

The Changing Character of the Identity Issue for Tamils - A Socio-Cultural History

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About the Book

The book traces the socio-cultural changes that visited the Tamil community since 1800. The colonial occupation and the missionary activities that followed had implications for the identity of the community. The community managed this threat to its identity successfully. The history as traced in the book stands testimony to this accomplishment. The community is at another important historical cross road following the 1983 upheaval, the dispersal of the community across the world especially to host country cultures and values that over emphasise materialism and individualism. The issue that disturbs the minds of members of the community is what values will pre-dominate for a progeny that grows up in this environment. Has the community's history any lessons for the community in addressing the issue of the Tamil identity for coming generations. This study has tried out a case study approach for readers to experience the events that unfolded and as they affected the people. Karainagar and the Vidane Kanaga Thillaiyan family are selected as cases for detailed examination. The criteria for the selection is not any narrow parochialism or bias but is intended to illustrate graphically how a conservative community insulated geographically has transformed itself to achieve a measure of success in the challenging globalised environment.

About the Author

The author, a career banker spanning 4 decades and who worked with premier institutions like the Central Bank of Ceylon and the Development Bank of Singapore retired in 1986. He climbed rapidly into senior management positions and on retirement he ran a successful management consultancy until 1997 during which period he served as advisor/board director of banks and other corporates in Indonesia and California in the US. An economist by training he broadened his skills into finance and management securing associateships of the relevant professional bodies in the UK and Australia. He holds a MBA degree and is a CPA. As advisor/board director he specialized in the area of corporate acquisitions and overall re-structuring of corporates to improve their growth and profitability.

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Preface

In recent years there has been a great deal of discussion and controversy over the subject multi-culturalism especially in host countries with substantial eastern migrants. Host countries with western cultures have now shifted emphasis from multi-culturalism towards integration of migrants into host country communities. The migrants view that this emphasis on integration has the potential to erode their identity as a community. How should the migrants meet the challenge to their cultural identity? This requires migrants to have a balanced historical perspective, especially a socio-cultural one.

To make the history relevant and refreshing for this purpose a case study approach to the community's socio-cultural history is attempted. The area selected was a village called Karainagar off the Jaffna peninsular and the family (or paguthi) selected was the Vidane Kanaga Thillaiyan (VKT) paguthi. The family tree of this paguthi was needed first. When tracing the paguthi's family tree, the family tree went back to around 1800. During this period (the heyday of colonial rule) the society in Karainagar witnessed a radical transformation when the vestiges of the feudalism gave way to a hybrid form of capitalistic society. The conservative character entrenched in the centuries old value systems of the community tempered the changes especially when the strong cultural roots provided the glue to its rich past. The changes that occurred in Karainagar also occurred in other villages in Jaffna and the Tamil homelands. Accordingly the conclusions of this research in effect represent the socio-cultural history of the Tamils in Ceylon since 1800. Enough has been written on the political evolution of the Tamils in this period that the political aspect is kept out of the study.

This case study approach went into in greater depth into the socio-economic evolution of a semi-feudal and caste structured society into a successful market driven one, as it affected actual families. The political turmoil in the 1980's and after in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) resulted in the changes in the Tamil homelands spilling over indirectly into the host country environments to which the displaced people moved. The study also covers the contribution of all emigrants including those who ventured out overseas to countries such as Malaya and Singapore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The attitudes of these early emigrants and nature of the links that they maintained with their counter-parts in Ceylon are also examined. Most importantly the study examines

the progress that the displaced people have made in the last two decades in re-building their lives and the evolving attitudes to issues of Tamil identity in the overseas communities.

Migrants from eastern cultures when settling into host country environments of non-eastern cultures indulge in family tree tracing activities; to some it is a pastime for others especially for those with 'settling in' problems the urge to re-establish links with friends and relatives they grew up and lived together is understandable. Family trees per se are of interest primarily to the members of the families concerned. It serves as tool to keep in touch with members in the family tree. For the purpose of the study abridged versions of the family tree should suffice and these are in the appendices. However data in oral history form that was obtained for building the family tree resulted in other findings sufficient to re-construct the socio-cultural history of the community.

Chapter 1

Introduction – concepts and methodology used

Identity – definition in context

Threats to a community's "identity" do occur in the history of most communities periodically. Communities in pre-colonial times in the East lived in isolation that threats to their identity only came during localized inter-community invasions. These invasions were for brief periods. In the history of Ceylon, Tamil invasions into Sinhala areas and Sinhala invasions into Tamil areas did occur periodically.

The effect of these inter-community invasions was felt more at the level of the rulers and the lives of the ruled continued as before with the identities of the affected communities remaining reasonably untouched. In India, the Muslim invasions of the pre-colonial era were of a different magnitude and character that religious persecution and conversions followed the invasions.

The invaders converted the rulers first who in turn tried to convert his subjects for which the rulers most times used coercion. When conversions follow invasions they contain elements threatening the values and the identity of the affected communities. The tolerant character of the Indian and eastern cultures easily absorb such identity shocks that even the partition of the country that occurred could have been avoided had not the colonial power involved created the environment to make partition inevitable.

Identity for the conquered – the colonialists view

An "identity" crisis of a more serious character developed for Eastern (Indian) societies when Western colonial powers for economic reasons moved east and occupied the colonies for centuries. Although there were similarities in the identity crisis that developed following the Muslim and colonial invasions there were crucial differences between the two. The culture and values of the colonial invaders were sharply different. The colonial invaders were essentially materialistic and the

conversions that accompanied colonial occupation were intended to erode the identity of an essentially eastern society. The scope and depth of the change that the colonial powers envisaged was succinctly summarized by an eminent proponent of colonialism, the English colonial historian and influential politician; Lord Macaulay in 1935 (about 200 years ago) who stated,

“We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern: **a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect**”.

This is the most explicit statement of intent of the colonialists affecting the identity of Eastern societies. In effect it meant that Western values were to gradually replace the values of Eastern societies undermining their socio-cultural identity. Colonialism also broke down the economic isolation of eastern communities and with the flow of goods traded globally, there was to be a growing movement of people globally. The elites of the East were sent west to learn the ways (**the tastes, opinions, morals and intellect**) of the West. Briefly the colonialists brought to Eastern cultures materialism and the crude individualism of the capitalist system.

Whither Multi culturalism and the identity issue?

The Tamils in Ceylon in the colonial period who moved overseas (Malaya) from their homelands as economic migrants since the end of the 19th century kept their roots and identity intact at least until the 1950's. The culture of the host country (Malaya) was Eastern. However the recent movement of Tamils in vast numbers following the 1983 ethnic carnage in Sri Lanka created a diaspora in host countries whose culture is basically Western. The diaspora was and is caught in a dilemma in striving to maintain their own identity whilst at the same accepting the host country demands for integration with host country communities. The issue was one of finding the right mix between two conflicting requirements. Multi-culturalism provided a sensible model when the host country accepted the cultural identities of the different communities that lived in the host country. This was and remains official policy in most host countries. But with Western host countries increasingly eschewing multi culturalism and with the progeny of the diaspora growing up in totally different cultural environments the Tamil community face the risk that it may gradually lose its identity as a Tamil community. In these circumstances, the future identity of the progeny of the Tamil diaspora and other Tamils overseas gives cause for some concern. A clear understanding of the relevant history is essential to address this issue rationally.

Role of history

A renowned English historian E H Carr in describing the role of history stated that “Modern man peers eagerly into the twilight out of which he has come, in the hope that its faint beams will illuminate the obscurity into which he is going..... No consciousness of the future, no history”.

In the heyday of colonial rule when the vestiges of feudalism gave way to a modified form of capitalistic society the conservative character entrenched in the value systems in Eastern societies served not only as the glue to its rich cultural past, it did temper

the changes that followed. Enough has been researched and written about the political evolution of the Tamils in the last hundred years but on the issue of peoples' identity, an in-depth research into the socio-cultural evolution will throw some fresh light on ("its faint beams" will "illuminate") the "obscurity" that surrounds the issue of Tamil "identity". A proper understanding of its history by the community (especially its progeny) is important especially when the community is at an important cross road in its history.

Chapter 2

Socio-cultural history in context

Scope and approach

Unlike political history, the study of socio-cultural history requires research in some depth for readers to have a clear perception of the changes that took place especially as it affected actual families and people. Accordingly a case study approach is used here. The changes that affected a pre-eminent elite family living in an isolated village called Karainagar off the west coast of the Jaffna peninsula was selected for microscopic investigation. The Kanaga Thillaiyan Paguthi (family) was selected more so as verifiable oral history was available to arrive at reasonably valid conclusions. The conclusions of the legacy study done were found to be applicable to other families living in villages in Jaffna. Hence it is reasonable to assume that this study in effect represents a socio-cultural history of the Tamils as a whole since 1800.

The communal politics of the political elites in Sri Lanka since the days of Sir Baron Jayatileke (circa 1930's) was tragic for the entire Tamil community. The tragedy took the form of oppression and massive numbers of Tamils being forced to flee from their homes in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Amongst those who were displaced were an influential diaspora dispersed widely around the world. The vast majority of these displaced people yearn to maintain their identity and links with their traditional homelands. Members of the diaspora indulge in ancestry research to preserve the records of their roots intact and keep the identity of the community alive for the benefit of their progeny. The issue of identity is gaining more importance with most host countries apparently moving away from their commitment to multi-culturalism and emphasizing instead integration with the host country community. Multi-culturalism accepted the cultural identities of the various migrant groups in the host country.

How should the diaspora respond to the challenge? Legacy studies have a useful role in this context especially to correct mis-conceptions that the culture and values that the migrants brought hinder the migrants' integration with the host country communities. The cause for such a mis-conception is the faith that mainstream host country communities especially the Anglo-Saxons still have in the Macaulayan model, requiring migrants to "acquire the tastes, opinions, morals and the intellect" of the host country community.

The thinking underlying the Macaulayan model was the attaching of labels or stereotyping of cultures – advanced or backwards. In this mental frame it seemed

logically to view the eastern cultures as backward for the west to justify a role in the progress of eastern societies out of the backwardness. Some sections of the migrant community fall for these fallacious reasoning and end up earning the crumbs and not the substance of progress. Ignorant of the richness of their own culture and values their identity is bartered away in an unequal relationship. An appreciation of socio-cultural history of migrant communities will disabuse the affected migrants that notions or labels stereotyping cultures - advanced or backwards are in the first place fallacious.

Why legacy studies?

Legacy studies of families in the Tamil homelands at the grassroots level (Karainagar is selected for this study) provide invaluable historical insights to appreciate the changes that impacted on the socio-cultural aspects of the lives of the community in the last two centuries and how the community responded to the events as they unfolded in the years just preceding and during the stormiest period of Tamil history (1956 thru' 1983 to the present). Such legacy studies will leave behind a recorded history of the far reaching socio-economic changes that visited these peoples in the last hundred years or more. The changes of this period, especially those after 1940 were momentous in the evolution of modern Karainagar and the Tamil homelands. Mirror images of these changes were evident in most regions in Jaffna and the Tamil homelands. The evidence of these changes are now partly in archival and partly in oral history form. To save this history and the available supporting historical records further research is required to raise the standard of the recorded history of the period. This study is a small step in that direction.

The keen interest in tracing the ancestry or roots is viewed by some as a mere past time for the diaspora living overseas. However it also underlines the community's inability to settle in comfortably into the host country given the environment in the host countries. On the individual level studies about the paguthies or families, their ties with other paguthies (families in other geographical areas to cover the wider Tamil community) is part of the natural urge in them to keep in touch and maintain their links with the families and the community they grew up in and lived with. More importantly it unravels the socio-economic context in which the values of the community evolved and how these still mould their way of life in the traditional Tamil homelands and in the host country environments for the international diaspora. These studies add depth and colour to the history of the people. History is more than a chronological narration about rulers; it is more a study about the ruled, the people, their attitudes and aspirations.

Chapter 3

Socio-cultural evolution since 1800AD

(a case study – Karainagar)

The ancestry of the Extended **Vidane Kanaga-Thillaiyan** Paguthi (VKT) is selected for this study not merely because the pagithi occupied a pre-eminent place in the relevant period but also because verifiable oral history evidence is still available.

Paguthi refers to a cohesive group that adhered to norms to keep its identity intact over an extended period of time. The ancestry of the VKT paguthi is traced back to about 1800 AD. The Dutch rule had ended and the British rule in Ceylon was beginning, circa 1800 AD. The VKT paguthi was one of a handful of paguthies (families) of repute that lived in the small island village of Karainagar off the west coast of the Jaffna peninsular. A study of the VKT paguthi is incomplete without reference to the few other peer paguthies especially the Vidane Veedu, Kantha Udaiyar and Ponn Udaiyar Veedus that were related to the VKT paguthi through marriages over the years. These paguthies in combination maintained their primacy by keeping marriages as far as possible within these peer paguthies for over two hundred years. There is one major short-coming in this study; it does not cover the Maniyagaran paguthi related to the Extended VKT paguthi through a number of marriages. The VKT paguthi's relationship with the Maniyagaran paguthy is not included for the simple reason that collection of authentic oral history evidence of this paguthi was not feasible.

The Karainagar elites- study in context

Although there certainly were a few **other** elite paguthies in Karainagar the study of which may be relevant in understanding the legacy of these other paguthies and hence the community that lived in Karainagar and in the Tamil homelands generally; but this requires extensive effort and time to complete. With the Tamil community dispersed in, the not easily accessible Wannu territory, the suburbs of Colombo, Malaysia (descendents of early migrants) and the diaspora in host countries like Canada, Australia, the UK and other European countries, assembling oral history in these circumstances is a logistically impractical task. Prudence demands that the study be kept to a manageable level to achieve limited but concrete results before the evidence that is available is lost for ever. Studies of this nature although constrained by such limitations do contribute to unraveling the underlying trends that shaped events for the Tamil community as a whole. The observed trends in one area have a tendency to replicate itself in other areas either simultaneously or after a period of time.

Geographic Isolation – its impact

Karainagar is an island. According to oral history the name Karainagar was a derivative from Karai chedigal (plants) found there or because Karainagarans are descendents of settlers from Karaikkudi. The validity of these propositions has so far not been tested. The size of Karainagar is about 16 square miles (8km long x 6 km wide) with a population variously estimated at about 4000 in 1900 and 16000 in 1950. A 4 km long causeway linking the island to the mainland was built during the period when Sir W Twynham was the Government Agent of Jaffna (1867 – 1884). An engraved stone plaque in the Sayambu hall (Karainagar Hindu College) gives the date of the bridge as 1869. The causeway ended the geographic isolation of Karainagar. Sir P Ramanathan after a visit to the island in 1922 had Karaitivu officially renamed Karainagar on 12.09.1922. The network of roads linking the settlements within Karainagar was built after that.

Karainagar being an island meant that logistically the movement of people in and out of the island was limited that exposure to and interaction with peoples outside

Karainagar was minimal. Karainagar retained its homogeneous character over the most part of the initial 150 years since 1800. The island's geography and socio-economic evolution provides the backdrop to explain the radical character of the changes that visited Karainagar since 1900. The isolation was evident during the Dutch rule. Although there is evidence that the fort Hammenheil in the sea off the south west coast of the Karainagar was built using the stones from the Palakaaddu Kannigal, Viyavil Ayanaar and Punnalai Perumal temples the Portuguese and Dutch stayed offshore with little or no contacts with the people living in Karainagar.

The erosion of the geographic isolation

The erosion of the isolation began in the last two decades of the 19th century after the building of the causeway. The conservative and insular character of its people was striking compared to people from other regions in the Tamil homelands. Travel in and out of the island and people to people contact across the straits was minimal. Before the causeway was built according to oral history the people from Karainagar went for the Nallur and Chellachannathi temple festivals in bullock carts crossing the straits during the low tide. People from Karainagar as did people from other regions also traveled on regular pilgrimages to temples (especially the Nataraj temple in Chidambaram) in South India using the Rameswaram route. The pilgrimages were mostly in the rainy month of December when the paddy growing needed the least attention. Even the Tamil homelands in that period were isolated from the rest of the world. Occupying a region in the north of the island of Ceylon it was separated from the rest of the island by un-inhabited dense forests. The isolation broke gradually with the construction of trunk roads and the railway line to the north and east between the late 19th and first half of the 20th century.

The social structure- the iniquitous caste system

With about 25 percent of the land area of Karainagar being arable, agriculture was the mainstay of the economy. Rice, the predominant crop was grown in the rainy season and garden crops in the dry season. The bulk of the peasants called vellalas comprised a large pool of small holders and a few landowners (who formed a powerful elite class). The vellala caste was further stratified into sub-castes. Marriages within the same sub-caste or a higher sub-caste were preferred. The disparity in the size of landholdings of the small holders and the landed elites was not as large as it was in India. The ratio was in the 1 to 10 range in favour of the landed elites. Coconut was also cultivated. The foundation that supported this essentially agrarian and mildly feudalistic society was a rigid and iniquitous caste system.

Landed class elites and Official Titles - The office of Vidanes

The founder of the VKT paguthi was Vidane Kanaga Thillaiyan who according to oral history served as the vidane of Karainagar in the beginning of the 19th century. Records of the Dutch years show that some pre-colonial titles were in use under Dutch rule. However there is no evidence of the Dutch appointing village level officials. Appointments of mudaliyars to the larger administrative area were apparently made. Villages despite their size were elevated to the status of the lowest administrative unit only under the British colonial rule. The English used the office of vidane to extend their administrative control to the village level. It is not strange that

the vidanes were selected from the powerful landowning class for the influence the landowning classes wielded in the villages then. The practice of appointing vidanes from the landowning class changed only after independence (1947) when under the revised selection procedures commoners qualified for such appointment.

Other titles- mudaliyars, udaiyars, maniyagars

According to oral history, the status of functionaries such as mudaliyars, maniyagars and udaiyars are not clear-cut. There are two schools of thought. According to one school, the offices of mudaliyars and maniyagars were higher than that of vidanes. Some others explain that the office of **Udaiyars** replaced the office of mudaliyars at some stage. However, the generally accepted and more plausible view is that the office of udaiyars was below that of the office of vidanes. Oral history provides evidence that of the udaiyar's principal duties conducting coronial inquiries into unnatural deaths was one of them. Udaiyars were also referred to as guardians of the peace. The fact however remains that there were functionaries called udaiyars.

The administrative unit larger than the village was the district, which is comprised of several villages. For this, the English colonial administrators initially appointed higher functionaries called **Mudaliyars**. After independence, Karainagar that was part of a district, and came under an office called District Revenue Officer (DRO). The DROs replaced the office of Mudaliyars. The elites of Karainagar whose influence was limited to one village could not qualify for appointment as Mudaliyars. It is common practice for the later year Karainagaran progeny to loosely attach titles such as **Mudaliyar and Mudali** to their ancestors whether in fact they held this office or not. Most vellalah families used the generic title of Mudali in the kalveddus. This practice had caste connotations, and did not necessarily refer to the title of any office held. The same reasoning applies to the progeny's claims to be descendents of maniyagars.

The peasants, workers and others

The large pool of landless workers was employed by (and economically dependent on) the landed class. In that period (even until 1945) when the economy was only partially monetary; wages for the landless workers were paid in kind (measures of paddy). The landless workers who were mainly from the lower castes lived in designated areas (akin to ghettos) away from the areas where the landed classes lived. Fishing provided for the livelihood of the fishermen class who lived in the coastal belt around the island. The other labour classes were the craftsmen (carpenters, masons, ironmongers making crude farming tools) dhobies, barbers, and undertakers. These were the untouchables in Karainagar.

The smallholder farmers also worked for the landowners (as farm labour, vandikkarans or freight haulers transporting produce using bullock carts and other similar menial jobs) to supplement the meager income from their small -holdings. The brahmins, the priestly class whom unlike their counter-parts in South India were not affluent enough to wield much influence in the community.

The caste system

The caste system in Karainagar and the Tamil homelands was less oppressive for that historical period compared to the feudal system in the West, slavery in the United States, and apartheid in most parts of Africa especially South Africa. Although untouchability was degrading the landed classes adopted a paternalistic view that they had a moral duty of care for their workers.

In Western societies the equivalent of the caste system was the oppressive feudal system. Vested interests mis-interpreted the Hindu laws of Karma and rebirth to sanctify casteism as did their Western counter-parts mis-interpret aspects of Christian theology to sanctify slavery in the United States and apartheid in South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi campaigned and achieved reasonable success in reducing the iniquity in the caste system.

Reverend Luther King campaigned with much less success against the injustices of colour prejudice in the US. Nelson Mandela in South Africa despite brutal suppression brought an end to the three century old sufferings inflicted by apartheid only in the dying decades of the 20th century.

In Karainagar and the Tamil homelands the generality of the society tempered by religious considerations ensured that the excesses of the caste practices were moderated. Further-more unlike the Western feudalism, the caste system was of a mild character as disparity in the size of landownership and wealth between the landed classes and the other classes was not as large compared to the landownership under the Zamindari system in India or feudalism in the West. Hence there was no clamour for land reform in the Tamil homelands. Any change in land ownership occurred gradually on its own steam without violence once money came to play a role creating conditions for social mobility within the society. The landed classes were the losers. They lost the land mortgaged to the money lenders through foreclosure sales.

Role of religion - Saivism

Temples dotted the Karainagar landscape and temple going was the main leisure activity for the people. There are 43 temples in Karainagar most dating back to the 19th century or earlier. The more popular deities were Pillaiyar, Murugan, Amman and Vairavar. There were two Sivan temples (one the famous Eelaththu Chidambaram) and two Iyanaar temples. Saivism flourished. Judging by the number of temples to the size of the population, faith in god and religion appears to have been strong. The crude individualism that the colonial powers brought with them was at variance with the basic values enshrined in Saiva dharma. Saiva dharmic values provided the glue underlying the cohesion in the extended family and the community. Parents and elders were respected. By emphasising family and social needs over crude materialistic individualism spirituality took the form of selfless bhakthi.

Village elders – extended family

The extended family was a powerful and close knit social institution. The head of the family managed the affairs of the family allocating work and providing for the sustenance of every member of the family. They were the acknowledged elders to whom families turned to for advice and guidance. In the VKT paguthi Moddaiyar filled this role until his death in 1941. After him it was Maniyakaran Sinna Podiyar

(the maniyagaran of the Payarikkoodal Murugan temple); next it was Perumal Kanapathy (an extended family elder). The latest was MA Kandiah, a teacher by profession now deceased. Since almost none from the VKT paguthi now lives in Karainagar or elsewhere in close proximity there aren't any families around to go to the elder. However in the agrarian feudalistic set up the elders wielded much influence and played an important social role.

Chapter 4

Winds of change – Tamil homelands (Phase 1)

Missionaries and opening of schools

By 1900 the British colonial administration was firmly established throughout Ceylon including Jaffna. The American missionaries (the early missionaries to come to Jaffna, many others followed soon after) arrived in Ceylon in the early part of the 19th century and in Karainagar in the dying years of the 19th century. An American girls school was established in Jaffna in 1823 and the American Mission English school in Karainagar was only opened in 1915 (about one hundred years later). Six Tamil mission schools (the more popular ones were Apputhurai and Govindar pallikkoodams) were also opened during that period.

Late arrival of missionaries in Karainagar

The late arrival (nearly a century later) of the missionaries in Karainagar whilst it heralded the penetration of foreign influence into an otherwise socially stable and rigidly structured society left Karainagar untouched by more than half a century of (material) progress that other areas of Jaffna benefited from. Although conversion to Christianity was the main motivation for the missionaries' coming, they opened up schools providing primary education in Karainagar. For secondary education (few progressed to that level by 1900) the missionaries encouraged students from Karainagar to move to the larger American mission school in Vaddukkodai.

The Hindu revival - India

The Christian missionary activities created ideal conditions for a Hindu revival India-wide and in the Tamil homelands. The names associated with the revival in India include that of Ram Mohan Roy and Brahma Samaj (1818), Swami Dayananda and Arya Samaj (1875), Tilak and Annie Besant and the Theosophical Society (1875), Ramakrishna (1879), Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Ramana Maharishi, Dr Radhakrishnan, Ramalingaswami and a host of others.

Their contribution was to tear up some of the malignant ritualistic and sociological overgrowth that masked the essence of the Hindu faith. The attitudes to sati, animal sacrifice in temples, child marriages, polygamy, divorce and widow-marriage, untouchables and castes that were primitive and savage underwent gradual but radical change. The missionaries pointed to these weaknesses in Hindu practices to further their agenda.

The Hindu revivalists, by correcting the distortions in the philosophical underpinnings based on which some of these social practices were explained returned Hinduism to its core teachings. By focusing on Gita's Karma yoga lessons that urged devotees to perform their duties to fellow human beings (social work) the revivalists removed the mis-interpretations in the Law of Karma that explained the average Hindu's indifference to the sufferings of the untouchables. In line with these teachings Mahatma performed Karma yoga in his campaign for the uplift of the Harijans whilst preaching for purity of thought, words and deeds.

Furthermore the Hindu revivalist movement nurtured a class of cultured Hindus who were able to explain the significance of rituals and other human actions by relating them to the underlying Hindu philosophy. The excessive obsession with certain prescribed rites that had little or no relevance to actual spirituality were the low points that Hinduism fell into just before the revival. An average Hindu could no longer claim to be moral and religious and still condone caste injustice. Similarly in everyday life, a true Hindu cannot claim to be religious and yet compromise on observing basic dharmic values like speaking the truth, not causing hurt to others in words and deeds and avoiding evil acts.

Hindu revival in Jaffna – Arumuga Navalar

Jaffna was deeply influenced by these developments in India especially South India. From earlier times Jaffna Saivaites undertook regular and arduous pilgrimages to temples in South India especially Chidambaram. The inspiration for Eelaththu Chidambaram in Karainagar is traced to those close links. South India countered the activities of the missionaries with a Hindu revival there. The Hindu revival in India inspired their counter-parts in Jaffna.

The moves to counter the growing influence of the missionary school activities in the Tamil homelands came in 1847 when Arumuga Navalar opened his own Hindu English school (Saiva Aangila Vidyalaya) in Vannarponnai, Jaffna. This venture was doomed to fail in the face of the hostility of the British colonial administration. The objective of the colonial education as summarized by the colonial historian Lord Macaulay in 1835 is quoted again here:

“It is impossible for us with our limited means to attempt to educate the body of the people. **We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern: a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.**”

Although the policy implementing Macaulay's objectives were alien and ran counter to Saivite values, there were Saivites (then aptly called the “brown sahibs”) who traded the values of their ancestors for the Macaulayan value model. In his celebrated 1866 address or sermon Navalar cautioned the Tamils against neglecting their religion and the values underlying it in preference for values that the colonial administrations were foisting on the population. Navalar's Saiva Vina Vidai addressed the dilemma of Saivites confused by the alien values that were parleyed to undermine the sanctity of Saiva values. Except for a minority the faith in Saivism of the mainstream Tamils remained solid.

The most historic step that Navalar took was in 1871 when he founded the Saiva Paripalana Sabha, which served as a forum to muster Hindu consciousness to protect Saivism and its values through out Jaffna. Navalar was closely associated with and contributed much to the revival movement in South India as well. Navalar traveled between Jaffna and Tamil Nadu frequently and spent time in espousing the Hindu revival cause in South India. He set up a press in South India. He used pamphlets and lectures effectively to deliver his message to Saivites. He groomed up followers who continued his work to awaken the consciousness of the Saivites and Hindus.

Hindu revival in Karainagar - Sayambu master

Inspired by Navalar, Sayambu master (born in 1866) founded the Hindu English School in Karainagar in 1888. Originally called the Thirugnanasampanthamoorthy Nayanar School, the school taught besides English, religion (Saivism). Sayambu master was the head master until he retired in December 1931. Like Navalar, Sayambu was dedicated to the cause and it used to be said, "What Navalar was to Jaffna, Sayambu was to Karainagar". Navalar and Sayambu were visionaries driven by a passion to save the East from the pernicious aspects of Western culture.

His successor as the Head Master of the Hindu English School was the former Head master of the American Mission English School, Ponnudaiyar Veluppillai (of the Ponnudaiyar paguthi and through marriage the extended Vidanai Kanaga-Thillaiyan paguthi)

Sayambu's efforts raised the standards of that school to a level that it earned affiliation to Jaffna Hindu College in 1921. Sayambu's work was continued by Kanagasabai (1935 -1945) before A Thiagarajah the next Principal earned the school its Maha Vidyalaya status.

There were others in Karainagar who were inspired by Arumuga Navalar and Sayambu to contribute to the Hindu revival movement building schools and temples. Before the end of the 19th century Tamil Saiva schools like the Subramaniya Vidyalaya, Viyavil Saiva Paripalana Vidyalaya and Suntharamoorthy Vidyalaya followed soon after. In all, Karainagar by the time of independence had 17 schools of which 6 were Christian schools, the rest Hindu schools. The Hindu schools were in most cases located in the vicinity of temples, which students visited for prayers before school lessons. There were nearly 43 temples in Karainagar.

Hindu revival in Karainagar – The Hindu Sabhas

Hindu revival was also evident in a number of Hindu religious organizations that sprung up in Karainagar in this period. The Karainagar Hindu Youth Sangam (1911), Karainagar Saiva Maha Sabai (1924) and Manivasagar Sabha amongst others played key roles in the Hindu revival. Murugesu Arumugam Kandiah a 5th generation VKT paguthi progeny was the president of Karainagar Saiva Maha Sabai in the period 1980- 1990. He was a close associate of Sivapathasundaram a deeply religious Saivite, author of numerous Saivite books and principal of Victoria College in Chulipuram. These organizations arranged visits to Karainagar of distinguished personages from India and through religious programmes contributed to the containment of the conversions in Karainagar to an extent that no other region in

Jaffna did. The strong conservative streak in the community did make the task easier for the Saiva Paripalana Sabha and other similar Saiva organizations.

The late arrival of foreign missionaries and the Hindu revival movement that followed explains why the changes and the material benefits from the changes were felt late in Karainagar. The spillover effect of employment perks showered on the converts to Christianity also converted the non-converts to the economic benefits from having some basic English education. Some who were economic converts assumed Christian names that were dropped soon after the necessary education for entry into the world of economic opportunities was accomplished. The conversions in Karainagar (with a conservative tradition born of its isolation), thanks to the work of the Hindu revivalists were minimal.

Chapter 5

Socio-economic developments

– an in depth case study - Karainagar

Outward migration – the first wave or phase

The follow-on effect of the English education that the missionary and the Hindu revivalist schools gave, led to the outward migration from Karainagar. Karainagarans followed the example of those in Tamil regions outside Karainagar in seeking economic opportunities outside Karainagar and the Tamil homelands.

Malaya – the first choice

The scramble to move out of Karainagar in search of employment and other economic opportunities overseas (then Malaya) and in South Ceylon began in earnest in the last quarter of the 19th century. Initially the jobs were semi-skilled and in the lower rungs of the colonial administration in Malaya and South Ceylon. The better qualified few worked as clerks and translators in the government sector; others as clerks, overseers and kangannis in inhospitable rubber estates and road construction work in Malaya. In number terms the outward migrants were not large but their economic contribution was significant relative to the size of the population then.

South Ceylon – the second choice

Those less skilled who moved to South Ceylon became itinerant traders, corner shops keepers selling betel, beedi (cheap form of cigarettes), owners of beedi making shops, small time hospital and transport (lorry) contractors amongst others. In numbers terms this economic sector was significant. Entry into this low capital intensive economic sector was easy. To succeed the entrants needed enterprise, hard work and capacity to bear up with hard living conditions. They found a niche which laid the foundation for their success and to call themselves “businessmen”. Although the use of the term “businessmen” is a misnomer yet they were pioneers who set foot into the commercial sector and whose contribution to the development of Karainagar and the Tamil homelands was significant. Even in this sector the communities from Manipay,

Uduvil, Atchuvely, Vaddukkodai and Chundukuli in Jaffna, performed much better than Karainagarans.

Malayan pioneers' success

However the foundation for the accelerated changes in Karainagar that was to follow in the 2nd half of the 20th century was laid in the 1st half of the 20th century. The thrust of change in the socio-economic landscape of Karainagar was vigorous enough that Karainagar caught up with and overtook their counter-part regions in Jaffna that had benefited from the early introduction of English education the missionaries brought there. An essentially agrarian society slowly changed when overseas earnings from the Malayan pioneers filtered into the economy. Compared to those who moved to South Ceylon the Malayan pioneers were economically better off. They accumulated more wealth than their Ceylonese counter-parts at that time. Without exception the families of the retired Malayan pensioners lived in reasonable comfort and were respected by the wider community. The money (capital) remitted back by the Malayan pioneers went into building larger houses (by 1940 there were about a dozen such houses in Karainagar). The philanthropists amongst them also built temples (like the Moddaiyar Murugan Kovil in Payarikkoodal) and improvements to schools.

The few not so philanthropically inclined Malayan retirees became unlicensed moneylenders. The practice of usury was extensive. Gains by foreclosing on defaulting borrowers enabled some of these money lenders to accumulate wealth fast enough to join the ranks of the new landed class in very short periods of time. The losers were the traditional landed elites who continued with a life style that they could no longer afford in the emerging new capitalistic economic order. Economic change led to social mobility creating the "new rich" class. Social mobility took place at the expense of the traditional landed elites.

In the first half of the 20th century the children of the Malayan pioneers received better English education. Crude individualism that accompanied the colonialists had not eroded the extended family values amongst the pioneering Malayan Tamils significantly that other children in the extended families of the Malayan pioneers continued to benefit from their generosity. This care for others extended at least to the extended family limit. By the 1940's a few of these beneficiaries successfully entered the local University College and thence into professions like medicine, engineering and administration.

Moddaiyar – the founder of modern Karainagar

Moddaiyar earned a reputation as a successful early Malayan pioneer. On return from Malaya, Moddaiyar also pioneered into the political arena in a significant way. Oral history does not throw much light on Moddaiyar's childhood and youth.

He was reputed to be a brave and fearless personality and according to oral history he had INA (Indian National Army) leanings which were strong amongst the plantation workers in the estates in Malaya where he worked. Subhash Chandra Bose was a hero to many there. Since the activities of the INA were secretive the activists were closely monitored by the authorities. The source for oral history about Moddaiyar's INA activities and his INA associates was his wife. Moddaiyar's wife died in 1945 and

with her death the only source of reliable oral history on this aspect of Moddaiyar's life was lost. Moddaiyar suffered persecution for his INA leanings that he had to leave Malaya pre-maturely and return to Jaffna. Oral history on these too is unavailable to give precise details.

On his return he invested in buying political influence at the local government (village council) level and used that office to improve infrastructure in Karainagar like roads. Moddaiyar as Village Council Chairman for over a decade in the thirties constructed a 5km long road to Eelaththu Chidambaram and the Hindu cremation grounds in Thinnakkali, North Karainagar. The former road also serves as the arterial road for tourists to the famous Casuarina beach. The other section of the road was to the sudallai madam which Moddaiyar built. The madam was a boon to mourners during funerals. It provided shelter from the scorching heat of the sun when funeral rites are conducted in the cremation grounds. Unlike the rest of the roads in Karainagar this road has withstood the ravages of the conflict over the last three decades. Social uplift was the motivation behind Moddaiyar's public works. The road is still called Moddaiyar theru and the madam, Moddaiyar madam. Moddaiyar is the 4th generation progeny of the VKT paguthi.

The history of Karainagar is therefore incomplete without a comprehensive account of the life and works of **Moddaiyar** Kanapathippilai a 4th generation progeny of the VKT paguthi. Moddaiyar is one of the most successful Malayan pioneers who entered local government politics to achieve his vision of a modern Karainagar. It is no exaggeration to assert that **Moddaiyar is the founder of Modern Karainagar**. There would have many others like Moddaiyar in other villages around in the Tamil homelands who likewise would have contributed to the progress of the Tamil homelands.

Local pioneers who moved south – their success

Amongst the local pioneers those who contributed most to the Karainagar economy were the trading classes. They were essentially small time shop keepers, traders and others. Though poorly educated, in most cases they accumulated wealth rapidly to earn respectability in an essentially agrarian community where money then the symbol of wealth was scarce.

In economic terms the success of the local pioneers who moved South initially was limited compared to the Malayan pioneers. This changed. The itinerant traders (oddukkadaikkarar) grew up into petty shop owners and traders in certain localities (Grandpass, Mutwal, and Kochchikkadai) of Colombo and in towns especially the smaller ones in the South mostly in the up country estates.

Though life was hard in these places (crime infested slums) their drive to succeed paid off. A significant number of these traders initially became richer as carriers in the drug (opium and ganja) trail running from India via Valvettithurai into South Ceylon. The market for such drugs was in the slums of Grandpass, Mutwal and Kochchikkadai. The ill-gotten wealth gave these "businessmen" class entry into the class of the "new rich" in the 1950's and thereafter. Besides the petty shop keepers, small time contractors won an increased share of contracts especially hospital contracts to join the ranks of the "new rich". With competition getting tough with too

many players entering this low capital intensive economic sector a few successful contractors. diversified into other economic sectors like planting. One successful contractor bought into the corporate sector that owned a leading English newspaper.

This trend towards diversifying was logical and inevitable in face of competition from the established corporate sector dominated and managed by the Agency houses. The established corporate entities were better funded and better managed. Walkers won almost all the major construction and infrastructure contracts.

The cash dowry system and social mobility

The “new rich” who could afford fatter dowries gradually bought respectability through marriages into families belonging to the higher social orders. On the other hand the progeny of the elite paguthies to offset the loss of their economic clout in the emerging new economic order willingly accepted marriages into the “new rich” families. Conscious that the lack of a good educational background set limits to their capacity to acquire wealth the “new rich” invested in finding places for their children in good schools. Money served as the catalyst that accelerated the economic decline of the earlier landed classes and in its place the emergence of the “new rich” and “new landowners”. Such social mobility eroded the rigid inequities in the caste system of that time. Money became the agent of social mobility.

Public and private sector employment

With the higher positions (of responsibility) being reserved in the colonial civil service for those of British descent, the majority of those who joined the clerical and similar government positions stagnated initially. But this changed gradually with the coming of self-rule under the Donoughmore (1929) constitution. Those in the public service also accumulated wealth and influence surpassing the Malayan Tamils also essentially a middle class community. The public sector employees were wealthy enough to give their children a better education in schools in Karainagar and Jaffna and later in Colombo. They lived in better localities like Bambalapitiya and Wellawatte.

The contribution to Karainagar of the public sector employees was much higher than that of their Malayan counterparts on account of their numbers and education. The public sector employees at all levels soon came to dominate public life and to become the agents of the rapid change and progress that Karainagar, Jaffna and the Tamil homelands witnessed in the years following independence. The baton of leadership of the political and socio-economic change in Karainagar and the Tamil homelands after 1950 passed on to the employed local pioneers who formed a vibrant indigenous middle class.

Post-pioneer Tamil Malayans – their outlook

The contribution of the early Malayan pioneers was remarkable. The Malayan pensioners, who valued their roots, retired and returned to their homeland bringing back the savings that they had accumulated. The injection of capital into the peninsular at this stage of economic development was invaluable. In contrast the contribution to the Tamil homelands from those who stayed back in Malaya (post

pioneers Malayan Tamils) was negligible. The Malayan Tamils who stayed back were essentially a middle class, and in the years immediately following Malayan independence were of modest affluence.

Seduced by the modest affluence that they enjoyed, the Malayan Tamils genuinely accepted Malaya (called Malaysia after independence) as their homeland. In consequence they loosened their ties with their Tamil homelands, gradually forgetting their roots. Further-more living in the shadow of the glory of recognition that the early Malayan pioneers earned, some from the more affluent section of the post pioneer Malayan Tamils developed a patronising attitude towards the sufferings of their counter-parts back in the Tamil homelands. This attitude was born out of poor contact with developments back in Ceylon and ignorant of the tremendous progress that a larger, affluent, better-educated and growing middle class in the Tamil homelands had achieved in the face of the disadvantages from an increasingly aggressive policy of state discrimination.

Except for the minimal links with their immediate relatives living in the Tamil homelands some of the not so well educated Malaysian Tamils continued to show an attitude of detached superiority in relating with their counter-parts in the Tamil homelands. This was most explicit in the simplistic views that they expressed on the ethnic issue in Ceylon. The ethnic issue was casually dismissed with statements like “What do the Tamils as a minority really expect or want?” However soon after an irony of history was in the making in the form of independent Malaysia’s bumi-putra policy. The small Malaysian Tamil community as descendants of the late 19-century migrants and not indigenous Malays were viewed as an inconsequential minority. The bumi-putra policy shook the Malaysian Tamils out of their stupor. Yet in relating to their counter-parts (the Ceylonese Tamils) a thinning die-hard Malaysian Tamil minority clings on to the condescending attitudes that they nurtured for decades. Their interaction socially with the counter-parts in and from Ceylon even in remote Australia was cold and aloof until a few years ago. However the positive attitude towards the Ceylon Tamils of the mainstream Malayan Tamils is warm and growing.

Chapter 6

Winds of change – phase 2 ethnic issues boil over – implications

Communal politics in Ceylon and Malaysia compared

Following independence with the advantage of an early start in education and sheer industriousness the local pioneers from Jaffna progressed into the higher echelons in the public service. The Tamils gained a dis-proportionate share of the top jobs in the civil service and similarly moved into top positions in the private sector. This success was replicated in professions such as medicine, law, engineering, public administration and the like as well. The achievement was remarkable by any standard. For the Malayan counter-parts the higher echelons in the public service were difficult to penetrate. In the immediate aftermath of independence of Malaya the colonialist retained some of the top positions as advisers to the Bumi putras. Soon after the

Bumis stepped into those positions as the logical successors to the British in independent Malaysia.

Unlike their counter-parts, in Ceylon those who started as itinerant traders and petty shop keepers graduated as small time traders developing skills in the commercial sector. The Malayan Tamils on the other hand neglected the commercial sector totally and failed to acquire comparable skills to break into that sector. Competition from the skillful Chinese commercial community also acted as deterrent for those contemplating entry into this sector.

It is in the traditional professional sector like medicine and engineering that the Malayan Tamils enjoyed a measure of success.

In Ceylon the disproportionate distribution of economic opportunities (employment in the public and private sectors and the professions) in favour of the Tamils just before independence and in the immediate aftermath of independence was a historical accident. Yet it sowed the seeds for the racial conflict that boiled over and caused the trauma on an unimaginable scale for the Tamils as a whole. Initially it took the form of decades of discrimination limiting access to economic opportunities especially in employment. Any form of protest against discrimination was repressed. The repression took the form of police and army oppression. This later developed into a systematic uprooting of a brutalized community from their homes and their dispersal around the world. What is now left in Karainagar is a few isolated settlements, war damaged houses and access roads to those houses still in serious disrepair. The rice fields are there but the original and the new landed classes are missing. A, once successful community that lived in Karainagar as elsewhere in Jaffna became displaced people. These events are well documented for the historians of all times.

For the Malaysian Tamils the ethnic policy was not as tragic. When the bumi putra policy in post independent Malaysia began to bite, the Malayan Tamils were disadvantaged and marginalised in the public and private sector employment, which was the mainstay of their livelihood. There were ethnic riots and violence but the target was the more successful Chinese community. With the Indian Tamils using their numbers to politically assert their due claims, the small Malayan Ceylon Tamil community became an inconsequential minority that they were left alone and did not suffer trauma on the scale that their counter-parts in Ceylon did. Unlike in Ceylon the need for people to flee their destroyed homes to save their lives did not arise in Malaysia. The few who left Malaysia were economic migrants looking for greener pastures though in justification some pointed to the bumi-putra policy as unjust and denying them and their children opportunities to achieve their aspirations. The movement of people out of Malaysia on account of ethnic violence or oppression was negligible and Malaysia did not create the equivalent of a Ceylon Tamil diaspora.

Chapter 7

Mass movement of people, the 2nd wave and creation of the Diaspora

The initial outflow overseas – more economic than racial

The ethnic conflict that was brewing since 1956 caused the disillusioned Tamils from the middle class to begin moving out of Ceylon. Initially the discrimination against the Tamils hurt those in the traditional professions of the Tamils specifically when the additional language proficiency requirement was imposed for promotions and entry into the public service. The 'Sinhala only' Act of 1956 of the Ceylon Parliament was a clear statement of intent of the state. In response the initial outward movement of Tamils (in the 1960's and 1970's) began. Only a handful moved and the motivation for which was more economic than political or racial.

The subsequent massive outflows overseas – the 1983 violence and oppression

The response to the passive resistance of the Tamils to the state sponsored discrimination was repression that intensified the ethnic tensions by stages burgeoning into near civil war level. There were riots in succession (1956, 1963, 1973, 1978 and 1983). The victims were the Tamils in South Ceylon. There was extensive loss of lives and property.

The vicious 1983 riots inflicted untold suffering and heavy loss of Tamil lives and property. This drove the pacifist Tamil population into supporting the emerging insurgency. Claiming to fight the insurgency the level of state repression increased again dramatically. To escape the ruthless repression the Tamil population had to move out of their homes on a mass scale. The movement took tidal wave proportions and refugees who fled overseas went first to India, and thereafter to Australia, Canada and Europe. The bulk of the exodus was middle class families with skills. Harrowing accounts of the sufferings of the people during this mass exodus evoked international sympathy and is still remembered by the affected people. This class of refugees had the skills to settle in and re-build their lives in the host countries. They now constitute an influential overseas community that is still conscious of its roots. There are a few amongst the diaspora who strike a discordant note but the mainstream remains conscious of their roots and identity.

The massive (1990s) outflows to safe havens within Ceylon

The atrocities that followed the armed forces offensive in the early 1990's to retake Jaffna from the insurgents led to another outflow of Tamils (involving those who could not flee overseas earlier) of massive proportions (over 300000) to safe havens especially to the Wannai and suburbs of Colombo. In the Wannai, protection from oppression by the armed forces was guaranteed. Oral history recounts of the sufferings of these people remain as permanent scars in the memory of affected peoples though decades have passed. The displaced (including the very young and aged) fled with meagre provisions (food and clothing to last the trek by foot over 100 to 150 miles).

Unable to bear the din of indiscriminate shelling that not only destroyed homes, the pain of loosing of all household possessions to the looting armed forces, the constant fear of mid-night knocks on the door and arrests by members of the armed forces drove ordinary people to undertake the painful "long march" despite the tremendous physical risks involved. Before venturing on the long trek fearing that the valuable jewels they carry may be snatched by sentries at the armed forces check points most refugees wrapped them in cellophane and buried them in the houses they left hoping

to recover them on return. These were looted by the armed forces using sophisticated detectors.

These harrowing stories that reduced a thriving community to abject poverty and immense hardships are narrated by the victims to visiting overseas relatives and friends even today which naturally evoke much sympathy for the victims and anger towards the perpetrators of these crimes. However visitors also observe that in a decade these displaced people have rebuilt their lives thanks to the resilience of the victims themselves, the supportive overseas Tamils and the organized support of authorities in the Wannai territory.

The rest (another about 100000) took the risk and moved to Colombo to live with friends and next of kin. These refugees lived cramped in one roomed annexes in the Colombo suburbs paying exorbitant rents which was possible only because of the generosity of their relatives living overseas. These refugees have also since rebuilt their lives without any state support over the past ten years. Most have moved into better accommodation and living conditions have improved. Again the benefactors are their relatives living overseas. The immediate and extended family cohesion remained strong enough to alleviate the hardships of these displaced people. The identity factor still burning strongly in the hearts and minds of the communities living overseas played and continues to play a major role in the improvements of living standards of these displaced people. A return to their homes in the North for conditions of normality to return remains a dream for these displaced people.

Chapter 8

The identity issue revisited – so whither the Diaspora?

Integration – The Tamil diaspora and others

The Tamil people from different regions in Jaffna who moved into host countries overseas had to learn to live together forgetting regional parochialism and other divisions. In the two decades since 1983, the prejudices that kept them apart back in the homeland broke down. In recent years the Malayan Tamils too driven by self-interest saw advantages in moving closer to the Ceylon Tamils. The disdain customarily shown by the few Malayan Tamils for decades slowly disintegrated. The Malayan Tamils grew eager for marriages into the successful Ceylon Tamil families. Marriages between these two communities are common now. This trend is most evident especially in Australia. The two communities moving closer in a foreign environment augurs well for the identity of the Tamil people.

A devastated and deserted homeland

A visit to Karainagar and Jaffna today provides evidence of the drastically changed character of the demographic topography in these places. There are only a couple of families of the elite VKT paguthi that still live in Karainagar. Poor and desolate the families etch out a meager living. The total number now living in Karainagar is estimated at a few hundred. For the Jaffna peninsular as a whole a reasonable estimate is a few hundred thousand. The middle class who moved out of the country to become

the diaspora is still a minority. Where have all these people moved to? The estimates are that about 150 000 are in Canada, 40000 in Australia, 10 000 in Britain and about 5 000 dispersed around the world. Over a hundred thousand (100 000) moved South to Colombo and its suburbs.

About another 200 000 have settled in territory about a hundred miles away from Karainagar and Jaffna in the Wannu territory not under government control.

The progeny in the host countries makes it

The size of the progeny of the various paguthies that are dispersed across the phase of the earth in countries as far apart as England and Canada and Australia is over 200 000 strong. These countries took the most number of refugees. Some refugees in small numbers are in European countries such as Norway, Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland.

Professionals – in traditional vs. new professions

Twenty years have passed since the 1983 trauma. Initially the bulk of the refugees from the Tamil homelands without the education and skills in line with the host country requirements did not move up the social ladder in the host countries. They were and are employed in semi-skilled and clerical positions in the public and private sector. Some are in junior supervisory positions. From amongst the progeny of these refugees who entered countries such as England, Australia and Canada there emerged a class of professionals. They are in both the traditional and new professions. With a host country education that is more in tune with local requirements this emerging class of professionals are in diverse fields. Most still hog the traditional fields such as medicine, engineering, accounting, law and teaching. A few ventured into the more lucrative new professions in the service sectors especially investment banking, commercial banking and financial services. The success earned by both classes of professionals improves the image of a community tarnished earlier as benefits rotors (benefits rotting is widespread that cuts across all communities in host countries). There is still a stubborn remnant number who condone such abuse of the system... The VKT paguthi has a number of its progeny in the class of successful people.

Professionals in the new professions - Are they pioneers?

Amongst those who first moved out of Ceylon (not as refugees) in the 1970's who were the better educated and with specialized skills first went to countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong and the United States. These countries were seeking to import specialized skills in short supply within the country; hence the demand for the skills of certain professionals in these countries. Singapore a successful commercial hub for over 4 decades encouraged overseas professionals especially those with skills for its service and non-traditional economic sectors such as development and investment banking.

The new world of globalization and intense international competition has created an attractive market for those with specialised skills in the newer disciplines such as corporate governance, finance, actuarial methodologies, funds management, and information technology. The new disciplines now attract the best and the brightest

(scholar category). The contribution of the extended VKT paguthi here needs special mention.

In entrepreneurship, a progeny (Senthilnathan* 6th generation) of the VKT paguthi in England has been successful. The success of other members of the VKT paguthi includes a 5th generation VKT progeny of Sinnarta Velupillai, his daughter and son. The skills of members of this family are in senior (including holding board of directors positions) management levels and in development banking, investment banking and specialized law fields with leading international corporate players in a globalised market. Likewise in the area finance, the success of Kulendran a 7th generation VKT progeny and grandson of a VKT village elder Subramaniam Kanapathy needs special mention. In the medical field a VKT progeny (Pathmanathan a 6th generation VKT progeny and grandson of Sinnarta Velupillai) achieved a break-through in the field of microsurgery in Malaysia to enter into the Guinness Book of records in 2003.

By the criteria of numbers the contribution of the Extended VKT paguthies in Singapore, Australia, Canada and England in the traditional medical and engineering fields has been extremely good and numerous. A special mention of the progeny of the Ponn Udaiyar paguthi is remarkable producing at least 2 distinguished academics (who were professors in world renowned universities), doctors and scientists.

A detailed study of the contribution of other related elite paguthies in Karainagar is necessary for a more balanced appreciation of the success of Karainagarans as a whole. Similar studies to measure the success of professionals in the other regions of Jaffna will vouch to the determination of the Tamils to achieve despite the setbacks they suffered.

Pioneers in the new professions - their role

The exodus from their homelands was a traumatic chapter in the history of Tamils in Sri Lanka. But the trauma also opened up new opportunities for the progeny of the diaspora in the adopted countries. Like the Malayan Tamil pioneers at the end of the 19th century the determination with which the present diaspora managed to turn the opportunities presented into success stories in such a brief period (2 decades) augurs well for the entire community. In a world that is moving fast in the direction of globalizing the trade in services, the timely involvement of Tamil professionals in the new professions with international scope is a pioneering contribution equaling that of the Tamil Malayan pioneers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It adds depth and width to the professional skills pool in the community lifting the profile of a community further to a level never before achieved.

The professionals from the traditional fields have a role in the re-development of a devastated homeland but for the Tamil homeland's longer-term growth and progress and to face the challenges posed by globalization, professionals in the new professions have a major role to play. The size and depth of skills in the new professions pool will be a key determinant for progress and continued success of the community in the globalised environment for any emerging nation. Hence to assess progress using the traditional indicators of progress like the size (numbers alone) of

the professional pool alone is inadequate. The quality and mix of the skills pool is as much or more important.

The role of the extended VKT paguthi progeny

Material success alone does not guarantee the long-term success of a community. Materially some sections of the paguthi have lost out but this is more than offset by the success achieved by the rest of the paguthi. Those successful were driven by an urge to succeed in a highly competitive environment overseas. Observing the core values of the community (like hard work - the formulae for success) the successful ones also realized that doom awaits a progeny that easily gives up those core values that originally fired the community's pioneering spirit. Keeping in touch with its proud roots stimulates a community to strive harder to keep abreast and progress in a broader sense.

In this respect the success of the extended VKT paguthi is remarkable. Although a natural dilution in the lineage occurred (with movement of peoples and marriages outside) the VKT paguthi members who pride over their lineage have kept the values and the identity of the ancestral paguthies. Senthilnathan, (son of MA Kandiah), and his sisters Theivayanai and Thevakuncharam (Dr) all 6th generation progeny of the VKT paguthi nourished by their extended family values ensured that almost the entire extended family benefited from the progress the family achieved. They gave the family the leadership keeping alive joint family values and not allowing selfish individualistic craving for own wealth and fame to interfere with the commitment to their Karma yoga activities. It was Karma Yoga in action a core value in the Tamil identity.

Marriages – within peer paguthies within Karainagar

Though paguthi considerations no longer have as much bearing on marriages, the progeny of the extended VKT paguthi do retain in a substantial measure the conservative streak that they inherited. This is evident especially in the most fundamental social institution, marriage. Fundamental changes occurred in this area in the last 30 to 50 years.

