SriLanka – From Earliest settlement to the recent Crisis

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**Pre History**

**Sri Lanka,** officially **Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

Formerly known as Ceylon,

Island country in the Indian Ocean, off the southeastern coast of India.

**Area**: 25,332 sq mi (65,610 sq km).

**Population**: (2023 est.) 22,638,000.

**Capitals**: Colombo (executive and judicial),

Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte (legislative).

**ethnic groups** include About three-fourths of the population is Sinhalese 75 %

Tamils 12 %, Muslims and others 13%.

**Languages**: Sinhala, Tamil (both official); also English.

Religions: Buddhism; Hinduism, Islam, Christianity.

**Currency:** Sri Lanka rupee.

**Highlands** make up Sri Lanka’s south-central region and core, with narrow gorges and deep river valleys.

The surrounding lowlands include hills and fertile plains.

**The developing mixed economy** is largely based on agriculture, services, and light industries. Clothing, tea, gemstones, and rubber are exported.

The island is world-famous for its gemstones, which include sapphires, rubies, and topaz. It is also a major producer of high-grade graphite.

**Sri Lanka is a republic** with one legislative house; its head of state and government is the president, assisted by the prime minister.

SriLanka geographically the land which is the extension of the south India the Indian peninsula which was separated from the mainland of India around 25 to 5 million years ago.

Archaeologist found that human settlement found around 75000 years to 125000 years back. The earliest people were the hunters and the gatherers in the area of Balangoda in the south and they made the rough stone tools. Even the fine stone tools of quartz and chert were also found dating 28000 years back.

The earliest inhabitant of Sri Lanka was the Vedda community. They were the forest dwellers for centuries. They lived in the thick forest and the caves. They were moving from one place to other if someone died.

The Veddas are now form less than 1 percent of the total population of Sri Lanka and remains only in the Hunnasgiriya hills in central Sri Lanka up to the coastal lowlands in the island's east.

The evidence of urban settlement was found near Anuradhapura in the north central Sri Lanka dating 10th century BC.

Sinhalese the current majority population of Sri Lanka migrated to Sri Lanka from north India from the west Bengal area around 5th century BC. They were probably Aryans as they were speaking Indo Aryan languages.

The first Indian settlement in SriLanka was by Prince Vijaya from Sinhapura kingdom of northern India. He was expelled by his father king Sinhabahu along with his 700 followers. They landed on the west coast of Puttalam in 5th century BC. He defeated yakshas and married to yaksha princess but he expelled his wife and two children and send them to Madurai in the court of Pandya king. Later he settled there, and became the king. He further married to the daughter of Pandu king but don’t had any offspring from her. He founded the kingdom of Tambapanni and Vijay dynasty. After his death in bother sumitt’s son Uppatissa rule the kingdom. The last king from Vijaya dynasty was Subharaja.

After Vijaya, lanbakanna,Moriya, Lijayabahu, Kalinga, Siri Sanga Bo, Dinajara and Nayaks ruled Srilanka.

The medieval period of SriLanka started when Chola king Rajaraja I invaded SriLanka in 993 CE. He defeated the Mahanda V of Lambakanna dynasty and established his control over the area of Anuradhapura. In 1017 his son Rajendra I launched another invasion and captivated Mahinda V and shifted the capital from Anuradhpura to Polonnaruwa.

In 1070 Viyabahu I defeated the chola king Kassapa VII and reunited the Srilanka. He founded the kingdom at polonnaruwa which rule the country till 1232 CE.

Siri Sanga Bo initially capture the power in 1220 CE and rule till 1597CE.

The Sinhalese people are probably the result of aboriginal inhabitants mixing with Indo-Aryans who began migrating from India c. the 5th century BCE.

The Tamils were later immigrants from Dravidian India, migrating over a period from the early centuries 3BCE to c. 1200CE.

Buddhism was introduced during the 3rd century BCE.

Between 1200 and 1505, Sinhalese power gravitated to south-western Sri Lanka, while a Southern Indian dynasty seized power in the north and established the Tamil kingdom in the 14th century. Foreign invasions from India, China, and Malaya occurred in the 13th–15th centuries.

