national press and in pamphlets, in the early 1950s, immediately preceding the abandonment of the consensus on language policy reached in the national legislature in 1943-44, four years prior to the transfer of power would appear to provide evidence to suggest that some of the proponents of the unilateral change on language policy in 1956 did think of the change in terms of an ethnic preference.¹⁸ But from the moment the policy change was given legislative form efforts were made to modify it in favour of recognising the language rights of the minority Tamils in many key areas of state policy. The modification of the *National Language Act No. 33 of 1956* began in earnest in 1958 with the result that in its implementation the language reform introduced in 1956 had very few elements—indeed if any at all—of a policy of affirmative action. The modifications introduced in 1958 survived the rapid political changes of the period 1958-66: three changes of government at three general elections, the UNP's very brief minority government of March-July 1960, the SLFP government of 1960-64, and the short-lived SLFP-LSSP coalition of 1964-65.

More important, despite the sanguine expectations of the 'Sinhala Only' activists of the mid-1950s, Sri Lanka remained very much a bilingual state (or a tri-lingual one if English is added, as it must be, to Sinhalese and Tamil) and as much a multi-cultural country as it was before the 'Sinhala Only' agitation began. Many if not most of the advocates of 'Sinhala Only'—Professor G P Malalasekera for one—also argued the case for assimilation of the minorities of Sri Lanka to the dominant Sinhalese-Buddhist culture,¹⁹ but no government sought to adopt such a policy on any systematic basis, and no major politician in power advocated that as a national objective to be imposed on the minorities. And this, at a time when assimilationist policies did not have the sinister connotations they have today. The minorities—the Tamils especially—were sensitive in regard to language and education policies

and viewed these with deep suspicion on account of the potential such changes had for assimilationist ends.²⁰

Bilingualism has been at its strongest in the most sensitive area of ethnic relations, education. The education reforms of the 1930s and 1940s had as one of their most vitally important features, the use of the 'mother tongue' of the students in education. One result of this policy was the evolution of two language streams in the education process beginning first of all in the primary schools, and extending through the 1940s into secondary education, and culminating, in the 1960s, in university education. Tamil parents were guaranteed the right to educate their children through the medium of the Tamil language, and this right was not restricted geographically to areas which were predominantly Tamil-speaking; it applied to all parts of the island. This right stemmed from the education reforms of the 1930s and 1940s, and was well entrenched by the mid-1950s. More to the point, the 'Sinhala Only' Act of 1956 did not imperil their right; indeed the education of Tamil children through the Tamil language proceeded apace over the decade 1956-66. Linked to it was the right that those educated in Tamil had to sit public examinations ranging from general education certificate examinations and university entrance examinations, to examinations for entry to public sector employment, through that language.

The right to an education in Sinhala or Tamil was treated, from the very inception, as a group right rather than an individual right.²¹ Both Sinhalese and Tamil politicians were agreed on this, and were insistent on it, the Sinhalese for fear that if the wishes of individual parents were conceded it would help perpetuate the primacy of English education, the Tamils for fear that some parents would opt to educate their children in Sinhala, and thus begin a process of assimilation. Children of mixed marriages were in a more advantageous position: their parents could choose the language medium in which such children were to be educated—Sinhala, Tamil or English. (The English medium continued in schools till the 1970s). Over the years the resistance to permitting individual parents to decide the medium of instruction of their children has persisted especially on the part of the Tamils. The Sinhalese are much less opposed to such a change of policy now, but no attempt has been made by governments in power to make such a change a matter of official policy.

Special provision was made for the Muslims. There has been a noticeable sensitivity to the special needs of the Muslims, themselves a Tamil-speaking group although quite distinct from the Tamils in ethnic identity. This sensitivity had begun in the 1940s, and was continued in the years after independence, and received a great impetus with the

appointment of a Muslim, Badi-ud-din Mahmud, as Minister of Education by Mrs Bandaranaike on two occasions, 1960-63, and 1970-77.

