STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

Who are Srilankan Tamils? Why did they come to India?

Polity & Governance

25 Dec 2026

1. Who Are Sri Lankan Tamils?

Sri Lankan Tamils are an ethnic Tamil population native to the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. They are distinct from Indian Tamils, although they share the same language, culture, and religious traditions.

2. Why Did Sri Lankan Tamils Come to India?

BECOME IAS
AI-Powered UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT

a) Ethnic Conflict and Civil War

Tensions between the Sinhalese-majority government and Tamil minorities grew after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948. Discriminatory policies such as the Sinhala Only Act marginalized Tamils in education, jobs, and governance.

b) Civil War (1983–2009)

The conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) led to large-scale violence. The 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom (Black July) triggered mass migration. Thousands fled by boat to India, especially to Tamil Nadu.

3. Where Do They Live in India?

Most Sri Lankan Tamil refugees live in Tamil Nadu, spread across:

- Over 100 refugee camps
- Districts such as Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, Salem, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai, Erode, and Coimbatore
- Some families also live outside camps with special permission.

4. Population and Legal Status

- Around 90,000–1,00,000 Sri Lankan Tamils currently live in India.
- They are classified as refugees, not citizens.

- They hold refugee identity cards issued by the Tamil Nadu government.
- Most do not have voting rights or Indian passports.

5. Living Conditions & Government Support

The Tamil Nadu government provides:

- Free housing or shelter in camps
- Monthly cash assistance
- Free education up to higher levels
- Healthcare access in government hospitals
- Free electricity, ration, and basic amenities.
- Recent initiatives include: Construction of permanent concrete houses to replace old camps and Skill development and self-employment programs.

BECOME IAS
AI-Powered UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT

6. Challenges Faced

- Limited job opportunities due to legal restrictions
- Travel restrictions outside the state
- No citizenship rights
- Economic dependency
- Psychological trauma from displacement and war

7. Education & Employment

- Children attend Tamil Nadu government schools and colleges
- Many youths pursue professional education
- Employment often limited to informal or semi-skilled sectors
- Some have successfully integrated into education, healthcare, and small businesses

8. Current Developments

- Tamil Nadu government is improving housing infrastructure
- Discussions continue about long-term rehabilitation, citizenship pathways, and dignified return options
- Central government policy remains cautious on granting citizenship

9. Cultural Identity

- Sri Lankan Tamils maintain their language, traditions, temples, and festivals
- Strong cultural ties with Tamil Nadu society
- Many hope for either dignified integration or safe return to Sri Lanka

BECOME IAS
AI-Powered UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT