



Tamils are not discriminated in Sri Lanka

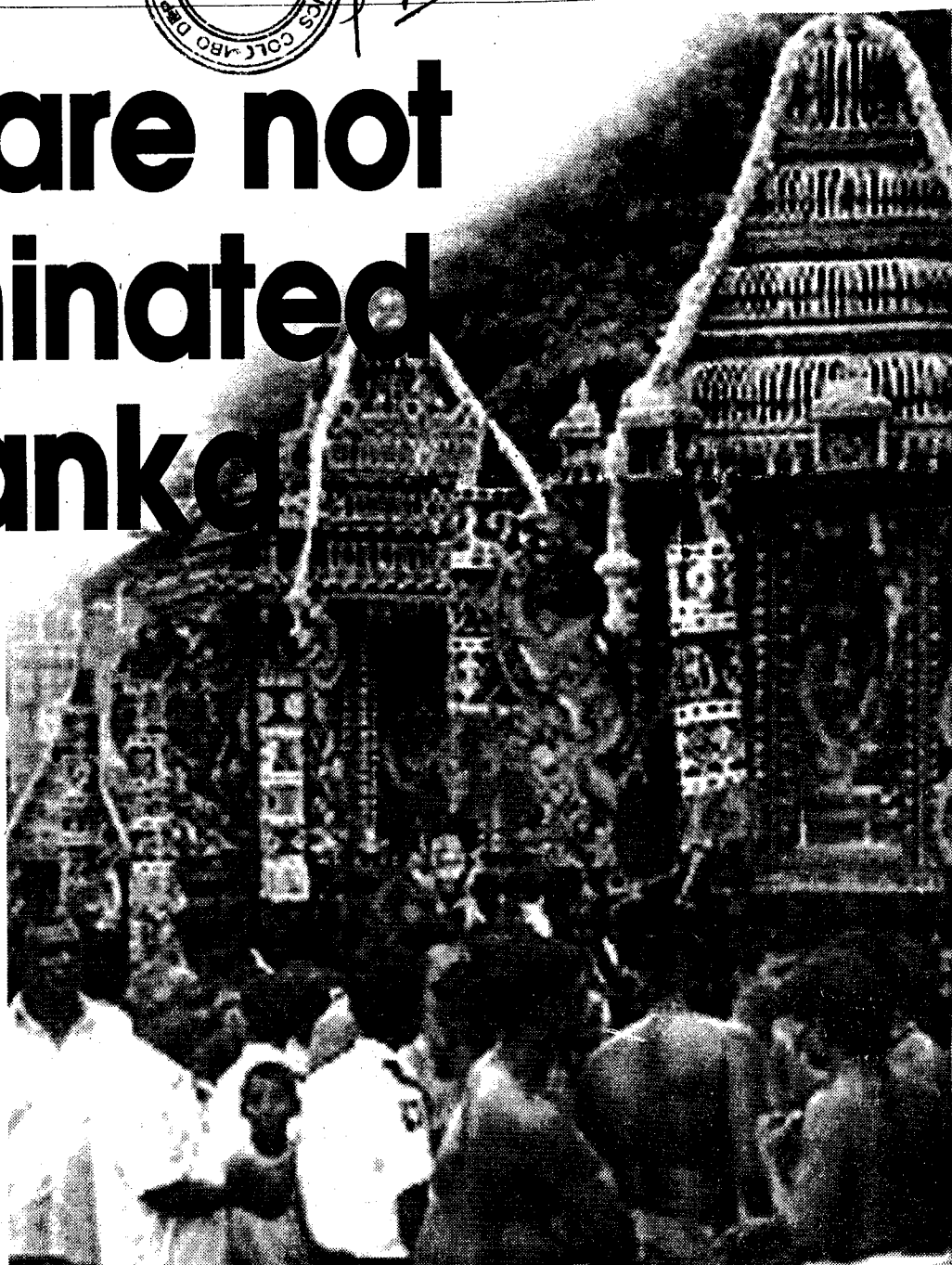
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The exact nature of the so called ethnic problem, sometimes referred to as the National Problem or the Tamil Problem, has not been clearly defined by those who comment on the subject and even those who propose elaborate solutions which impact on the lives of everybody who lives in this small island. Some vaguely say the Tamils are discriminated in relation to language, culture, employment, land ownership, security etc. without giving facts and figures to support their claim. They do not explain clearly how the Government or the majority community, by design, discriminates against the Tamils. They seem to imply that absence of devolution of political power to the North constitutes a major discriminatory policy aimed against a minority community.

