

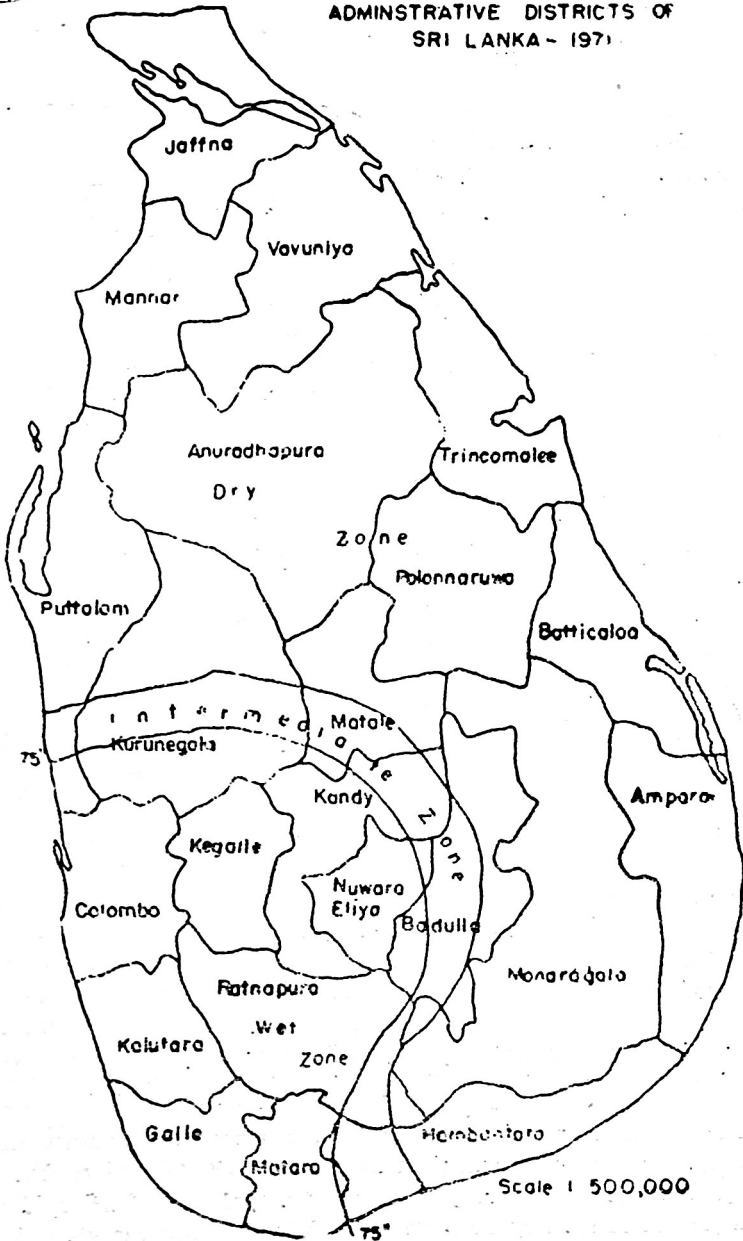
SOME ASPECTS OF POPULATION CHANGE IN SRI LANKA (1946 — 1971)

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Population of Sri Lanka expanded rapidly in the years between 1946 and 1971. Within this period, there was also a change in the pattern of distribution of population. According to the first census of 1971, the population of Sri Lanka was 2.4 millions and this increased to 6.7 millions in 1946. 1 The period upto 1946 may be considered as one of relatively slow growth when the rate of annual increase was 1.3 percent. Since 1946, the rate of growth appears to have doubled and averaged 2.6 percent, although within this period, there were some years when the rate of growth has been over higher. Upto 1946, immigration has contributed to the growth of population but after 1946, especially in the period after 1964, with the implementation of Srimavo-Sartri Pact, emmigration has increased. 2 Further, emmigration would continue with the implementation of Srimavo-Indra Pact of 1974. 3 After 1960s, emmigration had a negative impact on the rate of growth. The high growth rate especially after 1946, is associated with the control of malaria, reduction of maternal and infant mortality and the general improvement of the health of the population. General health of the population improved as a result of the introduction of advanced methods of sanitation and medicine, on the one hand, and the supply of free or, subsidised food and other facilities on the other 4. The overall improvement of the quality of life over the years must be considered as a significant factor leading to the expansion of the population.

The growth of population after 1946, has not been uniform throughout the country. Generally, growth rates have been high everywhere, but there are some regions where the rate of growth has been explosive. The rapid expansion was conspicuous in the Dry Zone, while the Wet the Zone experienced moderate growth 5. Population statistics pertaining to administrative districts demonstrate

FIG. 3

ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS OF
SRI LANKA - 1971

regional disparities in population growth 6. (Map 1) Columns 2, 1, 2 and 3 in Table i shows the population growth for the three intercensal periods while Column 4 shows the increase for the whole period. The data in Table 1 is shown in four maps.

Table 1. Population increase by intercensal periods and for the period between 1946-71. (in percent)

District	1946/53	1953/63	1963/71	1946/71
Colombo	20.3	29.2	21.1	88.1
Kalutara	14.7	20.6	15.9	59.8
Kandy	18.1	24.1	13.8	67.0
Matale	29.1	27.1	23.7	102.2
Nuwara Eliya	21.3	22.2	14.0	68.0
Galle	14.0	22.3	15.0	60.1
Matara	17.5	24.6	14.2	66.6
Hambantota	27.9	43.2	24.3	127.3
Jaffna	15.8	24.5	15.0	65.2
Mannar	38.5	37.6	29.5	147.2
Vavuniya	51.0	95.4	39.5	310.3
Batticaloa	30.9	40.4	31.6	144.6
Amparai	40.6	70.8	28.8	195.3
Trincomalee	10.5	65.1	38.6	148.0
Kurunegala	29.1	36.1	20.6	116.6
Puttalam	25.2	32.2	25.5	106.8
Anuradhapura	64.3	71.7	39.1	227.5
Polonnaruwa	—	—	43.8	687.0
Badulla	25.4	40.0	18.8	119.5
Monaragala	—	—	44.8	99.0
Ratnapura	22.7	29.5	21.2	92.7
Kegalla	17.4	22.7	12.7	63.0
SRI LANKA	21.6	30.1	19.8	90.3

Source: Calculated from the relevant censuses.

1946 — 1953

In the eight years between 1946 and 1953, the population of the country increased by 21.6 percent. Matale, Hambantota, Mannar, Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Amparai, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Monaragala and Ratnapura show an increase higher than the national average. (Map 2) Eradication of malaria helped to reduce the death rate in these districts and it also made resettlement of these areas feasible. These areas were made attractive to new settlers by the restoration of the abandoned tanks and the policy of state assisted colonization schemes. During this period, growth of population was lowest in

the Trincomalee district. This was largely a result of the migration of the population from the district with the reduction of naval and port activities of the Trincomalee harbour. Of the Dry Zone districts, other than Trincomalee, Jaffna district recorded a low increase. Jaffna district had shown lower rate of growth in the past as well due to out migration. All the districts in the Dry Zone other than Jaffna and Trincomalee experienced a rate of growth which was higher than the national average.

1953 — 1963

On the whole, the pattern of population growth in this period appears to be similar to the 1946-1953 period except that Trincomalee district which had experienced a low rate of growth earlier, showed a relatively higher rate of growth. (Map 3) All Dry Zone districts, except Jaffna, experienced above average rates of growth. Rates of population growth in the Wet Zone were lower than the average for the island. Increased colonization and extension of cultivated area in the Dry Zone attracted migrants from the already crowded Wet Zone. During this period, the Government policy appeared to favour the resettlement of the Dry Zone and the Government provided many incentives to the new settlers in the Dry Zone. Among the Wet Zone districts, Colombo and Ratnapura stand out as areas where the rate of growth was closer to the national average. Urban and industrial expansion in the Colombo district and agricultural development in the Ratnapura district proved to be an attraction to migrants from all parts of the country.

In the eight years between 1963 and 1971, Colombo, Matale, Hambantota, Mannar, Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Amparai, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Monaragala and Ratnapura (Map 4) experienced rates of growth higher than the national average. Colombo district also had a growth higher than the national average. In all other districts, the intercensal increase was lower than the national average.