Muslim children had the right (till 1974) to pursue their studies in any one of the three language media in the education system—Sinhala, Tamil or English—a privilege no other group in the country enjoyed. Special government funded Training Colleges have been set up for the Muslims. Arabic is taught in government schools as an optional language for Muslim pupils, and taught by *maulavis* appointed by the Ministry of Education and paid by the state. More important, in recognition of the cultural individuality of Muslims as distinct from the Tamils whose language is the home language of large numbers of Muslims, a new category of government schools was established for them. The usual practice had been to categorize schools on the basis of the language of instruction in them and the Muslims formed part of the Tamil-speaking school population. In the 'Muslim' schools the sessions and vacations are determined by the special requirements of the Muslim population, in particular the annual Ramadan fast. The establishment and expansion of these schools, it must be emphasized, vitiates the principle of non-sectarian state education which has been the declared policy of all governments since 1960.

Although the rhetoric of language policy did not conform to the reality, that rhetoric had a life of its own. There was, for instance, the virulent campaign waged by a combination of the SLFP and the Marxist parties against the regulations under the *Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958*, introduced in Parliament by the UNP-led coalition in January 1966. The opposition unleashed a sustained barrage of racialist propaganda in which the SLFP, the traditional advocates of the Sinhalese-Buddhist domination of the Sri Lanka polity, was joined by the *Lanka Sama Samaja Party* and the Communist Party, recent but enthusiastic converts to a cause they had once despised. The massive demonstrations organized by these parties on this occasion marked the triumph of the rhetoric of language policy over the hard reality of its practical application. This attitude had lasting effects as was seen in 1972 when these parties formed the government and were in the throes of introducing a new constitution. The constitution of 1972 unequivocally consolidated the 'Sinhala Only' policy of the 1950s and emphasized the essentially subordinate role of the Tamil language: thus while the use of the Tamil language was recognized and permitted within the limits set out in the *Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958*, regulations drafted under the provisions of the act were "deemed subordinate legislation." The reference was quite deliberately directed at the *Tamil*

Language (Special Provisions) Regulations adopted by Parliament in 1966. The rhetoric not the actual policy had become—to the constituent parties of the governing coalition—the political reality. This was much more so in the case of the Tamils who often, if not generally, preferred to judge the government by what it said, not by what it actually did. The tragedy was that this ostentatious elevation of rhetoric to political reality confused the situation, perhaps deliberately, concealing the fact that these changes had made no difference as regards the language policy in education, administration or public life. In practice language policy in these spheres did not change in any significant way from what it was prior to 1972; indeed there was no change at all.

The framers of the constitution of 1978 deliberately sought a more conciliatory language policy and gave it very high priority. The terms of that accommodation incorporated in that constitution were, at the least, a consolidation of the *modus vivendi* on language rights that had emerged after two decades of strife. They were, in fact, much more than that, as would be clear by comparing the provisions of the constitution of 1978 relating to language rights with those of its immediate predecessor.

We have seen how the constitution of 1972 unequivocally consolidated the ‘Sinhala Only’ policy of the 1950s and emphasized the essentially subordinate role of the Tamil language. In contrast Chapter IV of the 1978 constitution, while maintaining the status of Sinhalese as *the* official language (Article 18), recognized Tamil as a national language²² (Article 19), a significant modification of the ‘Sinhala Only’ policy.²³ Chapter IV of the constitution is an elaboration of Articles 14(1)(f) and 27(6), which, respectively, guaranteed an individual the freedom to use his or her own language, and laid down as a principle of state policy, that “no citizen shall suffer any disability by reason of language.” Moreover, all the rights enjoyed by the Tamil-speaking people of the island under the *Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958* were incorporated in the constitution and cannot therefore be changed except by way of a constitutional amendment.

Most of the language rights set out in Chapter IV of the 1978 constitution had been in existence in the past, derived from the language legislation of the 1950s and regulations connected with it such as those approved by Parliament in 1966, or from legislation relating to education, public administration and justice, to mention only the most important areas of public interest relevant to the use of the Tamil Language. Yet in theory, if not in practice ordinary legislation could override them, and although this had seldom happened, the more important point was that no real remedy was available against their denial through regulations or

even administrative decisions. The language provisions of the 1978 constitution changed all that.

Ten years later, the 13th amendment to the constitution, certified on 14 November 1987, raised Tamil to the level of an official language, with English given the position of a link language. Although there is some ambiguity about the position of English, its legal status was equal to that of Sinhala and Tamil. The provisions of the 13th amendment were clarified and indeed consolidated by the 16th amendment (certified on 17 December 1988). Article 25A introduced on that occasion stated that in the event of any inconsistency between the provisions of any law and the provisions of Chapter IV of the 1978 constitution, the latter shall prevail.

With the introduction of a new constitution in 1978, and a new language policy, the Official Languages Department was re-established, this time to implement a policy of bilingualism (if not tri-lingualism) instead of 'Sinhala Only.' That department had lost much of its importance and influence in the early 1970s. Indeed in 1973 its obligations and responsibilities had been dispersed among other ministries and departments on a directive of the Minister of Public Administration, Local Government and Home Affairs. The department itself had been reduced in status to a mere division in the Ministry of Public Administration.

Its revival on 1 January 1979 marked a new phase in the implementation of language policy in Sri Lanka. Indeed that policy had come full circle: from English only under colonial rule, to Sinhala and Tamil from 1944 to 1956, to 'Sinhala Only' from 1956 to 1978, and on to Sinhala and Tamil with English as well from 1978 onwards. Much of the ambiguity in the language law, and hence in official language policy, had been settled with the constitution of 1978 despite the lack of precision in the terms such as "official" and "national language," and "link language."

In 1989-90 under President R Premadasa, the UNP government took the important policy decision to establish an Official Languages Commission with wide powers to oversee the implementation of official language policy. The proposal for the establishment of such a commission had been made in 1945-46 by the Select Committee on Official Language Policy of the State Council under the chairmanship of J R Jayewardene then a backbencher in the national legislature. Such a commission had been established in 1951 and its initiatives in language planning and implementation in the years 1951 to 1953 had been one of the major creative phases in the history of Sri Lanka's experimentation in changes of language policy. The Official Language Commission appointed on 21 December 1991 with the passage of the *Official Language Commission Act*

No. 18 of 1991 has wider powers than the Commission of 1951-53 enjoyed in regard to the implementation of language policy since the latter was the creation of the administration and not a legal entity. Based on a Canadian model, the Act provides a legal framework to monitor and supervise the implementation of the country's official language policy. It has been in existence now for just over five years, too short a life-span for us to pass judgement on its usefulness and performance.

The establishment of Sri Lanka's Official Language Commission in its present form is a manifestation of a contemporary phenomenon, the transfer of institutions from one political culture and one political environment to a totally different one in the hope that they would take root and even flourish there. The institution is new even in Canada. The chances of successful transplantation seem difficult enough at first glance: the Canadian situation involves a conflict between two international languages which share a common script; in Sri Lanka the conflict is between a purely Sri Lankan language, and a regional one which has two centres, one in Sri Lanka and the other in Tamilnadu. To complicate matters even further there is the 'link' language, English. There are thus three scripts, and those who seek bilingual proficiency in Sinhala and Tamil need to master two scripts, and a third as well if they are proficient in English. But the willingness to import an institution from one troubled environment to another is evidence of a strong political will to seek an accommodation on an issue which destroyed the civil peace when it first erupted four decades ago.

Bilingualism (or indeed tri-lingualism) was seen in the use of the Tamil language in the national insignia, coins and currency, postage stamps, in road signs and in all official and semi-official documents at every level—many if not most of these documents were in both Sinhala and Tamil, or in Sinhala, Tamil and English versions—in broadcasting over the national radio and this principle was extended to television when that medium was introduced to the island in the 1980s. The right of Tamil-speaking citizens to correspond with state officials, and with employees of state-owned corporations and public sector autonomous bodies was protected, but the snag was that quite often their right to receive a reply in Tamil was observed in the breach. Even when the government has shown the political will to implement this policy—and governments since 1977 have been consistent in showing that political will—the lethargy of lower-level bureaucrats in combination with a shortage of bilingual officials have proved to be formidable obstacles to giving the Tamil minority satisfaction on this sensitive issue. The result is that a sense of grievance continued in regard to language policy,

focussing on this gap in the system while ignoring the reversion to a policy of parity of status for Tamil and disregarding altogether the advantages that Sri Lanka's Tamil minority have had in the field of education.

