

**REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON  
TAMIL DIASPORA**

**Tamil League, Réduit**

**MAURITIUS**

**Friday 9 March, 2007**

## FOREWORD

I am very pleased to present to the participants of the International Conference on the Tamil Diaspora organised by the Mauritius Tamil League on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2007 and to all members of the Tamil Diaspora the report of the Conference.

The one-day Conference has been marked by high level discussions and presentations on a wide gamut of issues relating to the overall well being of the Tamil community, encompassing its language, culture, religion, art, dance, music, economic plight and also its vision.

The gist of all the thoughts and ideas expressed at the Conference has been faithfully recorded by the rapporteurs of the four working sessions. The task of producing the final report of the Conference has left in the safe hands of the Rapporteur-General, Mr Soocramanien Vythilingem, former Permanent Secretary in the Mauritius Public Service and a still very active social worker. I commend him and all the rapporteurs for their splendid work.

As Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Conference, I have been benefited from the precious collaboration of all members and supporters of the Tamil League, particularly:

- Mr N Pyneeandee, Chairman of the Tamil League
- Mr G Vydelingum, Assistant Secretary
- Dr Vel Pillay, Editor-in-Chief of Tamil Newspaper "Vanakam"
- Mr R C Kadress Pillay, former Minister

My work as Chairman has been greatly facilitated by a very competent person who acted as Secretary of the Organising Committee. Mr Samoorgum Tirvassen, spared no efforts to coordinate all the conference arrangements, including the movements of international delegates. His dedication and commitment were essential ingredients for the success of the Conference. After the Conference, Mr S. Tirvassen liaised with Rapporteurs and the Rapporteur-General to ensure that the Conference report is finalised within the shortest time possible. I am pleased to put on record, his high sense of responsibility.

Finally, I thank the all participants and all those who have helped in one way or the other towards the realisation of one of the Tamil League's, namely, the holding of the International Conference on Tamil Diaspora.

**Krish Ponnusamy**  
19 April 2007

## COMPOSITION OF THE CONFERENCE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

- Chairman:** Mr Krish Ponnusamy  
**Secretary:** Mr Samoorgum Tirvassen  
**Members:** Mr Retnon Pyneeandee  
Mr Gooroonaden Vydelingum  
Mr Vijay Veeramootoo  
Dr Vel Pillay  
Mr Soopayah Samy  
Mrs Ruby Govinden  
Mr R. Chedumbarum Pillay  
Mrs Mala Govinden

## PROGRAMME

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| 8.30 a.m - 9.00 a.m   | Registration of Delegates  |
| 9.00 a.m - 9.10 a.m   | National Anthem, Tamize Vazhtu, Lighting of Lamp.  |
| 9.10 a.m - 9.15 a.m   | Welcome speech by Mr Retnon Pyneandee, Chairman Tamil League   |
| 9.15 a.m - 9.20 a.m   | Speech by Mr Krish Ponnusamy Chairman of the organizing committee  |
| 9.20 a.m - 9.25 a.m   | Speech by Mrs Sivanandini Duraiswamy of Sri Lanka, on behalf of the foreign delegations  |
| 9.25 a.m - 9.35 a.m   | Speech and formal opening of the conference by Hon. Rama Krishna Sithanen, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development |
| 9.35 a.m - 10.00 a.m  | Tea Break  |
| 10.00 a.m - 12.15 p.m | Plenary Session  |
| 12.15 - 13.00 p.m     | Lunch  |
| 13.00 p.m - 15.30 p.m | Group Discussion   |
| 15.30 p.m - 16.00 p.m | Tea Break  |
| 16.00 p.m - 17.00 p.m | Presentation of main recommendations   |
| 17.00 p.m             | Closing of Ceremony  |

## STRUCTURE OF REPORT

- (i) Objectives of the Conference and List of Participants
- (ii) Introduction
- (iii) Welcome and inaugural speeches
- (iv) Six substantive papers on themes presented in plenary sessions
- (v) Papers on themes presented in the four group sessions
- (vi) Reports of groups A, B, C and D
- (vii) Comments/Final Observations

## THE WHY FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

- Felt Need** : Taking stock of the situation of Tamils in the Diaspora and Charting the way ahead
- Central Theme** : Networking with Tamil Organisations overseas for the advancement of the Tamil Community in various fields.
- Objective** : To better understand the values of the Tamil Community and create new opportunities of collaboration.
- Participants** : Representatives of the Tamil Diaspora from Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India (Tamil Nadu), the Republic of the Seychelles, Réunion and Mauritius.

## LIST OF REGISTERED DELEGATES

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Names of Delegates</b>
<i>Malaysia</i>	Dr Paramasivam Muthusamy
<i>Reunion Island</i>	Aho Gérard Badamia Dr Krishna Boquiqueni Jean Chanemougame Dr Selvam Marimoutou Oberle Mme. Michèle Satyam Sautron Jean Claude Seriacaroupin Siva Sitaya Anaclet
<i>Seychelles</i>	Pillay Kali Deenadayal Pillay Mrs K. D. Pillay Selvam
<i>Sri_Lanka</i>	Duraiswamy Mrs. Sivanandini Vijayanathan Loganathan



*Tamil Nadu* :

Sethuraman Venkatraman  
 Narayanan Dr. Satya  
 Narayanan Vijay  
 Subramaniam Dr.  
 Sundara Rajan

*Mauritius* :

Alwar Mrs Sarojini  
 Amasay Mrs L  
 Annasamy Ansuya  
 Annasamy Naden  
 Appadu Naraja  
 Appasami Vijayantee Devi  
 Appavoo Oomadevi  
 Appavoo Tega  
 Aurmoogum Mrs Sarojini  
 Ayacootee Deven  
 Cathapermal-Nair Mrs Velamah  
 Chemen Mrs Danalutchmee  
 Chemen Jeevindiren  
 Chenganah R. D.  
 Cunden Mala  
 Cunjamalay Rajeshen  
 Cunjamalay Siva  
 Cunjamalay Mrs Vairon  
 Govinden Mrs Kamala  
 Govinden Mala  
 Govinden Mrs Ruby  
 Govinden Vel  
 Govinthan Moonsamy  
 Lutchmanen Varsen  
 Mooneyan Aruna  
 Moonsamy Mrs Indranee  
 Moonsamy Saga  
 Moorghen Mrs Rooba  
 Mootoo Camille  
 Motay Mrs Camalah  
 Motay Moganadasen  
 Munisami Deva  
 Nagalingum Moorthy  
 Hon Naidu Sekar  
 Narainen Dr Sen  
 Narayanan Mrs Ambal  
 Narrainen Ayave  
 Narsinghen Banee  
 Neeliah Mrs Shalini  
 Packiry Poullé Tiruvenkataswami  
 Padyachy Mrs Devi  
 Padyachy Pyneesamy  
 Padyachy Mrs Rajeshwari  
 Palani Mrs Salachee  
 Pareemanen Rajen  
 Pather Amoordalingum  
 Pillay Dr. Vel

Pillay Samoo Chandragassen  
Pillay Samoo Ramsamy  
Ponnusamy Mrs Sharmila  
Pyneeandee Mrs Roja  
Ramasawmy Deerajen  
Ramasawmy Deywarajen  
Ramen Dr. Sivalingum  
Ramen Mrs Sandravadhane  
Reddi Sadasiven  
Rengasamy Mrs Saraspady  
Rengasawmy Chandragassen  
Sawmynaden Collendavello  
Seeneevassen Mrs Rajamane  
Seeneyen Leevy  
Seerungen Collendavel  
Sockalingum Vinodumbaram  
Sooben Samoorgum  
Soobiah Mrs Danah  
Sornum Kadriavel  
Sornum Khesaven  
Swamy Sivasri Umapathy Sivam Sivachariar  
Tirumaleychetty Mrs Magalei  
Tirumaleychetty Ponsamy  
Tirvassen Mrs Navaneeda  
Tirvassen Radha  
Valadon Parmaseeven  
Veerabudren Mrs Magamane  
Veerabudren Mrs Priscilla  
Veeramootoo Vijay  
Veeramundar Rajarethnum  
Veeraragoo Mrs Kovila  
Veeraragoo Parama  
Veerasamy Barlen  
Viriapen Parmesh  
Vithilingem Soocramanien  
Vydelingum Gooroonaden  
Vydelingum Mrs Santa  
Vytelingem Sadasiven

## PART II

### Introduction

Through a fortuitous, but happy set of circumstances, the Tamil League's first ever International Conference on the Tamil Diaspora took place in the context of the celebrations of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the League. The Conference coincided with the national celebrations of the 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the accession of Mauritius to the status of an independent country and the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its accession to the status of a Republic within the concert of nations.

The Tamil League had, since its location in a spacious premise and on extensive grounds in Réduit, been seriously considering the advisability of organising an International Conference in furtherance of its mandate to promote the socio-economic and cultural development of the Tamils in Mauritius. After arduous discussions and meticulous planning, the idea crystallised on the 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2007 and during a whole day, Tamils from different fields of activity; namely academic, business, socio-cultural and religious organisations – assembled at the seat of the Tamil League in Réduit and deliberated on four main themes:-

- ◆ Language;
- ◆ Religion;
- ◆ Art, Dance and Music; and
- ◆ Business & Economic forum and Empowerment of Tamil Women.

After a musical interlude by Nadheswaram and Thavil Vidwan, Mr Barlen Vyapooree, the Master of the Ceremony for the Inaugural Ceremony called upon Mr Retnon Pyneeandee, the Chairman of the Tamil League to address the participants. Mr Pyneeandee, in a brief introductory speech, extended a warm welcome to the distinguished participants and guests. He had a special word for the delegates from Tamil Nadu, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Reunion and Seychelles. He regretted that the delegations from South Africa and Singapore could not make it on time. He had no doubt that the Tamil Diaspora all over the globe would have a good feel of the deliberations of the Conference through a perusal of the report. He said that the conference report would be widely circulated and placed on the website of the Tamil League: [www.tamil-league.org](http://www.tamil-league.org)

He also drew attention to some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Tamils in Mauritius and was confident that the participants would dwell on all issues of concern to the Tamil Diaspora in more detail in their deliberations in the group sessions and come up with some solid recommendations. He then wished the delegates a fruitful Conference.

Following him at the lectern was Mr Krish Ponnusamy, Chairman of the Conference Organising Committee.

After having greeted the delegations from overseas and the Mauritian participants, he then in a masterly and well documented presentation, retraced the steps taken towards the organisation of the International Conference. He recalled the main concerns and circumstances which had led him to initiate the idea on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the League. Bearing in mind the experience and skills acquired by the Tamil League over 70 years and the heavy burden placed on the shoulders of the community to preserve, consolidate and uphold the values of a civilisation which had existed from time immemorial, it was most fitting for the Tamil League to take the lead in organising a meeting of brains on the Tamil Diaspora.



Mr Ponnusamy dwelled extensively on Tamil culture, the priceless heritage of the Dravidian civilisation, its language, religion, art, dance and music. He went on to cite some interesting statistics about the almost ubiquitous presence of Tamils all over the world. Reinforcing his presentation with citations from academics and sages, he made a fervent plea for future generations of Tamils to be fully exposed to the Tamil language, culture and religion and for closer interaction within the Diaspora for the socio-economic upliftment of the Community worldwide. He ended by wishing the delegates fruitful discussions and deliberations.

*(The full text of his speech is at Annex A)*

Mrs Sivandini Duraisamy from Sri Lanka addressed the gathering on behalf of all foreign delegations. In a short but sweet address, she expressed the appreciation of all the foreign delegations to the Tamil League for having brought together under one roof Tamils from various countries to reflect on their identity and chart a way ahead for the consolidation of the Dravidian culture and its further flowering. She felt confident that "the sweetness of the Tamil Language and its people will naturally spread its cultural aroma all over the Tamil Diaspora in the world". Combining with remarkable dexterity Tamil with English words, she wished plenty of success to the Conference and the Tamil League.

*(The full text of her address is at Annex B)*

The inaugural part of the Conference reached its climax with the speech of Honourable Ramakrishna Sithanen, M.P, the Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Finance and Economic Development of the Republic of Mauritius as he proceeded to formally open the Conference.

The Deputy Prime Minister outlined a complexity of issues in the area of national policies with particular regard to religion, culture and economy. The Deputy Prime Minister had the choicest words of welcome for the foreign delegates and praised for the Tamil League and the current initiative to assemble high level representatives of the Tamil Diaspora in Mauritius to reflect on the current situation of Tamils in Mauritius and around the world especially in view of the rapid pace of technology and globalisation. He stressed the importance of drawing lessons from the past, however distant, as this would help to confront the present realities.

The Deputy Prime Minister linked efforts made by the Government of Mauritius with important changes taking place in the world, notably globalisation and trade liberalisation and their incidence on life on the planet. He mentioned how women are more vulnerable to the economic restructure taking place and wished that the upliftment of the status of women be addressed in the Conference.

The Deputy Prime Minister was very pleased to formally inaugurate the Conference. He wished the League every success in its endeavour and hoped that the deliberations would impact positively on the status of the Tamil Diaspora.

He then declared the Conference open.

*(The full text of his speech is at Annex C)*

A tea break intervened and participants while sipping their tea and munching their idley and other tamil sweets such as unday and adurson, could be seen discussing among themselves the issues raised in the opening speeches. This showed a high level of enthusiasm and augured well for the success of the Conference.



## PART III

### Welcome and Inaugural Speeches

#### Texts of the Opening Speeches

1. Mr Krish Ponnusamy, Chairman, Organising Committee of the Conference
2. Mrs Sivandini Duraiswamy, Delegate from Sri Lanka and Spokeswoman of the Foreign Delegates.
3. Hon. Ramakrishna Sithanen, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Finance and Economic Development.

## ADDRESS BY MR KRISH PONNUSAMY

Honourable Rama Sithanen, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development

Honourable Rama Valayden, Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Human Rights

Mr Retnon Pyneandee, President of the Tamil League

Distinguished Delegates from Overseas

Distinguished Tamil Nadu Expatriates

Distinguished Local Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

I extend a warm welcome to all the delegates from overseas namely Réunion Island, Seychelles, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu and the local participants to the First International Conference on Tamil Diaspora organised by the Tamil League.

The Tamil League celebrates this year its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For an individual, 70 years is considered as old-age, but not for an organisation. The more mature the organisation becomes, the more productive is the output. Ten years back on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Tamil League, I made a proposal in an article of the commemorative magazine that the Tamil League was adult enough to organise an international conference on the Tamil Diaspora. That proposal has materialized today. Through this conference on Tamil Diaspora we want the Tamil League, as a credible Tamil organisation, to establish a proper network with sister organisations in other countries of the Tamil Diaspora.

We have tried to gather participants from different cross sections of the Tamil Community to reflect on our Language, Culture, Religion, Art, Dance, Music and the new economic opportunities, especially for women. These issues are of great concern to us bearing in mind that we have inherited and are the guardians of one of the richest and most ancient languages and cultures, as beautifully encapsulated in the following extract from the book *"The Poets and the Powers"* by Mr Kamil Zvebil, a former Professor in Tamil studies at the Charles University in Prague:

*"Many and variegated are the contributions of the Tamils of South India to the treasures of human civilisation, the early classical love and war poetry, the architecture of the Pallavas, the deservedly famous South Indian bronzes of the Chola period, the well known Bharata Natyam dance, the philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta and the magnificent temples of the South."*

As regards the status of the Tamil language, it is an undisputed fact that the language is of Dravidian origin. According to UNESCO records, the Dravidians were the founders of one of the world's most ancient civilisations which existed in India sometime before 1000 BC when the Aryans invaded India. The Aryans who spoke the Sanskrit language pushed the Dravidians down in South India. In southern India, 4 languages of Dravidian origin are spoken today. Tamil is the oldest of them. It is acknowledged that the history of Tamil Nadu begins with the three kingdoms namely: Chera, Chola and Pandya. It is also acknowledged that the age of the Cholas is considered as the golden age of Tamil history.