**Tamil origin in SriLanka**

Tamils were probably migrated from central or eastern or the south India and may be Dravidian descendants. They were speaking Dravidian languages. They came to Sri Lanka between 3 BC to 13 CE.

Nallur Swami in “in ancient times” wrote that during the olden time Ceylon was divided in to four provinces, Nagadipa in the North, Kalyani in South West, Rohana in South East and Malaya in the centre.

The Medieval Ceylon was divided in to three countries.

First was the Pihiti or Rajaratas which is in the northern eastern part of Present SriLanka, the area of Anuradhapura, was the king’ country and the royal family was living there.

Second was Mahaya Rata Kingdom of Dakkinadesa which is in the western and the north west of the present SriLanka including Colombo and Kalyani was the country of Sub King. It was the administrative centre of the Kingdom.

Third was the Ruhuna which was at present in the south and south east of SriLanka, the area of Magampura. Ruhuna was the culture and economic centre since the ancient period. The Tamils who were connected to the Veddas through their linage, were living the Mahaya area of south and central SriLanka. Evidences proof that Tamils and Sinhalas were living peacefully for many years. In 237 BC Two brothers Sena and Guttika invaded the nuradhapura kingdom, killed the king Suratissa and ruled together till 22 years. They established the first Tamil kingdom in SriLanka from 237 BC – 215 BC. In 215BC Sinhala king Asela, brother of Suratissa recapture the power and ruled till 205 BC. Chola General Elara attack on Anuradhapura in 205 BC and ruled over it for forty years.

In 1505 the Portuguese arrived, and by 1619 they controlled most of the island.

The Sinhalese enlisted the Dutch to help oust the Portuguese, and the island eventually came under the control of the Dutch East India Company, which relinquished it in 1796 to the British.

 In 1802 it became the British crown colony of Ceylon, which gained independence in 1948.

It became the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972 and took its present name in 1978.

Civil strife between Tamil and Sinhalese groups beset the country beginning in the early 1980s, the Tamils demanding a separate autonomous state in northern Sri Lanka.

A prolonged insurrection by the Tamil Tigers guerrilla group was defeated by government forces in 2009.

**European Powers in SriLanka**

Siri Sanga Bo king Dharma Parakramabahu IX was ruling the country when Portuguese landed on the territory of SriLank.

Portuguese invaded Srilanka in 1505 and ruled till 1658. They ruled mainly in the central highland and the east coastal ports of Tricomalee and Batticaloa.

From 1658 to 1796 Dutch occupied the southern, south-western, and the western part of SriLanka. In 1665 they expand to the east coast and control the main cinnamon growing area and the main ports of SriLanka.

British entered into SriLanka in 1796 when Netherlands was occupied by the French between 1792 to 1801. In 1802 Ceylon was made a crown colony by the treaty of Amiens.

Later on both the Dutch and British they jointly occupied the maximum agriculture and ports in SriLanka from 1796 to 1948.

**Freedom struggle of SriLanka**

The freedom struggle of SriLanka was peaceful other than India and Burma.

The Freedom struggle of SriLanka was initiated mainly by the educated middle class.

The Sinhalas and the Tamils started modernising their institutions and imparting western education in their schools and colleges. They oppose Christianity. This educated class started bringing social and the political change which influenced the mind-set of many people.

During the first world war the nationalist got an opportunity to unite all the communities and fight against the British government.

1919Ceylon National congress was established.

1920 new constitution was design under the guidance of Governor Sir William Manning.

1924 changes in the constitution according to the demands of nationalist.

1931 The first rift occurred between the nationalist and the Tamil and the Sinhalas separated. This tension further intensified in 1936 when the board of ministers was formed which consist of Sinhalas and not given a single position to Tamils.

1947 Ceylon independence act was passes by which SriLanka got the domain status under British rule.

4 February 1948 Independence of dominion to SriLanka.

In the parliamentary election the United National Party, the coalition of nationalist and communist party won the major seats.

Don Stephen Senanayake was the first Prime Minister of Ceylon.

The important leaders who participated in the freedom struggle of SriLanka were:

Don Stephen Senanayake was the first Prime Minister of Ceylon and also called as the father of Nation.

