

Part IV
History of the Conflict

Paper 13

Sinhalese Settlements and Forced Evictions of Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces

by Prof. Chelvadurai Manogaran

The planned settlement of Sinhalese peasants in the Northern and Eastern provinces has threatened the economic, social and cultural future of Sri Lanka's Tamils and undermined the political power they have wielded in the province where they have a long-established history of settlement. The purpose of this paper is to validate Tamil claims that the government's colonization policies are politically motivated. Don Stephen Senanayake, the first Prime Minister of independent Sri Lanka, started the initial phase of the planned settlement of Sinhalese in the Dry Zone in the 1930, when he was the Minister of Agriculture and Lands in the British colonial government.

While the stated objectives colonization were to alleviate the problems of landless peasants in the Wet Zone and increase food production, he also regarded peasant colonization as a means of aiding the Sinhalese people to return to the land of their ancient civilization. Sinhalese leaders believed that the Dry Zone could be restored to its former glory if new irrigation projects were constructed, old tanks and channels restored, and large numbers of peasants settled throughout the Dry Zone. Tamil leaders accused the govern-

ment of formulating a policy on peasant colonization designed to change the ethnic composition of the Tamil-dominated areas. Sinhalese extremists insisted that it was anti-national to take up an attitude that any area of Ceylon is to be specifically reserved for any particular community or that any particular community should be excluded from any part of Ceylon.¹ Mick Moore, commenting on the government's policy on colonization and its impact on the Tamil-speaking people writes:

For not only have large-scale irrigation schemes intruded Sinhalese settlers into areas formerly occupied by Tamil speakers – Sri Lanka Tamils or Muslims – but this has been the conscious and admitted intention. There is thus the territorial dimension to what has been termed, in relation to Sinhalese political and cultural resurgence, 'The Myth of Reconquest.' Land policy, and the ideologies which support it, have in

¹Robert N. Kearney, *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1967, p.119.

general focused much more on the control of land than on the cultivation of or use of land.²

Mick Moore also states that D. S. Senanayake's zeal in promoting colonization and irrigation development in the Dry Zone resulted in the infusion of Sinhalese nationalism with the vision that the colonization of the Dry Zone was a return to the heartland of the ancient irrigation civilization of the Sinhalese.³ Janice Jiggins indicates that D. S. Senanayake desired his name to be associated with King Parakrama Bahu, who was responsible for restoring tanks and reviving the agricultural system which was destroyed by the Malabars (Tamils).⁴ Therefore, there is every reason to believe that the large-scale irrigation and colonization projects in the Dry Zone were initiated in the 1930s to restore the area to its former glory.⁵

The Government secured funds from local and foreign sources to launch massive projects to eradicate malaria, clear land for agriculture, restore irrigation works, construct roads that linked peasant colonies to markets and towns, and built homes for colonists. Peasant colonists also received government subsidies and allowances for the purchase of farm implements

²Mick Moor, *The State and Peasant Policies in Sri Lanka*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 45.

³*Ibid.*, p.45.

⁴Janice Jiggins, *Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese, 1947-1976*, London: Cambridge University press, 1979, p.408

⁵Donald E. Smith, "Religion, Politics, and the Myth of Reconquest," in Tissa Fernando and Robert N. Kearney, eds., *Modern Sri Lanka: A Society in Transition*, Foreign and Comparative Studies/South Asia Series, No.4, Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Action, 1979, p. 85.

and buffaloes, as well as for cultivation. Thousands of Sinhalese peasants were moved from the densely populated Southwestern Zone to areas of the northern and eastern Dry Zone, including areas regarded by Tamils to be within their traditional homeland.⁶

13.1 EXTENT OF SINHALESE COLONIZATION OF TAMIL DISTRICTS

An analysis of the ethnic composition of Tamil-majority districts indicates that between 1953 and 1981 Sinhalese population in the Trincomalee District increased by 465%, while the Tamil population increased by only 149% during the same period.⁷ Moreover, the Sinhalese population in the Eastern Province, as a whole, increased by 435% while the Tamil population increased by a mere 145% during the same period. In the Northern Province, Sinhalese population increased by 137%, while the Tamil population increased by only 92% during the same period. Moreover, the Tamil population did not exceed 10% of the total population in any of the Sinhalese-majority districts in 1981, whereas the Sinhalese population in the Tamil-majority districts of Vavuniya, Trincomalee, and Amparai are as high as 16.55%, 33.62%, and 37.5%, respectively. Indeed, Sinhalese colonization has changed the ethnic composition of Tamil-majority districts and reduced the size of the area Sri Lankan Tamils regard as their traditional homeland.⁸

⁶Robert N. Kearney and B. Miller, *Internal Migration in Sri Lanka and Its Social Consequences*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987, p.94.

⁷Chelvadurai Manogaran, *Ethnic Conflict and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka*, Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1987, pp. 95-102, and 140-148.

⁸Chelvadurai Manogaran, "Colonization as Politics: political Use of Space in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict," in Chelvadurai Manogaran and Brian Pfaffenberger (eds.),

Ethnic Cleansing Started in Amparai District. Tamils did not object to the movement of Sinhalese peasants from the wet zone to the no-man's land as long as the colonization schemes were established in predominantly Sinhalese-majority districts. Unfortunately, deliberate measures were adopted by the government to establish Sinhalese peasant colonies in Tamil-majority districts. Sinhalese politicians and scholars are reluctant to admit that the government's policy regarding the selecting of sites for peasant settlements and selecting colonists to these settlements were carefully manipulated to ensure that new colonization schemes were not only established in Tamil districts, but they also constituted predominantly of Sinhalese. Even the few ethnically-mixed peasant colonies were transformed into exclusively Sinhalese colonies during the horrible period of repeated anti-Tamil riots from 1956 to 1983, because the government failed to prevent Sinhalese mobs from forcefully evacuating hundreds of Tamil settlers. The ethnic cleansing of the peasant colonies was, in some instances, conducted with the assistance of the security forces and home guards. In Gal Oya, one of the major colonizations schemes established in the Eastern Province, Tamils and Muslims were either killed or driven out of these colonies by marauding Sinhalese mobs, retail traders, laborers, and squatters who had encroached on these colonization schemes illegally.⁹ By 1981, most of the Assistant Government Agent Divisions in the western parts of the Eastern Province were transformed into almost exclusively Sinhalese majority areas. Sinhalese colo-

The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994, pp.109-116.

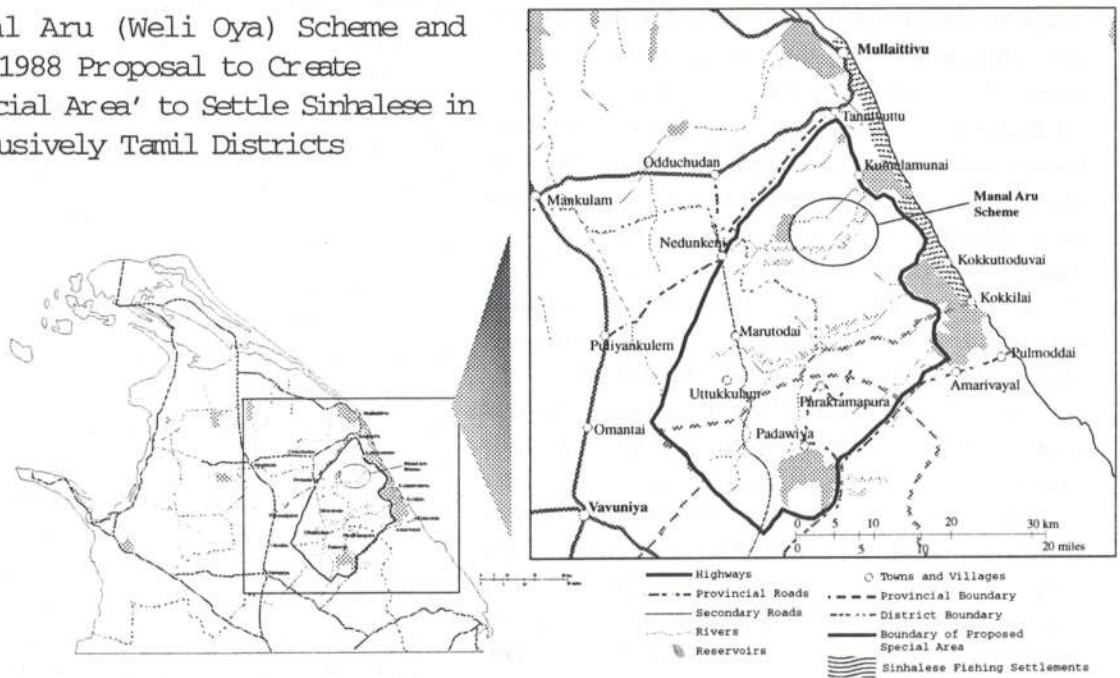
⁹B. H. Farmer, *Pioneer Peasant Colonization in Ceylon*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 203 and p. 229.

nization in the Eastern Province resulted in the creation of two new Sinhalese electorates by the late 1970s.

Ethnic Cleansing: The Tragedy of Manal Aru. Professor K. M. de Silva insists that peasant colonies were only established in the sparsely populated western interior of the Eastern Province, but by late 1970s, an area in the Northern Province which has a long history of settlement by Sri Lanka's Tamils became the site of an exclusively Sinhalese peasant settlement.¹⁰ In order to establish this colony, the government has evacuated more than 3,000 Tamil families from the Thannimurippu Colony in the Manal Aru area under the Accelerated Mahaveli Development Scheme since the late 1970s. This development scheme involved augmentation of the supply of water in the Manal Aru, by transferring water from the Mahaveli Ganga via other rivers and channels. Some of the villagers were not only driven out of the region by the military, but the security personnel was also accused of murdering 29 of those who refused to leave. The tragedy of Manal Aru did not end with the forced evacuation of Tamils, because none of the Tamils who lost their farmland were ever resettled in the area. Instead, more than 25,000 Sinhalese colonists were settled in the region when the Manal Aru scheme came into operation in 1984. The Tamil name of Manal Aru was subsequently changed to the Sinhalese name Weli Oya and the Tamil name of Thannimurippu colony was changed to the Sinhalese name, Janakapura colony. These colonists were armed, and additional protection was furnished to the colonists

¹⁰K. M. De Silva, *The Traditional Homelands of the Tamils*, Kandy, Sri Lanka: International Center for Ethnic Studies, 1995.

Manal Aru (Weli Oya) Scheme and the 1988 Proposal to Create 'Special Area' to Settle Sinhalese in Exclusively Tamil Districts



Source: The Weli-Oya Outrage Tamil Voice International, vol.2 (2), Feb.1, 1989, pp10-11.
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Figure 13.1: Manal Aru (Weli Oya) Scheme and the 1988 Proposal to Create 'Special Area' to Settle Sinhalese in Exclusively Tamil Districts

by establishment of army camps in their vicinity. Tamil leaders believe that the location of this colony was designed to deny Tamils the right to claim any district on their island as their traditional homeland any time in the future, and to deny Tamil demands for the merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces. Similar plans are afloat to colonize the Batticaloa District, a predominantly Tamil district, with Sinhalese settlers under the Maduru Oya Project. Sinhalese colonization in an exclusively Tamil district has been responsible for some of the ruthless violence that has been perpetrated by the military and the LTTE on the civilian population in the Amparai, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee, and Vavuniya districts.

The Government Engineers a Scheme To Evict Hundreds of Tamil Families From Vavuniya and Mullaitivu. Another scheme to ethnically cleanse an important area in the heart of the Tamil homeland was contrived by the government while the northeast was under the control of the IPKF. It was devised by Gamini Dissanayake, the Minister of Land and Land development and Minister of Mahaveli Development, who issued a gazette notification on April 14, 1988 that more than 7,590 Tamil families from forty villages would be displaced from the Vavuniya District, under the Mahaveli Development Scheme. This scheme was designed to extend the Sinhalese colony of Weli Oya westwards into the heart of the Tamil territory. While Indian officials succeeded in foiling this effort, there is no guarantee that this scheme will not be revived by the present government.