According to available statistics, the Tamil Diaspora consists of some 80 million Tamils in 50 countries. The bulk of the Tamils is found in Tamil Nadu and also in the islands of Andaman and Nicobar, made unfortunately more famous after the deadly Tsunami of December 2004. In an excellent paper on the history of the Tamil Diaspora, Researcher V Sivasupramaniam affirms that in the South East Asia, Tamil presence is strongly felt in Malaysia, Singapore, but to a lesser degree in Myanmar, Indonesia, Vietnam (where there is a Dandayathapani Temple in Ho Chi Minh city) Cambodia, China and Thailand.

In Africa, Tamils are present in Mauritius, Réunion, Seychelles, and South Africa. In Oceania and Pacific Oceans they are present in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, New Caledonia and Tahiti.

In the Gulf we find Tamil presence in Bahrain, Qatar, UAE i.e mostly professionals and migrant workers.

In Europe, Britain is home to over 300,000 Tamils. France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Denmark have varying sizes of Tamil population.

In the Americas and the Caribbean, Tamil presence is visible in the USA, Canada, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago.

In an international symposium on Tamil Language held in August 2006 and organised jointly by Paris 8 University and Pondichery University, one of the issues discussed was how the Tamil language could be taught to the Diaspora. Professor Appassamy Murugaiyan who holds a Phd on Tamil-French bilingualism and lectures at Paris 8 University has developed language-teaching techniques and has brought out a book on how to teach Tamil to people who speak French. The French Government has published the book for use in educational institutions and elsewhere. Professor Murugaiyan was looking forward to come to Mauritius to present to this Conference the findings of the Pondichery symposium, but he has unfortunately been taken up with his professional assignments.

Over the centuries, the Tamil Diaspora has been embellished by thousands of top grade artists, musicians, thinkers, policy makers, religious leaders, social workers, both men and women. One of them who participated in the cultural renaissance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the legendary Subramania Bharathi who intelligently linked the thrust for social reform with political power. He was a visionary and dreamed of a Tamil nation in an Independent India. Bharathi's songs moved the hearts of millions of Tamils around the world, especially with his salute to the Tamil Nation in his famous patriotic song "*Senthamil Nadu Enum Pothinile*".

Our past is glorious. Our children should be exposed to the language, culture and religion to appreciate the infinite richness of the Tamil heritage. It is important, as the French thinker de Tocqueville said, that the past should illuminate the future, otherwise we will walk in darkness.

The International Conference today offers an excellent opportunity for all participants to bring their contribution to the well-being of the Tamil Diaspora, bearing in mind that learning and sharing is a continuous process. All the papers to be presented at the Conference along with the record of our deliberations and the names of all participants will be placed on the Tamil League website for consultation by not only the Tamil Diaspora, but also by the international community.

It is high time for the Tamil League to think seriously of setting up a modern Research Centre on Tamil Heritage at the seat of the League for us and future generations to drink at the fountain of knowledge. There is an old Tamil saying which goes like this:

***"That which we have studied is but a handful of sand  
That which we have not studied is the size of the earth"***

I wish you all fruitful deliberations.

Mrs Sivandini DURAISWAMY

On behalf of the foreign delegates,

We have gathered today in this beautiful island of Mauritius to celebrate the Tamils at the international Conference on Tamil Diaspora. It was the poet laureate who said "**Thèn madura thamil osâi ulekelam paravum vagai seithal vendum**" – **The sweetness of Tamil should be spread across the world.** In keeping with this wonderful saying, Mauritius has brought all us together and the sweetness of the Tamil Diaspora in the world.

Several countries have been invited to participate – delegates from Seychelles, La Reunion, Tamil Nadu, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Mauritius have gathered here to deliberate on the Tamils and their status in their countries in respect of Language, Art, Music, Dance and Economic Performance.

As each delegate unfolds his/her story, we could network with Organisations in his/her country around the world for the advancement of the Tamil Community in various fields. And more importantly understand better the values of the Tamil Community whether it be in for flung Fiji and Australia, UK, USA, France, in Seychelles, La Reunion, Malaysia, Singapore, India and Sri Lanka – these would create new opportunities to collaborate and help one another.

The Tamil League has organised this conference to commemorate its Platinum Year. It is indeed a bold step and a Herculean task and we delegates would like to congratulate the President of the Tamil League, the Chairman of the conference, the secretary to the conference and all those members of the League who have worked tirelessly for several months planning every detail.

It is very easy for a government to organise such a conference. It has its man power and the finances to do so. But an NGO like the Tamil League will not have these facilities. Yet the League conceived this grand idea and is delivering it today with hopefully many follow up programmes in other countries.

On behalf of the delegates, I would like to convey my appreciation to all in the League.

May God shower his choicest blessings on the League – **Mënmeye köl Tamiz nïidhi valangum ellam**

**Nandri**

**Vanakkam**



## SPEECH BY HON RAMAKRISHNA SITHANEN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Mr Retnon Pyneendee, President of the Tamil League,  
 Mr Krish Ponnusamy, Chairman of the Organising Committee,  
 Mrs Duraiswamy of Sri Lanka,  
 Distinguished visitors from abroad,  
 Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen Good morning - Vanakam

It is indeed a great pleasure to be with all of you at the opening of the Diaspora meeting. I would like to wish all our brothers and sisters from Tamil Nadu, Reunion Island, Seychelles, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, a very warm welcome and pleasant stay in Mauritius. Today's meeting will no doubt set the stage for future cooperation in the various areas that you will be focusing on. I should like also to congratulate the Tamil League for the initiative to bring together so many delegates from abroad as part of an outstanding programme of activities to mark its platinum jubilee.

Mauritius has a relatively short history, but there are records of Tamils from India working in Mauritius as early as 1734, that is around 270 years ago. Many have come to work in Mauritius, returned to the Motherland or moved on to Seychelles, Reunion Island and South Africa. The permanent migration of Tamils to Mauritius has happened relatively recently.

The history of Tamil migration to this island is a powerful chronicle of integration, adaptation and participation. It is the story of a people who have joined other people from different places of the globe to forge one of the best examples of unity in diversity. We consider our unity to be one of the treasures of Mauritian society. I have no doubt that this global connection of the Diaspora will help the community to further contribute to that never ending task of nation building. By building a relationship with the Diaspora beyond our shores the Tamils in Mauritius will no doubt further strengthen the values of diversity, tolerance and fair-mindedness that have underlined social cohesion in our country.

We must not overlook the fact that Tamils make up a community of some 80 millions people spread around the world, with a significant presence in many countries. This gives us the added richness that Tamilness is becoming global. In fact, this dispersion and scatteredness around the world can also constitute a challenge to our efforts to preserve our common bonds and our heritage. That is why it is important that the Tamil Diaspora strengthens its fibre by reaching out to each other around the world, as exemplified by today's function to share experiences among those who share the same cultural values, same roots and heritage, and also the same concern about our future as a people. We must all turn with open minds and hearts to each other.

If the networking of the Diaspora allows us to be drawn into our past – a past that may go as far back as the Mohenjodaro and Harappa civilisation, it is also an opportunity to build the future. In today's meeting you will be sharing views and concerns in many areas that include language, religion, art, dance and music, empowerment of Tamil women and business and economic forum. And you will certainly be charting the way forward with plans of actions and a programme for cooperation. I can assure you that Government will continue to give you its full support. It is the declared policy and commitment of the Mauritian Government to encourage every community in the country to preserve and promote its culture so that we can take the fascinating diversity that epitomises our society to greater heights. Annually, Government allocates more than half a billion rupees for recreational, cultural and religious activities. This speaks of the commitment of Government to the growth of multiculturalism while at the same time entrenching a deep sense of national identity and pride in our people.



As you discuss on the economic and business forum later today, I hope that you will explore the numerous opportunities that come with our new approach to development focussed on greater openness of the country, economic restructuring, fiscal consolidation and democratisation and empowerment. Government philosophy is to attract more foreign capital, talents, skills, ideas and expertise to Mauritius. There are many opportunities for foreign participation in Mauritius and I hope that our brothers and sisters from abroad will fully explore these opportunities. I believe that can be an excellent platform from which to create common bonds between the local Tamil community and the Tamil Diaspora.

And as you discuss the empowerment of Tamil women which is a prominent part of today's agenda you will no doubt recognise that Globalisation is intensifying the pressure on women. No country can remain indifferent to the tough challenges that women will have to face. In Mauritius, the significant job losses in the Textile and Clothing Sector where women accounted for more than 85 percent and the shedding of jobs in the sugar sector are examples of the vulnerability of women to the globalisation process. As a result the unemployment rate among women is 16.5 percent compared to 5.8 percent for men. Women make up some 35 percent of the labour force but 61 percent of the unemployed. And the estimated earned income of women amounts to less than 40 percent of men's earnings. Government is making special efforts to address the predicament of female unemployment.

We are convinced that women worldwide, including Tamil Women should not resign themselves to the pressures of globalisation. Instead they should be empowered not only to meet challenges of such globalisation but more importantly to contribute and play a positive role in the process while fully protecting themselves. Government is channeling some 5 billion rupees in an empowerment programme that focuses on access to land for social housing and small entrepreneurs; a workfare programme emphasizing training and skilling; tourist villages; assistance for outsourcing; and support for development for new entrepreneurs and SMEs; and special programmes for unemployed women. There will be projects under the Empowerment Programme that will offer training and re-skilling activities geared to women while taking account of their need for more flexible working conditions and to have facilities for taking care of their children while they are acquiring new skills. In addition to its training and re-skilling component, the Programme will encourage entrepreneurship among women including a handicraft programme for women with the participation of experienced trainers from countries that have achieved excellence in that field. We will assess the outcomes of all expenditure programmes including the Empowerment Programme on gender gaps and take remedial actions where necessary.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude by saying that I believe firmly in the creative energies of the Tamil Diaspora. We all have sentimental ties to our common origin. We all carry in our heart deep pride for the legacies left behind by our ancestors through the millennia. But our journey continues. Today's function is a deep expression of an urge by the Tamil Diaspora to dialogue and interact and to strengthen further the ties of kinship. I wish you with all my heart, success in your deliberation and once again congratulate the Tamil League on its Platinum Jubilee. To have an institution that has survived and thrived for seventy years is no mean achievement – an achievement that we should all be proud of. I would like to take this opportunity to salute the efforts of the founding members of the Tamil League who 70 years ago established the Tamil League to unite the Tamils in Mauritius around a vision to uphold the values, traditions and culture of a people whose history can be traced back more than 5000 years. Such ancient ancestry is an enormous wealth that we must constantly protect, share with others and continue to build on.

I thank you for your attention and I have the pleasure to declare the Diaspora meeting open.

Nandri Vanakam

## PART IV

### The Plenary Session

In this part of the report, six substantive papers are published. They set the tone and the stage for further discussions in plenary and subsequently, in the groups. These papers are the results of solid research which draw on primary and secondary sources of information. Mr Krish Ponnusamy was the chairperson of this important part of the Conference. Six researched papers were presented and were followed by intense inter-action between the speakers and the participants.

The titles of the papers are:

- (1) "Le Tamoul à Maurice: une langue identitaire dans un contexte multilingue" by Dr Radha Tirvassen, Associate Professor, Mauritius Institute of Education;
- (2) "Status of Tamils in respect of Language, Religion, Dance, Music, Art and Economic performance in Sri Lanka" by Mrs Sivanandini Duraiswamy;
- (3) "Tamil Sangam a militant experience in Reunion Island" by Dr Shanmugam Selvam, President of the Tamil Sangam in Reunion Island;
- (4) "Status of Tamils in Malaysia" by Dr Paramasivam Muthusamy, Faculty Member, University Putra, Malaysia;
- (5) "Tamil Language: A Legend" by R. Sundarajen, Representative of the Tamil Nadu Delegations; and
- (6) "Religion in Island State Seychelles" presented by Mr K. D. Pillay, Founder Chairman of the Seychelles Hindu Kovil Sangam.



## Le tamoul à Maurice: une langue identitaire dans un contexte multilingue

### *Les langues à l'île Maurice*

L'association d'une douzaine de langues à la communauté linguistique mauricienne qui ne compte qu'environ 1,2 millions de locuteurs relève presque de l'effet carte postale. Si l'on veut se livrer à une présentation plus significative pour un lecteur qui cherche quelques repères rapides sur cette situation, il est nécessaire d'emprunter aux anglophones leur notion **d'architecture** sociale et de l'étendre à l'aire **communicationnelle et symbolique**. Cette disposition est organisée autour de quelques sous-ensembles qu'il est nécessaire de mettre en évidence. Un tout premier élément du dispositif concerne la **distinction** que l'on peut opérer entre les langues qui sont utilisées dans la **communication quotidienne** et celles qui n'ont que des **fonctions identitaires**. Les langues qui sont employées dans la vie de tous les jours sont le créole, le français et l'anglais. Le créole est la langue première de la grande majorité des Mauriciens et la langue de tous les échanges informels et, ainsi qu'on le constate, celle des réunions formelles même si son usage se limite à l'oral puisqu'il n'a pas encore accédé à l'écrit. Il est toutefois nécessaire de signaler que depuis 2001, la station de radio-télévision nationale propose des bulletins d'information en créole, ce qui formalise une présence largement attestée de cette langue dans l'audio-visuel depuis de très longues années. La naissance des radios privées qui tentent de mettre en place ce qu'on appelle une radio de proximité ne vient que renforcer ce constat.

Les langues européennes sont au centre d'autres enjeux sociaux. Au plan statutaire, l'anglais est une langue quasi officielle même si ce titre ne lui a pas été attribué: c'est la langue des communications écrites officielles et de certaines réunions de travail de la fonction publique (les débats à l'Assemblée Nationale par exemple) et dans les organismes semi-gouvernementaux qui opèrent sous l'égide du ministère de l'éducation nationale. Le français est une langue tolérée dans les échanges formels dans les institutions les plus importantes de l'île (l'Assemblée Nationale par exemple), la langue presque exclusive des médias, en tout cas des journaux les plus lus de l'île, une des trois premières langues de la population et surtout une langue qui est en pleine dynamique en milieu familial. Dans les communications de masse, on peut affirmer que la presse écrite est quasi exclusivement en français: tous les journaux nationaux (c'est-à-dire ceux qui ne visent pas une communauté ethnique) sont presque entièrement en français. La première page et l'ensemble des titres de la vie nationale sont en français. L'anglais se limite au courrier du lecteur, à la publicité ou à des articles littéraires dans ces langues. Selon la réglementation officielle, la station de radiotélévision nationale doit respecter "l'équilibre linguistique" de l'île par une répartition équitable du temps d'antenne entre les langues. C'est ce qu'elle a fait dans les premières années de l'accession de l'île à la souveraineté nationale. C'est d'ailleurs ce que montre la répartition du temps d'antenne entre les langues à la suite du relevé effectué par P. Baker (1972) pendant une semaine au mois de mars 1971. Le gouvernement a toujours tenté de conserver cet équilibre jusqu'à la récente libéralisation des ondes qui fut suivie par l'ouverture des ondes hertziennes aux émissions de Canal Plus et aux chaînes anglophones. Ainsi que nous avons eu l'occasion de le dire, ce sont au niveau des enjeux sociaux que se manifestent les évolutions les plus significatives concernant les langues européennes. Alors que le rôle de l'anglais dans la mobilité sociale s'est consolidé dans les dernières décennies du XXe siècle, c'est le français qui exhibé comme le symbole de la réussite socio-professionnelle au point où il s'est débarrassé des stigmates ethniques qui lui étaient associés.

Les langues asiatiques ne sont ni impliquées dans la **mobilité sociale** ni dans la **communication quotidienne** (c'est l'autre distinction qui structure la réalité des langues à Maurice). Elles ont pour seule fonction de sécuriser, au plan identitaire (il s'agit de **l'identité**



**ethno-culturelle**) toute la population qui ne se reconnaît ni dans le français ni dans le créole. Parmi cette catégorie, on compte les langues orientales «classiques» (celles qui ont une tradition écrite) qui n'ont aucune fonction sur le plan communicationnel, l'arabe et le bhojpuri. On admet à la suite de R. Tirvassen (2003) que la typologie «langues orientales» est trompeuse parce qu'elle ne constitue pas une catégorie homogène. On désigne, sous cette appellation l'hindi, le tamoul, le télégou, le marathi, le gujrathi, l'urdu, le mandarin, le hakka, le cantonais et le bojpouri. Au-delà de ces détails, les seules fonctions communicationnelles de ces langues se limitent aux rituels des cérémonies religieuses. Par ailleurs, si le bhojpuri est une langue de communication ayant eu une large dispersion dans le passé (c'était la langue première de la majorité des immigrants indiens et celle de la première génération des enfants des immigrés) dans les échanges en milieu informel, les recherches menées depuis de nombreuses années confirment sa lente disparition.

