

Bilingualism Among Tamils in Sri Lanka

A study among students at the University of Peradeniya

by

S. V. KASYNATHAN

and

N. P. SOMASUNDARAM

“A positive nationalism will promote the study of each other’s language and customs as an indispensable means of welding a multi-group society into a strong nation. Each language-culture must be the prized possession of both groups, the two traditions regarded as complementary to each other. National bilingualism must become a conviction, rather than a concession. To this end as many institutions of learning should be consciously planned so as to provide opportunities of learning each other through each other’s language and each other’s language through each other”.

—K. Nesiah. “The Status of Tamil in Ceylon”.
Tamil Culture. Oct. 1958, p. 195.

Introduction

The hope has been expressed from time to time by politicians as well as by others including educationists that greater harmony between the two major communities in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, would be promoted if they could be persuaded to learn each other’s language. It has been even declared on more than one occasion that it may be desirable to make Sinhala a compulsory subject in Tamil schools and Tamil compulsory in Sinhala schools. Thus R.S.S. Goonewardene who represented Gampola in the State Council said in 1944:¹

“I think it would be a happy day for this country if in every Sinhala school Tamil was made compulsory and in every Tamil school Sinhala was made compulsory and both sections understood each other’s language”.

1. Seconding the amendment that Tamil also should be one of the official languages along with Sinhala. The original motion that Sinhala should become the official language was moved by J. R. Jayewardene. The amendment was proposed by V. Nalliah. J. R. Jayewardene himself wished to amend the motion to include Tamil but could not do so due to procedural reasons. *Proceedings of the State Council 1944, May 24.*

This however never came to pass. Though the State Council passed in 1944 a resolution to make Sinhala and Tamil the official languages of the country, English remained the only official language until 1956. English also remained for a long time a compulsory subject for public examinations. Thus Tamil and Sinhala students had to study it besides their mother tongue. And in so far as one could not think of dropping English, introducing a third compulsory language could not be seriously contemplated. Even when Sinhala was made the official language, on the assumption that English had to be retained, it was argued that non-Sinhalese were now going to be subjected to the strain of learning a *third* language, namely Sinhala. To most minds English was obviously the language through which one would communicate not only with foreigners but with fellow Ceylonese as well. And in 1956 one of the arguments given against making Sinhala and Tamil official languages was that "neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils would have any incentive to learn the language of the other."²

However, the idea of bilingualism was taken up by some educationists and by the forties a few schools in various parts of the island made instruction in the other language available.³

Bilingualism and the Tamils

But when in 1956 legislation was enacted to make Sinhala the only official language of the country the Tamils saw this as a move by the Sinhalese to dominate them through language. Their attitude towards the learning of Sinhala also underwent a change. What was earlier the pursuit of laudable educational, cultural and nationalistic ends was now transformed into conformity to a sanction. Knowledge of Sinhala had now become a requirement and learning Sinhala was going to be useful. The Tamil reaction was swift and calculated to show their defiance. All the schools in the Northern Province which had until then, being mostly privately managed, taught Sinhala on their own initiative, abandoned those classes.

In the long run however this reaction was destined to seem a mere gesture, for the Tamils' notorious dependence for employment in the government service dictated that the original defiance should soon wear out. In the face of loss of increments, seniority and promotions and sometimes even their jobs

2. See KEARNEY, R.N. *Communalism and language in the politics of Ceylon*. 1967. p. 73.

3. Among the leading Tamil schools in Jaffna and Batticaloa were Hartley, Hindu, Mahajana, Skandavarodaya and Jaffna College in Jaffna and St. Michaels and R.K.M. Shivananda Vidyalayam in Batticaloa.

many public servants started learning Sinhala eschewing their earlier scruples.⁴ The Tamil political parties which had earlier exhorted Tamil public servants to refrain from learning Sinhala were themselves subject to this ambivalence. Succumbing to the logic of the measures which successive governments were forcing on them, those who once preached defiance were now not averse to offering counsels of prudence.

On the whole the phenomenon of Tamils learning Sinhala as a consequence of the Official Language Act is on the increase. While at the beginning the contract requirements for new entrant⁵ public servants served as the grudgingly accepted justification for learning Sinhala, by the early seventies classes catering to prospective public servants had appeared in many places and did not attract much adverse comment. Even the phenomenon of Tamil families permitting their children to study through the Sinhalese medium is not unknown.⁶

Though politicians including those in power have often declared that Sinhala and Tamil students should be taught each other's language and even made some attempts to do this, the inhibiting factors have been effective for the most part in preventing the adoption of any large scale institutionalised plan for the promotion of bilingualism. In 1970 the Education Ministry under the Coalition Government appointed a committee to go into the possibility of teaching Sinhala in Tamil Schools. Following a report submitted by this committee a scheme of teaching was drafted. Attempts were made to implement this scheme and teachers were recruited for the purpose. But from evidence available with the Ministry of Education it would appear that not much progress was made. Heads of Tamil schools in the North and East were apparently not very enthusiastic about the scheme. For the most part the scheme was implemented in Muslim schools. Very soon the scheme along with

4. Exact figures are not available regarding the number of persons who were discontinued or prematurely retired from the Public Service for failure to conform with the official language requirement. According to the figures available with the *Avasanka Ebhuvinaignar Sangam* (AES) only 59 of their members had responded up to 30.09.80 to their call through advertisements in the newspapers in order to list such grievances for negotiations with the government. It was the estimate of the Secretary of the AES that at the present time there were not more than 100 among their nearly 4000 members who had not got their increments for failure to acquire proficiency in Sinhala.

5. 'New entrant' denotes one who joined the Public Service after the Official Language Act of 1956.

6. The Education Act of 1972 gives parents the right to choose the medium of instruction to their child. Before this, education in the mother tongue was compulsory. Thus Tamil parents are now permitted to have their children taught in Sinhala and Sinhala parents their children in Tamil.

its envisaged corollary i.e. the scheme to teach Tamil to Sinhala students, seems to have faded out. After the formation of the U.N.P. government in 1977 the promotion of what has been called the 'link-language' programme has been somewhat more vigorously pursued. Some of the leaders of the U. N. P. particularly the Prime Minister at that time, Mr. J. R. Jayewardene, and the Minister of Education, Mr. Nissanka Wijeratne, expressed their keenness on the propagation of the 'link-language'. In 1978 the Director of Education, Tamil Unit, was also designated Director, National Integration, and was assigned the task of implementing the link-language programme. Owing to this programme, according to the figures available with the Department of Education, 424 Tamil schools were now teaching Sinhala and 299 Sinhala schools teaching Tamil. 37,692 Tamil and Muslim students and 43,212 Sinhala students were studying each other's language under this programme. Some of the teacher training colleges too have introduced programmes for the training of link-language teachers e.g. Uyanwatte Sinhala Teachers Training College and Addalaichchenai Tamil Teachers Training College.

The University of Peradeniya

The University of Peradeniya, planned at first to become the main seat of a single University of Ceylon is now, after the gradual abandonment of the ideal of the single fully residential University, one of the six Universities in Sri Lanka. The others are situated in Colombo, Jayawardanapura, Kelaniya, Moratuwa and Jaffna. A Campus loosely affiliated to Colombo has started functioning in Ruhuna in the Southern Province and another is scheduled to commence this year in Vantharumoolai in the Eastern Province. The University of Peradeniya has, a few miles away from it, in Dumbara, a separate campus where first and second year arts students are taught.

Sited beneath the Hantane hills with the Mahaweli Ganga, Sri Lanka's longest river flowing through it, the very picturesquely situated main campus of the University of Peradeniya is the biggest in the country. All faculties of study except Law and Architecture are available here and most of the student population is housed in Halls of Residence of which there are ten. Of the others, many have rooms in the quarters of University employees within the campus. Of the teaching staff most of the junior members live in the Halls and of the others many occupy staff houses which lie within the campus. The total student population in the campus at the end of the 1978-79 academic year was 4,068 and of these 878 were Tamils.⁷ Sinhala and Tamil students live together in the Halls of Residence and there has never been any attempt

7. 'Tamils' here does not include Tamil speaking Muslims, a parochialism sanctioned by accepted usage in Sri Lanka.

to separate them on the basis of race.⁸ Thus neither in the living arrangements of the students nor in the housing of the teaching staff is there any degree of spatial isolation between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in the campus.

On the whole, Peradeniya has a very good record of inter-racial harmony and adjustment. The campus was opened in 1952 and until 1960 the only medium of instruction was English. Sinhala and Tamil students attended lectures and tutorial classes together and held membership and offices in campus Societies and other bodies for common purposes. Though they have always been a minority in the campus, Tamils holding elected offices in campus Societies was common. Tamils have on many occasions been elected to the presidentship of the Student Union Society, the most popular elected position a student in the campus can attain. English being the *lingua franca*, Sinhalese and Tamils shared without difficulty or distinction in the extra curricular and cultural life of the campus as much as in the curricular activities.

Though in 1960 the first batch of swabasha educated students were admitted the communication gap did not become total in Peradeniya for quite some time due to two factors. One was that even after the entry of the exclusively swabasha educated youths there continued to remain for a few more years the tail end of the English stream of students in the arts faculty. More importantly, by this time there moved into Peradeniya the non-arts faculties in which English as the medium of instruction was never seriously abandoned.

Articulate political opinion in the campus continued for a long time to be dominated by the leftist groups and this too has to some extent helped the campus to keep in check the more blatant forms of communal sentiment. Even when communal feelings ran high in the rest of the country the campus community has managed to preserve an atmosphere of relative calm.