Looking at the situation as it exists today, the language rights of Sri Lanka's Tamil minority are on par with those of the French in Canada, substantially better than those of the English-speaking minority in Quebec, and immeasurably superior to those of the Tamils of Malaysia who form an overwhelming majority of the Indian community in that country. Sri Lanka, by a curious irony, is the only sovereign state in which Tamil is recognized as an official language, apart, of course, from the unusual and somewhat unreal situation in Singapore where Tamil is recognized as one of four official languages, the other three being Mandarin Chinese, English and Malay. In reality Tamil has a distinctly subordinate position there to the others, and especially to Mandarin Chinese and English. A more appropriate comparison is with the language rights of the minorities in the cantons of Switzerland. The comparison is appropriate because Switzerland is often cited by Tamil critics of Sri Lanka's language policy, as the most important success story of modern pluralist democracy, and they identify Switzerland's language policy as one of the keys to this success.²⁴ Such critics focus attention on article 116 of the Swiss constitution which lays down that

“...in direct dealings between the citizen and the confederation, the *vice versa*, the federal government must adapt to the language of the individual within the limits of the official language.”²⁵

There are two principles in operation in Swiss language policy: the principle of personality at the federal level, and the principle of territoriality at the cantonal level.

As Christopher Hughes points out in his book on *Switzerland*,

“...the Territorial Principle ...regards the map of the Country as divided into French, German, Italian areas, the boundaries of which are unalterable. [Under]... the Personal Principle, ...everyone can speak 'his' language in communicating with emanations of the state. The territorial principle takes precedence over the personal one in most cases of conflict.”²⁶

It is at the cantonal level that the more relevant comparison with the Sri Lankan situation lies. These cantons are not only remarkably

homogenous, but they are more or less unilingual, and persons “moving to a new canton are obliged to use its local languages for the transaction of official business.”²⁷ Indeed

“...the canton (in accordance with the principle of territoriality) determines the official cantonal language (or in a few cases, languages). The cantonal language is the medium of instruction in the public schools. In addition, all cantonal laws and regulations are issued only in the official language(s). While compromises are made in practice, the cantons have no legal obligation to provide translations or deal with citizens in languages other than their own.”²⁸

Indeed Hughes, whom we have quoted in the previous paragraph, refers to:

“The crisis of the territorial system which comes over the question of the school: it is here that official recognition has to be made when the actual boundary of the spoken language has shifted.... The burden of political decisions usually falls upon the canton, and in particular the all important decision as to which is the official language of the lowest unit of local government. The power to determine this last point is called the *Sprachenhöheit*, language-sovereignty, of the canton, and federal authorities acknowledge the cantonal decision here.”²⁹

Thus the practical realities of Swiss language policy show the language policy of Sri Lanka in a more favourable light than its critics have argued that it was, and the comparison would be even more favourable if one were to focus attention on education. Sri Lanka’s Tamil minorities—indigenous and Indian—have always enjoyed the right to an education through the medium of the Tamil language in whatever part of the country they live.³⁰ This right extends to university and technical education as well. Apart from the University of Jaffna—in the Tamil-speaking Northern Province—which teaches in Tamil and English, and the Eastern University of Sri Lanka located in the largely Tamil-speaking Eastern Province (i.e. Tamil and Muslim) which also teaches in Tamil and English, the University of Peradeniya is unique in providing instruction through three languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English. The University of Colombo provides instruction in Tamil in some of its departments of study, in addition of course to instruction in Sinhalese and English. Thus, so far as education is concerned the Tamil minorities of Sri Lanka have

enjoyed advantages which minorities in the Swiss cantons do not enjoy or have seldom enjoyed, not to mention the Tamil minority in Singapore and Malaysia.

Again, because the language rights guaranteed to the Tamils are operative in all parts of the island, and not merely in the north and east, their practical value is at least on par with, if not superior to language rights available to the minority population groups in the cantons of Switzerland. The great majority of such cantons are “officially unilingual.”³¹ Indeed while

“...Switzerland maintains more than one official language, the languages are spoken in clearly defined territorial areas.”³²

Looking back on these controversies one feels that the price the country has paid in the breakdown of ethnic harmony, and in the distortion of the national priorities, outweighed the undeniable benefits the emphasis on indigenous languages brought to the people at large. Had the Sinhalese political leadership that succeeded the first post-independence Prime Minister D S Senanayake not forced the pace of language change by seeking to give Sinhalese pride of place through an abrogation of the settlement on language reached in 1943-44, had they been more patient and eschewed the path of unilateral change, they may well have ensured the primacy of their language on a much more solid basis, without the rancour and bitterness that was the price of the ‘Sinhala Only’ policy. Quite apart from the natural advantages accruing to Sinhalese as the language of nearly three fourths of the population, there was the powerful attraction of economic necessity - the Sinhalese areas offered by far the greatest opportunities of employment and trade. As it was, the objective of ‘Sinhala Only’ has been pursued at the cost of conceding to the Tamils all the advantages of proclaiming to a sympathetic world that they, as a minority, have suffered greatly in the change in language policy imposed on them by an unsympathetic majority, when the reality was that, ‘Sinhala Only’ in its starkest form has proved to be an elusive objective. At the same time, adjustments and accommodations on language rights were made through political necessity and as part of a realistic adjustment to life in a plural society and democratic state from as early as 1958. These had all but granted parity of status to the Tamil language by 1978.