Il est sans doute utile de conclure cette partie en tirant certains enseignements de ce qui a été avancé ci-dessous:

- 1) Le Mauricien tamoul est Mauricien; ses besoins linguistiques sont ceux des citoyens mauriciens: il a besoin des langues européennes pour sa mobilité sociale et sa promotion socio-professionnelle; ces langues lui est aussi indispensable pour sa consommation de produits culturels importés; il a besoin du créole pour son intégration horizontale; le tamoul lui est nécessaire à **certains de ses besoins** identitaires et culturels;
- 2) Le Mauricien tamoul devrait éviter de donner au tamoul des significations qu'il n'a pas et devrait ne pas tomber dans le repli sur sa communauté ethnique, un non-sens dans un contexte multi-culturel et pluri-ethnique.

## **Enseignement et apprentissage du tamoul à Maurice**

### ***Quelques généralités***

Dans le paysage sociolinguistique mauricien, le tamoul fait partie des langues dites asiatiques.

Toutes les langues asiatiques n'ont pas les mêmes particularités. Le tamoul se différencie des langues que l'on associe à de grands groupes comme l'hindi (on dit que ces langues ont une importante base démo-linguistique) et des langues qui bénéficient de ce qu'on peut appeler une forte dynamique ethno-linguistique comme le hakka et le gujrathi, encore parlés dans certaines familles. Ces deux éléments expliquent pourquoi pendant les grandes mutations socio-économiques et linguistiques du début du XXe siècle, marquées entre autres par la disparition de la plupart des langues asiatiques (seul le bhojpuri a résisté à cette dynamique; mais on sait que cette langue-là aussi disparaît progressivement de l'aire de la communication courante), le non usage du tamoul a coupé de nombreuses générations de cette langue. Par ailleurs, comme l'enseignement du tamoul dans le cycle primaire a été généralisé à partir des années 80, le phénomène a pris de l'ampleur et constitue un des éléments à prendre en compte dans une stratégie visant à diffuser efficacement cette langue.

Pour la communauté ethnique tamoule, le tamoul assume une importante fonction identitaire dans un pays multi-ethnique et plurilingue où les habitants tentent un difficile équilibre entre leur appartenance à une communauté ethnique et à l'ensemble de la nation. Par ailleurs, l'Etat mauricien consacre un budget ainsi que des ressources significatives à l'enseignement des langues orientales. Si l'on veut obtenir des résultats plus proportionnels aux moyens consacrés à cet enseignement dans le système éducatif mauricien et si l'on veut que ces langues puissent assumer leur fonction culturelle, il est nécessaire d'améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement offert, tout au moins celui du tamoul (puisque nous n'avons ni les compétences ni le mandat nécessaire pour parler des autres langues), dans le cycle primaire.

Pour que le tamoul soit enseigné de manière efficace, un certain nombre d'éléments doit être pris en compte:



- 1 La majorité des familles tamoules n'ont aucune compétence en langue tamoule. Le tamoul est donc, au plan strictement linguistique, une langue étrangère pour la quasi-totalité des enfants qui l'apprennent à l'école primaire. Il s'agit donc de l'enseigner en s'appuyant sur les principes pédagogiques propres à l'enseignement efficace d'une langue étrangère. A cet égard, il faudrait:
- utiliser, au moins pendant les premières années de l'enseignement primaire, un médium connu qui permettra une communication fluide entre apprenants et enseignants;
  - rendre les manuels scolaires des premières années tout au moins, accessibles aux enfants en les rédigeant dans une langue qu'ils maîtrisent;
  - s'appuyer sur les technologies nouvelles permettant d'assurer un contact entre l'apprenant et des productions langagières intelligentes, attrayantes, etc.;
  - disposer de ressources humaines adéquates: enseignants maîtrisant adéquatement la langue et formés en psycho-pédagogie; encadreurs solidement formés, etc.
2. Les pratiques culturelles tamoules relèvent de rites dont on ne comprend pas exactement la signification.

Or, les repères culturels constituent un fonds utile et incontournable de l'enseignement d'une langue. Les textes doivent être dosés linguistiquement, riches culturellement et attrayants. Il est tout de suite nécessaire de souligner que cette référence au culturel ne doit pas entraîner l'enfermement voire une approche que l'on peut qualifier de sectaire.

### L'enseignement du tamoul: quelques propositions

Nous demandons au ministère de l'éducation nationale de prendre acte de l'échec de l'enseignement offert dans cette langue. Cet échec que nous constatons dans nos observations informelles mais perspicaces s'explique par les éléments suivants:

-le recours au tamoul pour enseigner le tamoul n'est pas compatible avec les principes psycho-pédagogiques (on accède à l'inconnu par le connu) modernes; en fait, cette démarche n'est pas compatible avec le bon sens; l'usage de l'anglais comme médium, notamment dans les manuels, devrait être envisagé;

-sur le plan méthodologique, l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère ne peut se limiter au *talk and chalk* du professeur; il y a une masse de méthodes qui s'appuient sur les apports des nouvelles technologies; elles sont efficaces et peu coûteuses; en fait elle permettrait à l'état de rentabiliser les investissements consentis pour l'enseignement de cette langue;

-ces méthodes combleraient aussi une importante lacune: elles permettraient aux apprenants d'être en contact avec la langue, condition incontournable pour assurer la réussite de l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère;

-nous demandons au ministère d'améliorer la qualité des ressources humaines mises à la disposition de cet enseignement: il faut déjà améliorer la maîtrise du tamoul des enseignants chargés de le transmettre; il faut améliorer la qualité de l'encadrement technique offert à cette langue; des stages pendant les vacances pourraient être organisés avec la collaboration de formateurs compétents;

-en raison du rapport entre l'enseignement de cette langue et son contenu culturel, nous demandons au ministère d'user de ses prérogatives inscrites dans la loi pour fonder un comité dans lequel siègeraient quelques membres de la communauté tamoule qui ne sont pas des techniciens au sens strict du terme mais qui ont des propositions pleines de bon sens à faire.

What are  
we  
proposing  
Can Tamil  
Teachings  
work?



## Abstract

Mauritius is a multilingual country with English, French, Creole and Bhojpuri as the main languages, and several ancestral languages which are mainly used for religious ceremonies. From a language policy perspective, English is clearly the official language of most of the important institutions of the island and the main language used in the National Assembly: 80% of the debates take place in English and the other 20% is occupied by the French language. Within the Judiciary, English is the language of all proceedings involving court officers (prosecuting officers, attorneys, etc.) and all judgements and rulings are drafted in English, sometimes with long quotes from Creole. All official documents in government ministries and public offices are in English. Finally, it is the medium of instruction in the educational system and the most important subject taught at both primary and secondary levels. French, apart from being the language of the written press and of the traditional private sector, is the prestige language of Mauritius and is linked to advancement in the social hierarchy. Mauritian Creole is the lingua franca of the country and is used in all non-formal communication and sometimes in formal situations. Mastery of English and to a lesser degree French opens up economic possibilities. All white collar jobs, especially those in government institutions, require a knowledge of these two languages.

Tamil is one of the standardized Indian ancestral languages. Apart from its use in religious ceremonies, it is perceived as a symbol of ethno-linguistic group identity. This paper takes a fresh look at the confusion between the language loyalty of Tamils towards the Tamil language and the teaching of the language as a near native language within a new theoretical framework. Stemming from sociolinguistics and the theorization of language acquisition, we argue that there might be a case to distinguish between language loyalty and psycholinguistic parameters which hypothesize that curriculum designers and teacher trainers need to take into account:

1. from a technical perspective, Tamil is a foreign language in Mauritius. Teaching a foreign language has both linguistic and pedagogical implications;
2. one of these implications concerns the use of the L1 or any language which can be used to transmit the foreign language;
3. the major developments which have taken place in language teaching following the theoretical importance given to communicative competence. The emphasis in language teaching and language learning is no longer on abstract knowledge of languages (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) but the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals.



## **Status of Tamils in respect of Language, Religion, Dance, Music, Art and Economic Performance in Sri Lanka**

Mrs Sivanandini DURAISWAMY

Sri Lanka is a plural society – multi lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic where different cultures have co-existed for a long time. Tamil culture, which is predominantly Hindu is one of them. In ancient times, “Sanatana Dharma,” the Hindu way of life, naturally became part and parcel of Tamil culture. This explains why Tamil cultural concepts are synonymous with Hindu concepts.

The quintessence of Tamil culture is seen in the well known saying of the great Tamil Sangam poet Poonkundranaar, “yaadhum oore yavaram kelir,” every country is my own and all the people are my kinsmen. This universality of approach and the treatment of all human beings alike reinforce the present day Human Rights concept that, “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights,” and are entitled to all rights and freedoms as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Hindu concept of the Oneness of humanity explains this clearly and could be addressed so that unity in diversity could be had in our plural society. Tolerance, understanding and a sense of trust would bring about a together-ness among the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities. During the Tsunami calamity, in the country’s hour of grief and trial the people responded in ways that demonstrate a rich natural character – a sense of solidarity had emerged giving us the hope that peace will dawn in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, this was short lived.

### **Language**

In Sri Lanka the two native languages are Sinhala and Tamil together with English which was brought into the island by the British. Sinhala is an Indo-Aryan Language that originated from a mixture of Sanskrit dialects. Tamil is a Dravidian Language that originated from South India. The Tamil Language is ancient and is one of the few living classical languages and has an unbroken literary tradition of over two millennia. Sri Lankan scholars like Arumuga Navalar, Swami Vipulanandal, C.V. Thamotherampillai, Yogar Swamigal, Ananda Coomaraswamy and others have contributed substantially towards the promotion of the language, literature, architecture, science, technology and cultural growth of Tamils. Arumuga Navalar was the champion of the Saiva renaissance movement and the pioneer of Tamil Prose. He awakened the consciousness of the Tamils. Yogar Swamigal was a guiding star to the Hindus and his several letters, the Tirumugangal and his Natchintanai are works of high literary value told in very simple Tamil. Swami Vipulananda appeared when there was a surge in alien thought and culture. He helped to resuscitate the Tamil Hindu social structure.

Sinhala and Tamil are the official languages in the country. In 1958, Sinhala became the only official language thereby requiring its use in all government matters. The Tamils strongly objected to the law. In 1978 the Constitution made Tamil a National Language while Sinhala remained the official language. An amendment to the Constitution in 1987 elevated the status of Tamil to an Official Language. The implementation of Tamil as the other Official Language is yet to be fully done. The government should pursue this course of action relentlessly, for, the full implementation of Tamil will contribute in no small measure to ethnic harmony which is a sine-quo-non for a united Lanka.

Multi ethnic, multi religious countries ensure the different languages spoken in their respective countries are given equal status. Unfortunately, in Sri Lanka, separation of the Sinhala and Tamil streams in school led to compartmentalisation of the youth at an impressionable age. Lack of



interaction between the two communities at the school level was exacerbated by the political climate of mutual suspicion and mistrust caused by many acts of omission and commission by the government on one hand and the Tamil leadership on the other. The rift gradually widened leading to violence against the Tamils.

The Tamil youth who were discriminated against in the fields of education and employment considered this action as the last straw that broke the camel's back. And the militant movements were formed becoming in the minds of the youth, a group engaged in liberation struggle and grew gradually to its present proportions. In the eyes of the Sri Lankan government and the international community, the Liberation Tigers (LTTE) is a terrorist organisation. However, unless a solution is reached namely to give the Tamils their legitimate rights and seeing them implemented, such organisation will surface from time to time to create problems in the country.

The scenario had changed and a rare opportunity to strengthen peace, reduce poverty and broaden economic development was given in 2002 when cessation of hostilities was declared. Unfortunately, hostilities have resumed though paradoxically the Cease Fire is still holding.

The government has to look after the territorial integrity of the country. However, it is the government that has to find a political solution that would satisfy the aspirations of the Tamil and Muslim minorities which has to be endorsed by the majority which would include the Buddhist Sangha – the clergy.

## **Religion**

Religion is taken very seriously by most people in Sri Lanka. Four world religions are found here:- Buddhist – 67%; Hindus – 17%; Muslim – 8%; and Christians – 8%. The major protagonists in the ethnic conflict are the Sinhalese (74%) and the Tamils (18%). The great majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhist (94%) while a comparable majority of Tamils are Hindus (85%). Though the Sinhalese and the Tamils consider themselves to be communities with mutually opposed and even hostile interests, as Buddhists and Hindus they have no significant problems. A minority of Sinhalese (6%) and Tamils (14) share the common religion of Christianity. Despite the polarization and continuing violence in the Sri Lankan society at the present time, there is no violent conflict between the religions. However, there is suspicion and unease particularly regarding religious conversions.

Several religious missions namely, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Chinmaya Mission, the Satya Sai Samithy and several others spread their cultural fragrance over the Hindu community in Sri Lanka making the more vulnerable Hindus, stronger.

## **Music, Dance and Art**

Each of these forms of art represents a medium of communication and has been an integral part of the social and religious life of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The basic impulse that inspires an artist, musician or dancer to create, is to express the emotional urges of the human soul. The concept of art, music and dance is an experience of joy – ananda.

Carnatic Music and Bharata Natyam as in South India have been adopted by the Tamils of Sri Lanka. In the north and east of the country, we have two forms of folk items – the Vadamodi and Then modi koothu nadanam.

Despite the ongoing conflict, Music and Dance have survived perhaps mainly because of the soul touching quality of its spiritual aspect. The musician/the dancer was able to express his feeling towards God through his song or dance and no one was able to take this away from him. There was a time in the nineties of the last century when music and dance seemed more



popular outside Sri Lanka where our people had moved to. Music festivals and arrange trams both song and dance were seldom held in Sri Lanka during those times. However, the young generation of Tamils even during the dark days greatly benefited by the various Schools of Music and Dance which have kept alive the intricate patterns of these arts and recently there has been a revival of these arts.

Music and dance have now been introduced as alternate subjects in the curriculum. Children have started learning these subjects and continue to do a degree either at the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts in Jaffina or the Vipulananda Academy of Fine Arts in Batticaloa.

In Sri Lanka, Hindu Temple architecture is similar to that of South India towering up bold and massive. The ancient Temples in the North and East of the Island namely the Tiruketheeswaram, Tirukoneswaram, Mavaiddapuram, Naguleswaram and Munneswaram are testimonials of Sri Lanka's glorious past and rich heritage. Several temples were razed to the ground by the Portuguese. Some have been/are restored through Temple Restoration Trusts while others due to the ongoing ethnic conflict remained closed. Today however, the Hindus both young and old perhaps due to the conflict have grown religious and on occasions like festivals and observation of fasts, the temples are crowded with devotees.

### **Economy**

Despite the present political climate, Tamils have contributed their share in the economic field. It was not education that counted but the sheer determination to succeed, consistency and hard work that brought about their economic contribution. Gnanam, Senthilveri, V.T.V. Devanayagam Pillai, Vaitilingam, Mascons, Eswaren Brothers are some of the pioneers in this field who have done well, gained recognition in the country. They have given employment opportunities to the Tamils and thereby raised the standard of living, education and health of the children of the respective families.

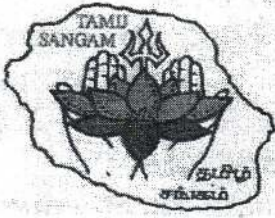
At present, a highly centralised form of government cannot solve this problem. The concept of devolution of power must be implemented. Power devolved is power shared and there is a feeling of collective participation creating a sense of belonging to the country and a better relationship among its peoples. This system also falls in line with the religious concepts of the various ethnic communities in Sri Lanka, concepts which advocate equality, brotherhood and good neighbourliness.

After twenty five years of conflict and agony, our country must be pulled out of the mire. The task of rebuilding fragmented nation has become paramount. The fact that both the main political parties of the country have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which though fragile, gives hope that times will change for the better.

