

# SRI LANKA BACKGROUND BRIEFING

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# JAFFNA

## A Profile

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தமிழ்த் தேசிய ஆவணச் சுவடிகள்



## Introduction

The world has yet to wake up to the fact that in the little island of Sri Lanka, there is a little area that has ceased to be under the island government's control. That area is the northern most portion called Jaffna Peninsula. In a country with a 74% Sinhala population, the Jaffna Peninsula is today almost 100% Tamil. It occupies a position that is unique in the civilized world. There is no Police force, and the courts of law are dormant. Lawyers get no briefs, the judges no work. The government writ does no longer prevail; the government-appointed civil administration functions only to the extent that it is permitted to exercise authority by Tamil liberation forces. Government derives little revenue by way of taxation. That revenue goes instead to the upkeep of the militant youths. A major militant group – the EPRLF – is even planning to run its own postal service within the peninsula, issuing its own stamps. Filling the vacuum of the Judiciary are the People's Courts under different names like Peace Committees Conciliation Boards, Panchayats etc., meting out justice in a unique manner. But to those who are found guilty of passing information to the government or working against the cause, there is a different kind of justice, summary and swift. They are known as "lamp post killings": the guilty ones, irrespective of sex, are shot and the bodies tied to lamp posts on the highways!

There are three daily Tamil newspapers and one English-language weekly published in the peninsula, over none of which has the government any control. The English weekly, the "Saturday Review" is in fact edited by a Sinhalese – Gamini

Navaratne, and he is probably the only Sinhala civilian functioning in the peninsula!

B.B.C. correspondent Hampshire Hawkesley who was expelled from Colombo by the Sri Lanka government said in a recent piece to the Guardian, London (Aug.7, 1986):- "....During a three-day visit to the peninsula it became clear that neutralising the Tigers – (the dominant militant group) – would involve much more than just taking the weapons away from a few hundred Tamil youths. An arms factory produces 25 mortars a day, and up to 100 grenades. A training camp – reportedly one of 12 in the northern and eastern combat zones – turns out up to 80 new recruits every three months. The recruits, some as young as 15, are given basic guerrilla training in subjects such as weaponry, explosives and ambush techniques. The militants have set up factories producing jam, soap, soft drinks and other products. They run an experimental farm and are building a nursery and playground for Jaffna's children. The militiamen are by no means all young idealists. The man in charge of the training camp mess is 62 and a former station master. The man who runs the arms factory is a 53-year old former laboratory technician....."

There is another significant fact, though. The peninsula is ringed round by a dozen Army, Navy, and Air Force camps. Cooped in these camps, the government forces have no land outlet to the rest of the country; the movements are either by sea or by air. The armed forces have made repeated attempts to enter the peninsula, and every time they have been repelled and forced to get back to the camps, sometimes at the expense of heavy casualties. Brigadier Nalin Seneviratne, now Army Commander, made an honest confession to foreign correspondents, two years ago, that his "dominance" as Northern Commander ceased at the boundaries of his base camp!

This Profile of Jaffna is intended for those who would want to have more than a military insight into the area. The entire text here is made up of a series of direct cullings from a publication titled "JAFFNA" published by the Government Department of Information and printed by the Department of Government Printing in 1983, but which for some curious reason was never issued for public release. We are informed that the entire stock was gathering dust in some government stores in Colombo ever since. The publication was initiated by then Government Agent of Jaffna, Devanesan Nesiiah, and edited by Professor K. Indrapala, then of the University of Jaffna. The text was prepared by an Editorial Committee from the University of Jaffna, comprising Professor Indrapala himself, Mr. N. Balakrishnan, Prof. P. Balasundarampillai, Prof.W.L. Jeyasingham, and Dr.V. Nithyanandam, helped in various ways by Dr.A. Sanmugadas, Mr.V.P. Sivanathan and Mr.N. Bhuvanendran.

The facts and data in the publication relate to the entire Jaffna District, not to the Peninsula alone. It must also be remembered that the population statistics are based on the 1981 census figures, and the major riots and convulsion of July-August 1983 have brought considerable changes to the face of Jaffna.

### cover

*Sunset scene from the Pannai causeway: the causeway is now out of bounds to the people, because of constant sniping by army men from the ramparts of the old Dutch Fort, where they are camped.*

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தமிழ்த் தேசிய ஆவணச் சுவடிகள்

## Physical Features

The total area of the Jaffna District is 2,158 square kilometres. The district is made up of the Jaffna Peninsula and the associated islands, both making up 1,046 square kilometres and the mainland section making up the balance 1,113 square kilometres. The peninsula by itself is made up of three blocks of land, Valigamam, Vadamaradchy and Thenmaradchi. These blocks are tied together by the Vadamaradchi and Upparu Lagoons. The former has about 104 square kilometres of water surface while the latter has about 26 square kilometres. The Elephant Pass Lagoon which is considerably larger separates the mainland from the peninsula. Its eastern wing, known as Chundikulam, is 88 square kilometres in extent, while the western section, known as the Jaffna Lagoon has a spread of 207 square kilometres.

There are eleven islands, of which eight form one group and are named Karaitivu (Karainagar), Velanai (Leyden), Mandaitivu, Pungudutivu, Nainativu, Analaitivu, Eluvaitivu and Neduntivu (Delft). All these lie to the south-west of the peninsula. The largest of these is Velanai (64 square kilometres) while the smallest is Eluvaitivu (1.6 square kilometres). Palaitivu, Mantivu and Kachchaitivu are three very small islands flung further away to the south and in area varying between 2.1 and 0.5 square kilometres. The former group is made up of limestone in the main with sandy bays and beaches and marshy scrub ridden patches. The outer edges are more reefy while the inner coasts are low. The latter islands are sandy.

It is worthwhile noting that the physiography of the peninsula and the islands do not have rivers or streams in any real sense while on the mainland the seasonal streams and the nature of the slope of the land permit the construction of tanks by damming the rivers from which gravity irrigation is possible while in the former the lowest depressions permit accumulation of water in *kulams*.....

## Climate

The region under consideration is situated within ten degrees of latitude to the north of the equator. It is in close proximity to the sub-continent of India and separated from it by the Palk Strait and the Bay of Bengal. In size the area is small and no place in it is more than 40 — 50 miles from the sea. The land, nowhere rises more than 300 feet above sea level. These locational and physiographic conditions are acted upon by the "equatorial atmospheric phenomena" to create a set of weather conditions that avert their individualities and make the region a climatic unit in itself.

The latitudinal position of the region results in high temperatures, resulting from the high solar intensity due to the high angle of incidence of solar rays at all times of the year. However, there is an amelioration of temperature conditions due to the processes of convection, adiabatic cooling and resulting condensation. The latter accounts for the high percentage of humidity in the lower atmosphere. This and the cumulus-cloud-covered skies absorb and reflect the incoming solar radiation in addition. The process of convection also leads to the development of the land-sea breezes which affect the temperature conditions on the sea-board by making it more equable.

TABLE I (In °F)

Jaffna (25)\*

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July
77.6	79.0	82.2	84.7	84.8	84.6	82.9
Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Av.	
82.4	82.6	81.6	79.2	77.6	81.5	

The next important consideration in this region is the effectiveness of rainfall. Owing to the high incidence of sunshine with cloudless days, long periods of drought and highwind velocity, the loss of moisture due to evaporation is very great. This condition would be further complicated by edaphic conditions. Therefore the effectiveness of rainfall is much less than the absolute rainfall figures would let us conclude. It is worth pointing out that there are at least five to six months in the year where the unreliability of water for agricultural and other purposes (April to September) is a serious problem, assuming that in February and March one could depend on the surpluses of the preceding rainy season.

This problem in the Jaffna Peninsula is offset to a degree by the use of the underground water in the limestone strata. In the mainland, the section where the limestone is absent, water is collected in tanks during the rainy season and used in the dry season for irrigation. The nature of geology and structure of the region does not permit a successful well system for perennial water supply. The wells of the limestone region have proved dependable, more so than the tanks of the mainland section.

## Natural Resources

Land and sea are two major resources of this district. Land offers limestone forming the base for the manufacture of cement, and sand, a mineral which forms the base for glass products. Both are exhaustible. The sea offers conditions suitable for the manufacture of salt by a simple process of evaporation which is aided by the terrain and climatic conditions. Salt may be considered an inexhaustible resource. The sea also offers the possibility of harvesting sea food from the marine flora and fauna.

In view of the limited amount of rainfall that is concentrated within a few months only, the proper harnessing and conservation of this resource has assumed importance in recent years because of the demand for both ground and surface water for agriculture-industry and domestic purposes.

The discovery of petroleum in limited areas on the Indian side of the Palk Strait may mean that petroleum might surface as another resource potential of this area; but one is only in the realm of speculation in this matter as far as the Jaffna District is concerned.

The listing of natural resources cannot be considered to be complete without reference to forests and palmyrah. As dealt with later under flora and fauna, forest cover that exists in a limited way is found in patches and needs conservation. The palmyrah being a semi-wild plant is found in groves all over the district. The count carried out in 1970 amounted to seven and a half millions, consisting of both the male and female varieties. This resource has formed the backbone of the economy of a section of the people and has for all people in the region helped to tide over the difficult periods of food shortage caused by frequent dry years when crops have failed. The uses of the produce that arise from this plant are manifold.....

## History

The Jaffna District, the northernmost region of the Island of Sri Lanka, is one of the oldest habitation sites in Lower South Asia. The name Jaffna, by which both the district and its capital are known, is an abbreviated form of Jaffnapatam, a Europeanised form of the Tamil, *Yalppana-pattinam*. The earliest form of this name occurs as Yalppanayan-pattinam in the fifteenth

of 110 years (1871-1981) the population of the district has increased by 238 per cent. In comparison with other districts of the country, the increase has been moderate.....

Internal and international migration have had some significance in the population dynamics of the district. The Jaffna district is generally regarded as an out-migration area. Out-migration had taken place in the district in the latter part of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century. During this period, nearly ten thousand persons, mainly males from Jaffna, migrated to the British colonies of Malaysia and Singapore seeking employment and a good percentage of them remained there. There is a sizeable descendant Jaffna Tamil community to this day in Malaysia and Singapore.

In the 1931-1946 inter-censal period, an inflow of population into the district was noted. Since 1946, internal and international migration have gained ground. However, the frequent communal disturbances since 1956 and the strained relationship between the major ethnic groups in the country had somewhat restricted the migration of the Jaffna population to the predominantly Sinhala areas other than the Greater Colombo area.....

The district is predominantly Tamil and is the core area of the traditional homeland of Sri Lankan Tamils. According to the 1981 census, the district has 42 per cent of the Sri Lankan Tamil Community of this country. The population by ethnic groups of the district in 1981 is given below :-

	Numbers	Per cent
Sinhalese ..	4,615	0.5
Sri Lankan Tamils ..	792,246	95.3
Indian Tamils ..	20,001	1.7
Sri Lankan Moors ..	13,757	1.7
Others ..	493	0.1

The majority of the Sinhalese and Moor population are found in urban centres, predominantly in Jaffna town. As much as 77 per cent of the Moor population of the district is living in the city of Jaffna. Nearly 75 per cent of the Indian Tamil population is found in the Karachchi division.

The numerical and per cent distribution of the population of the Jaffna district by religion is shown below :-

	Numbers	Per cent
Buddhists ..	4,068	0.5
Hindus ..	708,004	85.2
Muslims ..	14,169	1.7
Roman Catholics ..	95,566	11.5
Other Christians ..	9,144	1.1
Others ..	16	

## Culture

The culture of any society represents an adaptation or an adjustment to the conditions of life as people live it, including their physical, social and supernatural environment. In this sense, the culture of the Tamils of Jaffna manifests their adaptation to the conditions of life in this region. It is therefore not surprising to find that it is not the same in every way as that of the Tamils of South India. While there has been undoubtedly a diffusion of Tamil culture from Tamilnadu in this region, internal processes as well as external sources of culture change have contributed to the development of certain distinctive traits in the culture of the Jaffna man. An enduring contact with Kerala culture and the contact with Portuguese of elements from those

cultures — elements that are not noticeable in Tamilnadu. There have also been contacts with other cultures, as, for instance, with Malay culture, directly in the thirteenth century and indirectly in later centuries, first through the Dutch and in recent times through emigrants to Malaysia. Being cut off by more than twenty miles of sea from South India, the Jaffna Tamils did not fully share the historical experience of their brethren across the Palk Straits and were sufficiently removed and isolated from the home of Tamil culture to develop a culture that could be described as distinctive to them but were yet close enough to receive inspiration and draw sustenance from there.

Today the people of Jaffna speak a language that is not readily understood by the Tamils of South India. In their manners, customs and ceremonies as well as in their eating habits, they have much in common with the Malayalis of Kerala and the Sinhalese of Southern Sri Lanka. The same is true of their folklore. But in the case of the classical arts of Bharata Natya and Karnataka music, they share the same tradition with their South Indian brothers. Tamilnadu has no doubt contributed in a large measure to the culture of this district, but the elements of other cultures in it are not significant.

## Language

Tamil is the language of more than ninety-five per cent of people in the Jaffna District. Jaffna Tamil is identified as a dialect of Tamil, differing in many ways from the other dialects of Tamil, both in Sri Lanka and in South India. When a Jaffna man speaks his dialect in Madras, he is often mistaken for a Malayali. Jaffna Tamil and Malayalam have certain common linguistic features that are not found in South Indian Tamil. Both preserve certain archaic words which have gone out of vogue in South Indian Tamil. Consequently many consider the Jaffna dialect to be a purer form of Tamil. While in the later centuries it was free from Urdu influence, Portuguese and Dutch have enriched its vocabulary with loan-words. Despite its long history in the island, surprisingly it has remained free of Sinhala influences, although a few Pali words have been borrowed into it.....

## Music

For the Tamils, both in India and Sri Lanka, the temple has all along been an important cultural centre. It is there that the practice and cultivation of the arts of music, dance, drama, painting and sculpture took place until modern times. Even today traditional Tamil music is closely associated with the temple. Jaffna can in no way claim to have evolved an indigenous system of music, but it has certainly played its role in preserving traditional forms of South Indian music, especially the *Pannisai*, the devotional music of the Tamils, and the Karnataka Isai (Sangita), which is the classical music of South India. The development of this art was heavily dependent on South India and it drew much inspiration from that region. It has been the practice for artistes from Tamilnadu to visit Jaffna periodically for music recitals, while a considerable number of students intending to learn Karnataka Isai has been going over to South Indian institutions for this purpose. But now Jaffna has a leading institution conducting a four year course in Music and Bharata Natya (dance). This is the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts, now a part of the University of Jaffna. There are also other associations and organisations here that foster this art. Among them are the Gnanasambanthar Atheenam at Nallur, the Ilam Kalaigarn Manram, the Annamalai Isai Tamil Manram, and the North Ceylon Oriental Music Society.

century sources. Later it was abbreviated as *Yalppana-pattinam* (also — *pattanam*) and finally *Yalppanam*, by which name it is still known locally. In the Sinhala literary sources it is referred to as *Yapa-patuna*. The Portuguese, who came to this region in the sixteenth century, rendered the Tamil name as *Jaffnapatao*, while the Dutch in the seventeenth century adopted the form *Jaffnapatam*. This was used by the English, too, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but soon the present form of *Jaffna* came into vogue.

But this was not the name by which the region was known in the earliest period of its history. In the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era and in the early centuries after Christ, the Jaffna peninsula was known as the "Island of the Nagas". The Tamil form was *Nakanadu* (Land of the Nagas) with its variant *Nakativu* (Island of the Nagas, Skt. Nagadvipa, Pali Nagadipa, Sinhala-Prakrit Nakadiva). It is interesting to note that in the well-known map of Ptolemy (second century A.D.), it is marked as *Nagadibi*.

The story of man in this region is closely linked with South India. Separated from South India by only a few miles of sea, Sri Lanka in general and the Jaffna District in particular have always been within easy reach of various influences from the sub-continent. It is with the aid of archaeological evidence that the spread of human settlements in the district could be traced, but unfortunately not much of archaeological work has been done so far. Consequently our knowledge of the early settlements is relatively meagre.....

The early history of the Jaffna District is enveloped in darkness. The settlements of the first millenium B.C. appear to have led in course of time to the emergence of a chieftaincy or a petty kingdom some time before the third century B.C. The legends about the Naga rulers of Nagadipa preserved in the Pali chronicles and in the Tamil epic *Manimekalai* as well as the story in the Pali *Sammohavinodani* of a one-eyed prince who ruled over Nagadipa seem to preserve some memory of this early kingship.....

Throughout the first millenium A.D. further waves of settlers undoubtedly crossed over from South India. Early in the eleventh century the district came under the rule of the Imperial Colas of Tamil Nadu and this probably led to further settlement of Tamils and other South Indians. It was at this time that *Uratturai* (now known as *Urkavatturai* in Tamil and *Kayts* in other languages, though in colloquial usage it still goes as *Uratturai*) emerged as the chief port for foreign trade in the north. We find that in the twelfth century elephants and horses were among the imports at this place. With the development of the horse trade the first Muslim Arab settlers must have come to this region.

Early in the thirteenth century, when the Polonnaruva kingdom broke up, a powerful kingdom emerged in the Jaffna District under the leadership, it appears, of *Magha*, the foreign invader from Kalinga in eastern India. He is said to have brought large numbers of mercenaries from Kerala and settle them in the territories conquered by him in Sri Lanka. A strong Kerala element was probably introduced into the population of the district at this time, and many of the traces of Kerala culture that we find in this region may date back to the thirteenth century.

Before the end of the thirteenth century there were more invasions from outside and the reins of power in the Jaffna kingdom passed into the hands of the *Aryachakravarttis* who belonged to a feudatory dynasty of the *Pandyas* of *Tamilnadu*. The rulers of the new dynasty brought many new settlers to the district from *Tamilnadu*. The Tamil chronicles of *Jaffna* supply

details of the various communities settled by the *Aryachakravarttis*. Some of these references may also relate to the time of *Magha*. As these rulers encouraged the trade with the Muslims, there must have been Muslim settlements in the main port town.....

### The Jaffna Kingdom

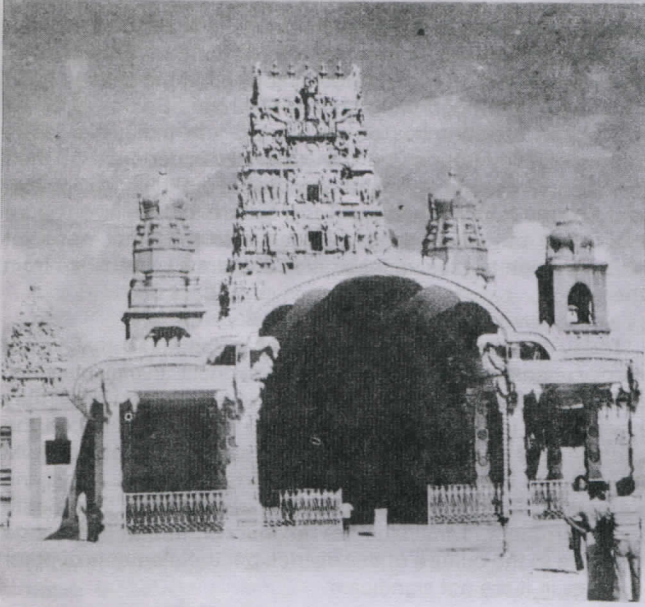
In the thirteenth century we see the emergence of the Kingdom of *Jaffna*. As mentioned earlier, *Magha* the Kalinga invader was probably the founder of the kingdom and the *Javaka* invaders succeeded him. At the end of the thirteenth century, the *Pandya* feudatories, *Aryachakravarttis*, gained control of the kingdom and began a career of conquest along the western coast of the island. Under them, the kingdom with its capital at a place called *Cinkainakar* (Skt. *Simha-nagara*) emerged as the most powerful one in the island in the fourteenth century. Foreign trade was the basis of its power and we find that merchant vessels from this kingdom played an important part in the Indian ocean trade. The *Aryachakravarttis* controlled the chank and pearl fisheries off the western coast and enjoyed a share of the island's cinnamon trade. Under them there must have been a significant growth of Muslim settlements on the western coast.

The kingdom had closer political, economic and cultural ties with South India than with the southern part of Sri Lanka. At this time there were minor chieftains called the *Vannis* controlling the southern parts of the present *Jaffna* District, and most of the *Mannar*, *Vavuniya*, *Mullaitivu* and *Trincomalee* districts. These chieftains usually paid tribute to the *Jaffna* rulers and their territories served as an effective buffer between the Tamil kingdom in the North and the Sinhala kingdom in the South. Only on one occasion did the armies of the south succeed in penetrating through this buffer and holding the kingdom briefly on behalf of the southern ruler. That was in the middle of the fifteenth century when *Sapumal Kumaraya* (*Senpaka Perumal*), the prince of Kerala origin brought up by *Parakaramabahu VI* in the court at *Jayavardhanapura Kotte*, led an invasion to *Jaffna* and occupied the kingdom for seventeen years. He later returned to *Kotte* on the death of *Parakaramabahu* to ascend the throne there and *Jaffna* again came under the rule of the Tamil dynasty.

The *Aryachakravarttis* were patrons of *Saiva Siddhanta*, *Siddha* medicine and Tamil literature, and under them notable contributions were made in *Jaffna* in these fields. The influence of the *Vijayanagara* empire of South India was strongly felt at this time, and it is possible that *Dravidian* architecture, *Bharata Natya* and Tamil music received royal patronage. None of the architectural monuments of this period has survived and we are in no position to say anything about the state of architecture or sculpture under these Tamil rulers.

The *Jaffna* kingdom, right through its history, had close economic, cultural and political links with the Tamil kingdoms of South India. With the Portuguese conquest and the consequent disruption of trade with South India, the region was gradually cut off from the mainstream of development in *Tamilnadu*. This helped the region to consolidate the developments of the period of the *Aryachakravarttis* and to strengthen its separate identity. From now on, its fortunes were linked with those of southern Sri Lanka and soon it was drawn into the mainstream of Sri Lankan politics.

After their brief rule, the Portuguese were supplanted by the Dutch in 1658. The latter had better success than their predecessors in holding the region for nearly one and half centuries, until 1795. Though Portuguese rule was brief, *Jaffna* suffered most under them. All the major temples of the area were razed



*The Nallur Kandasamy Temple, which during festival season draws worshippers from all over the peninsula.*

to the ground and their art treasures plundered. The people had to practise their religion in secret and the temple ceased to be the centre of social and cultural activities.....

The local religion, Saivism, and the traditional arts continued to suffer under the Dutch. But there was a change in their religious policy in the latter half of the eighteenth century when they allowed the building of temples. The oldest Hindu structures in Jaffna today date back to this period. The old Dravidian style temple — building was not revived fully and the new structures showed distinct influences of Dutch architecture.

The Portuguese and the Dutch administered the Jaffna District as part of their northern territory, named by the Dutch as the Jaffna Commandery. The Jaffna town, with its large fort, was the capital of this commandery and the residence of the commander who administered the region. The commander was also the lieutenant-governor of the region and his coat-of-arms had the figure of a palmyrah palm. The area under him extended from Mannar to Trincomalee.

The fort and town of Jaffna considerably expanded under the Dutch. The fort, the original foundation for which was laid by the Portuguese officer, Filipe de Oliveria on 15th August, 1620, was rebuilt by the Dutch who also enlarged the town. By the end of the eighteenth century there was, besides the main fort with its church and residences for Dutch officers, a section without any walls called the Pettah (Tamil *pettai* — outer town) or Black Town which was very populous. This is the area of the modern Main Street and may be considered the oldest part of Jaffna town.....

From the beginning of British rule, the people of Jaffna took to English education in a remarkable way. Various foreign Christian missionary organizations and local Hindu associations and philanthropists established schools all over the peninsula. The American Mission, which came to the island in 1816 and was one of the first to begin activities in Jaffna, established several free schools in the peninsula and soon went on to establish the Batticotta Seminary, the first institution of higher learning in the country. They also started the first western medical school.....

Politically, in the nineteenth century, Jaffna was brought under the control of Colombo and the administration of the district was effectively unified with that of the rest of the island. This was from 1833 when the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms came into operation. From that year, the district came to be administered by a Government Agent who was the head of all the branches of administration in the district. In the nineteenth century, when communications with Colombo had not been developed, he ruled the district in royal style, and was indeed known as the "Raja of the North".....

The election of Ponnampalam Ramanathan, the Tamil leader from Jaffna, to the Educated Ceylonese seat in the first ever election held in the country no doubt was one of the factors that contributed to the growth of this political consciousness. But, more than that, the developments in India had a profound influence on the minds of the youth of Jaffna. Added to this was the impact of western ideas that resulted from a century of English education. The American Missionaries especially, being in no way associated with British rule, were agents in the spread of liberal ideas among the youth of Jaffna. It is therefore not surprising to see the birth of various political groups and associations in Jaffna in the 1920s. The Tamil Mahajana Sabha (1921), Servants of Lanka Society (1922) and the Students' Congress (1924, later named Youth Congress) were among these political associations. The Students' Congress, it may be mentioned, was committed to national unity and independence from British rule. It was greatly influenced by Gandhi's movement in India and was responsible for his visit to Jaffna in 1927. Gandhi's visit must have helped to raise the political consciousness of the masses, too. In 1931, when elections were held under the Donoughmore Constitution, the Congress led a successful boycott of the elections in the north, for which it is still remembered. After this event, its influence began to wane. It has been described as "primarily Jaffna's response to the Gandhian nationalist movement in India" (S. Kadirgamar). It may be mentioned here that Mr. Handy Perinbanayagam, who was a prominent public figure for the next three decades in Jaffna, was the most outstanding leader of the Congress.

While the Youth Congress was committed to an all-island nationalism, the other political movements of importance in the Jaffna District were committed to the Tamil cause. The Tamil Mahajana Sabha, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (1944) and the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (Federal Party, 1948), though organizations concerned with the Tamils of the whole island, have drawn their strength primarily from the Jaffna District. Since 1956, it has been the home of resistance movements and has represented in Parliament by a majority of Federal Party members. When the Federal movement transformed itself into a separatist movement, again the district has been in the forefront of the new movement. In the 1977 elections all the M.P.s returned to Parliament from the district belonged to the Tamil United Liberation Front (1977). Similarly, when the first elections to the district's Development Council were held in 1981, all the members returned were from the TULF. Since 1979, the most significant development has been the growth of an underground movement.

## Population

The population of the Jaffna District according to the provisional results of the 1981 census is 831,112. The district is ranked fifth in population size in 1981. In 1814 and 1827 the total population of the district was recorded as 106,319 and 125,620 respectively. At the first national census held in 1871, the district population was recorded as 246,063. For a period

*Pannisai*, the traditional devotional music associated with the singing of sacred hymns in the religious rituals, is as a rule preserved only in some of the temples. It is said that this music has developed certain characteristics that make it distinctive to the region.

The *Nadasvaram* (also called *Nagasuram*) is an instrumental music of the Tamils that no visitor to Jaffna will fail to hear, however short his stay is. It is actually the classical music played on the drum called *tavil*, accompanied by a pipe called *nadasvaram*. It is a must for all temple rituals and festivals as well as for all auspicious occasions in the home. Jaffna has for long enjoyed a reputation as the home of some of the best musicians playing the *tavil* and the *nadasvaram*.

### Dance

The classical dance of the Tamils, Bharatha Natya, is very popular in Jaffna today. But it is an art to which the region has made very little contribution. As in Tamilnadu, it was not popular during the colonial period, when it was confined to the temples and practised by a class of danseuses called the *devadasis* (literally God's slaves). Once a great and noble art, it had gradually fallen into disrepute and was revived and restored to its former position in this century. Dance was part of the temple ritual and the *devadasis* lived and performed in the temple. After its restoration, it is no more performed in the temples. It is now taught in the schools and in a number of private institutions and has become a status symbol. In recent years, the classical dance of Kerala, namely Kathakali, has also been introduced to Jaffna and is becoming popular.

### Folk Drama

One of the performing arts that really flourished in Jaffna in the pre-modern period is folk drama. It was inspired by the *Teru-kuttu* (street play) of Tamilnadu and was popular both among the Hindus and the Christians. It was found to be a useful medium in the propagation of the Catholic faith and many plays with Christian themes were performed. The art that was developed in Jaffna later influenced the evolution of the Sinhala *nadagama* folk play.

### Literature

Since the time of the Kingdom of Jaffna, Tamil literary works have been produced in this region. Among the notable works of the early period is the Tamil version of the Sanskrit *Raghuvamsa*, written by Prince Arasakesari. But the body of Tamil writing belonging to the period prior to the nineteenth century, though considerable in itself, cannot be treated as a distinctive literature of the district. They are not sufficiently different from South Indian Tamil literature, either in subject-matter or in style, to be called distinctive. But in the nineteenth century, when the influence of English became a modernising and vitalising force, there were important developments in respect of the literature of the region.

Scientific literature and lexicography were two fields in which important developments were seen, chiefly owing to the efforts of Christian missionaries. Several scientific works, most of them translations, were published in Tamil. The missionaries were also responsible for the production of dictionaries on the lines of those in the European languages. The *Manual Dictionary of the Tamil Language* (1842), M. Winslow's well-known work, *A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary of High and Low Tamil* (1862) and P. Percival's *Tamil Dictionary*, were among the early Tamil dictionaries and these were mainly the work of scholars in Jaffna. The most important development was the

emergence of prose Tamil literature. The contributions of that renowned Jaffna scholar Arumuga Navalar, the brightest luminary of this period, are significant in this respect. He may rightly be regarded as having inaugurated the age of Tamil prose literature.

Under English influence, the novel and the short story came to be popular in the district as elsewhere. In the twentieth century, Jaffna writers began to make a significant contribution to enrich their literature, but it is in the post-colonial period that we get the development of a literature that could be truly called regional, reflecting in many ways the culture and environment of the people of Jaffna and dealing with themes relating to their society. Today it could be said that Jaffna can proudly claim that she has a literature that is distinctively hers.

### Religions

*Hinduism* : Adherents of all the four major religions of the island, namely Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, are to be found in Jaffna. But the vast majority of the people are Hindus. The Christians and Muslims form strong minorities. The number of Buddhists is very small indeed.

Hinduism, the oldest of these religions, is not represented in all its sects in the district. The Hindus here are mainly of the Saiva sect. Consequently almost all the temples are dedicated to Siva, Murukan and other Saiva deities. There are three Vaishnava temples but the devotees of these temples are Saivaites. The temples of Murukan are the most famous in the region. Of these, the temples at Nallur, Mavittapuram and Selvasannithy draw large crowds of devotees during the annual festivals, which last for as long as twenty-five days.

Saiva Siddhanta, the religious philosophy of the Tamil Saivas, is jealously preserved and studied by the Hindus of this region. Many of the traditional scholars here evince a deep and abiding interest in this philosophy.

### Society

The people of the district are engaged in diverse economic activities. Farming, fishing and related activities provide employment to nearly 40% of the economically active population. About 15% of the employed population is in government and semi-government services. A good number of the Jaffna Tamils in government and semi-government employment are working elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Government service has been a major source of employment for Jaffna Tamils in the past. Its importance, however, has declined in recent times as entry into the Public Services became increasingly difficult. Another 35% of the employed population is engaged in numerous service activities — including self-employed categories — such as, trade, marketing, repairs and maintenance in the Jaffna town and in some of the other important townships in the district.

Family is still the primary unit in the Jaffna social system. As in many other traditional societies an 'extended family' system is widely prevalent in the Jaffna villages. Even in many educated middle class households this practice continues. In the Jaffna society the family has been traditionally dominated by the male. Though this is still the case, it is undergoing change especially among the educated middle classes where women are now playing an increasingly important role in the running of the family, family decision-making and social activities.



Women carrying fish baskets, a memory of the past.

The property rights vis-a-vis the family members are still governed by the *Thesavalamai*, the customary laws of the Jaffna Tamils. The *Thesavalamai* refers to three types of property and property ownership, viz., (i) property given as dowry (*seethanam*) to the daughter by parents, (ii) property inherited by male members from parents (*muthusam*), and (iii) property acquired by the married couple (*thediatheddham*). All three forms have an important place in the activities of the family members reflecting a family-centered system of ownership, inheritance and transfer of property.

In the acquisition of wealth by the members of the family — especially among the affluent sections — jewellery, land and house now figure prominently. The people of Jaffna, or rather those who can afford it, are well known for keeping their wealth in gold. Even in poor families the parents will strive hard to acquire gold jewellery for their daughters.

Caste still has a dominant place in the Jaffna social system. Although class divisions have emerged, caste often tends to overshadow them especially in the villages. Economic and social differentiation at the village level seems to correspond largely to differentiation in terms of caste. The prevalence of caste in its traditional form may be considered as the most conservative aspect in Jaffna society. That the caste system had endured so long in the society could perhaps be attributed to the religious orthodoxy derived from Hinduism — in a manner very similar to the South Indian society. It would, however, be incorrect to view caste as exclusively a phenomenon among the Hindu Tamils. The Christian Tamils have not been free from it either, even though Christian influence has helped, to some extent, to blunt some of the sharp edges of the traditional caste system in Jaffna. Particularly in relation to marriage, the Christians in Jaffna may be just as caste-bound as the Hindus. However, the Muslims have no caste system.

## Economy

Economic development of any region is generally, a function of the natural and human resources available in that particular region. The natural resources of the Jaffna District, compared with other districts in Sri Lanka, are, no doubt, very much limited. Out of a total area of 2,158 km. in the District

(1,046 sq. km. in the peninsular region and 1,113 sq. km. in the mainland), only about 200 square miles or roughly about 20 per cent is suitable for either cultivation or habitation. The climate too is not very kind. The District falls under the dry zone, with an annual rainfall ranging from 40 to 60 inches; the bulk of the rain — about 90 per cent is experienced during October to December, the North-East monsoon season. The South-West monsoon brings in very little rain. Consequently, streams found in the mainland region are not perennial, but carry surplus waters during the North-East monsoon time, especially in the months of November and December. In the peninsular area of the District, the existence of underground limestone helps to conserve water. However, the problems of loss of fresh water by seepage into the sea, salt water intrusion and well water turning saline are causing increasing concern.

Despite unfavourable physical and climatic conditions, the Jaffna District, from earliest times, has been a centre of vigorous economic activities, some of them peculiar to Jaffna. The reasons for this economic enterprise may be found in the human resources of the District and the manner in which its society organised itself so as to derive maximum benefit from an unkind environment.....

## Agriculture

Like in most other districts of Sri Lanka, agriculture constitutes the most important activity of the District. About 45 per cent of the District's population is engaged in agriculture and other related occupations. However, our comparison with other districts ceases at that point, because, in several respects, agriculture in the Jaffna District stands out as a unique exercise.

The total extent of paddy land cultivated in the District during 1981-82 was 39,809 hectares. Of this 22,842 hrs. or 57.3 per cent was in the mainland area, where production was in both Maha- (North-East monsoon) and Yala (South West monsoon) seasons. In the peninsular region, however, only rain-fed cultivation is possible and, hence production is confined to Maha alone.

Among garden crops cultivated, subsidiary food crops occupy a place of prime importance. These crops have been cultivated for a long time in Jaffna, but it was since the mid 1970s with the increasing restrictions placed by the government on the import of some of the major subsidiary food commodities, particularly onions, chillies and potatoes, that their production got the necessary fillip. The advantage Jaffna had over other areas in respect of these commodities accrues mainly from the large surplus it produces. Often, more than 90 per cent of the onions and over 80 per cent of the chillies produced are available for export to other districts. Peasant incomes increased in the late 60's early and mid 70's with the help of poor rate orientation in government policy. Statistics for Jaffna alone are not available in this respect, but it may safely be assumed that these crops produced annual small farm incomes comparable to urban middle class incomes. Jaffna has attained a very high degree of efficiency in the cultivation of subsidiary food crops, especially in respect of three, but as regards agronomic practices it has been reported that there is little room for further improvement.

Apart from subsidiary food crops, vegetable growing forms an important part of garden crop cultivation. A wide variety of vegetables are cultivated.....

The two palms, palmyrah and coconut, are an integral part of the Jaffna District. The utility of these two is too numerous to enumerate and very fittingly both are called *katpaha virudsham* — the tree of life.



Another common fruit found in the Jaffna District is the mango. Mango trees are reared mainly as home garden crops and rarely does one find commercial production in marketable proportions. Mangoes in Jaffna have two seasons for bearing the regular harvest during May to July and the other a smaller harvest during the rainy season in November, December and January. The fruits which come out during the latter season are usually less sweet and fetch a lower price. Like bananas, mangoes too have different varieties, but it is only a few (sweet) varieties which make the mark in the market. Considering the delicious nature of the fruit and the favourable conditions for its growth it could be said that optimum cultivation of mango cultivation has not been achieved in the District.

One of the recent phenomena of the horticultural development in the Jaffna District has been the introduction of the cultivation of grapes. From colonial times grapes had been imported into Sri Lanka particularly for the use of urban consumers. When in the early 1960's with the mounting foreign exchange crisis, the imports of several commodities were either curtailed or completely banned, grapes came under the latter category. But even as late as 1969 the extent of land under the cultivation of grapes in the Jaffna District did not exceed 9 hectares. Today, however, more than 200 hectares are under grapes, producing about 620,000 lbs. Moreover, within Sri Lanka, Jaffna dominates in the cultivation of grapes. Of the total extent under grapes about 75 per cent is found in Jaffna. Unlike the case of many other crops grown in the District, cultivation technology in respect of grape vine is not widespread or easily available. Expert personal knowledge is therefore essential for success in this field. This crop is also more capital intensive.

### Fishing

Fish has, traditionally, been the most popular form of animal protein in the District. It is consumed primarily in the wet form. Dry fish and canned fish are also consumed but in smaller quantities. Total per capita fish consumption stands at around 18 kilograms per annum.

It is estimated that the waters along the Sri Lanka coast can produce about 254,000 metric tons of fish per annum. It is noted that the District accounts for 25 per cent of the Island's catch. Yet, exploitation is supposed to be only a quarter of the potential. The scope for further development need not, therefore, be stressed.

The abundance of lagoons in the District offers good scope for prawn fishing. The prawns caught are purchased by the Fisheries Corporation and the Cey-Nor Development Foundation for consumption outside the District and export. The lobsters, which too have a ready market outside the District, are also caught.....

### Industries

It is essential that each region should attain a minimum level of industrialisation for it to produce at least certain basic consumer goods needed within that region. Apart from this, several specialised industries, depending on the mineral resources available, should also be developed. In a region where pressure of population is high such industrial development can go a long way in providing employment opportunities. The industrial development of Jaffna falls far short of its potential.

The major mineral resources of the Jaffna District are salt, limestone, and sand. The key industries developed within the district are, therefore, based on these three resources. Salt manufacture in Jaffna is well established and is concentrated



*Fishing boats on the northern coast: with the imposition of security zone, fishing is today banned.*

around Elephant Pass. It is a government monopoly. Salt-making here is carried out by solar evaporation and all the necessary pre-requisites for such production are readily available here. When Elephant Pass is in normal production, it employs around 500 workers, but during the rainy season when production is stopped annually for about five months the labour force too is curtailed. Then, only a permanent gang of about 150 workers remain.

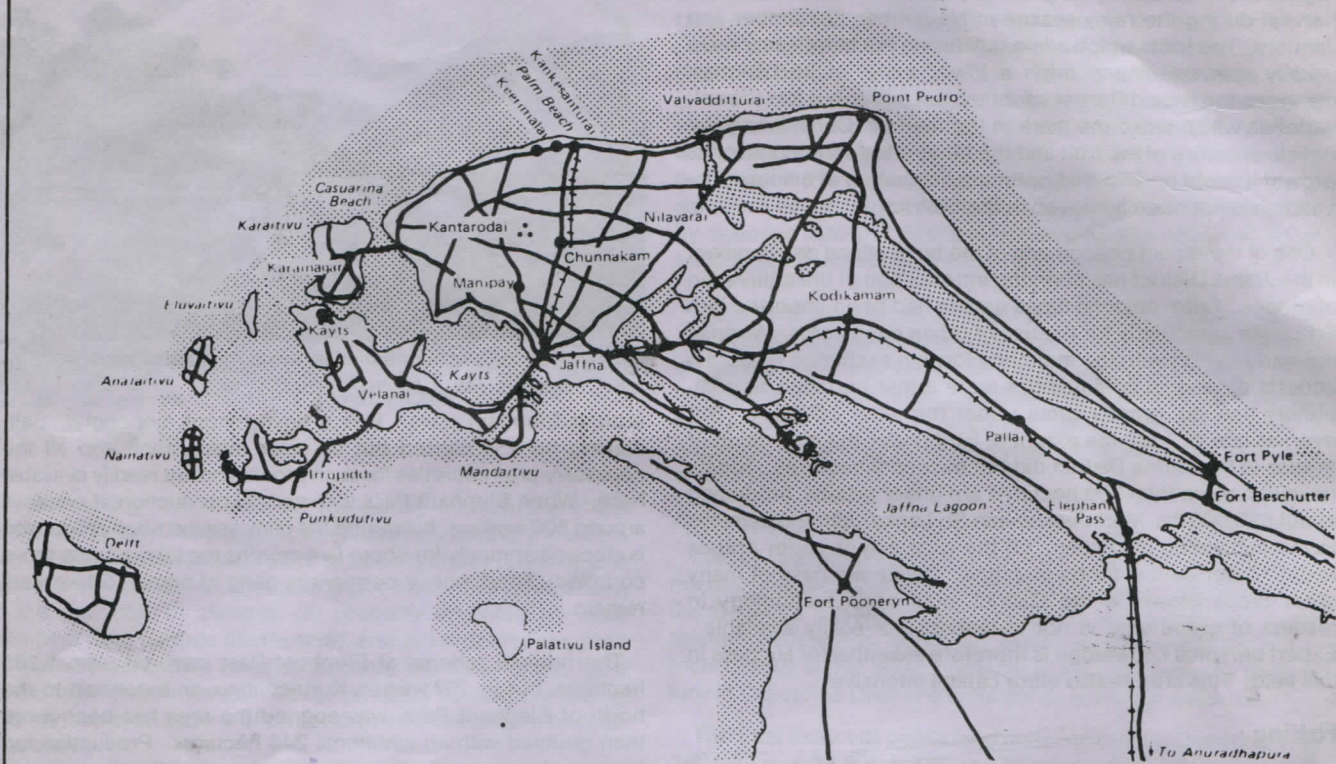
The original salterns at Elephant Pass covered almost 205 hectares, but in 1971 when Kurinchativu, an extension to the north of Elephant Pass, was opened the area has been more than doubled with an additional 243 hectares. Production too increased commensurate with the area and there is surplus production. In 1976, for example, the harvest at Kurinchativu had to be restricted by more than 50 per cent because of the surplus salt from the previous year. Even though salt had been exported in certain years this has not so far become a regular feature. Exploration for export outlets is an important pre-requisite for full scale development: Gypsum, a vital component of cement, is produced as a by-product of the salt industry. The whole production of this commodity is bought up by the Cement Corporation for use either at Kankesanthurai or Puttalam.

Cement is another major industry of the Jaffna District. The Cement Plant was completed at Kankesanthurai in 1950. Unlike salt, where there is always a surplus, the cement industry has never been able to meet the demand. With the obstruction boom in housing and accelerated Mahaweli Development the problem has become more acute. Production at Kankesanthurai has increased from about 188,000 tons in 1969 to about 257,000 tons in 1979. At present, there are about 15,000 employees working at the cement plant in three shifts.

There are a number of small industries scattered over the peninsula, producing various consumer items. The IDB in its Survey of Industries within the peninsula carried out in 1980 counted 77 such establishments.

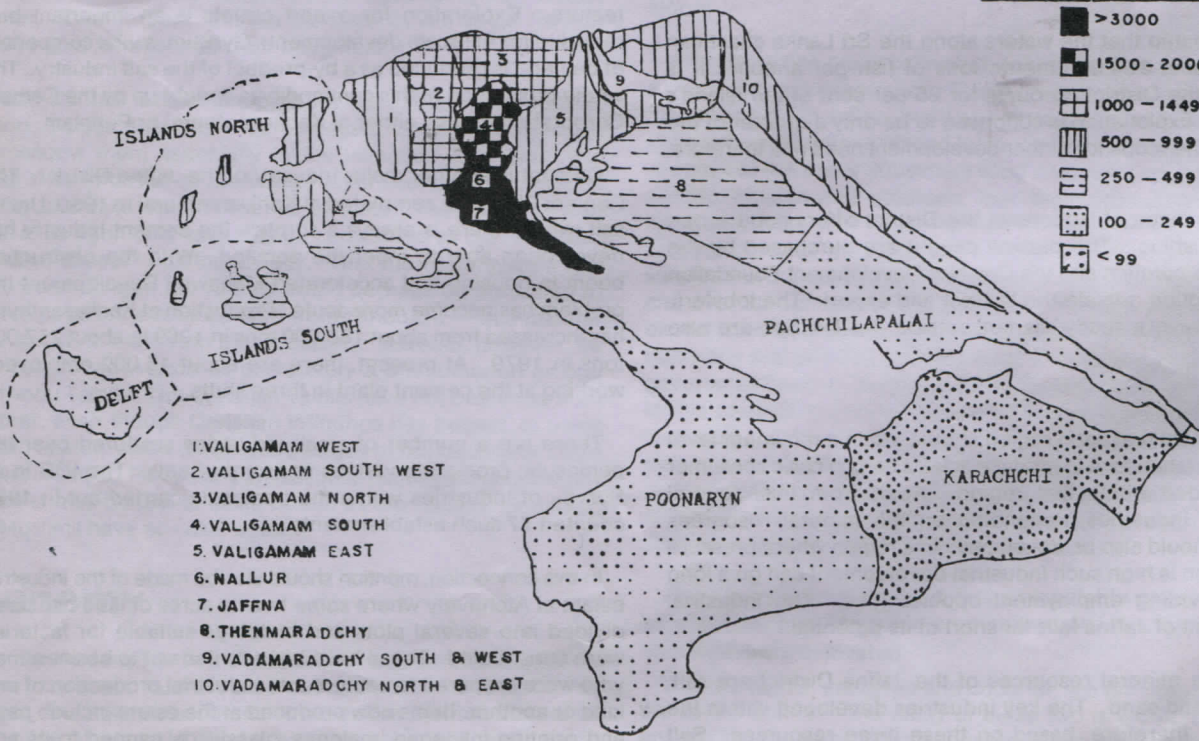
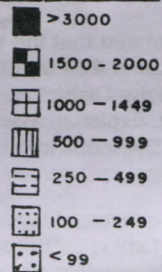
In this connection, mention should also be made of the industrial estate at Atchuvely where some twenty acres of land had been divided into several plots and buildings suitable for factories were constructed. These have been rented out to businessmen who were prepared to venture into industrial production of one kind or another. Items now produced at the estate include paint and printing ink, soap, matches, glassware, canned fruits and vegetables.

### Jaffna Peninsula



### DENSITY OF POPULATION OF JAFFNA DISTRICT BY A.G.A'S DIVISION - 1981

PER SQUARE KILO METER

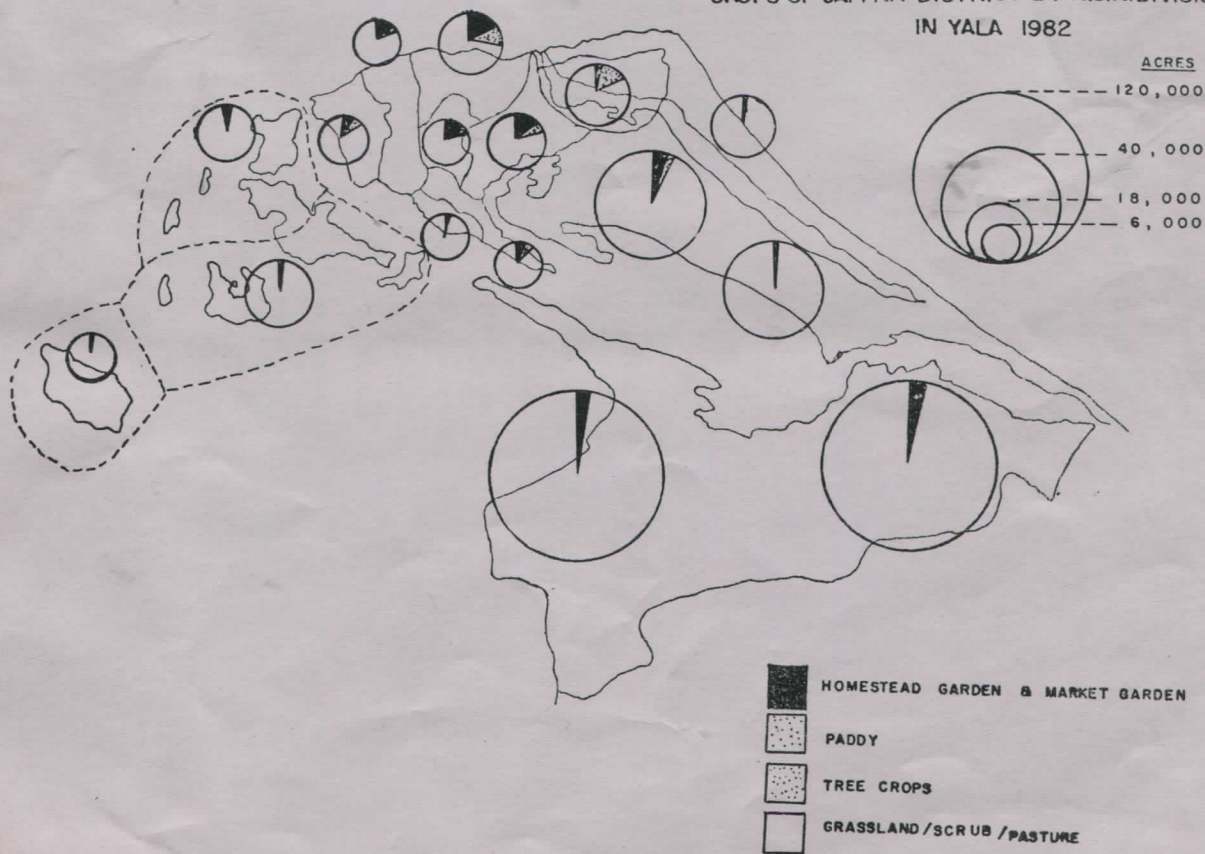


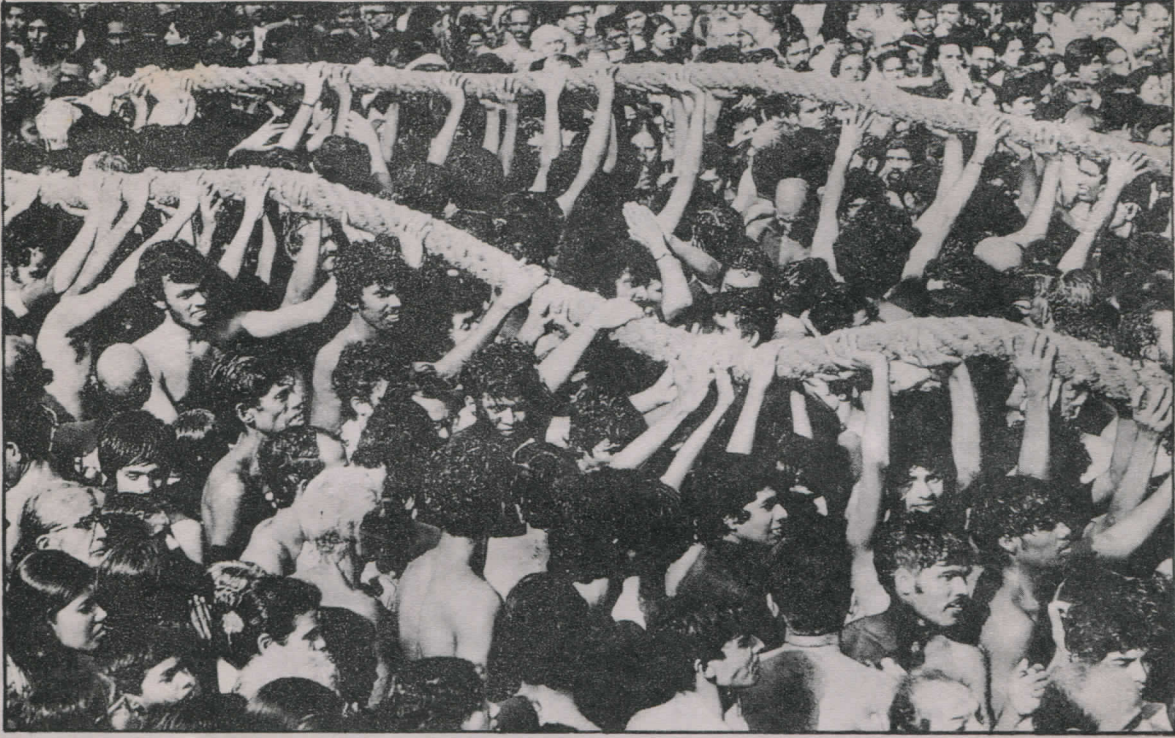
1. VALIGAMAM WEST
2. VALIGAMAM SOUTH WEST
3. VALIGAMAM NORTH
4. VALIGAMAM SOUTH
5. VALIGAMAM EAST
6. NALLUR
7. JAFFNA
8. THENMARADCHY
9. VADAMARADCHY SOUTH & WEST
10. VADAMARADCHY NORTH & EAST

JAFFNA DISTRICT — TOPOGRAPHY AND DRAINAGE



CROPS OF JAFFNA DISTRICT BY A.G.A. DIVISION IN YALA 1982





At the chariot ("Ther") festival at Nallur Kandaswamy Temple, enormous ropes are used to draw the chariot; hundreds and hundreds of devotees lend a hand. (above). The mini desert of Manalkadu, off the Pt. Pedro coast. (below). Sri Lanka.