This theory does not hold because devolution of political power is not considered a compulsory or essential minority right as enunciated in the UN Charter on Minority Rights - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27). The United Nations would not have defaulted on a matter of such importance if it felt that devolution of political power is necessary to guarantee the equality of treatment of all communities. These minority rights cover protection of existence, protection from discrimination and persecution, protection and promotion of identity and participation in political life. The fact that the UN Covenant does not specifically mention devolution of political power as an essential arrangement in order to safeguard the above mentioned minority rights, would mean that what is required is deliverance in respect to the above minority needs and not devolution per se. If a government fails in that score there may be a case for devolution. However it could be shown that Sri Lanka has not failed in this respect and on the contrary has in fact achieved high standards in all these areas compared to other countries which face similar problems.

As regards language the Sri Lankan Constitution guarantees the right to use Tamil as an official language in any part of the country. A Tamil speaking person for instance could use Tamil in any court of law anywhere in Sri Lanka. This right is not granted even to the Tamils in Tamil Nadu in India where the Tamils are not allowed to use their language in the courts in their own state. This proves the fact that minorities are looked after very well in Sri Lanka and better than in those countries which preach to us on minority rights. Freedom and space to engage in cultural activities are made available to the minorities in Sri Lanka without any restriction what-so-ever. For instance the Vel festival is held in parts of the South with equal pomp and pageantry as in Jaffna and very often with the participation of Sinhala Buddhist politicians and ordinary people. The Theru procession of Arulmini Sivasubramania Swamy Kovil in Slave Island parades the streets with complete freedom. Further the universities in the North and the East have departments of study in fine arts and religion which could foster the development of Hindu and Islamic cultures. Moreover some universities in the South too have facilities for the study of these subjects.

With regard to employment exact figures for Jaffna are not available but in other districts in the North the unemployment rate is comparable with the national figure of 7.5%. In the Eastern province employment figures are better compared to some districts in the South such as Moneragala. Similarly household income, which is a good indicator of employment, is quite satisfactory in a comparative sense in the North and the East. For instance, household income in the Vavuniya District is Rs. 39,640/- per month which is the fourth highest in the country after Colombo, Gampaha and Ratnapura (Reference HIES Report, 2009/2010, Department of Census and Statistics). Household income in Trincomalee and Batticaloa Districts are better than in the Moneragala District. Per capita income in the Vavuniya District is Rs.8,988/- which is better compared to Kandy (Rs.8,285/-), Galle (Rs.7,923/-) and



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Moneragala (Rs.5,605/-). Similarly household expenditure figures indicate that districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces compare favourably with the other districts with Vavuniya coming fourth and Batticaloa doing better than Moneragala.

Data on the percentage of people living below poverty level reveal that Vavuniya is the best district in the whole country in this regard. The percentage of people living below poverty line is 2.3% in Vavuniya, whereas it is 3.6% in Colombo which is the second best in the country. Batticaloa has recorded the worst figure in this respect (20.3) and Jaffna comes next with 16.1. Kurunegala and Trincomalee districts have recorded an identical value of 11.7 as the percentage of people living below poverty line.

In the field of education, the availability of schools in Jaffna in relation to its population are better than most of the Districts in the South. There are more functional schools in the Killinochchi District than in the Moneragala District. The number of Tamil and Muslim students studying in the national universities corresponds favourably with the national population ratios of these communities. Similarly the numbers entering the more popular streams of higher education such as medicine, engineering, law and commerce also tally well with the population ratios of the different communities. Data on school attendance in the 5 - 20 year age group show that the best performance in this regard is by the Eastern Province which records 86% school attendance. Northern Province is not far behind with a figure of 85%. More importantly these two provinces have done better than the Western (84%) and the North Western (81%) Provinces.

With regard to infra-structure development suffice it to say that far away Mullaitivu now has better roads than some parts of Kandy. Access to supply of electricity is available to 83% of people in the Vavuniya District whereas only 77% in the Kurunegala District has this facility. War ravaged Jaffna is not too far behind in this respect with 65% enjoying electricity supply. If an effort has been made by the Sri Lankan government or the majority community to systematically discriminate and oppress the minority communities the above mentioned favourable achievements in the socio-economic and education spheres would not have been possible. And these gains have been made despite the ravages of war which devastated these areas for three decades. No other country in similar circumstances has achieved what Sri Lanka has achieved. Yet the vicious campaign to smear the good name of the country, its leaders and the Sinhala Buddhist majority goes on led by the Tamil politicians, Tamil Diaspora, Tamil Nadu politics, Western Imperialists and local opportunist politicians. What is the reason for this well organized hugely funded campaign of vilification? Obviously their aim is to pave the way for a separate state which in turn would help each of these players to ply their agendas.

Reference; HIES Report 2009/2010, Census and Statistics Department