### **Conclusion**

A realisation must dawn that the need today for us in Sri Lanka is an awakening, which would help a policy of live and let live, make a conscious effort to use our love and understanding to live in peace and harmony in our plural society and finally an awakening must arise to make us minorities feel that we are also Sri Lankans even though we are Tamil Hindus, Tamil Christians or Tamil speaking Muslims. The relationship of the major community and the minority communities should be based on freedom, equality and justice – this would bring about unity in diversity.





தமிழ் சங்கம்  
TAMIJ SANGAM

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**PAPER PRESENTED BY DR. SHANMUGAM SELVAM, PRESIDENT  
OF TAMIL SANGAM FROM REUNION ISLAND  
TAMIL SANGAM,**

**A Militant Experience in Reunion Island**

Reunion Island as you know was peopled by successive waves of immigration. There was no native population before. It was a virgin island in the beginning.

But its status as a French colony first, and later a French overseas department, generated a government policy of assimilation, both cultural and religious.

Nowadays, any desire to investigate one's roots is considered as a communal inclination and thus, dangerous.

Some Tamil intellectuals, in the sphere of influence of local decision makers, fully agree with that idea.

When Tamizh Sangam celebrated both Tamil New Year and Dipavali on the public highway in 1990, our association had to face resistance from the political, cultural and even religious local authorities.

The historic site where the first Indian immigrants landed, Apravasi Ghat, is part, here in Mauritius, of the UNESCO World Heritage.

The same historic site in Reunion is running wild and is even partly occupied by the offices of the Administration of Public Works.

Tamizh Sangam modestly built a stele in memory of these first arrivals.

Similarly, the erection of a statue of Mahatma Gandhi by our association in 1998 met with some difficulties, the municipal authorities suggesting places far beneath such a great figure as Gandhi. Some people even declared themselves against this statue, owing to the fact that Gandhi was not from Reunion.

We have to face two kinds of difficulties:

- Firstly the French authorities' policy of assimilation. For instance, big colonial residences are listed among monuments of historical heritage whereas a Hindu temple, more than a century old, was demolished by a big landowner three weeks ago because it was not protected by any registration on the list of historical heritage.
- The second difficulty is about the way Reunion culture is officially defined.

The local decision makers have imagined or built up a single mixed culture that does not favour any relationships with the land of our forefathers or even any collaboration with the Tamil Diaspora throughout the world.

Fortunately, the liveliness of our religious practices, the revival of Tamil culture among young people in the 1990's, as well as a similar revival in other communities have appeased these decision makers who now preach for diversity in unity. The local County Council is now working on a great cultural project called the House of Civilizations and of Reunion Unity.

Above the various projects achieved, the best success of our association is convincing the local political decision makers that the Tamil cultural revival is not incompatible with living together with the other ethnic groups. On the contrary, it improves local creativeness and makes it blossom.

We, members of Tamij Sangam, have to face those specific difficulties due to our living in a multicultural society ruled by France.

We think that the difficulties the Tamil Diaspora experiences depend on the specific country where these Tamil people live.

Our position in the world is globally worrying. The situation of Tamil people in Sri Lanka, flexible and submissive Tamil labour in some Middle East countries and even in Tamil Nadu itself where a major political party was wondering whether the next generation of Tamils would still speak Tamil and where it is necessary to subsidise Tamil film producers so that they do not use English titles for Tamil films, should be of concern to the Tamil Diaspora.

I think we should build up a new way of co-operation and understanding between our various Tamil delegations.

Co-operation and exchanges should also include the activists and all the persons in charge of various associations who struggle daily, often facing lack of concern or even sometimes hostility, in order to preserve our cultural values.

I wish for a true and stronger co-operation, free from any kind of allegiance or submission to some idolatry or sterile protocol whatsoever.

Thank you



# STATUS OF TAMILS IN MALAYSIA

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## Background of Malaysia

The nation of Malaysia comprises two major areas, West (or Peninsular) Malaysia and East Malaysia. They are separated by the vast expanse of the South China Sea. West Malaysia is divided into eleven states namely Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak, Pathang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Johor. In addition, there are the three Federal territories of Persekutuan, Putrajaya and Lubuan, the first of which is the Federal District where the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, is located. East Malaysia, in turn, comprises only two states, Sabah and Sarawak that extend along the northern coast of Borneo and cover approximately one fourth of the Island. The total population of Malaysia is approximately 23 million according to the census data of the National Population and Family Development Board (2003). The country is a multiracial kingdom where the monarch is selected from among the sultans presiding in each state and rotated for a period of two years. It accommodates a large number of ethnic groups among which the most numerous ones are the Malays as well as other indigenous people (bumiputra), the Chinese and the Indians. The approximate breakdown of these ethnicities is as follows: Malays and other bumiputras (or natives of the Malaysian soil), 62%; Chinese, 27%; Indians, 8% and others 3%.

Malaysia counts on a significant historical past with multiple migration waves as, at different periods of the Malaysian history, scores of communities from different parts of the world speaking distinct languages and belonging to different cultural groups have come to Malaysia. They mingled with the natives and contributed to the rise of an amalgamated multilingual and multicultural society. Like other immigrant groups that came to Malaysia for whichever reason, Tamil speaking Indians from South India and Sri Lanka also came here and settled and mingled with the local population of Malaysia.

## 2. Migration of Tamils to Malaya

As world history has shown, every nation keeps contact with other nations for many reasons. Only if such contacts are healthy, the nations can grow and develop. Malaya (as Malaysia was called in times of the colony) is no exception to the rule. In effect, Malaya had contact with several neighboring as well as non-neighboring countries. Among all these Malaya's contact with the Indian state of Tamilnadu had contributed greatly to the socio-political linguistic and economic growth of the country. According to the historian Arasaratham, Malaya had contact with Tamilnadu even before 500 B.C. (1970: p.149, 191). Though, in the course of history, the main reason for this contact was trade, the Tamils also exported their arts and culture to Malaya. Eventually, this contact spread to other areas, such as politics. History has taught us how extensive this contact had become in the past up to the period of Krishna Devarayar (1509 – 1529). This increase of contact can actually be substantiated by consulting the historical writing of Kassim Ahmad (p.339), who claims in his book that "a Malaya soldier by the name Hang Tuah" spoke to Krishna Devaraya in Tamil.

## 3. Present Day's Tamils in Malaysia

Tamils, living at present in Malaysia are not the traditional Tamils of the past. Instead, they are the migrants that came to Malaysia during the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, over a period of hundred years. When Malaya's Penang Island came under the control of the British in 1786, they started working on farms to make the land fertile, since the British wanted to reform Malaya, a region of forests and mountains, in many ways, they needed, in order to achieve their



objectives, a large number of human resources. So, they planned to bring in labourers from outside Malaya. In their choice of an appropriate work force, they gave preference to workers who were not only illiterates but also would not show any tendency to fight for their rights. In short, they wanted total subordination from their labourers. Subsequently, they decided that only South Indian Tamils fell into that category of worker. There was also another reason why South Indians (Tamils) fitted the pattern so neatly, namely, both countries, India and Malaya, were under British rule and it turned out easy to transfer Tamil workers as slaves to Malaya, that is, move them from one colony to another.

At this time, the socio-economic situation in Tamilnadu was deplorable in the sense that common people were suppressed by their landlords or Jaminthars. A caste oriented hierarchy was causing poverty and untold misery to its people, mainly as a result of their inability to comply with the interest payments demanded by the money lenders. In other words, even in their own state of Tamilnadu the common people were in every respect slaves to the landlords. This situation had many South Indians want to migrate to other more prosperous places (Rajaram, 1991).

This very thought of the common people got further accelerated by the seductive promises of agents, who were involved in shipping the workers to Malaya. These workers who were all so desperate and literally crushed due to socio-political, economic and authoritative high-handedness in Tamil Nadu were actually willing to do any kind of work. They were truly consumed by fear, were humble in behaviour, ready to believe anybody and, above all, experienced total psychological insecurity (Ramasamy, 1999).

The selected workers were then brought to Malaya in order to change the forest lands into cultivable fields. This was obviously a highly demanding and challenging task. During 1870's workers were contracted to cultivate pepper; during 1830's they were brought in to work in sugar can plantations and during 1870's, to work on coffee plantations. The British also wanted a large number of workers to clean the cities, to build roads, to lay rail tracks and to attend to scores of other public projects. After the initial establishment of rubber plantations in 1870's, the necessity arose to contract even more plantation labourers. This large scale immigration scheme started in 1786 and lasted until 1938 (Nedumaran, 1997: p. 55).

The British did not encounter any difficulty in making the South Indian labourers work. These workers never raised their voices against the British about increasing their salaries, about creating other facilities, such as, living quarters, medical facilities nor about securing proper schooling for their children. Rather, they worked hard and untiringly and were obedient to their masters without the smallest deceit.

As the workers from South India were 85% Tamils, only a minor percentage being Malayalis and Telugus, so the government decreed Tamil to become the official Indian language in Malaya. However, everybody invariably worked hard to the satisfaction of his masters. The British were known for their divide-and-rule policy, brought educated Malayalis to supervise the workers of other mother-tongue speakers. Hence, Malayalis became the clerks and helpers in the hospitals situated on the estates. On the other hand, the British also appointed educated Tamils from Jaffna to work in the Government offices (Nedumaran, 2005).

Tamils that had emigrated from Tamil Nadu, often conversed in Tamil observing little, if any, change to their original language. This prevalent situation even made the people, who were working in the estate offices (mostly Malayalis and Sri Lankan Tamils) also use Tamil in their day-to-day interactions. Even the British learned Tamil and some of them became quite proficient in speaking the language. The influence of Tamil was such that it even became a necessity for the British to learn Tamil in order to get work done by the Tamil labourers whose numerical strength surpassed that of other workers (Nedumaran, 2005). It is to be noted that a Tamil instructor by the name of Murasu Nedumaran taught Tamil to the British and used a Tamil textbook for this purpose bearing the title of *Cooli Tamil* (Personal Communication, 2005).



#### 4. **The Schooling of Tamil Children**

Prior to the war there were only isolated Tamil schools run by private groups. Such schools were established in places like Penang, Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and other places. These schools were established mainly for children who were under 15 years of age. Unfortunately, these schools were far from functioning properly. Semi literate clerks, hospital attendants, supervisors and temple priests were chosen to teach the children. Furthermore, these schools were operating either in temporary sheds or in places of worship. Although the main objectives of these schools were to teach the Tamils alphabet to the children of workers, some basic mathematics was also taught. Also, no proper syllabi had been devised for these schools. Rather, the books that were used in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka were selected as textbooks without giving any consideration to the kind of student who would use them and the appropriateness of the content of these texts. There was, however, still another school environment in Malaya at the time Christian missionaries had established Tamil schools in different areas where subjects were taught in the children's native languages to the extent that there were separate schools for English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil children. This kind of compartmentalization of education failed to provide children with the opportunity of exposing them to other languages and cultures.

#### 5. **Further Changes Affecting Tamils**

Many more changes occurred in the country after the war. These changes affected all areas, in particular the industries, education and the society at large. Innovations in the educational system led to the appointment of properly trained teachers to the schools of Malaya. Tamil schools could now hire teachers trained in respected training institutes. In spite of these innovations, each school still operated in its own language and no other language was taught. As a result, the students in any school would only have the opportunity of studying in a single language, their own native tongue. There was very little opportunity for children to mingle with members of other communities. Later, this situation changed, that is, the post-war scenario would allow different linguistic communities to integrate with one another as some Malay and Chinese speakers began working together in the rubber and palm oil estates. Eventually, more Chinese would come to the plantation areas in order to open their business in this area. This situation demanded of the Tamil speakers to become at least incipient bilinguals by adding some basic Malay to their Tamil language knowledge.

#### 6. **Drastic Changes in Malaya**

The country was moving fast towards independence. Several political parties arrived at nationwide consensus and series of proposed changes were discussed and acted upon. As for the implementation of the new policy, changes became mainly noticeable only in the cities and even there at a very slow pace. A reflection of such changes could, however, be observed on the plantations too. As a result of these changes, Tamils from the plantations started migrating to the cities, hereby widening their contact with workers from other mother-tongue communities.

Tunku Abdul Rahman had now become the new political leader as a result of the 1955 National elections. During his rule, he implemented many changes, the most significant one during his tenure being the plan that he had laid out for education. His minister of education, Tun Razak, modified the curriculum as designed by the colonial government and introduced a broadly based curriculum suitable for a country expected to become an independent nation. The curriculum, which viewed all languages as equal, aimed at the parallel growth of all the languages spoken in the country. This new vision paved the way for a drastic change in the educational system. This new concept of linguistic freedom had been advanced by Abdul Rahman's minister of education with the intent to promote greater cooperation and much-needed coordination among the communities whose members speak several distinct languages.



## 7. **Social Implications of Tamil Linguistic Behaviour**

The linguistic behaviour of Tamils recognises three basic categories whereby the spoken form of the language of each varies considerably as can be attested in the following language patterns:

- ◆ The language spoken in residential areas
- ◆ The language spoken at educational institutions
- ◆ The language of the media

The pattern found in residential areas can be further broken down into three groups as follows:

- ◆ Dwelling areas on plantations
- ◆ Unauthorised temporary quarters on revenue lands
- ◆ Well-established urban localities

## 8. **Language Patterns of Tamil Settlers**

Prior to the 1970's, the Tamil population on the estates spoke pure Tamil, that is, a Tamil language uncontaminated by foreign influences. This was mainly so because at that time only Tamil speakers lived in a given colony and the contact of the Tamils with other language groups was extremely rare. At a later time, however, and for a number of socio-economic reasons, these early settlers tended to move into cities where they came into contact with members of other communities.

The following three reasons contributed to the above mentioned changes:

- ◆ Government sponsored developmental activities on the estates
- ◆ The development of surrounding areas at the cost of estate lands created greater job opportunities in developing city areas

Because of these reasons, the early settlers began to move out of their traditional quarters and settled in areas like

- ◆ Satellite areas of large towns where unauthorised revenue lands could be found
- ◆ Tamil localities in urban areas where mostly middle class Tamils resided
- ◆ Localities with higher-income group Tamils who shared this neighbourhood with members of other linguistic communities

For all these reasons, the Tamil language spoken by Tamils in the area became heavily infiltrated by the languages of two other speech communities i.e. English and Malay.

## 9. **The Educational Scenario**

A different linguistic setting existed in educational institutions depending on the level of instruction as follows:

- ◆ Education in primary schools
- ◆ Education in secondary schools
- ◆ Education in institutions of higher learning

### 9.1 **Primary Schools**

Two types of primary schools operated in the country, i.e;

- ◆ Schools that were attended by Tamil children only where the Tamil language was the primary language of instruction. It was taught as mother tongue to all children.



- ◆ National Type Schools were attended by all three linguistic groups, the Malays, the Chinese and the Tamils. The Tamil language is taught as a subject (POL) to children whose mother tongue is Tamil.

## 9.2 Secondary Schools

The Tamil language is taught as mother tongue (POL) if there is demand for it; however, other language groups (Chinese, Malay) also study in these schools. This paved the way for Tamil children to often use other languages at school (POL).

## 9.3 Tertiary Education

The rising interest in the Tamil language has contributed to its presence in higher education. Teachers colleges have increased their offerings in Tamil, a number of universities offer courses in Tamil as language for communication and one university, the University of Malaya, has established a full-fledged department of Tamil.

## 10. Language of the Media

In general the use of language in the media contributes to the growth of any given language and its culture. In the Malaysian setting, various media such as television, radio and the press have contributed significantly for the growth of Tamil. Even some Tamil associations can be credited with contributing to the rising interest in Tamil. A brief summary concerning Tamil in the media may thus be in order:

### 10.1 Radio and Television

The Malaysian radio programming includes 24 hours of Tamil broadcasting in its Indian Languages Channel where Tamil occupies an important slot. Apart from songs and music, considerable time is allocated to talk shows, poem recitals and plays or dramas.

### 10.2 Tamil Dailies and Magazines

Locally printed magazines and dailies as well as magazines from Tamil Nadu are all available in Malaysia. As a result, there were ample opportunities for Malaysian Tamils to develop Tamil language skills and to hold on to their culture.

