

Denmark: Welcoming many

1713 the Tamil boy Timotheus is presented at the court in Copenhagen. He is brought from the Danish colony Tranquebar by missionaries of the “Dänisch-Hallesche Mission”, the first protestant mission in Southern India from 1706 to 1837. At their school he was taught not only the Christian religion but also the Danish language. Now he is brought to Europe as a show piece. Seeing Timotheus the widow of the king is so much impressed, that she asks for a Christian Tamil boy for herself, whom she gets. Timotheus gets to know the Tamils already living in Copenhagen. When his relationship to a Tamil girl – a former slave of a Danish priest in Tranquebar – becomes public in 1714, prejudices about the sexual permissiveness of Tamils are strengthened. Nonetheless Timotheus begins his studies to become a missionary. These are interrupted when the king allows a journey to Halle. After his return Timotheus is selected to teach two Danish candidates for the mission in Portuguese and Tamil. Soon, however, another training is sought for Timotheus, he begins an apprenticeship as a bookbinder, which he completes in 1717. After marrying the Tamil Sahra he returns to India, where he works for the mission. (Liebau 1996, 9-18)

Today - long after Denmark has ceased to be a colonial power - the link to Tranquebar seems to have gone as well. Only few immigrants of Indian origin live in the country, the considerable number of Tamils are refugees from Sri Lanka, the largest South Asian group in Denmark are the Pakistanis.¹ The latter seem to have come as guestworkers in the 1960s and 70s (Steen 1993, 103). Ali (1982, 84-85) gives an account of the Pakistanis in Denmark at the beginning of the 1980s.² According to this report they come mainly from the Punjab, the majority are men, who work in the production and service sectors of the economy. An Imam of a mosque is a Pakistani, there are some Urdu magazines and already 1982 a convention of Pakistanis in Denmark has been held. A few years later in 1985 the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Denmark invites to an international Hindu Conference in Copenhagen with the objective of bringing the European Hindu community together.

While the majority of immigrants of Indian or Pakistani origin have in 1998 the Danish nationality, most Tamils who came later as refugees are legally still Sri Lankans.³ Their entry is the second influx of refugees after the 4000 to 5000 Asians coming from East Africa at the beginning of the 1970s⁴. In fact Denmark, which has had a history of assisting refugees (Steen 1993, 87)⁵, received an unusual large number of Tamils for its size (81).

When the first Tamils applied for asylum in Denmark in 1984 they could not refer to an ethnic support group living there already, they came to a culturally totally alien country (81). The support came from the Danish state. Although in 1986 Denmark tightened its Aliens Act (87), most Tamils⁶ have been recognised as de facto refugees, which gives them a legally secure status, allows for family reunion (81) and provides them access to the same social services as the Danes (106). The refugees pass through a process beginning with the pre-asylum phase from a few months to several years in refugee camps, where they are not entitled to work and their children cannot attend the Danish schooling system, continuing with the integration

¹ See Table 1 and 2. In the European comparison the presence of Pakistanis in Denmark is very high.

² See Table 3.

³ See Table 2.

⁴ According to Tinker (1977, 12).

⁵ All following references which give only the page number refer to Steen (1993).

⁶ More than 90% of all Tamil asylum-seekers (106).

phase, when their asylum has been granted and they are - for in average 17 months - in the care of the Danish Refugee Council, and finally finding their welfare in the responsibility of the municipality. (94-95)

Confronted with the bad reputation of other refugees and the guestworkers of the 60s and 70s the Tamils make attempts to differentiate themselves from these (103). Their polite and reserved behaviour makes them the ideal refugee for the Danes, makes them the favoured group of the officials (102-103). Nonetheless their life is not easy. Besides being faced by patronising and missionising instincts by the Danes, who are guided by cultural stereotypes and use their asymmetrical power position (100), they increasingly have problems finding employment (97). The Danish system makes them clients rather than acting subjects (106).

After the first pioneers had found their way to Denmark chain migration set in. Newcomers – mainly young bachelors – are related to earlier refugees, are their friends or school-mates from the home village. Virtually nobody leaves Sri Lanka for Denmark without contacts and telephone numbers of Tamils living there already. Once arrived they often become closely attached to their “contact”- families. (166) The social life takes place primarily in the Tamil community. Only few have relationships with Danish women and even less legalise these. (176) There is no feeling of belonging to the place they live in, which hinders also the establishment of their own institutions (186).

In 1985 the need for a Hindu temple is first formulated (183). The wish is however not strong enough to put it to realisation (185). The religious rites are performed by a travelling Brahmin (183). The first Tamil death in Denmark brings total confusion about the rituals, a book of verses is sent for in Germany, but there are not the right persons present to perform the service (189). Nonetheless Tamils from all over Denmark attend the burial as they were called by the leader of the LTTE in Denmark. Thus it became a political demonstration of the refugees in exile. (190-191) Well organised Tamil militant groups in fact play an important role in the life of the Tamil community in Denmark. Several groups compete with each other (129). The pressure on the refugees to support them financially is so high, that many have complained to the Danish Refugee Council and have requested its help against this (136).

With the emergence of the internet also the Tamil community uses this medium. For some time the English www.tamil.dk gives a forum to Tamil issues. But not only the Tamils can be found in the virtual world. There are, for example, some appearances of second generation Indians. A student with roots in Punjab refers to these on his homepage⁷ and on Dr. Bombay's⁸ homepage⁹ one learns about his Danish-Indian parents.

Research Notes

The statistical material differentiated according to immigrants and descendants on the one hand and foreign nationals on the other opens to research the question on how ethnicity is defined in Denmark and the practical question about the acquisition of the Danish nationality.

Besides Steen (1993) there is little research about South Asians in Denmark available in English. In particular there is a lack of studies about the East African refugees and the early (Pakistani) guestworkers as well as about the developments in the 90s in general. As the Pakistanis are the largest community this is a major lack.

⁷ www.econo.cbs.dk/people/para95ab/person.html

⁸ A Swedish music star for a short time in 1998.

⁹ www.wea.de/artist/drbbombay/bio2.htm

There are a large number of South Asian organisations in Denmark. These could be a basis for further research about the life of South Asians in Denmark.

Tables

| Table 1 | | Population according to citizenship | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------|------|-----------------------------|---|------|---|
| | Total (1000) | | Indians (1000) | | Pakistani (1000) | Indians per 100.000 population | | Pakistani per 100.000 population |
| | 1991 | 1997 | 1991 | 1997 | 1997 | 1991 | 1997 | 1997 |
| Dänemark | 5.146,5 | 5.275,1 | 0,9 | 1,1 | 6,7 | 17 | 21 | 127 |

source: Eurostat, own calculations

| Table 2 | | Immigrants and their descendants by country of origin | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| | Immigrants/ Descendants | foreign nationals | immigrants/ descendants | foreign nationals | |
| country of origin | 1988 | | 1998 | | |
| Pakistan | 10,956 | 6,500 | 16,353 | 6,934 | |
| Sri Lanka | 4,176 | 4,034 | 8,790 | 5,409 | |
| India | 2,005 | 842 | 2,881 | 1,115 | |

source: www.dst.dk

| Table 3 | | Pakistanis in Denmark | | |
|----------------|----------------|------------------------------|--------------|--|
| | working | students (0-15 years) | total | |
| male | 2249 | 1822 | 4071 | |
| female | 1455 | 1341 | 2796 | |
| total | 3704 | 3163 | 6967 | |

source: Ali (1982)

| Table 4 | asylum applications |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| year | Sri Lanka |
| 1984 | 266 |
| 1985 | 300 |
| 1986 | 2752 |
| 1987 | 516 |
| 1988 | 605 |
| 1989 | 361 |
| total | 4800 |
| source: Steen (1993) | |

Bibliography

Ali, Muazzam (1982), Pakistanis in Europe, London, 84-85.

Brief description of Pakistanis in Denmark given at a European conference on Pakistanis in Europe.

Jensen, Tim (1994), "Hinduisme", in: Tim Jensen, Religionsguiden, Copenhagen, 25-32.

Survey of Hinduism in Denmark in Danish including contact addresses.

Liebau, Kurt (1996), „Die ersten Tamilen aus der Dänisch-Halleschen Mission in Europa. Vom Objekt zum Subjekt kultureller Interaktion?“, in: Gerhard Höpp (ed.), Fremde Erfahrungen: Asiaten und Afrikaner in Deutschland, Österreich und in der Schweiz bis 1945, Berlin, 9-28.

Historical study about the first Tamils from the Danish colony Tranquebar in Europe in the early 18th century.

Steen, Ann-Belinda (1993), Varieties of the Tamil Refugee Experience in Denmark and England, Copenhagen.

Differentiated and extensive analysis of the Tamil refugee experience in Denmark, especially in the small industrial town Herning, founded on research in 1988/89.

Tinker, Hugh (1977), The Banyan Tree. Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Delhi.

Tinker gives estimates about East African refugees to Denmark.

Homepages

Dr. Bombay, Calcutta (Taxi Taxi Taxi), biography, in: <http://wea.de/arist/drbombay/bio2.htm>

Homepage of the musician with Indian-Danish origin.

Parvinder's Personal Info, in: <http://www.econo.cbs.dk/people/para95ab/person.html>

Homepage of a student with Punjabi origin from the Copenhagen Business School,

www.tamil.dk, in: <http://www.tamil.dk>

In 1998 a highly sophisticated homepage covering following areas of Tamil life and interest: backstage - the crew behind, etc; Sri Lanka - general, political, cultural; Refugees - Press on

Tamils, organisations; Silanthi - poems, photos; Bollywood; Showbiz; Computer; Entertainment; miscalleneous. Being rebuild at least since 1999. Referring in 2000 to another homepage with information in Danish (www.katpahan.dk/unge).

Letters

Vishwa Hindu Parishad - Denmark, Invitation to 2nd Hindu Conference 1985 in Copenhagen

Further literature

Pedersen, Lars (1991), „Tyrkiskske og pakistanske indvandererorganisationer i Århus“, in: Pedersen and Bodil Selner (eds.), *Muslimsk invandrenugdom*, Aarhus, 105-133.

Singla, Rashmi (1993), *Psychological counselling of ethnic minority youth*, Esbjerg, 12 p.

South Asian Organisations

Indian Welfare Association Denmark

Inderjit Singh Suri, Pinjevej 10, 3000 Helsingør

Pakistan Welfare Society

Fosgården 12, 1.tv., 2620 Alberstlund

Pakistan Pashtun og Baluch Velfærdsorganisation

Jehnaagir Khan, Tagensvej 250, st.tv., 2400 København NV

Pakistans Peoples Society

Nyelandsvej 53, st.tv., 2000 Frederiksberg

Sikh Foundation Denmark

M.S. Rathour, Ballerup Byvej 220, 2750 Ballerup.

Tamilsk-Dansk Venskabsforening

Selvakumar Thurasisingam, Porsvænget 7, 2, 7400 Herning

Bangladesh Forening, Danmark

Parvaz Ahmed, Nordbanegade 12, 2. Th., 2200 København N

Indisk Musik og Kultur Forening

Anita Rattan, Musvågevej 6, 2.tv., 8210 Århus V

Bharatiya Mandir

Borups Alle 201, 1.th., 2400 København NV

Indian Cultural Association

Ingstrup Alle 25 B, 2770 Kastrup

Pakistan Forening i Ishøj

Kamal, Vejlegården 3, 2635 Ishøj

Den Pakistanske Forening i Århus

Ny Munkegade 13 B, 8000 Århus C

Pakistansk Indvandrerforening i Tåstrup

Abdu Shakir, Leen B 4, st.2., 2635 Tåstrup

Vishav Punjabi Sabhiachark Manch

Gurdial Singh Ramta, Ellegårdsvej 19, 2820 Gentofte

Pakistansk Kulturforening

Maqbool Hussain Bhatti, Høje Gladsaxe 67, 1.tv., 2860 Søborg

Den Tamilske Venskabsforening

Vra Dendran, Nygårdsterasserne 273 F, 3520 Farum

Hidnu Kulturel Forening

Krishna, Vestergade 24, 1.sal, 7400 Herning

Vishwa Hindu Parishad – Denmark

S.L. Sharma, Skandiegade 19, 2450 København SV