A *de facto* status was elevated to a *de jure* fact by 1987-88. Yet the political benefits to the Sinhalese majority, of these working arrangements, have proved to be just as elusive as the quest for ‘Sinhala

Only' because the main representatives of Tamil political opinion in the country have never publicly or officially acknowledged that the reality of language policy had deviated from its rhetoric over the years.

IV State Employment

If the examination of the realities of Sri Lanka's language policy since the mid-1950s shows that there is little justification for treating it as part of a system of affirmative action, there is even less reason for accepting Robert Oberst's view that the recent and current dominance of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka's public sector employment is the result of a deliberately introduced system of affirmative action policies. An examination of the record will show that this is not supported by the evidence.

Much of the bitterness underlying the controversies on employment is explained in part by the conflict between the Tamils' traditional anxiety to maintain levels of employment in the state services they had grown accustomed to under British rule and the attempt on the part of the Sinhalese to insist on what they regard as their legitimate share of it. The fact of the matter is that the economic resources of the Northern Province are severely limited and as early as the last quarter of the 19th century it was evident that the increasing population of the region could not be accommodated in the traditional occupations based on land. The Tamils turned to state employment and the professions much more than to plantation agriculture and trade, in search of avenues of employment.

The schools system that had developed under British rule was concentrated not diffused, with the region in and around Colombo as the principal location along with some of the principal towns; but one area was surprising, the Jaffna peninsula, the northern part of the island, with its hard dry climate and lack of natural resources. In that region missionary enterprise found a very receptive people. In that region alone American missionaries (their head-quarters located in Boston) were permitted to operate, but not only American missionaries. The historical legacy of their endeavours was the creation of a superb network of schools and the production of generations of educated Tamils who were equipped for service in the lower rungs of the British administrative system. Jaffna did not have the economic resources to support this increasingly educated population. It began to export this "labour" in the form of literate and educated youth to the more prosperous southern parts of the island, to establish a secure position in the clerical goods of the bureaucracy. Parodying Dr Samuel Johnson's observation that the most pleasing prospect in the Scotland of his day was the road that led to London, it would be truly said that for much of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the most pleasing prospect in Jaffna was the road that led to Colombo.

They did not face much Sinhalese competition till the 1930s at least when the advantageous position enjoyed by the Tamils in the state services first became a point of bitter division in politics. Soon the more enterprising among them went to other British colonies, principally to what is now Malaysia and, in much smaller numbers to East Africa as well. This emigration to Malaya—as it was then known—came to a stop in the 1930s, and the movement to Colombo and the Sinhalese areas was strengthened. An official report written in 1946 explained that:

“the acute shortage of trained staff for administrative and clerical functions caused the government of Malaya to appeal to the Government of Ceylon to send Ceylonese [Sri Lankans] for service to Malaya, and from the year 1867, at the invitation and encouragement of the Malayan Government, large numbers of Ceylonese subordinates practically all of whom were Ceylon Tamils from Jaffna, secured employment in building roads, in surveying lands and doing the work of clerks, dressers [sic] etc. About 25 years ago [that is about 1921] more than 50% of the Junior Officers in the Government Services, General Clerical, Railway, Posts and Telegraphs, Medical, Public Works etc. were Ceylon Tamils.”³³

Indeed by the early years of the 20th century the Tamils had come to be singularly dependent on government service and precisely because they had no deep roots in the island’s plantation economy or trade for that matter, they were moved to defend their position in the public service all the more zealously. By the 1930s Tamils, dominated the public sector, as clerks, teachers, and technicians and were well established in the professional services as doctors and engineers as well. More significantly, they now faced Sinhalese competition, and their advantageous position in government employment became a point of contention and division in politics. The Soulbury Commissioners reported in 1945 that appointment to the public services

