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The Brahmins: A Study on the Traditional Elite in Jaffna with Reference to their Dialect

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The Brahmins, originally those who are priests are considered the highest Hindu caste. The Brahmins consist of nearly 1% of the population in the Jaffna Peninsula. Most of the Brahmins in Jaffna are the descendants of those who have migrated to Jaffna after the Hindu revival which took place during the 19th century which was triggered by Srilasri Arumuganavalar. All the Brahmins are Hindus and are attached to temples either as priests or as assistants. The Brahmins wear the sacred thread. They are also strictly vegetarian. The Brahmin community significantly differs from the others in their life style. They have special rituals connected to their day to day life. : "Santhiyavanthanam" "Upanayanam" etc. The artisans maintain a close connection with India. This cast performs several essential religious duties for the Hindu population in Jaffna and their existence is inseparably interwoven with the other casts. There are two kinds of dialects used by the Sri Lankan Tamils: Regional dialect and Socio dialect. The Socio dialect is influenced by the cast system. This research explores the special features visible in the socio dialect used by the Brahmins. It will further focus on demonstrating how the Brahmin rituals and practices vary from those of other casts and how they are able to maintain the artisan identity in Sri Lanka. Further, The effects of Brahmin caste on their socio dialect will be analysed through the study. In conducting this research the technique of participation and observation, interviews and further, the discussions were used as the methodology.

Key words: Brahmins, cast system, influence, regional dialect, socio dialect