It would however be idle to pretend that the communal problem in the country has not had any impact on the ways of life of the campus community. In the absence of a common language for free communication between the Sinhala and Tamil populations an alienation has set in between the two groups to take the place of the frank dialogue that was characteristic of campus community life in the fifties and the very early sixties. One may compare the condition in the fifties when the Union Society took up for discussion a resolution condemning the 'Sinhala Only Act' and such issues as the demand for federalism

8. The Sinhalese 'race' consists of all whose mother tongue is Sinhala and Tamil 'race' consists of all whose mother tongue is Tamil. The Muslims are not included in either 'race' whatever the mother tongue.

by the Tamils or the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact, with the position today when even topics which vitally concern the campus community such as the media-wise standardization of the examination marks of candidates seeking admission to the University, the district quota system of admission etc. are hardly ever discussed openly. Membership in societies which are not exclusively Tamil or Sinhalese has dwindled. Active Tamil participation in the Student Union Society is virtually absent. Tamil and Sinhalese students prefer to choose as room-mates members of their own community. Inter-racial communication except for strictly academic purposes and between followers of radical left groups or within the minuscule 'westernised' element, is minimal. Even 'ragging' of new entrants by senior students is mostly confined within communal lines.⁹ However it is important to point out that the situation is one of alienation and not one of hostility.

This alienation is certainly an unfortunate feature of campus life. Instead of the maximum benefit from the opportunity for discussion available in this fully residential campus, there is a tender sensitivity which appears to be seeking to avoid confrontation of communally polarized points of view and degeneration into open communal conflict.

Purpose of the study

The present study was undertaken in this context primarily in order to determine Tamil attitude towards learning Sinhala and to test the hypothesis that bilingualism leads to softer attitudes on the question of language and generally in the areas of conflict between the two communities. The word 'attitude' is notoriously unclear as would be evident from the literature on the subject.¹⁰ We do not attempt to give any definition of 'attitude' but adopt for our purpose the principle that a statement which requires evidence is symptomatic of an attitude when ventured in the absence of such evidence. Thus one betrays an attitude when one makes or assents to, without proper study, a sweeping generalisation which is in need of carefully collected evidence. But even this heuristic principle is not without its difficulties. How far such statements are symptomatic of attitudes would depend on how firm a grasp one has of the general principles governing the connection between statements and their grounds. For instance, when a person who is by education and training equipped to discriminate between adequate and inadequate evidence, ventures to make an unsupported statement, it is more symptomatic of an

9. See HETTIARACHY, J., N. HETTIARACHY, and S. SRIKANTHA, "A social interaction based on diversion : case study of ragging in a residential University". Ceylon Studies Seminar, 1958. Serial Number 89, p. 15.

10. See e.g. *Attitudes*, eds. Jahoda M. and Warren, N. 1966. Part I.

attitude than when such a statement is made by one who is not so equipped. While such considerations always cast some degree of doubt on all attitude scale scores it may be pleaded that the sample here, composed as it is of University students, is such that its verbal behaviour may be taken to be relatively more symptomatic of its attitudes.

The distinction made here between 'soft' and 'hard' attitudes may be illustrated by the following items :

If Tamils study Sinhala, Tamils as a race will become extinct in the country.

The Sinhalese dislike the presence of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

In future Tamils can never live safely in Sri Lanka outside the Tamil areas.

Agreement with these statements was considered to be symptomatic of a hard attitude and disagreement of a soft attitude.

The method adopted was to administer a questionnaire which consisted primarily of two groups of sections. In one group the subjects were asked to make free responses to questions. In the other group there were batteries of statements and subjects were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement. Apart from complementing each other the two groups also served to cross check the extent of reliability. Content-analysis was used to extract the data obtained from the first group. Data from the second group was tabulated to show agreement and disagreement between statements indicative of attitudes and examined for association between items. Significance of association was measured wherever necessary by administering chi-squared tests.

The Sample

From the Tamil students at Peradeniya (878 at the end of 1978/79) a sample of 100 was chosen. One half of this sample of 100 was proficient in Sinhala while the other was not, 'proficiency in Sinhala' being defined as the ability to conduct *without difficulty* a conversation in Sinhala with a Sinhalese who knew neither Tamil nor English. The bilingual and non-bilingual halves of the sample were formed by applying a table of random numbers to the University Student Registration Lists until the quota was reached in each category. As the two groups thus formed were not in the same ratio as did the bilingual and non-

bilingual elements in the Tamil student population in the Campus¹¹ a system of weighted averaging was used in arriving at the percentages for the whole sample of 100. The bilingual group of 50 included 38 who could also read and write Sinhala. Again, 26 of them had what could be called a very high proficiency in Sinhala - they could follow and deliver extended talks or lectures in Sinhala.

Table I gives some features relating to the composition of the sample population. Information about residence was obtained to find whether the respondent always lived within the Northern and Eastern provinces where the possibility of normal social contact with Sinhalese is minimal or had lived for any length of time in the other provinces where the possibility of such contact is comparatively great. Faculties of study were divided into contact and non-contact faculties. 'Contact faculties' are those in which opportunity exists in the course of daily routine for mixing with Sinhala students and to engage along with them in activities such as dissection, attendance at clinics, field and survey camps, etc. Faculties of Engineering, Medicine, Agriculture and Veterinary Science fall into this category. Faculties of Arts and Science in which opportunities for contact are relatively sparse are termed 'non-contact faculties'. Income information was elicited to determine whether the monthly income of parents was above or below Rs. 1,000.

As would be seen from Table I there is association between bilingualism and such factors as residence, faculty, income and the existence of close friends.

Learning Sinhala—Consequences

When the sample population was questioned to determine its attitude towards the learning of Sinhala the response on the whole was positive. Ninety six percent said that learning Sinhala was useful and thirty-one percent had attended classes to learn Sinhala. This would seem to indicate a fair degree of motivation. Though among the non-bilinguals the percentage attending classes was lower it was still as high as 24%. Also, seventeen percent had attended classes in Sinhala, for which they had paid fees. Considering that the sample consisted of students who had not yet signed any contract of employment, it would appear that the inhibition against learning Sinhala, which was

11. The bilingual group in the population was a little over 16% by the criterion stated above. National figures are available only for Tamil and Sinhalese bilingualism taken together. In any case the criterion employed in obtaining the national figure seems somewhat less strict than ours.

The Northern and Eastern Provinces

When an allowance is made for the factors discussed above the turnout in the NEP appears to be more or less normal. However, even in the NEP there were significant inter-district variations in the turnout (see Table 1) with Jaffna District recording 69.1 per cent which was the lowest in the NEP and also was a drop of over 12 percentage points on the 1977 turnout. The turnouts in Amparai and Trincomalee were also significantly lower than those in 1977.

Table 1
1977 Parliamentary Elections and 1981 DC Elections Turnout
in the Northern and Eastern Provinces

	(i) 1977	(ii) 1981	(iii) Difference (i - ii)
Northern Province			
Jaffna	81.5	69.1	12.4
Mannar	92.7	85.0	7.7
Vavuniya	82.6	78.4	4.2
Mullaitivu	79.7	72.6	7.1
Eastern Province			
Batticaloa	87.8	80.4	7.4
Amparai	88.9	71.7	17.2
Trincomalee	85.6	74.0	11.0

Source : Table 2A.

Jaffna of course has always been a district with a relatively low turnout at general elections. In every parliamentary election its turnout has been significantly below the national average and often the lowest in the NEP.⁹ However, the main factor that would have kept some potential voters away from the polling booth on 4th June would have been the pre-election violence which severely disrupted normal life in many parts of the district. Moreover, it was also reported that a number of polling booths were not kept open for the full duration required by law which could have been a contributing factor that helped to cause a low poll.

9. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for this. The generally conservative nature of Jaffna society which stands against politicisation of society to the extent that it has happened in the South could be one reason. It is also possible that many voters (e.g. government servants, traders etc.) who are registered in Jaffna are resident elsewhere and therefore fail to exercise their vote, the postal vote notwithstanding.

they learnt Sinhala. When asked to comment whether if Tamils learnt Sinhala they would lose the rationale for opposing the 'Sinhala Only Act' only forty-six percent answered in the affirmative.

It is interesting however that when asked whether Tamils learning Sinhala would make it easier for the authorities to deny Tamils their language rights only thirty-eight percent was confident enough to disagree. (See Tables 2a and b). The majority of the respondents expressed the fear that governments in power may make use of growing bilingualism among the Tamils as an excuse to refuse Tamils their language rights.

It would seem that learning Sinhala was objectively seen to be beneficial and harmless while the fear remained that it was likely to be unfairly exploited by those in power. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that an important obstacle to the promotion of bilingualism among the minorities would be their distrust of the government of the majority. Thus a perception of good faith seems to be a condition for the promotion of bilingualism and not a consequence of bilingualism, for, as our tests show, in almost all these attitudes, there is no significant difference between bilinguals and non-bilinguals.

Only thirty percent of the sample felt that Tamils learning Sinhala would help to solve the problems between the two communities and thirty-three percent that if Tamils study Sinhala they would no longer be at any disadvantage as a community in Sri Lanka. Bilinguals and non-bilinguals were equally distributed for this attitude. Obviously Tamil motivation to learn Sinhala is not sweetened with the hope that they would thus escape their disadvantages as a minority. (See Table 2c). It seems clear that the majority of the sample does not see the problems between them and the Sinhalese as arising from their ignorance of the Sinhala language.

Learning Sinhala—Conditions

There was strong agreement in the sample that Tamils ought to learn Sinhala even if they did not seek employment outside the 'traditionally Tamil areas'. This is of course in agreement with the finding noted earlier that forty-two percent of our sample claimed that their attempts at learning Sinhala were motivated by social reasons. The forty-two percent which claimed social motives is more than echoed by a fifty-eight percent which stated that Sinhala should be learnt whether or not one sought employment in Sinhala areas. Though employment was thus not seen as a condition for the learning of Sinhala seventy-three percent insisted that it should be ensured that Tamil students learn their mother tongue before they are taught Sinhala. It would seem therefore that the lack of anxiety that the spread of bilingualism among the Tamils

may endanger the future of the Tamil language or community in Sri Lanka is dependent on the assumption that adequate provision would be made for instruction in the mother tongue. The move therefore to make instruction in the mother tongue optional could create anxiety and suspicion among the Tamils despite their readiness to learn Sinhala. (See footnote 6).

Seventy-eight percent of our sample held that Sinhala should not be taught in Tamil schools unless Tamil was also taught in Sinhala schools. Considering the very favourable attitudes shown towards the learning of Sinhala the insistence on this condition may appear curious. It can only be explained as being indicative of the resistance to institutionalized or state-sponsored attempts to 'impose' Sinhalese on the Tamils. Or, in other words, what surfaces here is the reluctance of the Tamils to see themselves as a minority that could, for that reason, be treated differently from the majority.

PERCEPTION OF PROBLEMS

Discrimination

When tested with problems the sample group showed a very high perception. A large majority expressed the view that there was discrimination against the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Only sixteen percent denied the statement that the government was concerned solely with the welfare of the Sinhalese—sixty-five percent was positive that the government looked after the welfare of the Sinhalese alone. Seventy-six percent believed that the Tamils were discriminated against in all fields and ninety-two percent believed that the Tamils were discriminated against in the fields of education and employment. These perceptions show no significant association with the incidence of bilingualism. (See Table 4a).

Colonisation

Ninety-five percent in the sample felt that Sinhalese were being settled in lands describable as the traditional homelands of the Tamils while seventy-five percent was sure that this was all part of a plan by successive governments to reduce the Tamils to the status of minorities in their own areas. Here too the perception was not affected by the presence or not of bilingualism (See Table 4b).

Sense of alienation

Asked to comment on the view that the Sinhalese dislike the presence of Tamils in Sri Lanka only twenty-nine percent said that this was false. Forty-one percent agreed with the view and thirty percent was unable to decide. Bilingualism did not seem to make any difference to this widespread sense of

alienation and feeling of not being wanted by the majority community. On the question of political rights the majority of the respondents said that in Sri Lanka the Tamils had no political rights and only twenty-seven percent of the sample felt confident enough to disagree. (Table 4c).

Security

Seventy-one percent of the sample was of the opinion that in future Tamils could never live safely outside what are called Tamil areas. Only nineteen percent rejected this view. This is a remarkable result when one considers that at the time of the study the entire sample was living in an area which could, in terms of this attitude, be described as unsafe. It should however be remembered that at the time of the study (1979) the communal disturbances of August 1977 were still fresh in the minds of the respondents aided by the tensions being created by the publicity given to the sittings of a Commission of Inquiry into the communal disturbances. The majority of the respondents also felt that the government was not interested in providing adequate safeguards for the minority. They had little faith in the law enforcement agencies of the State. Seventy two percent said that the Police are never fair in their treatment of the Tamils and sixteen percent was undecided. Eighty-one percent of the sample felt that Tamil youths were being imprisoned unjustly. (Table 4d)

Causes and solutions

Fifty-one percent of the sample felt that the problems faced by the Tamils were no worse than those faced by minority groups in plural societies elsewhere in the world. Forty-five percent felt that the chief cause of the conflicts between the Sinhalese and the Tamils was the country's colonial past while forty-two percent disagreed. Only twenty-two percent agreed with the theory that the causes of the communal problem were economic while seventy-two percent denied it.

Among the hundred respondents there were twenty-two who attributed the problems to Tamil political intransigence and nineteen who felt that the Tamils asked for more than they were entitled to.

Asked to comment on the suggestion that the Tamils should resort to a programme involving violence for the achievement of their rights only thirty-two percent was in agreement. Forty-nine percent or nearly half the sample was against any programme involving violence. The proposal for a separate Tamil State did not fare much better. Only thirty-four percent was for it while forty-eight percent was against it.

Summary of findings

- (i) A very high proportion of the sample (96%) considers Tamil bilingualism beneficial.
- (ii) There was a fair degree of motivation in the population to learn Sinhala—thirty-one percent had attended Sinhala classes and forty-two percent of the population claimed to have attempted learning Sinhala through various means. A substantial number had paid fees to attend classes.
- (iii) Fears about what would happen to the Tamils and the Tamil language as a consequence of growing Tamil bilingualism are not widespread. Less than half the sample confessed having such fears. The anxiety that their proficiency in Sinhala may be used to refuse the Tamil language its rights was, however, widely prevalent. (Tables 2*a*, *b* and *c*.)
- (iv) There is widespread agreement that Tamils should learn Sinhala whether or not they seek employment in Sinhala areas. (Table 3).
- (v) There is resistance to any attempt to impose bilingualism on Tamils if it is not reciprocated by the imposition of bilingualism on the Sinhalese. (Table 3).
- (vi) Bilingualism is accepted by the sample in the strict sense of the concept, in that instruction in the mother tongue was insisted upon as a condition for learning the second language. (Table 3).
- (vii) Bilingualism is seen by many as a means of forming better social relations with the Sinhalese (page 7) but not as a solution to the problems between the two communities. (Table 2*c*).
- (viii) The sample showed a very high perception of problems of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. More than 90% of the sample felt that there was discrimination in education and employment. A similarly high proportion had anxieties on the question of Sinhala colonisation in 'Tamil areas'.
- (ix) Less than half the sample agreed that the government did not develop Tamil areas or that the Sinhalese dislike the Tamil presence in Sri Lanka. Those who agreed, however, were more numerous than those who disagreed. (Table 4*c*).

- (x) The majority were inclined to reject the theory that the problems of the Tamils were solely due to the economic difficulties which beset all Lankans. (Table 5).
- (xi) A little over half the sample (51%) felt that the problems of the Tamils in Sri Lanka were no worse than the problems faced by minorities in plural societies elsewhere. Taken along with the high perception of problems (vide under viii) this would seem to indicate a sense of fatalism among the Tamils about their problems as a minority group. (Table 5).
- (xii) Nearly half the sample rejected the idea that Tamils should resort to a programme of violent action or seek to form a separate State. Only a third of the sample found these solutions acceptable (Table 6).

Discussion

Our study discloses no statistically significant association between the incidence of soft or hard attitudes and the presence or not of bilingual skills. Statistically significant association was found to obtain between proficiency and soft attitudes in the case of only three items out of the twenty-eight tested. Obviously it would be a naive interpretation of the bilingual hypothesis to think that the mere acquisition of another language would alter a person. Bilingualism, if it is to have any significant impact upon a person's attitudes towards the other group, should serve to provide, as Nesiah put it, "opportunities for learning each other through each other's language and each other's language through each other". When the proficiency in the other language is acquired away from a living environment as would occur in class rooms merely intent on preparing persons to conform to contract requirements, the benefits hoped for are not very likely to follow, or in any case, not immediately.

As bilingualism seemed not a determinant of the attitudes in the sample, a group of persons who had at least for some time been resident outside the exclusively Tamil areas and also had close friends among the Sinhalese, was extracted from the sample. There were 24 such persons and the responses of these persons (Group A) was compared with the responses of a group (Group B) of persons who were not bilingual and had neither been resident outside the Tamil areas nor had close friends among the Sinhalese. Here the results indicated that contact arising through residence in non-Tamil areas and close friends among the Sinhalese was definitely a determinant of attitudes towards

the Sinhala people. Sixty per cent in Group A disagreed with the view that the Sinhalese dislike the Tamil presence in Sri Lanka while in the negative group only 12 per cent disagreed. Content analysis of the descriptions of the Sinhalese given by the members of the two groups also revealed that Group A gave significantly more positive descriptions than was given by Group B.¹² The stereotypes of the Sinhalese, the two groups had, also differed radically. Using a cumulative scale, a score of + 95—39 was obtained for Group A while for Group B the score was + 37—94. Group A thus had more favourable attitude towards the Sinhala people compared with Group B which had little or no contact with the Sinhalese. Group A also showed a high resistance to the idea of a separate Tamil State than Group B. On the desirability of resorting to violence to gain Tamil rights the difference between the two groups was even greater. More persons in Group A disagreed with the view that Tamils are no longer safe outside their areas. It is very evident therefore that close association between the two communities helps to promote better understanding and, as was seen from the stereotype tests, to dispel suspicion and anxiety about the other community. The understanding gained thus also seemed to promote greater optimism regarding the possibility of living with the Sinhalese. (Table 12 illustrates how the two groups deviate from the sample. The distribution of soft attitudes is greater in Group A and lower in Group B than in the sample. This association between soft attitude towards the Sinhalese and contact with them was shown to be statistically significant by chi-squared tests).

This optimism seemed however to be confined to the attitude towards the Sinhala people and did not to any significant extent soften the group's perception of the problems faced by the Tamils. The positive group did not differ significantly from the sample in the way it perceived problems.

Attitude and problem perception

The possible determinants of attitudes examined so far were bilingualism taken by itself and bilingualism taken along with contact through residence and close friends. Another determinant that was suspected to be of relevance in the Sri Lankan context, namely, the level of perception of problems was also taken up. A group which showed a uniformly high perception of problems was therefore isolated for comparison with the sample. (This group felt that the governments in Sri Lanka looked after the welfare of the Sinhalese only;

12. Positive descriptions are those which include adjectives such as courageous, kind, generous, intelligent, loyal, sincere, easy going, reasonable and clean. Negative descriptions tend to include adjectives such as cruel, dangerous, unreliable, unintelligent, greedy, immoral and dishonest.

that the Tamils are discriminated against in all fields; that the Tamils are being made minorities in their own areas through the device of colonisation; that the Sinhalese dislike the Tamil presence in Sri Lanka; that Tamils can never be safe outside their own areas and so on. In our sample of 100 persons there were twenty-two who agreed with all this.). The composition of this group did not show any bias towards either bilingualism or contact. In its attitude however the group differed significantly from the sample on most matters.

Table 8 illustrates how on all the issues presented there, the majority in the high problem perception group exhibits hard attitudes while in the sample group the majority has soft attitudes on most issues. There is thus a definite association between hard attitudes in the conflict areas and a high perception of problems.

It would seem then that where there is a strong sense of outstanding problems none of the other determinants of attitudes are of much avail: neither bilingualism nor association with Sinhalese, which in general shows positive results helps to soften attitudes in such cases.

Relevance of the findings

The sample studied here (October-December 1979) constituted a little over 11% of the Tamil student population in the University of Peradeniya.

The University population at Peradeniya comprises students of both sexes with varying socio-economic backgrounds from all parts of the island. In this sense the Campus serves, among other things, as a uniquely convenient location for the type of study undertaken. Within a manageably small area one finds gathered here a group which is representative of the composition of the general population in many respects.

The Campus Tamil population is of course a very tiny fraction of the population of the country. (<0.003% of the Tamil population of the relevant age group in the island). It is also untypical due to its educational level, age and location.

Nevertheless the importance of our study population should not be underestimated. Apart from the fact, mentioned a while ago, that it is a microcosm of the rest of the country in several respects, there are other significant considerations. Programmes for the promotion of harmonious relations in a plural society should identify and pay attention to areas where the different groups interact rather than to the places where they live in relative isolation from one another. For it is only in such areas that sensitive spots are exposed and hard

as well as soft attitudes formed. Indeed the attitudes which surface in other non-interaction areas are often the result of the percolation of the attitudes formed in the interaction areas. For this reason and because of the obvious importance of the age group to which this population belongs (19-25) it is suggested that the seeming weaknesses of our sample really enhance the importance of our study.

The findings about this group are not without significance also because of the important leadership roles its members are likely to take in the society at large.

Table 1

Composition of the sample

	Ability High to read Compe & write tence		Residence		Faculties'		Close Friends'		Income	
	T.A.	N.T.A.	T.A.	N.T.A.	C.F.	N.C.F.	YES	No.	> 1000	< 1000
Bilinguals (50)	38	26	18	32	32	18	33	17	26	20*
Non-Bilinguals (50)	12	—	48	2	20	30	21	28*	12	32*

* Discrepancy in totals is due to information being withheld by some respondents.

Abbreviations used in this and the tables which follow :

B-Bilinguals	T.A.-Tamil area
NB-Non-Bilinguals	N.T.A.-Non-Tamil area
OS-Overall sample	C.F.-Contact Faculty
N.C.F.-Non Contact Faculty	

Sig. assn.—Whether by chi-squared tests a statistically significant association was found to obtain between the attitude and bilingualism.

Table 2 (a)

LEARNING SINHALA

Consequences

Items		Agree	Disagree	No. opinion	Sig. assn
(a) If Tamils learn Sinhala, the Tamil language will disappear from Sri Lanka	B	22	60	18	Yes
	NB	46	46	8	
	OS	42	48	10	
(b) the Tamil struggle for language rights would be weakened	B	34	60	16	No
	NB	40	46	14	
	OS	39	48	13	
(c) the Tamil race would become extinct	B	24	70	6	No
	NB	26	64	10	
	OS	26	65	9	
(d) they will lose their rationale for opposing the Sinhala Only Act	B	34	58	8	No
	NB	48	40	12	
	OS	46	43	11	
Total for overall sample		38	51	11	100

Table 2 (b)

<i>Item</i>		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Sig. assn.</i>
If Tamils learn Sinhala, it would be easy to deny the Tamils their language rights	B	58	28	14	
	NB	58	40	2	No
	OS	58	38	4	100

Table 2 (c)

<i>Items</i>		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Sig. assn.</i>
If Tamils learn Sinhala, intercommunal problems would disappear	B	30	58	12	
	NB	30	56	14	No
	OS	30	56	14	
the Sinhala Only Act will not affect the Tamils	B	26	62	12	
	NB	34	54	12	No
	OS	33	55	12	
Total for sample		32	55	13	100

Table 3

Learning Sinhala Condition

<i>Item</i>		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Sig. assn.</i>
The Tamils need not study if they do not seek employment in Sinhala areas	B	20	70	10	
	NB	34	56	10	No
	OS	37	58	5	
Sinhala should not be taught to Tamils unless they learnt Tamil	B	66	28	6	
	NB	74	18	8	No
	OS	73	19	8	
In schools Tamils should not be taught Sinhala unless the Sinhalese are taught Tamil in their schools	B	66	16	18	
	NB	80	16	4	No
	OS	78	16	6	

All figures represent percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.
 For explanation of abbreviations see under Table 1.

Table 4 a

PERCEPTION OF PROBLEMS

Discrimination

Items		Agree	Disagree	No opinion	Sig. assn.
The government is concerned with the welfare of the Sinhalese only	B	68	18	14	No
	NB	64	16	20	
	OS	65	16	19	
There is discrimination against the Tamils in all fields	B	87	12	6	No
	NB	74	16	10	
	OS	76	15	9	
There is discrimination against the Tamils in education and employment	B	90	6	4	No
	NB	92	2	6	
	OS	91	3	6	
Total for sample		78	11	11	100

Table 4 b

Colonisation

Items		Agree	Disagree	No opinion	Sig. assn.
Sinhalese are being settled in traditionally Tamil areas	B	90	2	8	No
	NB	96	2	2	
	OS	95	2	3	
Successive governments implement measures to make Tamil minorities in their own areas	B	78	10	12	No
	NB	74	4	22	
	OS	75	5	20	
Total for sample		85	4	11	100

All figures represent percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.
For explanation of abbreviations see under Table 1.

Table 4 c

Sense of alienation

Items		Agree	Disagree	No opinion	Sig. assn.
The Sinhalese dislike the Tamil presence in Sri Lanka	B	38	34	28	No
	NB	42	28	30	
	OS	41	29	30	
The Tamils have no Political rights in Sri Lanka	B	58	30	12	No
	NB	60	26	14	
	OS	59	27	14	
The government is not interested in developing the Tamil areas	B	50	36	14	No
	NB	46	44	10	
	OS	46	43	11	
Total for overall sample		48	34	18	100

Table 4 d

Sense of Security

Items		Agree	Disagree	No opinion	Sig. assn.
In future Tamils can never live safely in Sri Lanka outside their own areas	B	66	26	8	No
	NB	72	18	10	
	OS	71	19	10	
The government is not interested in providing adequate protection to the Tamils	B	56	36	8	No
	NB	58	32	10	
	OS	51	33	10	
The Police are never fair in their treatment of the Tamils	B	56	30	14	Yes
	NB	76	8	16	
	OS	72	12	16	
Tamil youths are imprisoned unjustly	B	76	10	14	No
	NB	82	2	16	
	OS	81	3	16	
Total for overall sample		70	17	13	100

All figures represent percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.
 For explanation of abbreviations see under Table 1

Table 5

Causes

<i>Items</i>		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Sig. assn.</i>
The problems of the Tamils in Sri Lanka are no worse than those minorities in plural societies elsewhere	B	46	46	8	No
	NB	52	44	4	
	OS	51	44	5	
The cause of the conflicts between the two communities is the country's colonial past	B	28	54	18	Yes
	NB	48	40	12	
	OS	45	42	13	
The economic problems common to all are the cause of the problems of the Tamils	B	32	60	8	No
	NB	20	74	6	
	OS	22	72	6	
The problems of the Tamils are due to their political intransigence	B	24	66	10	No
	NB	20	76	4	
	OS	21	74	25	

Table 6

Solutions

<i>Items</i>		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Sig. assn.</i>
The Tamils should resort to a programme of violent action to gain their rights	B	22	54	24	No
	NB	34	48	18	
	OS	32	49	19	
Only by forming a separate state can the Tamils solve their problems	B	34	46	20	No
	NB	34	48	18	
	OS	34	48	18	
Total for overall sample		33	48	19	100

All figures represent percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.
For explanation of abbreviations see under Table 1.

Table 7

Contact Groups A & B

	<i>Disagree</i>		
	<i>Group A</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Group B</i>
The Sinhalese dislike the Tamil presence in Sri Lanka	60	29	12
The Tamils should resort to a programme of violent action to gain their rights	58	49	40
Only by forming a separate state can the Tamils solve their problems	56	38	40
In future Tamils can never live safely in Sri Lanka outside their own areas	28	19	12

Table 8

The High Problem Preception Group

<i>Items</i>	<i>Sample Population</i>		<i>High problem perception group</i>	
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
If all Tamils study Sinhala, the Tamil language will disappear from the country	42	48	59	31
If Tamils study Sinhala it will be easy for the government to deny Tamils their language rights	58	38	90	5
If Tamils study Sinhala the Tamil race will become extinct in this country	26	65	62	27
Tamils studying Sinhala will not solve the communal problem	56	30	86	4
Tamils who do not seek employment in Sinhala areas need not study Sinhala	37	58	54	40
Tamils should resort to a programme of violent action to gain their rights	32	49	59	18
Only by forming a separate state can the Tamils solve their problems	34	48	77	9
The problems of the Tamils in Sri Lanka are worse than those faced by minorities elsewhere	44	51	59	41

All figures represent percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.