Ethnic Cleansing in other areas in the Eastern Province. The government not only

failed to stop ethnic cleansing in the western interior of the Eastern Province, it was instrumental in the forced evacuation of hundreds of Tamil families from their traditional villages located in the heart of the Tamil homeland in the Northern Province. Many of the atrocities and revenge killings carried out by the army and the LTTE in the Eastern Province, or across the border in the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa Districts, were directly linked to the establishment of Sinhalese settlers in areas which had, until the late 1970s, been the land of many generations of Tamils.

Forced Evacuation of Tamils Refugees in the Eastern Province. In the early 1980s, the government concentrated its military operations in the Eastern Province, where troops mounted a series of attacks on Tamil villages to flush out militants. Most of the victims of these raids were Tamil civilians, many of whom were killed or rendered homeless. Trincomalee District became the focus of Sinhalese colonization, with some of the colonists settled in the areas which Tamil inhabitants had been forced to vacate for security reasons. The army, frustrated by its inability to marginalize the LTTE, carried out a ruthless campaign of burning towns and villages that displaced thousands of Tamils in the Eastern Province. It is estimated that at least 3,300 Tamil civilians in that district were tortured and killed by the military in 1984. This type of forced evacuation of Tamils continued into the 1990s and the latest incident involves the seizure of lands from Tamils to expand the army camp in Linga Nagar in the Trincomalee District.

Forced Evacuation of Indian Tamil Refugees. The most vicious of the killings

occurred in November 1984, along the border of the Vavuniya District where Tamil settlers were gradually being replaced by Sinhalese settlers. In one of the most inhumane acts committed by the government, hundreds of Indian Tamils were driven out of two private farms, Kent Farm and Dollar Farm. These two settlements were established in 1977 with the help of voluntary organizations, such as the Gandhian Society and the Tamil Refugee Rehabilitation Organization, in order to provide refuge to Indian Tamils who had fled the central hill country during the anti-Tamil riots of 1977. The military settled four hundred and fifty Sinhalese ex-convicts in the very area that had been the home of Indian Tamil refugees for almost seven years.

It is estimated that almost a quarter of the island's population was moved from the Wet Zone to the Dry Zone between 1946 and 1971, under peasant colonization schemes. These colonization schemes have drastically altered the ethnic composition of Tamil provinces. In particular, Sinhalese population in the Trincomalee District increased from 3.8% to 33.6% of the total population between 1911 and 1981. During the same period, the Tamil population decreased from 56.8% to 33.7% in the district. In the Amparai District, Sinhalese population increased from 7.0% to 38%, while the Tamil population declined from 37.0% to 20.0% between 1911 and 1981. This rapid increase in the number of Sinhalese settlers in the Eastern Province led to the creation of the Sinhalese electorates of Seruvila and Amparai in 1976. Even though Tamil leaders consider Sinhalese colonization of Tamil districts as a form of ethnic cleansing, Sinhalese politicians continue to justify the policy on the grounds that Sri Lankan Tamils, like Sinhalese, have been migrating to Sinhalese areas. Tamil migration into Sinhalese districts,

however, has been voluntary and personally financed. Tamils sought residence in Sinhalese areas for the sole purpose of securing white collar jobs, because the Tamil-dominated dry areas of the North and East lack water for successful farming. Moreover, the migration of Sri Lankan Tamils into Sinhalese areas has neither significantly changed the ethnic composition of any Sinhalese districts nor created Tamil electorates in Sinhalese provinces.