### 10.3 Internet

Another effective media which contributes greatly to the growth of Tamil is the Internet. All major Tamil dailies can be found on websites and these contain a wide range Tamil news. The presence of Tamil news on the net creates considerable interest among all Tamils in Malaysia in maintaining a positive attitude towards learning Tamil script, especially among those who do not know how to read and write Tamil.

## 11. Tamil Associations

Tamil associations all over Malaysia offer multiple activities with the objective of developing Tamil language skills and reinforce Tamil cultural concepts. One of the primary activities of these associations is the support and enthusiasm for the publication of Tamil books dealing with different aspects of Tamil language and culture.

## 12. Tamil Language as a Foreign Language

It is quite common to hear Tamils in Malaysia speak Tamil language but it is very surprising that a large number of people from other races (Chinese and Malay) take Tamil as a foreign language at universities in general and in University Putra Malaysia in particular. Besides that, the Malaysian government is in the move to introduce Tamil as a communication language to the primary schools to all races.

### 13. Cultural

Many aspects of cultural activities in the Malaysian setting can be observed. For example, stage dramas, vocal music, traditional dance, arts, festivals, temple rituals and etc. All these activities are carried out to preserve the Tamil heritage in Malaysia.

#### Conclusion

Tamils who came from Tamil Nadu as labourers have contributed in various aspects to safeguard the heritage of Tamil language. The youngsters today, are still safeguarding all the efforts done by their ancestors towards the Tamil language. But in today's global economic world, can we still maintain the Tamil language? Even in Malaysia, the scenario, where children from educated family background are not giving much importance to the language can be observed. Moreover, the percentage of Malaysians knowing the Tamil language in-depth is decreasing. However, by having our motherland, Tamil Nadu, within the region, and the great influence from the Tamil media, the Tamil language will not lose its place completely in Malaysia.



## FACETS OF TAMIL WAY OF LIFE

R. SUNDARAJAN, Tamil Nadu

### Tamil Language a Legend

Tamil language has the honour of belonging to one of the oldest civilisations in the world. Tamil is one of the ancient languages has proved its presence in this world for more than 8000 years. Tamil peoples are the oldest civilisation in the world.

Tamil is the oldest language in the world and particularly in India; it's presence is at par with any other ancient languages.

From the source of many researches, it has become very clear that the Tamil people have been present in this world along with the oldest civilisations like Greek, Rome and Nile river civilisation.

Tamil literature is not just focused on romance or hero worship. The ULAGA PODHU MARAI – THIRUKURRAL is a typical example, which stands as an ethics from ordinary man to super powers and multinationals of today. Nothing is being unsaid in this epic.

Thirukkural is translated into so many languages in India and abroad. For example Mr. G.U. Pope has translated Thirukkural into English. The famous Mauritian poet Thiru Muthukumaran Sungeelee, had done it into French.

### Ancient Rulers of Tamil Land:

The Tamils were ruled by 3 brave kings namely Chera, Chola and Pandiya and lately by the brave Pallavas.

#### (a) *The Bravery of the ancient Tamil Kings*

Each of the above mentioned kings was brave in their own way and they have their own borders extended up to mid of present India. The Chera Kings conquered up to Himalayas and conquered the rulers of North India (Kanaka Vijaya) and made them carry the foundation stones of Kannagi Temple which is presently at the southern borders of Tamil Nadu.

The Chola king namely Rajendra Cholan conquered part of north India and had a renowned title of Gangai Konda Cholan. The Pallava King Mahendra Pallava and Mamalla conquered the Chalukiya kings Pulikesis and extended their borders up to mid of India.

#### (b) *Incomparable and unique justice of Tamil Kings*

The Chola king, Manu Needhi Chozla, ruled the regime with High Justice (Needhi). Once his son killed a calf while going by chariot. There was a bell, which was tied in front of the palace for bringing justice to his subjects. The cow, which lost its calf, rang the bell to seek justice and the king hearing upon the happenings punished his only son by running the chariot over the prince.

The Pandiya King Nedunchizian gave up his life the moment he came to know about the injustice done to Kovalan. Silapathigaram elaborates about the prides and justice of Pandiya kings while explaining the presence of Kannagi and Kovalan in the city of Madurai.

The King Chibi Chakaravarthy was the king who had seen that there was a Dove, which was fighting with an Eagle. In order to secure the poor dove, the king removed his own flesh from his lap and fed the same to the Eagle.



(c) **Contribution of Tamil Kings towards Tamil**

Chola kings were supporting the poets of their periods in order to develop the Tamil literature. Famous *Kambaramayanam* was written and narrated by Kavi Chakravarthi Kambar. Though there was a Ramayana already, poet Kambar, has transformed the epic into poetical expression. There is so much of literature depth in his poems, which is beyond comparison.

The Pandiya Kings contributed towards Tamil development by means of supporting sangam literature. Poet Nakeera chaired the Kadai Sangam and nourished the language to grow. In Thirumurugatrupadai he has hailed the glory of Lord Muruga and Aarupadai Veedu.

The Chera King Elango, brother of Chera Sengootuvan, with the guidance of Seethalai Satharnar (famous poet who wrote the book *Manimekalai*) has written the glorious story of Kovalan Kannagi in his *Silapathigaram*. Even though the story is mainly narrating about Kannagi, he contributed vastly towards social harmony and peace.

(d) **Fine Arts of Tamilians**

From ancient times until today the fine art of Tamilians, either instrumental or vocal, has its own incomparable uniqueness with bliss. Age old music instruments like "Nadhaswaram", "Veena", "Kuzhal (flute)" and "Yazh" can be found nowhere else in the world. The Bharathanattiam, carnatic music, folksongs and Karagattam of Tamil Nadu prove the profound music knowledge.

The hand paintings of Tanjavore, handloom fine silk sarees of Thirubhuvanam and Kanchipuram, hand made bronze and pancha loga statues of Swami Malai prove the refined handicraft knowledge of Tamilians.

Elegant way of tying silk sarees and the contrast half sarees of teenagers shows the profound fashion design of Tamils.

(e) **Architecture**

A visit to Indus valley civilisation to the monuments of stone architecture in South India proves the talents, planning and engineering knowledge of Tamils.

**Srirangam Ranganatha Swami Temple** is one among the beautiful Temple, which was built by THIRUMANGAI AZHWAR. This temple seems to be like an Island huge in size with beautiful arts.

**Madurai Meenakshi Temple** is one among the goddess Sakthi shrines in the world. Pandian dynasty built it and this temple is preserved as a world monument. Recently, it was recommended to be proclaimed as one of the World Wonders for its dedicated paintings and arts.

**Thanjavur Brahadeeswarar Temple:** This temple built by Raja Raja Cholan is unique in the world for its dynamism, excellent engineering skills, arts etc. The speciality of this temple is that even during the daylight the shadow of the "Main Tower (Gopuram)" does not fall on Earth. It has been predicted by those sculptures that in future there would be British rule in the same place for which there is a proof of an idol of an British soldier in the Gopuram. This temple is part of the World's Heritage, which is maintained by the ASI (Archeological Survey of India).

**Rameshwaram Ramanatha Swami Temple** is one among the famous temples in Tamil Nadu. It is in the Ramanathapuram district. This temple is an Island. It is famous for its beautiful corridors on all the four sides. This is the only temple, which has 18 wells inside one compound wherein the devotees who are



to have dharshan of Lord needs to take bath in all the holy waters inside the temple. The shrine is of two avatars "Rama and Easwara (shiva)". This temple stands beyond archeological comparisons.

(f) **Astronomy**

Before the modern science and the European invaders, Tamilians are well aware of astronomy (Vana Shastra). They even went beyond imagination to predict the past, present and future of an individual with the help of "Agastiya Naadi Shastra".

Tamilians were having their own calendar and vedic mathematic guide book named "Panchangam". They were well aware of planetary positions and the movements of nine planets of the sun family well before the satellite technologies. They were even able to fix the degree of inclination of the planet earth and build temples with a unique nature of arise of sun getting into the main deity on a particular day in a year.

(g) **Gastronomy**

The recipe of Tamil traditional foods shows the knowledge of balanced diet and food was fed to an individual as an indirect form of medicine. The five main species form part of Tamil kitchen are medically proven to be very essential to human body. Dishes like "Idli (steam cooked cakes)", "dosa (pan cake)" are some examples of delicious traditional Tamil dishes.

## Defence

Though There are countless warriors and Great Kings who had the courage to fight with invaders to any extent, there is a history about the Chozha dynasty King who went to conquer the Ganges (in the North India) valley and had fought with the King named Kanaga Vijaya and defeated him. As a punishment the king and its army were made to carry the stones from the Ganges valley to Tamil Nadu and with the stones Gangai Konda Chozapuram temple was built. This temple is one of the best architects of the Chozha dynasty and this proves that there was no king to dare to fight with the Tamil kings.

The Chozha kings were able to invade to Singapore and Cambodia for trading purpose. Even at Cambodia, the Chozha king was able to build the temple for the Sun God. This is the only one big temple in the world for Sun God. This proves that Chozha kings were having the technology, equipments and skills to cross the sea and conquer the countries.

## Sports

Sport named "**JALLIKKATTU**" is performed during the Pongal ("Sankaranthi") celebrations. In this sport people **take the bull by its horns** directly. Even today this is conducted at Tamil Nadu. So many foreign visitors arrive in Tamil Nadu to view and enjoy the bravery of the Tamilians.

## Religion

Tamils are the ones from the earlier period to have maintained SAIVAISM. VAISHNAVISM. There was enough number of Saints and Sages who wrote the epics on Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu.

In Tamil, there are so many epics for Lord Siva e.g.: Thiruvagasam, Thevaram, Periyapuramam. Those who worshipped Lord Siva were called Sivaites. Great Saints who worshipped or devoted their life for the service of Lord were called as Nayanmaarkal. To name a few of nayanmaarkals are, Appar, Sundarar, Sambandhar, Manickavasagar, Thirugnanasambandar, Thirunavukkarasar.

Those who have worshipped the Lord Vishnu were called as Vishnavites. There are so many followers of Vaishnavism. The great saints of Vaishnavism are called Aazhvaarkal. "Naalayira



Divya Prabandham” is one of the best epics with great poems, Which praise Lord Vishnu. Some examples of great Vaishnavites are Sri Andal, Thirumangai Aazhvaar, Poygai Aazhvar, Paiyaazhvaar Thirumazhisaiyaazhvaar.

Aandal of Srigilliputtur, great Saint of Vaishvanism wrote the Thiruppavai (Tamil) poems which shows how to worship Lord Vishnu. Though there are Saiva and Vishnavism, Tamil Diaspora has later turned to follow both Siva and Vishnu along with Lord **MURUGA** and other forms of Lords.

There is a number of Lord Muruga devotees and saints who wrote the epics worshipping Lord Muruga. Arunagirinaadhar, Kumaraguruparar, Pamban Swamigal, Saint Vallalar, Thirumuruga Kripananda Variyar are to name a few. These saints have shredded their life for Lord Muruga.

### **Science**

Tamil community never lags behind in science from those days to present. The Great saints like Thayumanavar had first stated that “**knowledge is Divine**”.

The Great Saint Thirumoolar who lived 2000 BC, has said that “**Love is God**” as well as **God is Love. (Anbey Sivam, Sivamey Anbu).**

The Great saint Thirumoolar has explained the weight of Soul. And the Saint has said that the Soul can **ONLY** be realised by Meditation.

There are so many saints like Pogar, Pulippanisiththar, Paampaatti Siththat, Agathiyar, Pulaththiyar, Pathanjali, Karuvoorar. Like this so many sidhdhar’s attained their Jeeva samaadhi around the Tamil Nadu.

### **Astrology**

Tamil Saint Agathiyar has written the Naadi Astrology, before 3000 years. Even today the Naadi Astrology prediction is helping so many thousands of people around the Globe.

Even the astrology is using the thumb impression. This shows that thumb impression has introduced more than 3000 years of Tamil history.

### **Health**

So many saints and sages prescribed the Medical treatment using natural vegetation. This has transformed into the Siddha treatment. So many natural treatments are helping to cure so many diseases without any side effects.

Even today, Tamil Nadu is a perfect centre for Medical Treatment in India. So many foreign visitors are getting very good treatment in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu’s medical advancement is really impressive in the History of Tamil Nadu.

### **Architecture**

During the Regime of Kari Kala Chozha, so many new buildings and architects boomed in the State. The King built a Dam across the Cauvery river at Trichirappalli, which is very strong even now. This Dam has been constructed with high Engineering techniques. It has faced so many floods and cyclones, still this Dam is very safe and spreading the name of King Karikalan.

Mahabalipuram Caves were built by King Pallava. This caves were a thousand pillar mahal in best architectural style, which creates various music around the mahal.

### **Arts**

Tamil Diaspora has so much knowledge on ARTS. Among that the Bhartha natyam which is one of the classical dance of India.

So many cultural developments have taken place. In Tamil Cinema, so many cultural developments have taken place.



During the period of the 50's, so many Poets like Pattukkottai Kalyana Sundaram, Bharathidasan, Kannadasan, Vaali and the recent times poet Vairamuthu gives incredible depth of the Tamizh Poems.

In the area of the Film acting, Actor Sivaji Ganesan who had excellent acting skills was applauded around the Globe. The Movie named "Veera Pandiya Kattappomman" obtained a KAIRO Award. This Movie is the first Tamil movie to get an international award.

Sivaji Ganesan is the only actor to get the honour of "Sevaliye" award from French Government.

Tamil Film, Music Director Illayaraja is the First Asian to perform and Conduct the Symphony Music at London. Also he holds the world record of performing music in more than 800 Movies.

Our present generation, Music Director, A. R. Rahman, took our Tamil music to International level.

Tamil Cinema has contributed Three Chief Ministers to Tamil Nadu. Dr. C. N. Annadurai who is the excellent poet of the Tamil language has become the First C.M of Tamil Nadu from the Filmdom.

Later, Kalaignar M. Karunanithi who had also a wide knowledge of the Tamil language has become Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Even for the Fourth time, Mr. Karunanithi rules the state.

Actor M.G.R is the next follower to rule the state. He ruled more than 11 years continuously.

Later, Ms. J. Jayalalitha has become the Chief Minister and ruled the state for two terms.

### **Education**

The Anna University and IIT Chennai are some of the great Education centres where so many top leaders and IAS Officers are generated for the Nation.

The Tamil Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujam is a great scholar in Mathematics. His theory is world famous and even after the Century his theorems are giving challenges to the Mathematicians.

The Mahakavi Subramaniya Barathi said that Tamil is the best ever language among the World. He learnt 17 Languages of the work including French, English and German.

Even Tamilians are famous for their talent in English. Mr. Ganapathy sasthiri was an English Orator who rightly pinpointed the mistakes in the Speech of Sir Winston Churchill of the U.K.

During the English colonial period in India, the justice Dept. has sent advice for punishing the King George V who has committed some crime against UK Law. Though it is difficult to punish the British King, the Madras High Court Judge Mr Krishna Iyengar's recommendation was accepted by the British Government. As per the advice of Iyengar, the British government released the British Coins without a Crown in the Head of the King. This was applauded as international judgement.

### **Martial Arts**

The Silambaattam and Malyuththam (Judo) are the well known Martial Arts. Even the Chinese traveler Yuan Tsuang did mention these arts in his diary and praised them.

### **Spititual**

#### 1. **Ramalinga Vallalar**

Ramalinga Vallalar is one of the Great Yogis who wrote the THIRUVARUTPA in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. He has advised to follow the JEEVA KARUNYAM and advised the people to perform Meditation for peaceful Life. He has mentioned that Light is the Divine. His Divine speeches and Tamil Poems have helped so many followers to attain the Spiritual fulfillment and upliftment of Humanity.



## 2. **Thirumoolar**

Saint Thirumoolar is famous for writing more than 3000 Poems, which help the people to attain the peace in life. Thirumoolar's quotes are GOD IS LOVE AND LOVE IS GOD. He quoted that who realised that GOD (Sivam) only can love all in another way who Loves everyone only can realise the GOD (Sivam).