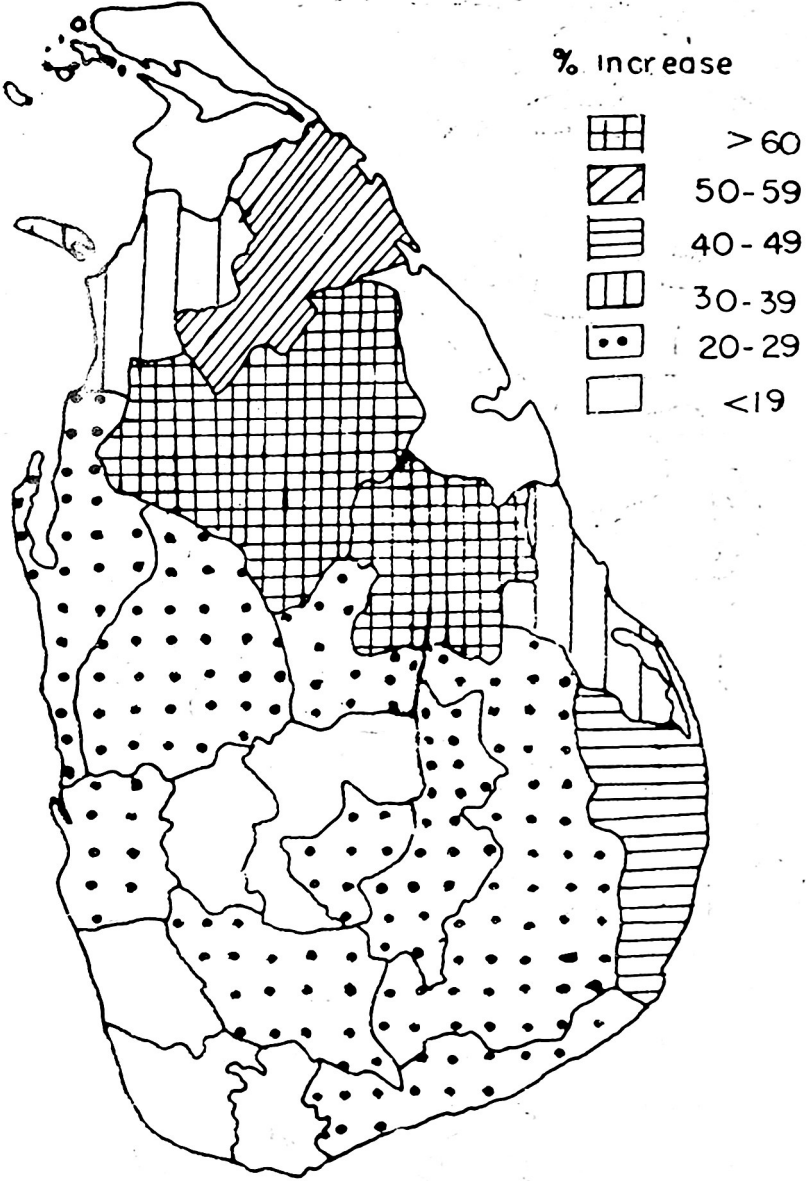
1946 — 1971

On the basis of the rate of population of growth between 1946 and 1971, administrative district of the island can be classified into six groups. (Map 5)

Growth Pattern	Increase (Percent)	Districts
Low growth	60 - 68	Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Nuwara Eliya, Jaffna & Kegalle.
Moderate growth	80 - 99	Colombo, Ratnapura and Monoragalla.
Intermediate growth	103 - 127	Matalae, Hambantota, Kurunegala, Puttalam, and Badulla.
High growth	141 - 228	Batticaloa, Mannar, Trincomalee Amparai and Anuradhapura.
Very high growth	310	Vavuniya.
Phenominal growth	687	Polonnaruwa.