Other prominent leaders of the SriLanka freedom struggle were;

F. R. Senanayake (1882 – 1926) elder brother of Don Stephen Senanayake.

Sir James Peiris JP (1856 – 1930), D. R. Wijewardena (1886 – 1950)

Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, KCMG, KC (1851 – 1930)

E. W. Perera (1875 – 1953) was a Sri Lankan barrister, politician and freedom fighter. He was known as the ‘Lion of Kotte’.

Anagarika Dharmapala (1864 – 1933) was a leading figure of Buddhism in the 20th century.

C.W.W. Kannangara (1884 – 1969) was a Sri Lankan lawyer and politician.

Dr. Tuan Burhanuddin Jayah (1890 – 1960)

Captain Henry Pedris CTG (1888 – 1915) was a militia officer and a prominent socialite in colonial Ceylon who was executed by British officials for alleged incitement of racial riots in 1915, which were proven false.

Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam CCS (1853 – 1924) was a Tamil political leader in Ceylon.

SriLanka got the domain status from the British on 4 February 1948. It was called as domain status for Ceylon. This domain status continues till 1972.

On 22 May 1972 Ceylon form the republican government and renamed itself as SriLanka.

 **Tamil Invasion in SriLanka**

By 9th century AD Pandya became powerful in south India and invaded the norther part of SriLanka at present the area of Jaffana and Anuradhapura

According to the report published by ***Dr. Daya Hewapathirane***

 SriLanka was invaded seventeen times by the Dravidians since 230BC. They plundered the villages and established their control. They enslave Sinhalasa and ruled the different parts of the country in different phases for over 170 years.

Pandya Chola and Pallava were firm to rule and control Sinhalas.

Dutthagamani is the outstanding hero of the Mahavamsa waged fifteen years’ war against Elara and recaptured the Anuradhapura.

Sinhala again restored the power in 145 BC.

Tamil and Sinhalas were connected through the marital ties.

King Vijaya who established the first kingdom in SriLanka, his second wife was the daughter of Pandya king. During his 38 years rule he continuously maintain the relation with his in laws in India.

The Tamil in SriLanka was divided into two groups. First the SriLankan Tamil those who are the descendants of Dravidian and Cholas from ancient and medieval period. Second those who were send as labour during colonial rule.

During the colonial rule from 1819 many Tamil Labours were forcefully send to SriLanka to work in the tea plantation. In 1839 the British government in India banned the emigration of labour from India but again in 1847 this ban was lifted with the condition that these labour were treated equal to the local population of SriLanka.

**Tamil after independence**

In 1948 Ceylon citizen ship act was passed. This act didn’t give citizenship rights to the Indian Tamil.

The SriLankan Tamils were also not happy with this act as it has not given the appropriate representation in the civil services and judiciary.

Discontent among Tamil after independence

Pre independence in SriLanka created the feeling of alienation among the Tamil minority. Both SriLankan Tamil and Indian Tamil were not happy with the majoritarian attitude of Sinhalas. Tamil in SriLanka lost their livelihood, the discrimination in university, civil services, even in markets. Most of the political rights were given to only the Sinhalas.

In 1936 the SriLanka Sama Samaja Party proposed to replace the English with the vernacular languages for the official use.

In 1944 Mr. J R Jayawardhane convinced the British government to make Sinhala as the official language.

In 1956 the government pass the language act and declare Sinhala Language as the official language. The conflict over the language create a separatist movement in SriLanka and they started demanding the territorial rights within the country.

In 1972 Prabhakar formed Tamil New Tigers and in 1976 Tamil United Liberation Front was formed for the self-governance in the Tamil area.

In 1976 Liberation Tamil Tiger Eelam (LTTE) was founded by Velupillai Prabhkar for the freedom movement of Tamil minority. Through the gorilla war tactics, they attack on government officials and ministers. Kilinochchi town was the administrative centre of LTTE.

In 1983 LTTE killed 13 soldier through gorilla war tactic.

In 1985 LTTE control Jaffna. But by October 1987 they lost Jaffna by Indian Peace keeping force.

In 1987 the LTTE attack on former Indian Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi when Mr. Gandhi signed the peace treaty with the SriLanka President Mr. Jayewardene and send the Indian peace keeping force to SriLanka.

1990 Indian peace keeping force withdraw from Jaffna.

On May 21, 1991, LTTE Assassinated Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as a part of revenge against IPKF.

August 1992 land mine bomb explosion by LTTE in Jaffna in which 10 senior military officers were killed.

May 1993 than President of SriLanka Mr. Ranasinghe Premadasa was assassinated.

In January,1996 LTTE attack on the central bank of Colombo in which 100 civilians were killed.

In 2001 LTTE attack on Colombo international airport.

In 2002 government of SriLanka signed ceasefire with LTTE but it was for a shot period.

In 2006 European Union included the LTTE in the list of terrorist organisation and then LTTE again started suicide bombing in Colombo and other cities.

In 2008 SriLankan government. **Area control by LTTE**

Breach the peace treaty in control the administrative centre of LTTE that is Kilinochchi.

On May 18, 2009 the than leader of LTTE Velupillai Prabhkar was killed with the joint efforts of SriLankan government and UN peace keeping force.

On May 20, 2009, Parbhakaran’s son Balachandran Prabhakaran just 12 years old, was killed. With this LTTE officially surrendered in that year.

**Aftermath**

After the surrender of Tamil Eelam more than 3 Lacs of Tamils were detained in military guard camps in the districts of of Vavuniya, Mannar, Jaffna, and Trincomalee.

After the assassination of Prabhakaran the SriLankan president Rajapaksa appointed the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission LLRC to provide the suggestions for peace making with the Tamils in SriLanka

The commission found that both Sinhalas and the Tamil Politicians were responsible for civil war between the two groups. The commission was criticised by the UN Secretary General’s Panel of Expert for lack proper investigation and decision making and failure to meet the international standards.

**SriLanka Economic Crisis**

The main problem is the problem of balance of payment and Foreign exchange reserves.

The root of the SriLanka was from the beginning as the Sinhala majority started taking all advantages and alienated the Tamil minority.

Rajapaksa wanted to establish the family domination. More than 30 members of his family were appointed on different government post.

If we look in the past, we found that even though area wise SriLanka is a small country but its GDP was more than many other countries like India in terms of its per capita income. SriLanka was earning by exporting crops like tea, rubber.

When the country got independence SriLanka adopted the IMF made economic plans because the country having taken money from IMF so it was mandatory for them to implement IMF’s economic plans and secondly the were under the western influence.

SriLanka was the victim of China’s debt trap but for these conditions Rajapaksa government and its economic policies were mainly responsible.

Between 1983 to 2009 the SriLankan economic faced problems and instability.

Even after the civil war the proper measures were not taken to create the balance among the people.

After civil war in 2009, Mahindra Rajapksa took 2.6 billion loans from IMF to pay the war expenses, to promote tourism and to build the infrastructure. Also to reward the close friends.

Instead of economic reforms the government implemented many tax relax policies.

Even though the GDP was 8 % to 9% during 2012 but in 2013 it remains half due to the global commodity price fell which effect its exports.

Again it took 1.5 billion in 2015 from IMF.

Easter bomb blast of 2019 in Colombo church effected the tourism in SriLanka which was the main source of revenue in the country.

But many expert’s opinions that it was Rajapksa’s wrong economic policies and the family domination which is responsible for the economic crisis in SriLanka.

In 2021 Gotabay Rajapksa ban the import of chemical ferlitizer to move towards the Organic. This overnight shift effected the production of food grains and the food crisis started. To come out of this crisis the SriLankan president declared the economic emergency and depreciated the currency and depleted the foreign reserves.

By 2022 the inflation in SriLanka rose up to 50%. The main problem was the shortage of fuel in further the shot up the price of the fuel. This disturbed the transportation system in the country.

By June 2022 the government banned the sale of petrol and diesel for non-essential vehicles.

School and other educational institutes were closed and people had to work from home.

The work of many sectors especially the unorganised sectors badly.

SriLanka had to pay £ 5.7 billion to China and £ 1 billion to India.

Public was on the road widespread protest started against the government.

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