He did attain the JEEVA SAMADHI at the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple. Even today so many Meditators perform the meditation around the Samadhi of Saint Thirumoolar.

## 3. **Raagavendra Swamigal**

Sri Raghavendra Swami was born in Tamil Nadu and spread Love around the State. He performed so many miracles for the devotees and attained Jeeva Samaadhi at Mantralaya, India.

He was the first saint to prove the Jeeva Samaadhi in front of the Pulic. His Holiness Samadhi is well known by the Indian People. And so many foreigners do follow the teachings of Sri Raghavendra Swamigal.

## 4. **Sri Ramana Maharishi**

Sri Ramana Maharishi lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and he was very famous for SELF- Enquiry to attain the enlightenment.

His teachings of "WHO AM I" has given Good result to so many peoples. His teachings was translated into so many languages in the World including French and English.

He strictly followed the SILENCE and advised all of us to follow the path of the SILENCE. He is a Perfect Master for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **Conclusion**

Tamil Language has its own richness and is Unique in its own food style and Self Respect. Tamil is the First Dravidian Language which gave birth to Kannada, Malayalam, Telegu and Tulu (South Indian Languages).

After Jesus Christ, his followers arrived in Madras to spread the Christianity. Tamil, the First Language in India, has been chosen for Bible Translation.

They translated Bible into Tamil. Even at the Crying wall of Jerusalem, the only Indian Language written is Tamil.

Such is the importance of Tamil Language. It has faced so many hurdles for survival. Though the Tamil People followed the multi language system in India, the independent government of India has imposed HINDI in education in Tamil Nadu.

Hundreds of Tamil opposed the imposition and fought against Hindi imposition. Even the people have thrown out the ruling government for the sake of Tamil. Even after 40 years, they couldn't get the chance for ruling the Tamil Nadu.

Because of the anti-hindi movement in Tamil Nadu, people have chosen to learn English. Even today many Tamils are working in Software industry and developing the nation with their talent in English.

Tamil crossed so many hurdles to maintain its self-respect.

The Tamil Language has never been saturated by problems and it has surged against every odd.

We wish the Tamil around the Globe success in the maintenance of the Tamil Culture and we have been happy to meet you all here.

**Tamizh Vaashga! Tamil Velga!**



## RELIGION IN ISLAND STATE – SEYCHELLES

*From: Mrs S. PALANI & Presented by: Mr K. D. PILLAI*

Religion, which is eternal, is the property of all people. Any attempt to remove its influence from the people will be only an exercise in futility. Whether one likes it or not, it is soaked in every individual and cannot be removed from him. The common factor in all religions is the belief that there exists in it Transcendental Truth, acceptable by all and applicable to all. This idea will continue to be entertained for all times to come. The purpose of religion is the creation of Divine consciousness. The world cannot thrive even for a second without religious activity in some way or the other. The various celebrations undertaken by Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Jains and other religious groups emphasise the above fact. This religious belief is an important element of life especially in small island states like Seychelles.

The living Godman of India, Bhagavan Shri Satya Sai Baba said:

*“Love your religion, so that you may practise it with greater faith. And when each one practise his religion with faith, there can be no hatred in the world, for, all religions are built on universal love”.*

Even though in Seychelles, the first settlement of Indians date back to 200 years, the practise of Hindu religion and its festivals by Tamils started almost 150 years ago. Krishna Jayanthi celebrations were arrival feature which provided a chance for the Tamil community to meet and relive their religious sentiments. The Tamil community mostly Hindus prayed and followed religious activities in their respective houses, observing festivals that are celebrated in their motherland, Tamil Nadu, like Pongal, Navrathri, Sivarathri, Deepavali etc.

But only 22 years ago, (due to the painstaking efforts of a Sri Lankan Tamil), the religious faithful joined hands and formed a Registered Association and named it as

“Seychelles Hindu Kovil Sangam” and elected Mr K. D. Pillai as its Founder Chairman.

With years of pioneering attempt to persuade all Hindus to join the Association. The Sangam brought a place in the heart of the capital city, Victoria and laid the foundation stone on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1990, the day which is celebrated all over the world by Satya Sai Baba devotees as Easwaramma Day. It was a fitting tribute to Satya Sai Baba, since the Hindu Kovil Sangam started its activities with weekly Sai Bhajans, later on weekly prayers to Panchaloga Idols brought from India in a temporary building. Once again, with God’s Blessing and with the help of the Hindu Community, the consecration of Shri Nava Sakthi Vinayagar Temple took place on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1992, once again, on the same Easwaramma Day!

The local Minister for culture Mrs Sylvette Pool as well as dignitaries from India and then Minister of Mauritius Mr Arumugam Parsuramen graced the occasion! The dream of the Hindus, especially Tamils in Seychelles, became a reality on that day! From then on, all Hindu religious festivals are celebrated in the Temple bringing the Hindus together and to enhance their faith in Divinity. The Thai Poosam festival attracts even local Seychellois Citizens and Tourists since the arrival of Kavadi procession goes around the streets of the temple.

After thirteen years, as per religious scriptures, a renovation of the temple is being undertaken along with the construction of a five stoned Rajagopuram. In Seychelles, due to the various ethnic religious groups living together, we also have Hindu Council of Seychelles, an association which celebrate with funfair the Deepavali festivals annually. On this joyous occasion, the local non Hindu Community also joins in the presence of Ministers and the Vice-President of Seychelles. We also have a smaller Durga Samiti, which celebrates annually the Navrathri Celebration following the Bengali tradition, transporting idols from India and conducting the festival with priests from Bengal.

The Satya Sai Baba devotees conduct weekly Bhajans in the temple hall and celebrate in a grand manner, Baba’s Birthday on 23<sup>rd</sup> November and Easwaramma Day on 6<sup>th</sup> May. The



devotees also undertake in community service by donating to the orphanages, to follow Baba's saying, "Love all; serve all"

As Baba says:

*"God is the mother and father of the world. Our parents are the mother and father of this body".*

We, in Seychelles, try our best to follow our religious tradition and educate our children on the importance of our religion through the festivals and cultural activities.

Religion forms the very basis of our living; because it controls our emotions and senses. Religious exercises, like fasting may appear painful in the beginning but will be like elixir in the end. The Bhagavad Gita says that the pleasures enjoyed by man may be like nectar in the initial stages but will turn as poison after some time. We must not forget the fact that all religions are facts of the same truth. All scriptures are Holy, all places of worship are holy. All religions are seeking the one and the same GOD, although they may call him by different names. Then only, the world will become a place for all to live in Harmony and Peace! We have to cultivate strong faith in God and keep our heart free from envy, egoism, greed and other evil traits in order to attain perfect bliss and reach Divinity. As Baba says, "God is Love, Love is God. Live in Love. Love may appear to be very simple thing. But there is no power greater than Love", we must:

*"start the day with love,  
Fill the day with love,  
Spend the day with love,  
End the day with love"*

Then the world will surely become a place of peace and prosperity.

We, in Seychelles, with the temple and its observance of religious festivals, prayers, poojas are following the tradition of our ancestors who had emphasised in various poetry, discourses, epics like Ramayana, Mahabaratha, that we can achieve happiness both here and hereafter by the worship of God.

We face certain constraints but our faith is very firm and with the blessings of God, the future generation of Tamils and Hindus will follow our religion more ardently than before. We make it a point to teach them the meaning of religious rites like yagna and yaga and observance of fasting and other rituals to attain external and internal peace.

Finally, we wish to state that it is possible for men to survive without religion; but the vital factor to be remembered is, in that case, a person will be taking a trip down an endless road. Religion provides the guide or map to travel on the vast unknown road of life and reach the destination safely. The well-known Tamil poet and saint Thiruvallwar says:

*"Those who seek the foot of God alone  
Can safely swim across the ocean of life;  
Others cannot"*

Lets our actions and thoughts be guided towards our belief and prayers to God and his immense powers to cure worldly evils, for,

*"Where there is Faith, there is love,  
Where there is Love, there is Peace,  
Where there is Peace, there is God,  
And where there is God, there is Bliss"*

**SAIRAM**



**PART V**  
**Group Sessions**

The Group Sessions were instituted as follows:

**Group Reports:**

<b>Group A</b>	-	<b>Language</b>
Chairperson	-	Dr Seeven Tiroumalechetty, Head of Foreign Language, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Mauritius
Rapporteur	-	Mr Paramaseeven Veeraragoo, Director of Court Services, Judicial Department, Mauritius
<b>Group B</b>	-	<b>Religion</b>
Chairperson	-	Dr Vel Pillay, Editor in Chief, Vanakam Newspaper, Mauritius
Rapporteur	-	Swami Sivachariar Sivasri Umapathy Sivam, Priest, Kali Kovil, Chebel, Mauritius
<b>Group C</b>	-	<b>Art, Dance and Music</b>
Chairpersons	-	Mrs Kovila Veeraragoo, Assistant Director, Ministry of Education & Human Resource Development, Mauritius
Rapporteur	-	Mr Venkatraman Sethuraman, (from Tamil Nadu), Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Mauritius
<b>Group D</b>	-	<b>Business &amp; Economic, Forum and Empowerment of Women</b>
Chairperson	-	Mrs Yanambal Moorghen, Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Agro Industry, Fisheries Division, Mauritius
Rapporteur	-	Mrs Velamah Cathapermal-Nair, Senior. Executive, Regulatory Affairs, Mauritius Telecom

In view of time constraints, not all papers could be presented in plenary. Participants were, therefore, encouraged to do same in the group discussions. A very well documented paper was presented in Group A entitled "Linguistic Vitality in Tamil Diaspora". The author, Dr Jeevendiren Chemen is presently Senior Lecturer in the Tamil Department of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Mauritius. (*His paper is at Annex D*)

This part contains the numerous comments, suggestions and recommendations made by individual participants. Unfortunately it cannot describe the various methods of communications that were used in groups e.g.: sketches, dance, and songs. It has been suggested that video filming of the entire Conference would have been desirable in order to reinforce reporting. However, only some of the deliberations were videoed.

## GROUP A

### *Language*

The discussions in Group A centered on the main themes in the papers presented in plenary by Dr Radha Tirvassen and by Dr Jeevendiren Chemen. Having identified issues from main themes for general discussions, the group proceeded with some general observations viz:-

- ◆ The erosion of the Tamil Language was attributable to colonial rule and to a policy of assimilation and integration with the language of the colonial power.
- ◆ Urgent measures have to be taken to reverse this trend and restore the vitality of the language especially among the young.
- ◆ All pragmatic approaches should be adopted. Learning the language through French, creole or other languages or dialects is not a bad thing in itself. This is currently done in Paris and Reunion.

The Group finally came up with eight strategies that could help to enrich the teaching and learning of Tamil. The summary of the main recommendations are:

1. Give due recognition and support to Tamil students, teachers, writers and scholars who excel in any aspect of Tamil Culture and Religion.
2. Encourage the learning of Tamil through the country's vernacular e.g. Creole in Mauritius.
3. Explore teaching methods that will strengthen the learning process.
4. Encourage young and old to participate in cultural activities. Women have an important role to play in the transmission of values.
5. Link the learning of Tamil language with economic considerations. Mastery of the Tamil language would facilitate interaction between businessmen and other professionals in the Tamil Diaspora.
6. Lobby the Broadcasting Organisation (Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation for Mauritius) for increased time slots on radio and TV for Tamil programmes.
7. A request should be made to the Government of Tamil Nadu for quality Tamil films with sub titles to be made available in all countries of the Diaspora.
8. Set up companies in the Diaspora for the development and promotion of radio and TV programmes and for the sale or loans of CDs, DVDs etc....

*(The full text of the recommendations is found at Annex E).*



## GROUP B *Religion*

At the outset, the Group identified the best methodology for sound time management, clarification of issues and disregard of futile ramblings of a semantic order. The Group divided the discussions into three parts, mainly:

- (a) discussion on problems in the practice of religion;
- (b) suggestions for improvements; and
- (c) formulation of clear recommendations/action plans.

The Group found that unlike the situation in Reunion and Seychelles, Tamil Speaking Hindus in Mauritius had witnessed a drop, as shown in the population census of the Government. Conversion was one of the problems identified among the Tamils in Mauritius. Faith in their religion, language and culture has to be strengthened. The Group surveyed the situation in the Seychelles and Malaysia. There was much to learn from the small community of Tamils in the Seychelles. In a very short period of time, they have put up some key structures for religious worship and education. In Malaysia Tamil teaching is done at a very high level by top professionals using Information Technology.

The Group made a number of interesting recommendations, a summary of which is given below.

### **Religious Training**

1. A body of senior priests and prominent members of the Tamil community selected for their proven track record should be set up as an Advisory Body. They will be responsible for the development of Tamil priests for our kovils. This high level body of sages will impart the highest moral values and virtues and other salient features of Tamil Culture. In actual fact, they will be role models not only for priests but for the whole community.

It is desirable that the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation should be encouraged to initiate this reform and the Tamil League may be roped in to give support.

2. Religious education: Religious education will be done under the aegis of the Advisory Body of learned priests. Religious education will cover the temple worship and the meaning of religious ceremonies. Lessons should be simple, to the point and enjoyable. But simplicity should not lead to amateurism. Indeed, lessons should be inspiring with citations from the great spiritual masters and institutions e.g. (Saiva Siddhanta, the Himalayan Academy, Sai Baba, Ramana Maharishi, Divine Life Society, Swami Sivananda, the Ramakrishna Mission etc). Our youth should avail of these opportunities to probe deeply into the teachings of Tamil sages.

3. *Temple Worship Sessions*.: Temple worship should be reorganised with a view to making prayers and other rites and rituals shorter, more enjoyable and indeed more meaningful even to those who do not know the Tamil language. The body of sages already referred to above should monitor the evolution of religious practices in our kovils.

The kovil is a place of choice for Tamils to congregate, to know one and other and exchange views and ideas on Tamil community affairs around the temple and after prayers. The kovil, however, should be understood to be a sanctuary where souls commune and group prayers are directed to the Tamil deities. Young and old, women and men, all unite in their kovil to worship the deities far away from the conundrum of the cities, the violence and vice of the streets.

4. Kovil administrators should act as role models for the Tamil Community. Indeed, every effort should be made to enlist the help of expatriates to help them in their work. The kovil administration should be structured in such a way that they develop the capacity for the promotion of solidarity with the more vulnerable groups of the Tamil Community. This can trigger efforts to provide moral, material and other support to the needy.

*(The full text of the recommendations is found at Annex F).*



**GROUP C**  
**Art, Dance & Music**

This Group reflected on Tamil Culture and its main components:

- ◆ Art
- ◆ Dance
- ◆ Music

It is an acknowledged fact that South India has given birth to the soul inspiring Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam.

Bharatanatyam has had various offshoots and the process does not show sign of fatigue. Carnatic music traces its beginnings from the ancient Pann System which was very popular in the Sangam Period. Religious, zeal and artistic creativity have resulted in innumerable religious hymns.

According to the Group, Tamil artistic treasures lay half hidden and deserved to be uncovered for future generations. There was, therefore, no need to reinvent the wheel although there was no doubt that Culture was not static; It was bound to develop further and adapt itself to the changing world environment. The Group then proceeded to make some nine recommendations, one of which deserves special mention:

- ◆ that a request should be made to the authorities in Tamil Nadu to set up a Department of Overseas Affairs in the Tamil Nadu State Government to facilitate the implementation of the main recommendations of International Conference on Tamil Diaspora.

The summary of the other recommendations are:

1. Every effort should be made to revive Carnatic and Tamil music as this remains the essential underpinnings of Tamil Culture and Philosophy.
2. The proposed World Tamil Secretariat should now be pursued in earnest. A sub-committee should be set up to oversee the promotion and development of Tamil Music and Dance.
3. The Tamil League in association with local institutions of tertiary learning or on its own should organise courses in some aspects of Dravidian Culture, Music, Art and Dance, especially for the benefit of the younger generation. Assistance may be sought from the Indian High Commission to further develop existing courses. A course on Spoken Tamil is indispensable to develop confidence in the learners.
4. Those who are knowledgeable in Music and Dance should be encouraged to contribute to the dissemination of their artistic talents to the community. They should be supported in their networking endeavour within the Tamil Diaspora so that they become aware of each country's contribution to Tamil Culture.