About 150 years ago marriages were as far as possible kept within the peer paguthies. Marriages outside the paguthies were taboo and rare then. With the custom of inter-peer paguthi marriages being so strong in the pre-1950 years, marriages into non-peer paguthi families were frowned upon by the conservative Karainagar elites then who mistakenly attributed this as necessary to keep the purity of their lineage. Well-known marriages within peer paguthies include that of:

Moddaiyar Kanapathy* a 4th generation VKT paguthi who married Theivanai daughter of Vidane Vaithylingam and a 3rd generation progeny of the Kantha udaiyar/vidanai paguthi.

Theivanai's younger sister and the 2nd daughter of Vidane Vaithylingam, Valliammai a 3rd generation progeny of the Kantha udaiyar/vidanai paguthi married Ragunather a 3rd generation progeny of the Ponn udaiyar paguthi.

The daughter of this couple (Ragunather and Valliammai) Maheswary, a 4th generation Kantha Udaiyar/Vidane and Ponn udaiyar paguthies married Veluppillai a 4th generation progeny of the VKT paguthi. Veluppillai is a blood cousin of Moddaiyar. Maheswary was known as Vidanayatte paiththi.

The eldest daughter of Veluppillai and Maheswary, Thapomany a 5th generation progeny of the VKT paguthi and 5th generation progeny of the Kantha udaiyar/vidane paguthi married Thillainather a 5th generation progeny of the Kanthar udaiyar paguthi (family).

The brother of Thapomany and son of Veluppillai/Maheswary, Sivasubramaniam a 5th generation progeny of the VKT and 5th generation progeny of the /Kantha Udaiyar/Vidane paguthi married Kamalam (Kamalawathi) a 6th generation progeny of the Kanthar udaiyar paguthi (family) in 1962. Sivasubramaniam used to be called Vidaneyatta peeddan.

Oral history is unavailable to establish the inter-peer paguthi marriages in the period before Moddaiyar. Official records of Hindu marriages in this period are also unavailable.

Apparently the custom of maintaining the chain of inter-peer paguthi marriages did not continue after 1962. Inter-paguthi marriages between the three peer paguthies occurred over several generations at least until the early 1960's.

Although records and oral history of inter peer-paguthi marriages in the period before Moddaiyar's marriage are patchy, it is well known that the marriages of two female progenies of the Chettiyar paguthi established the link between the Ponn Udaiyar and Kanthar Udaiyar paguthies. Kanthar udaiyar married Chettiyar's sister-in-law and Chettiyar's daughter married Ponn udaiyar's son Veluppillai. Similarly both Kandappar Paaraththai and her brother Kandappar Sinnathamby both 3rd generation progeny of the VKT paguthi married the brother and sister of the Maniyakaran (Subramaniam) paguthi. Details on the Maniyakaran paguthi could not be included in this Extended VKT paguthi study, as oral history evidence was not readily available for validation.

Other marriages within Karainagar

The socio-cultural changes since the 1950's saw the decline of the influence of elite landed classes and the ascendancy of the new rich. Non-peer paguthi marriages became the norm. Even those who went for non-peer paguthi families (unsure of the social standing into which they were marrying) did not accept marriages outside Karainagar before 1950 and more so before 1900. The attitude to marriages changed drastically in the last 50 plus years.

With people gaining education and people moving within the country and overseas and social mobility engined by momentous economic changes, there were more intra peer paguthi marriages than inter peer paguthi marriages. With the emergence of a new class structure (especially the so-called new rich) in the Tamil homelands money became a major consideration in marriages within both the Ceylon Tamils and Malayan Tamil communities.

Marriages outside peer paguthies and outside Karainagar

Lineage purity – rapidly shifting boundaries

Socio-economic changes eroded the (economic) power of the land owning paguthies and emerging new rich (especially the traders) had the money power to buy into the old landed classes. The measure of wealth no longer was based on the criteria of land ownership; money and near money assets taking its place. The composition of the wealthy changed in the first half of the 20th century that marriage outside the peer paguthies gained acceptance.

There are still families even in overseas host countries such as England, Australia and elsewhere who take pride over their children marrying into Karainagar families. The obsession with maintaining a pure Karainagar lineage that replaced the obsession of the landed elites with maintaining the pure peer paguthi lineage shifted further that marriage outside Karainagar is now readily accepted. This shift out occurred even earlier when Malayan Tamils who settled in Malaysia married Chinese spouses. When the Tamils moved into non-Asian host countries such as Britain, Australia and Canada populated predominantly with westerners both the Ceylon Tamil and Malayan Tamils learned to gracefully accept marriages into white families. The boundaries of the preferred lineage purity have moved far out that the concept of lineage purity becomes meaningless. There are no winners or losers amongst those making lineage purity claims (whether paguthi or Karainagar lineages). Those gloating a winner's status today have no assurance of the claim lasting the next day. This social change though inevitable for the diaspora in most host country environment has important implications for the issue of Tamil identity.

Lineage purity, Tamil national identity and multi-culturalism

So, how does an obsession over the purity of lineage impact on the more fundamental issue of maintaining the home country cultural identity for the progeny living in host countries of diverse cultures? This is a burning issue for the Tamil diaspora. The diaspora as migrants is torn between their desire to maintain their cultural identity and the political compulsions in host countries for integration with the rest of the community in the host country. The mainstream diaspora ended up in these host countries after waging a struggle to keep their identity and paying a very high price for it.

The call by racist groups that migrants integrate with the host country communities amounts to losing their own core identity. This is not in the spirit of “multi-culturalism” that offered an acceptable integration model for immigrant communities. But most host countries that once loudly proclaimed their championship of “multi-culturalism” now express these words in much muted tones! The epic (Civil Rights movement in the US) struggle of the progeny of the Afro-Americans who were brought to the US (the bastion of democracy!) and kept down as slaves for decades struggled to keep their identity. Lynching ensured that protests against such inhumanity by Afro-Americans were kept peaceful! This was a democracy in action and Alex Hayley vividly captured it in his epic “Roots” some years back.

The success achieved in the various fields by the Tamils (in the Tamil homelands and as displaced people) is enviable. To sustain the pace of progress, the progeny of succeeding generations need the motivation of the community's identity and values. To nurture this motivation, the consciousness of their identity has to be kept alive. It has to sink into the psyche of the progeny of the generations to come. Although a tiny fraction of the Tamil community is prepared to jettison the concept of cultural identity as irrelevant garbage, the mainstream show commitment to the core values in the Tamil identity.

To fire up this commitment to identity consciousness the Tamil progeny has to be kept aware of the community's proud heritage. Lineage and history studies of the Tamils as a community have a contribution to make here. Identity consciousness of the past and the present reflect the changes that a society passed and is passing through. The consciousness of the past and present is important. But if history is to be of relevance it should also give due place to the consciousness of the future as well. "No consciousness of the future, no history" said E H Carr. The community has to constantly keep the consciousness of the future to revitalize the community's values and identity in facing the challenges of the future. This ensures that the identity consciousness remains relevant.

The sounds of Sivapuranan and Suprabhatham continue to resonate the moral (ara olukkam) and spiritual (aanmeeka olukkam) values of the community; for the present day worldly life which is focused on material progress social values (udal olukkam) has not kept pace with the socio-cultural changes in the last hundred years. The 19th century Hindu revival revitalized the social values (udal olukkam) to reflect the end of the feudalistic social order but the quality of the revitalizing in the social values (udal olukkam) area has fallen short. Hence its inability to cope with the emergence of the new capitalistic social order. The shortfall is most transparent in its inability to moderate the excesses of crude individualism and obsession with one's own material success in the new social order. To give moral values (ara olukkam) its due place in their lives, the community needs to revitalise the social values (udal olukkam) for the two values (olukkam) to work in harmony. For this purpose the community needs to re-visit the Kural to progress materially without compromising on the moral and spiritual values strongly embedded in the community's identity.