Sinhalese nationalists and scholars have even used demographic data to insist that Sinhalese have the right to colonize any districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces because a large percentage of Sri Lanka's Tamils live in Sinhalese Provinces. They also indicate that a substantial number of them have been living outside the Northern and Eastern provinces when the island was a British colony. This claim cannot be validated because the census data of 1881 suggests that Sri Lanka's Tamils constituted less than 3.0% of the total population in all the Sinhalese districts, except in Anuradhapura District where they accounted for 4.6% of the total population. They however constituted almost 100% of the population of the Jaffna District and 81%, 64%, 62%, 62%, and 58%, of the population of Vavuniya District, Trincomalee District, Mannar District, and Batticaloa District respectively in the same census year. Tamil-speaking Muslims constituted a substantial portion of the remaining population in these districts while both the Tamils and Muslims constituted 50% and 30% of the population respectively of Amparai District in the 1881. On the other hand, Sinhalese population accounted for less than 5.0% of the total population in all the Tamil-speaking districts, except in the Amparai District where they constituted 18.24% of the total population.

The 1981 Census of population data reveal

that, except for the Colombo and its suburbs, where the Sri Lankan Tamils accounted for 9.8% of the population, they constituted between less than 1.0% to 3.0% in most Sinhalese Districts. Instead of suggesting that the Sinhalese constituted 94.4 %, 94.6% and 97.4% of the total populations of Galle, Matara, and Hambantota districts, respectively, in 1981. Professor Peiris is willing to make a general statement that Sinhalese account for over 90% of the southern lowlands.¹¹ This statement can imply that Sri Lankan Tamils may account for 8-9% of these populated provinces. There is another statement made in the same paper implying that, excluding the southern lowlands, Sinhalese constitute between 70% and 90% in the remaining Sinhalese-dominated provinces. The 1981 Census data however reveals that Sri Lanka's Tamils constituted: (a) less than 1.2% of the total population in the Kalutara, Anuradhapura, and Kurunagala districts, (b) less than 2.3% of the total population in Polonnaruwa, Ratnapura, and Kegalle districts, (c) less than 5% of the total population in Kandy District, (d) less than 6% of the total population in Badulla, Monaragala, and Matale districts, and (e) 6.7% of the total population in the Puttalam District. The granting of citizenship to Tamils of Indian origin in the 1970s gives a false impression that 13% of Nuwara Eliya's population were Sri Lankan Tamils in 1981.

Therefore, the figures presented in the paper were carefully manipulated to give the impression that 27.4% of the Sri Lankan Tamils who lived outside the Northern and Eastern provinces were distributed throughout the island as to include all the Sinhalese-dominated districts. In-

¹¹G. H. Peiris, "An Appraisal of the Concept of a Traditional Tamil Homeland in Sri Lanka", *Ethnic Studies Report*, IX(1), pp.13-39.

deed, of the total of 512,332 Sri Lankan Tamils, who lived outside the Northern and Eastern provinces in 1981, 163,946 Sri Lankan Tamils lived in the Colombo District and 46,109 Sri Lankan Tamils lived in the Gampaha District, respectively. Approximately 184, 493 Sri Lankan Tamils resided in the districts of Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Puttalam and Badulla. The remaining 117,836 Sri Lankan Tamils were distributed in other Sinhalese districts, but nowhere was the Sri Lankan Tamil population large enough to drastically alter the ethnic composition of any of them. Indeed, Sri Lankan Tamils constituted 4.9%, 6.7%, and 5.7% of the total population of Kandy, Puttalam and Badulla districts, respectively in 1981 (see Table 13.1). Sri Lankan Tamils only accounted for 9.9% of the total population of Colombo district during the same year.