*(The full text of the recommendations is found at Annex G).*



## GROUP D

### *Business & Economic Forum and Empowerment of Tamil Women in Mauritius*

Many of the local participants reflected with nostalgia on the former economic power the Tamil Community wielded in the capital city of Mauritius. It was deplored that the situation had changed beyond recognition. Only a handful had emerged as successful political or business leaders. The Group highlighted some of the causes of this decline. As regards Tamil Women, this was studied against the UN's strategy for women empowerment and participants were unanimously of the view that the proportion of Tamil Women still living in a state of subjugation should be eliminated. Male domination and patriarchal tendencies which still persist must make room for a better balanced society.

The summary of the main recommendations are:

1. Identify the Tamil Women associations and groups and build up an inventory of knowledge, skills and aptitude in order to channel their energies into gainful economic activities.
2. Creation of specialist cells to allow for the identification of opportunities and matching these to fill needs among women entrepreneurs.
3. Creation of decentralised units in targeted localities to ensure that vulnerable groups within the Tamil Community obtain immediate moral, material, financial or other forms of assistance.
4. Empower Tamil priests in our kovils so that they take the lead in the transmission of Tamil values, the teaching of the Tamil language and religion.
5. There should be built a strong forum for the empowerment of women. This is a strategy that has assumed great urgency. So it is imperative that ideas on the matter are further clarified, programmes and projects agreed upon as well.
6. All these recommendations should be incorporated in a document with clear vision, mission, objectives and values.

Many other findings came to light and the report at *Annex H* contains the recommendations in the form of an action plan.

## LINGUISTIC VITALITY IN TAMIL DIASPORA

Dr. Jeevendiren CHEMEN, Senior Lecturer, Tamil Department, MGI

### Introduction

Diaspora is defined as the dispersion of people with common origins, backgrounds and beliefs to various parts of the globe irrespective of the time and conditions in which they have left their motherland. Jewish, African, Indian, Chinese are, just to mention a few, Diasporas that have caught the attention of many researchers from multiple disciplines.

According to Cohen, if among overseas workers, there is evidence of:

1. a strong retention of group ties sustained over an extended period in respect of language, religion and cultural norms;
2. a myth and a strong connection for a homeland;
3. high levels of social exclusion in the destination societies,  
a labour Diaspora can be said to exist.

### Tamil Diaspora

In the last two centuries people from India moved to different parts of the world, forming the third largest Diaspora next to British and Chinese. Indians migrated in different capacities to far-off places such as the Caribbean islands and near by places like Africa. The three broad patterns of Tamil migration can be classified as follows:

1. Migration in 1830s to European colonies mainly as indentured labourers.
2. Migration to industrially developed countries during the post World War II period
3. More recent migration to developed countries as professionals and skilled workers mainly on contract basis.

All the above waves of Tamil migration were prompted by the desire of the people to earn a better living and included a sizable number of Tamil population.

### Tamil Diasporic Countries

Although migration of Tamils to European colonies began earlier than the abolition of slavery, yet it gained momentum only thereafter. Tamils along with other Indians were recruited in large number as indentured labourers, to mainly replace the slaves, to work on sugar, tea, banana, paddy and rubber plantations and mines in those colonies. Free skilled workers who were already present in the colonies before the indentured labourers, were continuously needed to set up the infra structural facilities in those colonies. A good number of Tamil traders also followed the indentured and free workers. Except for the Tamil traders, most of the Indian workers, whether indentured or free, settled down in those colonies after the end of their contract, for one reason or another. Today, the descendants of those Tamil workers are still striving for a better livelihood in the Caribbean Islands such as Martinique, Surinam and Trinidad, and African countries such as Mauritius, South Africa and Reunion Island, and South East Asian Countries such as Malaysia, Fiji and Sri Lanka.



Recent migration of Tamils to wealthier countries did not originate only from India but from other countries mentioned above, where Tamils had settled earlier. The ongoing lasting racial conflict in Sri Lanka has been another main cause that has prompted Tamils to move out not only of Sri Lanka but also of other politically and economically unstable countries to settle down in Australia, Canada, England, France, New Zealand, United State of America. Tamil settlements in these countries along with those mentioned above constitute the Tamil Diaspora. Nagarajan (1994:44) states that 86 percent of Tamils in the world live in India and the remaining of 14 percent are scattered over Tamil Diasporic countries.

The conditions of those emigrated Tamils specially the indentured labourers were initially very deplorable, but gradually improved. Today, Tamil descendants in most of Tamil Diaspora have not only already developed a sense of belonging to their countries, but have also adopted the emigrated country as their homeland. In fact very few among them would like to return to India.

In the process of assimilation, integration and isolation with the other Indian and non-Indian ethnic communities, Tamils have undergone tremendous changes both linguistically and culturally. In some countries Tamils have almost lost their mother tongue, in some others they are in the process of language loss, but in some there is an of the need to revive the language. With the exception of Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, overseas Tamils no longer speak Tamil as their mother tongue. Lack of contact with the main land, acceptance of western culture as superior to their own and enhanced career prospects, inter alia, are the reasons which explain the eventual loss of Tamil language and culture in the Tamil Diaspora.

### Malaysia

In Malaysia, if Tamils shift languages, they will become either Malay or English speakers. There are a number of reasons why English-educated Tamils are in fact switching to English as a dominant language. Marimuttu (1993) claims that the educational system provided to the plantation Tamils does not raise them out of the cultural dead-end they are stuck in, this system, according to Marimuttu, preserves and perpetuates the plantation system in a kind of neocolonial atmosphere. Tamil education therefore perpetuates their isolation.

Only the working class Tamils send their children for education in the above system. Middle class Tamils have always preferred either the English or Malay medium schools found mostly in urban areas. Unlike the Chinese education which extends up to Middle three at the Secondary level, Tamil education in Tamil medium schools extends up to primary level only. According to the Government order, in any school, whether English or Malay medium, the school authority should provide for a teacher to teach Tamil language if there is a minimum of 15 students willing to study it. But the reluctance on the part of the parents to encourage their children to study Tamil language coupled with the school administration often not encouraging Tamil studies have resulted in a situation where many schools do not provide such facilities. Those who are really interested have to make their own private arrangement. Tamil is also being taught at the University of Malaya at undergraduate studies. Besides the teaching of Tamil in the school curriculum there are numerous Ethnic Mother Tongue (EMT) schools run by various associations. We can observe two language strategies employed by the Tamil community in Malaysia. One continues to prefer Tamil schooling; the other abjures Tamil schooling and is economically motivated to prefer Malay and English.

### Singapore

Malay is the national language. Malay, Chinese, English and Tamil are 4 languages can be used by the members of the Parliament, Tamil is the least spoken one (Manickam, 2001:347). According to Sobrielo (1985) Mani (1979) and Gopinathan(1983), Tamils will fail to maintain their mother tongue as they are shifting towards English and other languages. Ramiah(1991) and Kuo(1979)point out the decline in the use of Tamil language by



Tamils themselves in spite of their positive perception towards it. Even for their day to day communication among friends and colleagues, educated Singapore Tamils speak English or shift to it often while communicating in Tamil (personal observation). But, according to Manickam (2001: 353), Tamil, in spite of its low economic status, will survive in Singapore because:

1. it is one of the official languages,
2. it has been used in literary expression since a long time,
3. it is having Government support to maintain it in the curriculum.

Singapore is one of the few countries in the Tamil Diaspora where Tamil teaching and learning of Tamil benefit from the full support of the government. Since 1960 Tamil is being offered as a second compulsory language for the Tamil ethnic group and Indians. Today there are more than 280 Tamil teachers teaching Tamil as a second language in some 120 schools across Singapore. According to Manickam (2001:352) there are around 100000 students in primary and 5000 students at secondary level studying Tamil language. At university level also Tamil is compulsory for the Tamil ethnic group and is being taught in 13 colleges and 2 central government institutions. Even at pre-primary level Tamil has been introduced by the government to compensate the children whose parents do not speak Tamil at home. The study made by Ramiah (1989) on the Tamil language in Singapore reveals that the situation of Tamil language is not that rosy. According to him around 23% of Tamils do not offer Tamil as a subject in the curriculum. Thus, confirming the gradual shift from Tamil to either Malay or Chinese.

## **Fiji**

The most important languages spoken in Fiji are Fijian, Hindustani and English. Even though Tamil is spoken by a few, it is not recognized by the Government. Tamil language has long ago ceased to be the day to day language of the Fijian Tamils. Some of the Tamil population have adopted Hindi as their language, others Fijian. According to Nagarajan (1994), lack of proper Tamil education and competent teachers, imposition of Hindi as a compulsory language for all Indians, the inferiority complex of the Tamils themselves are among the main reasons that have adversely affected the growth of Tamil language in Fiji.

In Fiji Tamil is not being taught in the school curriculum. However, the government has allowed the teaching of the language by socio-cultural associations. According to Nagarajan (1994:64) there are around 19 EMT schools in Fiji islands. Lack of trained teachers and appropriate textbooks based on Fiji are among the main factors responsible for the inefficient teaching and learning of Tamil in Fiji. There are approximately 1600 to 1800 students studying Tamil. The current efforts done by the Tamils to teach the language can be observed as an attempt to revive Tamil language in Fiji.

## **South Africa**

None of the Indian languages have official status. However Bhojpuri/ Hindi, Gujarathi, Telugu, Tamil and Urdu are the Indian languages that are still used in some form or other in South Africa. Regarding the Bhojpuri/ Hindi languages, Mesthrie (1985:165) attributes lack of prestige as one of the main causes for the erosion of Bhojpuri in South Africa. Tamil language is also not being used as the day to day communication language by Tamils in south Africa. Most of the Tamils prefer the learning of English for professional reasons. Inter marriage also encourages use of English in the family. Most of the Tamils speak English at home. However, they still try to maintain Tamil in the cultural and religious spheres. They use roman scripts to transliterate the devotional Tamil songs to be sung in temples and during festivals.



In South Africa Tamil language along with Hindi, Telugu, Gujarati and Urdu was introduced in the school curriculum from standard 2 to 5. Today Tamil language is being taught in about 100 primary schools and around 4 secondary schools. Tamil is not being taught at tertiary level in South Africa. At primary level although Tamil has been examinable as a subject for a number of years, yet it is not taken into consideration for over all pass at the primary level. Tamils show more interest in art and religion than in Tamil language. Well before the introduction of Tamil in the school curriculum it was already being taught in the EMT schools as from 1914 in Durban. This responsibility was undertaken by the Hindu Tamil Institute founded in 1914. Even today it continues to teach Tamil to both children and adults on Saturdays and Sundays.

### **Mauritius**

Tamil, like the other Indian languages, is being taught as from the primary school level. Around 200 offer facilities to learn Tamil language. It is also observed that mostly students of Tamil origin study the language. It has been legislated that as from 2004 performance of the students in Indian languages (Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu and Mandarin) will be taken into consideration for the award of Certificate of Primary Education and for admission in secondary schools. However, yearly around 1200 students take part in Tamil in the Certificate of Primary Education Examination held at the end of Standard Six.

At secondary school level, about 30 secondary schools offer Tamil language up to School Certificate. Mahatma Gandhi Institute has under its aegis five secondary schools where there are opportunities to teach Tamil language up to at least School Certificate level. There are around 25 teachers involved in the teaching of the subject in the secondary schools. Most of them are called upon to work in two or more schools due to scarcity of teachers and low number of hours of teaching in most of the schools.

At secondary school level, most students study the language up to form three, and drop it at Form Four due to lack of interest, absence of the subject in the choice offered, lack of motivation, lack of proper textbooks, unavailability of teachers and so on.

**721 students were thus studying Tamil at secondary level in 2002. Around 60% of the students drop the subject in Form four. Less than 90 students take part in the School Certificate examination yearly.**

The number of students studying Tamil at tertiary level is even lower. It is the Mahatma Gandhi Institute that caters for the teaching of Indian languages at tertiary level in Mauritius. In 2000 ten students completed their B.A Tamil Honours with Education at Mahatma Gandhi Institute. Another five students enrolled for the above course and fifteen students are at present studying Tamil at Diploma level. Mahatma Gandhi Institute is also responsible for the training of teachers to be posted in primary schools. Introduction of Tamil at tertiary level is noteworthy because Mauritius is one of the very few countries offering such possibilities. Even countries like Singapore and Malaysia where Tamil is present much more in the day to day communication do not provide a university degree exclusively in Tamil studies and most of the students have to go Tamil Nadu for such studies.

Today there are 63 registered EMT schools across the country, in which some 108 teachers are involved in the teaching of the language. More than 3300 students attend the Tamil classes after school hours on weekdays and sometimes on Saturdays. Many of the EMT schools are conducted on the temple premises and others are run in government schools. The State encourages such extra teaching outside the curriculum not only by providing school infrastructure to conduct the classes and but also by remunerating the teachers in such schools. The government also instituted a supervisory system to look into the smooth running of these schools. Unfortunately this supervision is not properly structured and conducted with a view to yielding a better output from these schools.



Promotion of Tamil language has been the preoccupation of many Tamil associations in Mauritius. Associations such as Mauritius Hindu Maha Jana Sangham, Mauritius Hindu Benevolent Society and Tamil League, whose main objectives are promotion of culture and religion also show some of interest in the development of Tamil language. Of the above associations Hindu Maha Jana Sangham and Hindu Benevolent society run Tamil classes for the benefit of the Tamil pupils living in the area.

### **Reunion**

French is of course the official language of Reunion Island and Creole the national language spoken by almost all the people. Tamils of this land have almost lost the Tamil language. Very few can write, read and speak Tamil. However the new generation is getting opportunity to learn it in some of the schools. Only a handful of old people can still speak the language.

In Reunion Island Tamil teaching and learning is quite a recent phenomenon. In fact Sangelee from Mauritius was the first Tamil teacher in Reunion in 1982. In the formal curriculum, Tamil language is an optional subject at primary, secondary and there are also many Tamil associations which are involved in the teaching of the language outside the formal curriculum. These EMT schools also combine Indian dance and music along with Tamil.

### **Caribbean Islands**

In none of the Caribbean islands Tamil language is being spoken by Tamils. They have completely lost the language. In Guyana generally Indians use always English language as their language of communication, education medium, and language of religion. Formerly Tamil only was used in the Tamil temples, but now both Hindi and English are also being used. Very few still retain Tamil as the medium of prayers, but here also English translation is being offered. Guyana is another example like Fiji where Tamils have already shifted to Hindi even as the language of religion. In Guadeloupe also Tamils have almost lost Tamil language and adopted French as their day to day language. In Martinique except for a few Tamil phrases and words which are mostly used as magical syllables, Tamil language is no longer present in the repertoire of the people. Most of the Tamils have adopted the local language as their day to day language of communication.

### **Developed Countries**

The loss of Tamil language in European and other developed countries where Tamils have settled has been very fast. Most of the second generation of the Tamil population settled in those countries cannot speak Tamil language. According to Neethivanan, the fact that almost all the Tamils who migrated to U.S.A have a high proficiency in English they do not feel the necessity of maintaining Tamil as their mother tongue. Even many 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Tamils in U.S.A argue that their home land is America and not India (Neethivanan).

Tamils in Australia believe strongly that Knowledge of their mother tongue is the constant and vital ingredient in the preservation of their identity and culture, language learning. Its retention and continual practice are rated highly. The Sri Lankan and Indian Tamil communities have established weekend EMT schools to teach Tamil to their children. Tamils being taught in around 32 EMT schools in Australia, run by Sri Lankan and Indian Tamil communities. However, Tamil has not yet found its place in the school curriculum. But interestingly Tamil can be offered as a subject at Higher School Certificate Examination.

According to Nagarajan there are a total of 23 organisations promoting the cause of Tamil language in Great Britain. EMT Tamil classes are held on Saturdays and Sundays at public places. There is also an association to coordinate the schools. Some of the schools give more importance to fine arts than Tamil language. As far as Tamil education in Canada is concerned,



Nagarajan states that a Tamil college, a part of world Tamil Organization, is teaching Tamil culture, music, dance and musical instruments to a very much interested number of students. 50 part time Tamil teachers are working in this college. One can easily observe the efforts put in by the Tamils of Canada to maintain their language and culture. Parents send their children to dance and to learn musical instruments such as violin, veena, mirdangam and flute.