FIG 2

POPULATION CHANGES BY DISTRICT 1946-53



POPULATION CHANGES BY DISTRICT 1953-63

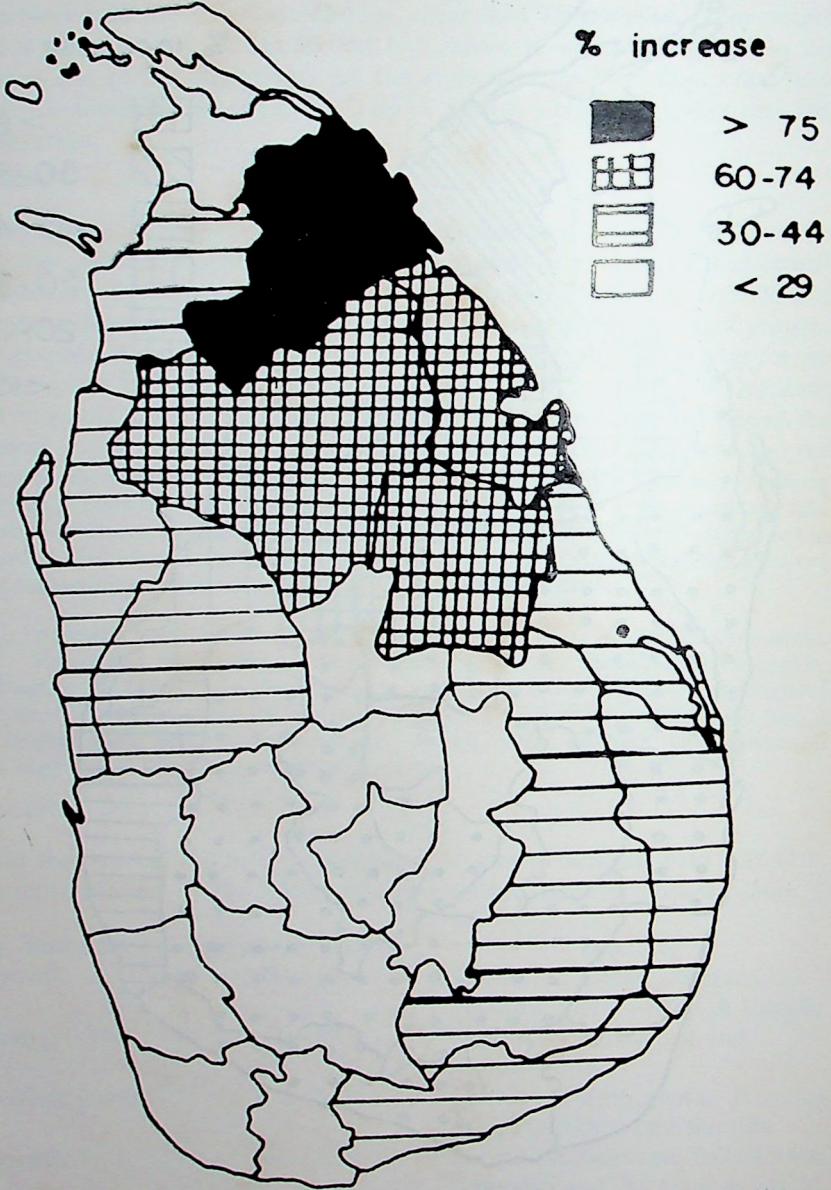


FIG. 4

POPULATION CHANGES BY DISTRICT 1963-71

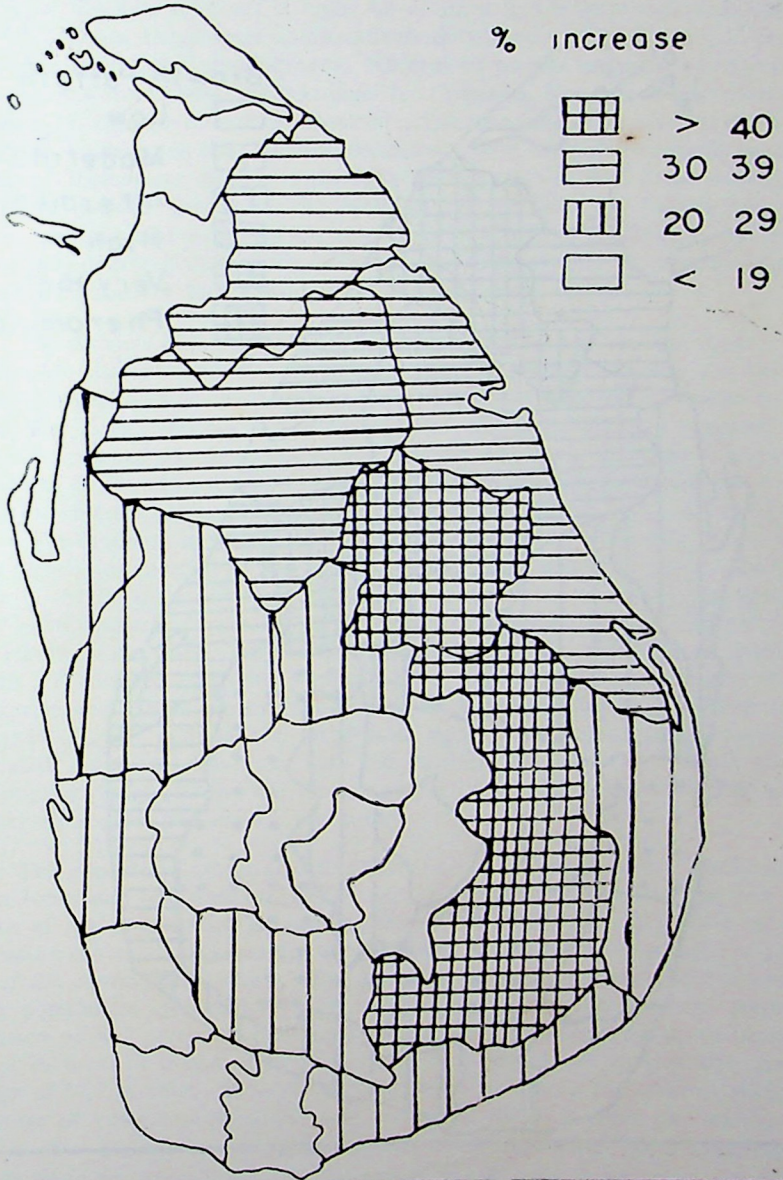
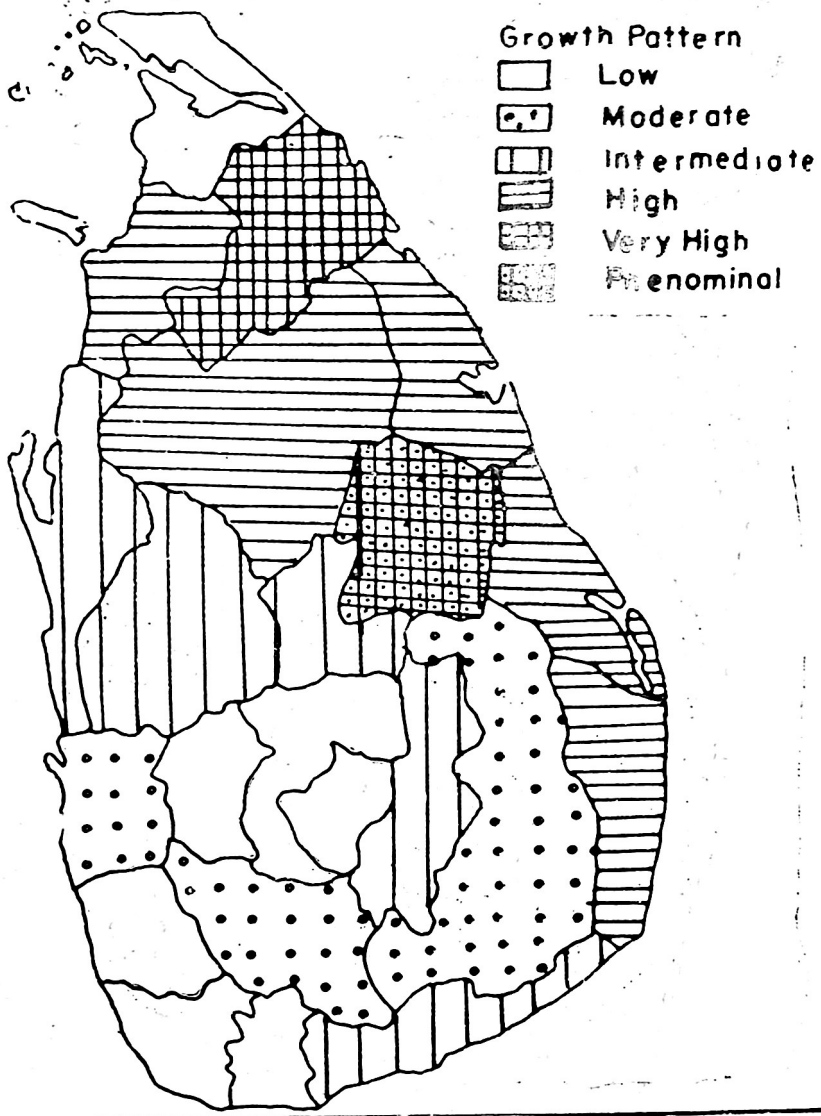


FIG 5

POPULATION CHANGES BY DISTRICT 1946 - 71



The low rate of growth of population between 60-68 percent growth is observed in seven districts. Although the percentage growth is low, the growth in terms of absolute numbers is high. All of them had large populations and high densities. These districts are comparatively developed and have limited potential for further agricultural development. Number of people migrated outwards from these districts from 1946-1971 was high. Colombo, Ratnapura and Monaragala in group 11, though diverse in economic structure, had a similar growth rate. Industrial expansion in the Colombo district in 1960s, attracted migrants in sizeable numbers. Ratnapura district is the only district in the Wet Zone which had a population growth similar to the national rate of growth. Udawalawa multipurpose scheme and other agricultural activities helped to develop the district. Monaragala district is the only Dry Zone district to experience a lower rate of growth probably because of late development of agriculture there.

The districts in group 111, are the border districts of the Wet Zone. These districts are characterised by intermediate rates of growth. As they are bordering the Wet Zone, the rate of growth in these districts appear to be similar to those of the Wet Zone. Within individual districts climatic variations appeared to influence the rates of population growth. Drier areas show population characteristics that are to be found in the Dry Zone, while wetter areas have similarities with the Wet Zone districts. For example, in the Puttalam district, there are two distinct areas:- (1) Puttalam area falls entirely in the Dry Zone. This area of the district had a population increase of 236 percent between 1946 and 1971. (11) The Chilaw region of the Puttalam district which falls largely within the Wet Zone had an increase of 80.5 percent during this period. Similarly, in Kurunegala, Matale, Badulla and Hambantota, there were remarkable intra-district variation of population growth. Batticaloa, Amparai, Anuradhapura, Trincomalee, and Mannar in group IV experienced a high growth of population. All these districts benefited through the eradication of malaria and large scale agricultural colonization schemes and associated activities. Vavuniya and Polonnaruwa in group V and VI increased their population by 310 and 637 percent respectively. Main reason for the increase appears to be the expansion of agriculture.

The process of urban growth in Sri Lanka has been slow. The studies of Gavin Jones and Selvaratnam (1970) and Gunatilake (1973) reveal the low urban growth of the country. Between 1946 and 1953, the rate of growth of urban population of the country was not very different from the rate of growth of population of the country as a whole. But after 1953, urban expansion accelerated and urban population increased by 62.7 percent as against the national population expansion of 30.7 percent. Between 1963 and 1971, the same trend continued, the rate of increase of urban population being 41.3 percent as against the national average of 19.9 percent. It must be noted, however that in the 1963-71 period, the definition of "urban population" was somewhat different from the earlier phase because after 1963, even the smaller towns administered by Town Councils were considered to be urban areas. In the earlier phase, only those areas administered by the Municipal and urban Councils were classified as urban. Table 11 shows some characteristics of urban population of Sri Lanka.

Table 11. Total population, urban-rural ratio and urban settlements.

	1946	1953	1963	1971
Total population in Thousand	6657	8097	10590	12690
Urban (percent)	15.4	15.3	19.1	22.4
Rural (percent)	84.6	84.7	81.2	77.6
Number of urban settlements	42	43	99	135

Source:- Based on Census Reports of Sri Lanka.

More important reasons for the urban growth in Sri Lanka have been the natural increase of population within the urban areas, the redefinition of urban boundaries and elevation of rural areas to urban status. The rural-urban migration factor appears to have played a minor role in the urban growth in Sri Lanka. In the 1946-71 period, significant urban expansion was seen only in the Colombo district and in some of the urban centres in the Dry Zone.