Comparison of the ethnic composition of the administrative districts for the census years 1881 and 1981 indicates that while the proportion of Sri Lankan Tamils living in Sinhalese districts had dramatically decreased between these years, Sinhalese population had increased substantially in the Amparai, Trincomalee, and Vavuniya districts. It is true that Sri Lankan Tamils continue to live in substantial numbers in the Colombo District for security reasons, but very few of them live in other Sinhalese-dominated districts. The substantial increase of Sinhalese population in Tamil districts, especially in the Eastern Province, has been attributed to the aggressive policy of settling thousands of Sinhalese in Tamil districts by the government. On the other hand, the dramatic decline in the Sri Lankan Tamil population in Sinhalese districts can be attributed to ethnic conflict; many of them were forced to flee following the anti-Tamil riots of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Many Tamils sought refugee status in Tamil Nadu, India and

Table 13.1: Changes in the Ethnic Composition of Administrative Districts in Sri Lanka 1881–1981. Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors. (Source: Derived from the Census data of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for the period 1881–1981, published by the Colonial Government and the Government of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Colombo, Government Press.)

Year-District	1881	1881	1881	1946	1946	1946	1981	1981	1981
	S	T	M	S	T	M	S	T	M
Colombo	82.2	2.8	6.0	81.1	4.1	5.5	77.9	9.8	8.3
Gampaha	82.2	2.8	6.0	81.1	4.1	5.5	77.9	9.8	8.3
Kalutara	90.6	0.1	7.8	86.8	0.8	5.5	87.3	1.0	7.5
Kandy	53.7	2.7	7.6	57.8	4.2	7.4	75.0	4.9	9.9
Matale	61.03	1.4	6.8	68.1	3.1	6.0	79.0	5.9	7.2
Nuwara Eliya	36.1	3.0	1.4	37.8	2.0	1.9	35.9	13.5	2.8
Galle	93.0	0.1	4.9	94.5	0.7	3.0	94.4	0.7	3.2
Matara	95.6	0.1	3.3	94.4	0.7	2.6	94.6	0.6	2.6
Hambantota	96.1	0.5	1.7	96.6	0.5	1.6	97.4	0.4	1.1
Jaffna	0.03	98.3	1.0	1.07	96.3	1.3	0.60	95.3	1.7
Mannar	0.67	61.5	31.1	3.76	51.0	33.0	8.10	50.6	26.6
Vavuniya	7.4	80.9	7.3	16.6	69.3	9.3	16.6	56.9	6.9
Batticaloa	0.4	57.5	30.7	4.0	69.0	27.0	3.2	70.8	24.0
Amparai	18.24	30.0	50.4	16.7	28.3	54.9	37.6	20.1	41.5
Trincomalee	9.1	63.6	25.9	20.7	40.1	30.6	33.6	33.8	29.0
Kurunegala	66.7	0.8	4.4	92.2	1.5	4.2	93.1	1.1	5.1
Puttalam	80.7	10.0	16.0	78.7	7.0	9.9	82.6	6.7	9.7
Anuradhapura	80.7	4.6	11.2	79.7	6.7	10.7	91.2	1.2	7.1
Polonnaruwa	80.7	4.6	11.2	79.7	6.7	10.7	91.2	2.2	7.1
Badulla	68.7	1.2	3.7	57.4	4.2	3.2	68.5	5.7	4.2
Monaragala	68.7	1.2	3.7	57.4	4.2	3.2	68.5	5.7	4.2
Ratnapura	89.5	0.5	2.5	75.4	1.2	1.7	84.7	2.3	1.7
Kegalle	90.9	0.2	4.3	82.1	0.8	3.7	86.3	2.1	5.1

other nations, such as Canada, Australia and England, following the anti-Tamil riots of 1983. The government's policy on peasant colonization, the anti-Tamil riots, the large scale migration of Tamils to India and other countries, the forced evacuation of Tamil refugees from many areas of the Trincomalee District, the forced eviction of Tamils from their traditional villages in Manal Aru area of the Mullaitivu District, the military occupation of the Northern Province which resulted in the large scale movement of the Tamil population from the Jaffna Peninsula to the Vanni, and measures adopted by the government to evict Tamil populations under the pretext of expanding the perimeter of the security zones, such as those associated with Linga Nagar in the Trincomalee District and the Palaly Airport in the Jaffna District, have greatly undermined the traditional standing of Sri Lanka's Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces; their traditional homeland has now been transformed into a war zone under the control of an occupational army of Sinhalese soldiers.

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