“... provides a common source of dissension between majority and minority communities... [The] Ceylon Tamils appear, at any rate as late as 1938, to have occupied a disproportionate number of posts in Public Services... That they have won for themselves a much larger share is a consequence of the higher standard of literacy and education which this community has so long enjoyed, and of its energy and efficiency. For similar reasons the Burghers have achieved an even more remarkable position.”³⁴

The Commission viewed

"... the Sinhalese challenge to the predominant position of the Tamils in public appointments... [as] the natural effect of the spread of education and of the efforts being made to bring other portions of the island up to the intellectual level of one portion of it..."³⁵

Having identified the problem they turned to the British experience to reassure the Tamils:

"In this connection, we cannot help recalling a period in our own history when, as the result of the superior educational facilities and better teaching prevalent in Scotland, a minority was enabled to secure a larger share of administrative and executive posts in the United Kingdom than could have been justified on any proportional allocation. Since then the English have made strenuous and not altogether unsuccessful endeavours to redress the deficiencies of their past."³⁶

Thus, at the time of the transfer of power, the Tamil minority was warned in the clearest possible terms—even though the style chosen for the warning was understatement rather than exaggeration—that hard times lay ahead of them as educational standards improved among the Sinhalese. Unlike some achievement-oriented minorities in other parts of the world, the Chinese in Malaysia and other parts of South East Asia, for instance, the Sri Lanka Tamils grew accustomed to state employment. Their position in commerce and industry and plantation agriculture did not match their stake in their chosen field of concentration, and the determining factor was a quest—almost a passion—for security and a steady income, a reflection of their awareness of the limited opportunities for employment available to them in the Jaffna peninsula. This made them exceptionally vulnerable and exceptionally sensitive to changes in language policy, to educational reform, and changes in the mechanisms for determining admission to tertiary education in a country in which expansion in university education lagged far behind the expansion of secondary and primary education.

After independence, competition increased, especially with the rapid expansion of educational opportunities in the Sinhalese areas. This greatly reduced the prospects of the Tamils in their search for positions in government service. Over the next twenty-five years they would be overtaken in almost every sector of state employment and in the professions by the

Sinhalese, overtaken but far from being overwhelmed. For a while they retained their advantageous position in some of the professions - medicine, law and engineering - but lost it by the early 1980s. This represented the intellectual capital of the past, carefully gathered, and protected and augmented but, in their eyes, not expanding rapidly enough to overcome what they saw as the disadvantages that would face the next generation of Tamils. They preferred to believe that it was a matter of discrimination; in fact, it was the natural result of an expansion of education at the secondary level in the Sinhalese areas.

The drop in the numbers of Tamils in the state service was very marked after 1956. While representatives of Tamil opinion often argue that this was the inevitable result of the change in language policy adopted in that year, there were other powerful forces of change at work. Given the demographic structure of the country, the Tamils could hardly have maintained the percentage of posts they held up to the 1930s.

In an assessment of this complex situation made in 1984 S W R de A Samarasinghe points out that:

"The Tamils have already lost the relative position in central government employment that was enjoyed in the past. Apart from the obvious economic loss this entails, there is the psychological adjustment that many Jaffna (Tamil) families must make in the wake of this change. There is the fact that government jobs are no longer as easily obtained as they were a generation or two ago. The Sinhalese, on the other hand, are bound to view the change as a natural and inevitable adjustment that bestows on them their 'due' share. Clearly there are two different perceptions of the same phenomenon. The result is the Tamils have begun to feel they are 'discriminated' against and the Sinhalese feel recent changes have simply reversed the 'discrimination' they had been subjected to in the past."³⁷

Samarasinghe's assessment holds true for the last 13 years as well, i.e. for the post-1984 period. Indeed if one excluded the state-owned plantation sector where the vast majority of the employees are Indian Tamils, the number of Tamils in *all* grades of state employment has declined to 10% or less. This is about a third or a fourth of what it was in the early 1940s.

Many factors have contributed to this sharp decline in numbers after 1984: first, there is the large-scale emigration of Tamil youth from all strata of society to western countries such as Canada,³⁸ and Britain principally, and to Australia, and to the Scandinavian states (largely to Norway and Sweden) in the wake of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and, in particular, the disturbed

political situation in the Jaffna peninsula, fleeing the rigours of life under the LTTE and escaping the harsh reality of compulsory military service in the LTTE's army. Second, there has also been a steady stream of "economic refugees" to Denmark, Germany, France and Switzerland³⁹ in western Europe and to Canada. There is next, the collapse of civil administration of the north of the island and in parts of the east. This has greatly reduced opportunities for state employment for the Tamils who live there. In addition, there is another factor, the expansion of the private sector for the first time since the mid-1950s. Since the late 1970s the private sector (including import-export trade) has provided opportunities for employment, outside the control of government and the political processes - including the system of patronage - that often govern admission to state employment. The expansion of the private sector was on a scale that would have seemed impossible in the early 1970s. Among the principal beneficiaries of the expansion of the private sector are the minorities, Tamils and Muslims. More to the point, state employment is no longer as attractive as it once was in comparison to the private sector with its greater flexibility in wages, and promotions, greater recognition given to merit and personal initiative and above all its freedom from political interference. Nevertheless remedial measures - perhaps a form or forms of affirmative action - are required to get the country's public services to reflect more accurately than it does today the country's ethnic profile in the composition of its cadres.

V Conclusion

Affirmative action policies in Sri Lanka are confined to university admissions alone, and even in that regard only to the admissions process to undergraduate education. They do not operate in post-graduate education, or for appointments to the staff of the universities, or to promotions of staff from grade to grade.

Introduced as a temporary measure, this very limited exercise in affirmative action has survived for over 25 years now, and there is no sign that they will be abandoned anytime soon. Only very recently the Minister of Education of the present Sri Lankan government, Richard Pathirana, assured the country that nothing of the sort would happen under his watch. As we have seen in Part II of this paper there have been substantial changes in the system, changes which unfortunately strengthen the forces opposed to its abandonment or radical reform because with every mutation, one more element is added to a complex system of vested interests that unite to secure its survival.

The base of the university system is much broader and deeper than it was in the early 1970s, and no longer can it be said that deserving and competent students from the rural and remoter areas of the country are at a decided disadvantage in the competition for admission, especially to the professional faculties. On the contrary the evidence is overwhelming that the greatly increased access to higher education has come at a tremendous price. The political aspects have been dealt with in earlier parts of this article. Here we need to make the point that one result of this system of admissions is that the concept of academic merit has gone by the board. In the hard choice between quality and quantity, quality has been sacrificed to a much greater extent than in most other university systems in the third world. Sri Lanka's three-tier system of university admissions devised to protect and foster the interests of the rural student has now become a formidable obstacle to the development of a national pool of competent students who measure up to the standards of their peers in other parts of the third world in their capacity to cope with the challenges of the modern technological world, in research and in administration.

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Notes

1. See, Thomas Sowell, *Preferential Policies - An International Perspective*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p 14.
2. Robert Oberst, "Policies of Ethnic Preference in Sri Lanka" in Neil Nevitte and Charles H Kennedy (eds.), *Ethnic Preference and Public Policy in Developing States*, Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner, 1986, pp 95-118.
3. Robert Oberst, "Tigers and the Lion: The Evolution of Sri Lanka's Civil War", *Harvard International Review*, XVIII (3), Summer 1996, pp

- 32-35, and p 80. This essay was one of several on the special theme of "The Politics of Identity in South Asia" in that issue of the journal.
4. *ibid.*, p 33
 5. The 1987 report was published by the UGC; the 1993 report was handed over to the then Minister, Higher Education, Mr Anura Bandaranaike, but was never published because of the change of government that occurred in 1994.
 6. It is to the credit of the academic community at the then University of Ceylon, Peradeniya that they criticised this change from the moment it was proposed. Its implications were reviewed at discussions organised by the Ceylon Studies Seminar, and in several well-researched articles on its basic unfairness, and its potential political dangers. See, for example, C R de Silva, "Weightages in University Admission: Standardisation and District Quotas in Sri Lanka, 1970-75," *Modern Ceylon Studies*, V(2), pp 152-178.
 7. In a long obituary on the recently deceased Badi-ud-din Mahmud, an anonymous writer seeks to assign the blame for the initiative in the unilateral change in University Admissions Policy, to a Sinhalese activist group, the Sinhala Tharuna Sanvidhanaya. While it is true that this group did play a role in highlighting this issue, they could not have succeeded in securing this fateful change of policy without the active support of the Minister of Education, Badi-ud-din Mahmud. The obituary on Badi-ud-din Mahmud appeared in the *Sunday Leader*, 22 June 1997.
 8. C R de Silva, "The Politics of University Admissions: A Review of Some Aspects of University Admissions Policy in Sri Lanka, 1971-1978," *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. I, No. 2 (1978), pp 89-90.
 9. *ibid.*, p 90.
 10. See my chapter "University Admissions and Ethnic Tension in Sri Lanka, 1977-83" in R B Goldman and A J Wilson (eds.), *From Independence to Statehood: Managing Ethnic Conflict in Five African and Asian States*, London, 1984, pp 97-110.
 11. C R de Silva, "The Politics of University Admissions," *op.cit.*, p 99.

12. *ibid.*, pp 100-101.
13. See, *Report of the Committee to Review University Admissions Policy*, Colombo, University Grants Commission, 1987, p 7-8.
14. *Report from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into and Report on the Grave and Unsettled Conditions Prevailing in all the University Campuses in Sri Lanka and to make Recommendations with Regard to the further Functioning of the University Campuses*. Parliamentary series, No. 107, 16 December 1987, published in mimeographed form. The proceedings of the committee and the minutes of evidence referred to on the cover were not published. Indeed the report itself was not printed.
15. See my article, "The Sri Lankan Universities from 1977 to 1990: Recovery, Stability and the Descent to Crisis," *Minerva*, 1990, pp 156-216, see particularly, p 202.
16. *ibid.*, p 203.
17. *ibid.*
18. See G P Malalasekera's articles in the *Ceylon Daily News*, October 10-12, 1955.
19. *ibid.*
20. On opposition to assimilation, see G G Ponnambalam's speech in the State Council, *Hansard* [State Council], 1939, column 960; see also S Nadesan, *Ceylon's Language Problems*, Colombo, 1955, *passim*.
21. While students entered the universities on the basis of the language medium in which they sat the qualifying examination for admission to the universities, they had a free choice in regard to the medium of instruction in they preferred to read for university examinations once they gained admission.
22. On the significance of this change see the assessment by N Satyendra, "Language in the New Constitution," *Ceylon Daily News*, 4 October 1978. Satyendra, Nadesan's son, like his father, is a lawyer.

23. *Sessional Paper [SP] V of 1980*. Report of the *Presidential Commission on Development Councils*, pp 86-87, for a memorandum by two Muslim members of the Commission pointing out the importance of changes made to the benefit of Tamil speakers in the island.
24. See, for example, S Nadesan, *Ceylon's Language Problems*, Colombo, 1955.
25. Carol L Schmid, *Conflict and Consensus in Switzerland*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982, p 21.
26. Christopher Hughes, *Switzerland*, London, Ernest Benn, 1975, p 59.
27. Cynthia H Enloe, *Ethnic Conflict and Political Development*, Boston, Little Brown, 1973, p 97.
28. Carol L Schmid, *op.cit.*
29. Christopher Hughes, *op.cit.*
30. Article 21(1) of the Constitution of 1978.
31. Carol L Schmid, *op.cit.*, p 20.
32. *ibid.*
33. Quoted in Mavis Puthucheary, "Indians in the Public Sector in Malaysia" in K S Sandhu and A Mani (eds), *Indian Communities in South East Asia*, Singapore, 1993, p 337. The document cited, *Report on the General and Economic Conditions etc. of the Ceylonese in Malaya* as prepared by V Coomaraswamy for the then Ceylon government and was published in June 1946 as *SP IX of 1946*.
34. *Soulbury Report*, 1945, p 49.
35. *ibid.*, p 50.
36. *ibid.*
37. S W R de A Samarasinghe, "Ethnic Representation in Central Government Employment and Sinhala-Tamil Relations in Sri Lanka: 1948-1981" in Robert B Goldman and A J Wilson (eds.), *From*

Independence to Statehood: Managing Ethnic Conflict in Five African and Asian States, London, 1984, pp 179-180.

38. In the 20 year period 1973-1992 there were over 40,000 immigrants to Canada from Sri Lanka, of whom the vast majority came in after 1984. The great bulk of them were Tamils from the Jaffna peninsula. See, *Refuge*, XIII(3), June 1993, Special Issue on Sri Lanka, p 36. *Refuge* is Canada's principal periodical on refugees, published by the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, Ontario. The current estimate is that around 125,000 Tamils, almost all of them from Jaffna and the north of Sri Lanka, live in and around Toronto.
39. On the Tamil emigration to Switzerland, see Christopher McDowell, *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland*, Oxford and Providence, Rhode Island, Berghan Books, 1996.