America is one among the most developed countries where there exist opportunities for higher education and research in Tamil studies at university level. University of Pensilvania is the first university to introduce research in Tamil in 1950. University of Chicago which is known as one among the best place for Tamil research in America. The University of California offers opportunities not only to study Tamil but also folklore, music, drama and other subjects related to Tamil studies. Washington University, Texas University, Michigan University, also provide opportunities for the teaching of Tamil language and culture

## Conclusion

No doubt there is a sociological dimension to the linguistic scenario in the Tamil Diaspora. Socio-linguistically language loss and maintenance is a process - the time of loss varies from country to country due to various factors. The Tamil Linguistic Diaspora can be classified as follows:

1. Tamil linguistic Diaspora with language maintenance (Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka)
2. Tamil Linguistic Diaspora with Tamil Language existence in Curriculum only (Mauritius, South Africa and Reunion)
3. Tamil linguistic Diaspora with language loss (Caribbean Islands, Fiji and developed countries)

Except for countries like Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia, Tamil language is no longer the mother tongue of Tamils in the Tamil Diaspora. Tamils are either adopting the local language, or another Indian ethnic language, or simply shifting to a European language. Teaching and learning of Tamil language is present in almost all the Tamil Diasporic countries. In a few countries it is included in the formal education curriculum with the support of the respective governments, whereas in other countries it is mostly taken care by socio-cultural associations. Except for South East Asian countries, Tamil language is almost inexistent in the written media and very negligible in the audio-visual media. Tamil associations in the Tamil Diaspora have a crucial role in the maintenance of the Tamil language and religion. Inter-ethnic marriage is also responsible for the language and cultural loss and assimilation of Tamils. Regarding the Tamil language situation in both Malaysia and Singapore Fishman (1996) states that Tamil language may survive in these two countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perhaps in isolated rural areas or as the language of marginalized underclass living in urban areas.

**Working Group A: LANGUAGE**

Chairperson : Dr Seeven Tiroumalechetty  
 Rapporteur : Paramaseeven Veeraragoo

Dr Chemmen made a presentation on "*Linguistic vitality in the Tamil Diaspora*".

**Four main analyses were put forward viz:-**

- (1) The reasons underpinning the Diaspora are mostly economic.
- (2) The economic power of the colonial master imposed its language on the migrants to the detriment of the Tamil language.
- (3) The shifting from the mother tongue to other languages was due to assimilation and integration.
- (4) The more distant a country is from Tamil Nadu, country of origin of the tamils, the greater is the loss of the language.

**General Observations**

- (1) Sri Lanka has witnessed two waves of immigration: - One dating to 2000 years back and the other in the 1830's. There are specificities attached to each one of them.
- (2) In Malaysia 150,000 students are studying in Tamil language medium at primary school level. As from 2004 Tamil is taught in all the primary schools as a foreign language.
- (3) The language may be learnt not for the language per se but for preserving the ethnic identity.
  - ◆ It is better to use the advantages and resources already available in the Diaspora to promote the language; e.g. learning Tamil through the French language already being done in Paris.
  - ◆ Learning the language and the desire to keep it alive emanates from a strong sense of loyalty and deep emotional feelings.

**Strategies**

- (1) Give due recognition to Tamil students, scholars, teachers, writers etc. who show excellence in their respective fields.
- (2) Get young adults involved in cultural activities
- (3) Learn Tamil through a known medium e.g. creole for Mauritius.
- (4) Adopt creative and innovative methodologies for the studying and teaching the language.
- (5) Target adult learning more specifically the womenfolk.
- (6) Link the study of the language with economic ends in view.
- (7) Request for increased time slots for Tamil programmes on radio and TV.
- (8) Request the Government of Tamil Nadu to sponsor quality films to be screened in the Diaspora with sub-titles.
- (9) Set up companies in the Diaspora with a view to have radio animated programmes, sale and loan of CDs, DVDs.



**Working Group B: RELIGION**

*Chairman* : *Dr C. M. Pillay*

*Rapporteurs* : *Swami Umapathi and Chandra Rangasamy*

**Guiding Principles**

The Chairman in his welcoming remarks, stated that the group would try to work towards the objectives set out by the Tamil League and the Plenary Morning Session Presidents, namely to come up with solutions and proposals so that the final recommendations would hopefully constitute an Action Plan.

The group would get full latitude during the first half to mention and discuss problems concerning religion; the second half would deal with solutions for the problems identified in the first half. The group therefore had to use its time productively. What was not productive was the age-old discussion on whether we were Tamil Hindus or Tamil Tamils, the biggest time-waster in our community's history.

No one would dream of fighting over whether a glass was half empty or half-full; or whether a Catholic was Catholic or Christian by religion. It did not matter anyway as there was one Universal God, call Him what you like.

**Identification of Problems**

The biggest danger, by far, was conversion to non-Hindu religions. From the census of 1972 to that of 2000, Tamil speaking-Hindus had dropped in proportion as well as in absolute numbers and Hindus as a whole had dropped to about 49% of the population. It was noted that in Reunion and Seychelles Hinduism was in fact advancing, unlike the situation in Mauritius.

**Reasons Identified for Conversion**

1. Our priests do not explain our religion during worship. If they do, the explanations are not consistent or logical, therefore, unlikely to satisfy young inquiring, and educated minds.
2. Considering a Catholic priest undergoes about 7 years training, our priests are amateurish and cannot grasp the fundamental texts or may not even have read our sacred books.
3. Our children are often asked by their peers questions in a disparaging way about our Gods e.g. the elephant-faced one; inability to answer leads to an inferiority complex and eventually a prey to conversion.
4. Our worship sessions are too long; and do not encourage a process of concentration.  
Lectures and prayer sessions should not last for more than an hour. It is a common sight to see children asleep and men gossiping during worship.
5. Our religion is not only the oldest, but also the richest and most tolerant. This is not inculcated in our devotees as there are divisions and dissensions at all levels: Tamil v/s Sanscrit, Tamil v/s Hindu, Brahmin v/s non-Brahmin, local v/s overseas priests etc... While the group does not believe that the priesthood should be restricted to a particular caste, it does recognise the much longer training and deeper knowledge of the overseas priests.
6. The scarcity of missionaries as opposed to priests was deplored. The Chinmaya Mission, Ramana Maharishi Ashram, Ramakrishna Mission and Divine Life Society were relatively ignored and underutilised by our devotees.



## Proposed Solutions

### *Religious Training*

A body of our Senior Priests and prominent members of the Tamil Community selected for their deep knowledge of religion and high moral values should be set up as an Advisory Body to lay down standards for religious training and practice. Swami Umapathi volunteered to coordinate such a body if necessary. The purpose is to focuss on the importance of training to enable future priests to be better equipped in their religious mission..

Such a body should ideally be set up by the Mauritius Federation of Tamil Temples. The Tamil League should be prepared to play a facilitating role.

### *Religious Education*

The result of a good religious education is a tolerant open mind, ready to serve fellow-beings resist attempts at conversion. We should achieve and monitor success on these counts.

Our Religious Education will be promoted by the above-mentioned body, with regards to temple worship and its explanation. For the philosophy of our Religion, we have to make use of the teachings of the Great Spiritual Masters, (Saiva Siddhanta and the Himalayan Academy, Sai Baba, Ramana Maharishi, Divine Life Society and Swami Sivananda, Ramakrishna Mission etc.) some of whose teachings are available locally and also through publications and the Internet. Our educated youth will have all the answers to their questions if they read these books and publications. An illustrated brochure from the Himalayan Academy on: "**Ten Questions People ask about Hinduism and Ten Terrific Answers**" was circulated to the group and agreed to be very user-friendly.

### *Temple Worship Sessions*

These should not be too long. The Advisory Body should try to reconcile religious tradition with modern realities when advising on the duration of prayer sessions. Who does not adapt perishes.

Explanations given should be logical and consistent.

### *The Seychelles experience*

The Temple caters for the broader social needs of the devotees and takes part in their sorrows and problems. The Seychelles where the promotion of Hinduism is on the rise, may inspire Mauritius. Out of a population of 80 000, 5 000 are Hindus; of these 3 000 are Tamils. They make use of the advice and support of the Indian expatriates posted in Seychelles. The temple administrators of the main religious body, the Seychelles Hindu Kovils Sangham act as role models for the community by virtue of their own educational and moral standards. They help with educational needs of the young, offer scholarships when necessary and also moral and financial support to members in special need.

In Malaysia, the Tamil Teachers are highly qualified and use the Internet for the teaching of Tamil.

In Conclusion the two important markers of our identity, RELIGION AND LANGUAGE are both on the decline and look fragile unless strong remedial action is taken. The root causes in both cases have much in common; so do the solutions.

Hopefully this Conference will dispel complacency in the relevant quarters. Let every delegate go back to his country and announce that the Tamil League Conference has triggered action which will eventually pull us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



**Report from Group C: ARTS, DANCE AND MUSIC**

*Co-Chairpersons* : *Mrs Kovila Veeraragoo*  
*Mr Venkatraman Sethuraman*

*Rapporteur* : *Miss Megalei Tiroumalechetty*

**Culture, Arts, Music and Dance**

Music and Dance form an integral part of Tamil culture. South India has given birth to the highly appreciated Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam. In the course of time, other Tamil indigenous forms of dances have emerged. As far as music is concerned, the ancient Pann system, very popular during the Sangam period, has been the forebear of Carnatic Music. The religious movement has created situations where innumerable religious hymns were produced. The Thevaram, Tiruvaasagam, Divyaprabandam and Tiruppugazh have all added new dimension to our existing music. The Tamil Diaspora need not reinvent the wheel in as far music and dance are concerned. However, it will go along way if it can adapt what exists in our repertoire to the present need of the diasporic countries.

With view to evolving an action plan for Tamil culture in the Diaspora, the following points have been discussed:

- In some diasporic countries Hindustani music is given more prominence. Carnatic and Tamil music are made to lag behind. The situation needs to be changed.
- Within the diasporic World Tamil Secretariat, there is a need to have a sub committee responsible for the promotion and development of Tamil music and dance.
- A variety of courses be organised to cater to the different taste of our community and others. This will go a long way in the promotion of Tamil music and dance, especially with the younger generation. Assistance from Indian High Commission to improve the existing courses and include a course on spoken Tamil so as to be able to
  - have an effective communication with our brothers and sisters in Tamil Nadu
  - give a small speech in Tamil
  - appreciate Carnatic/Tamil music
 (*Dr Subramanyam has offered to prepare such a program*)
- Those knowledgeable in music and dance could popularise our great works of arts and literature e.g. sillapadigaram and Tirukkural. The children should be exposed to such great works in a pleasurable and enjoyable manner in the school curriculum.
- Exploiting the media towards promotion of Tamil music and dance need to be looked into. The government/socio-cultural associations/Diasporic Secretariat has to liase with Chennai government for implementation of above.
- All sites connected in some way or the other with our heritage in the diasporic countries need to be preserved and popuralised.
- Tamil culture must go beyond the religious boundaries so that Tamil emerges stronger.
- A networking of diasporic cultural group to be established through exchanges between the diasporic countries with the Motherland.
- The creation of a Department Overseas Affairs in Tamil Nadu will help implementing the above recommendations.

**Report From Group D : BUSINESS & ECONOMIC FORUM AND EMPOWERMENT OF TAMIL WOMEN IN MAURITIUS**

*Chairperson : Mrs Yanembaal Moorghen*

*Rapporteur : Mrs Velamah Chathapermal-Nair*

**Business and Economic Forum**

The population of Mauritius is around 1.2 Million (1,256,730) consisting of 621,000 males and 635,429 females. The Tamil population represents 6.1 % of the population with 35,354 males and 36,123 females. No further disaggregation of data is available officially.

The participants coming from Reunion Island, Seychelles and Mauritius provided an interesting forum to reflect on the times in the 50's when the Tamils in Mauritius were the leaders in business and commerce. However, although there was no data to substantiate such statement, it was sad to note that now only a handful of Tamil leaders still emerge in the economic and business sector. There was consensus regarding factors which contributed to the impoverishment of Tamils in general:

- Lack of solidarity among the tamilians; those who have achieved a position in whatever field tend to ignore poorer tamilians unlike other communities;
- Ignorance of opportunities and possibilities available in the Business Sector in the country;
- Lack of entrepreneurial spirit;
- Poverty;
- Limited role of the Tamil Chamber of Commerce.

The members proposed a series of initiatives to help Tamil men and women to become more active in the business field. However, there was the need to categorise people to participate actively in the business sector at different levels. Proposals made are in respect of the following:

- Need to set out a database with the profile of men and women willing to do business. The different components of the database e.g. name, address, family, status, employment etc should be as comprehensive as possible to facilitate networking and communication;
- Establishment of database of different types of businesses. Tamils already in the business sector as may be reflected in the Tamil Chamber of Commerce should be able to help, network, partner with others not only at local levels but also with Tamils from other countries to facilitate trade and expertise;
- Creation of an economic forum to facilitate trade, which can be virtual as well through the creation of a new website or existing one such as that of the Tamil League;
- Sensitisation of the targeted group of Tamils on the different opportunities available in Mauritius through the Empowerment Fund to start a business;
- Setting up of Cooperatives among groups of people having similar preferences;
- A more active role of the Tamil Chamber of Commerce;



- Reinforcement of the solidarity among the Tamil Community.

### **Empowerment of Women**

According to the United Nations, empowerment of women has five components namely:

- ◆ women's sense of self-worth;
- ◆ their right to have and to determine choices;
- ◆ their right to have access to opportunities and resources;
- ◆ their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside their home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change including the cultural domain to create a more just and social and economic order nationally and internationally.

Based on the above definition, discussions focused on the state of women in Mauritius, Reunion and Seychelles particularly Tamil women, in different roles both in the public and private spheres, opportunities and challenges that we need to address in order to develop a strategy to empower Tamil Women.

### **Challenges/problems**

Participants were unanimous to agree that while some women have achieved a high position and can participate in the decision-making process, other women are still being exploited both at work and at home and in the community. It is a fact that women cannot think of being recognised when, as a human being, their basic needs are not met. They are still subjected to domestic violence and other sexual abuse, are being underpaid at work, have no recognition for household chores and are being looked down by their own husbands, children, and employers.

There was consensus that several actions should be taken to empower women namely:

- ◆ Household: Women should be able to participate in the decision-making process, have control over their household income and household decisions, have control over their body and sexuality and freedom to choose motherhood and contraception methods;
- ◆ Religious/cultural/societal: Women should avoid traditional practice that harm them and deprive them of their universally recognised rights, such as gender-based violence, forced early marriage;
- ◆ Legal: Women should maximise on employment opportunities and equal rights to a job;
- ◆ Education: Women should seize opportunities for education and training for those without schooling and seek access to technical, vocational and other life-learning education; and
- ◆ Political: Free participation of women in the political field at all levels.

### **Opportunities**

Women should seize the numerous opportunities in view of meeting the challenges in today's environment.

- Use of media as a powerful tool for advocacy
- Use of IT and ICT
- International instruments to provide women's rights in line with ratified conventions

- Sharing of women's issues through networking
- Legal framework
- Regional networking
- Globalisation movement and the right of women to movement of advocacy and lobby so as to articulate specific concern relating to women e.g. abortion and domestic violence

▪ **Economic: Economic power and power over economic resources**

Recommendations

- Identify the 36,123 women and classify in different groups so as to meet their targeted needs in a database (directory);
- Creation of specialised cells depending on their interest and occupation to determine their needs;
- Creation of decentralised units in targeted regions to provide immediate financial and other assistance to women in case of need and other economic reason;
- Creation of a list of resource persons to provide training, sensitisation and mentoring depending on the needs to be determined to different groups of the Tamil population;
- Active role of the Priests in Temple and other Temples Federations in transmitting norms, values, history of the Tamil Culture;
- Unity of forum to best advocate empowerment of Tamil women;
- Identification of opportunities;
- Review of existing structures and organisations for better service to Tamil women – clear mandate and time frame;
- Define vision and objectives with an action plan; and
- