

To begin with, I wish to thank the Tamil Information Center, London, for sending me a copy of Dr. Siva Thiagarajah's esteemed book which is being launched today.

Secondly, I offer my humble apologies for being unable to be physically present at this distinguished gathering. I am being prevented from enjoying and benefitting from the intellectual enlightenment this event is sure to offer due to illness.

I wish to take this opportunity to extend my heartiest congratulations to Dr. Thiagarajah on the completion of a work of this magnitude.

I know from my own experience how time-consuming, exacting and strenuous a work of this nature can prove to be.

Dr. Thiagarajah has traced the history of Sri Lanka and also of the South of India from prehistoric times through the middle ages to the present day.

He has marshaled his vast knowledge of excavations, lithic records and written works to prove his conclusions. They are objective, well-founded and thus irrefutable.

Sri Lanka, as per Dr. Thiagarajah's study, was first peopled by the immigrants from the South of India. This began when the two countries were a single landmass. Subsequently, streams of immigrants flowed into the country from the North of India too on various occasions and got mixed with their predecessors from the South. Then, both groups joined hands to develop Sri Lanka into a cultural treasure house.

During the last three decades, when there was an ongoing war, an ideology, a false consciousness, according to Engels, was developed by a series of academics and pseudo-academics in Sri Lanka that the Sinhala was the dominant ethnicity from the very beginning. Dr. Thiagarajah's book levels a blistering attack at this chauvinist deception.

Whatever Sri Lanka has achieved historically, culturally, economically and artistically was due to the combined efforts of the Sinhala and Tamil communities.

In fact, throughout the mediaeval times, very cordial relations existed between the two communities. However, after Independence from <sup>the</sup> British rule, a disproportionate degree of power was transferred to the majority <sup>Community</sup>, interrupting these relations.

A little known mediaeval text reveals that the Buddha and the Buddhist clergy could be invited to accept food in either the Sinhala, Pali or Tamil languages.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C., in Sri Lanka, there was an ethnic group called "dameda", stemming from the Sanskrit terms "dravida" or "dramida". This word yielded the later terms "damila" or "demala". The damedas, who were affluent and powerful constructed and donated cave dwellings to the clergy and also developed public facilities.

It was the monks who came from the South of India, mainly belonging to the Dravidian community who wrote commentaries on the Buddhist canon without which Buddhism would have been unintelligible to the present world.

It is well known that in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, when the country was in turmoil, the high priests and ministers entrusted the responsibility of safeguarding the Temple of the Tooth Relic and its properties and lands to the Tamils.

In fact, a separate book can be written about Sinhala-Tamil relations in mediaeval Sri Lanka. Of course, one has to work through old Sinhala texts for this purpose.

It was in later times that a Tamil kingdom in the North of Sri Lanka evolved.

I am sorry that I was unable to study Dr. Thiagarajah's work in depth and give a fuller account and evaluation.

I hope to be able to come and spend a few days with you in the near future and share in your good work.

I wish you all the best and great success for this occasion.