The dominance of agriculture in the economy, slow rates of industrialisation and service activities are the reasons contributing to the slow pace of urbanization in Sri Lanka. Moreover, opening up of the Dry Zone inhibited the migration of the people to urban areas. Expansion of the cultivated area in the Dry Zone during this period, was very pronounced and according to the Land Utilization Survey Report of 1967, some 20,000 acres of land in the Dry Zone was brought under cultivation annually. The growth of agricultural settlements led to the development of service centres in most parts of the Dry Zone. Rural areas are fairly well served by the educational, health and retail outlet facilities and this has tended to reduce the need to migrate to urban areas. Traditional attachment to agricultural land further impedes rural-urban migration.

The pattern of percentage of urban population by district between 1946 and 1971 are shown in Table 111. Throughout the period, the Colombo district remained as the highest urbanised district. Next to Colombo, Jaffna and Trincomalee are the most urbanised districts. The growth of urban population in the Jaffna district increased rapidly after 1950s with the creation of several urban settlements. Though Trincomalee remained a high urbanised district, its urban percentage declined from 42.8 percent in 1946 to 25.1 percent in 1963 and increased to 38.4 percent in 1971.

Table 111. Urban population by district, 1946 — 1971.
(percentage to the total district population)

District	1946	1953	1963	1971
Colombo	40.7	41.5	46.4	55.2
Kalutara	11.1	11.1	20.0	21.9
Kandy	10.7	10.8	11.4	12.4
Matale	9.0	8.6	11.5	11.9
Nuwara Eliya	4.0	5.5	6.2	6.1

Galle	10.9	10.4	14.9	15.3
Matara	12.8	12.7	20.3	21.1
Hambantota	7.2	5.8	8.1	9.8
Jaffna	13.0	13.5	23.1	30.4
Mannar	—	—	15.0	14.3
Vavuniya	—	—	16.3	21.7
Batticaloa	6.4	6.4	25.1	27.1
Amparai	—	—	13.5	11.7
Trincomalee	42.8	31.4	25.1	38.4
Kurunegala	3.2	3.3	3.5	4.1
Puttalam	9.2	9.4	12.4	13.9
Anuradhapura	8.8	8.0	11.8	10.0
Polonnaruwa	—	—	5.2	10.0
Badulla	4.4	4.7	8.0	9.5
Monaragala	—	—	2.6	2.7
Ratnapura	4.2	4.5	4.8	7.6
Kegalla	1.2	1.2	3.0	7.4

Source:- Calculated from Census Reports of Sri Lanka

The growth of urban population in the district was due to, creation of new towns than urban-rural migration. Batticaloa, the only district other than the above mentioned districts which has the urban ratio above the national percentage. Nuwara Eliya, Hambantota, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Monaragala, Kegalla and Ratnapura are the least urbanised districts in the country. There are two important current patterns of urbanization that could be identified:- (i) the growth of small towns (central places) throughout the country and particularly in the Dry Zone. (ii) The growth of Colombo and the suburbs into a large metropolis. The Dry Zone development and the proposed Mahaveli Project accelerated the growth of the small towns; the Free Trade Zone of Colombo North and the establishment of the capital city at Kotte (Jayawardenapura) will help the city of Colombo to grow as a large urban agglomeration.

Sri Lanka is a multi-racial and multi-religious country. Sinhalese (Low Country and Kandyan), Tamils (Sri Lankan and Indian), and Moors (Sri Lankan and Indian) are the major racial groups. Malays, Burghars and the Veddas are the minor racial groups in the country. The religious composition of the country in 1971, was as follows:- Buddhists 67.4 percent, Hindus 17.6 percent, Muslims 7.1 percent and Christians 7.8 percent of the total population. During the last twenty-five years, internal migration had brought about some change in the racial distribution of the country. The Eastern Province prior to 1946, was mainly settled by Tamils and Moors. But with the agricultural colonization, the Sinhala population increased remarkably. 27,556 Sinhalese were enumerated in the province in 1946 and their number increased to 149,458 in 1971. This gives an increase of 422 percent. The Sinhalese were mainly settled in Galoya, Allai, Kantalai, Morawewa

schemes and this helped to increase their population in the Eastern Province. The Trincomalee district which is part of the Eastern Province may be taken as an example, where these changes have taken place to a significant degree. Table IV shows the population growth by race between 1921 and 1971.

Table IV

Year	Sinhalese		Tamils		Moors		Others	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1921	1996	4.3	18586	54.6	12846	37.5	1179	3.6
1946	15706	20.7	33795	44.5	23219	30.6	3206	4.2
1953	15296	18.3	37517	44.9	28616	34.2	2204	2.6
1963	39130	28.9	54050	38.7	42560	30.4	1660	2.0
1971	55308	28.8	73255	38.1	61538	32.1	1888	1.0

Source:- Calculated from Census Reports of Sri Lanka.

The Sinhala population was only 4 percent of the total district population in 1921. But in 1946, their percentage increased to 20.7 percent and in 1971, to 29.8 percent. But at the same time, the Tamil population has declined relatively. However, the Moor population continued to maintain their percentage as a result of a high birth rate.

In the plantation districts, such as Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Ratnapura and Matale, the population of Sinhala population has been increasing due to the repatriation of Indian Tamils. Further, a sizeable Indian population also moved out from the estate and migrated to Vavuniya and Kilinochchi. There is evidence to show that the Sri Lankan Tamils had increased their percentage only in the city of Colombo. In 1946, the percentage of the Sri Lankan Tamils was 9.8 percent of the city population and the percentage increased to 18.3 percent in 1971. Further, a sizeable Tamil population is found in Dehiwala and Wattala. Tamil population in these places increased after 1946. The multi-racial character of the population appears to be increasing in Sri Lanka. This trend is likely to accelerate further with the expansion of the economy of the country.

The distribution of the population of the country is likely to change with the completion of the Mahaveli Project. Mahaveli Ganga basin covers nearly 4,000 sq.miles. This project will help to develop two areas:- (i) Mahaveli basin below Mahiyangana upto the delta area. (ii) Kalawewa and North Central region. These areas receive water through Mahaveli diversion at Polgolla. The Kalawewa region is already under intensive development. With the completion of all stages of Mahaveli Scheme, 900,000 acres will be brought under irrigation in the Dry Zone and will attract more than 1.5 million people to this area, thus reducing the imbalance in the distribution of population seen in the country.

References

1. *Year of population censuses of Sri Lanka* - 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1921, 1931, 1946, 1953, 1963 & 1971.
2. *Srimavo-Sastri Pact* an agreement concluded in 1964, between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Government of India in regard to the status of Indian origin. Under this agreement 300,000 of these persons together with their natural increase will be granted Sri Lankan citizenship, while 525,000 with their natural increase will be repatriated to India.
3. *Srimavo-Indra Pact* an agreement concluded in 1974, between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Government of India regarding the status of Indian origin not covered by the Srimavo-Sastri Pact. Under this agreement, Government of Sri Lanka will grant citizenship for 75,000 persons of Indian origin and 75,000 will be repatriated to India.
4. From 1-9-1979 onwards, the Government of Sri Lanka introduced Food Stamp Scheme, which replaced the Rice Ration Scheme introduced in February, 1942.
5. Sri Lanka has two climatic zones known as Wet Zone and Dry Zone. Colombo, Kalutara, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Matara, Kegalla and Ratnapura are regarded as Wet Zone districts. Matale, Hambantota, Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Amparai, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Monaragala and Badulla are regarded as Dry Zone districts.
6. In 1946, there were 20 districts. The district of Chilaw was amalgamated with the district of Puttalam. Three new districts (Polonnaruwa, Amparai & Monaragala) were created.
7. Census of Population, 1971, *Sri Lanka General Report*. Department of Census and Statistics. p. 47.
8. Gavin W. Jones and Selvaratnam S. *Urbanization in Ceylon, 1946-53*, *Modern Ceylon Studies*, Vol. 2, 1970. pp. 199-212.
Gunatilake, G. "The rural-urban balance and development: *The experience in Sri Lanka*" *Marga*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1973. pp. 35-68.
9. Department of Census and Statistics, *The Population of Sri Lanka*. 1974. p.62.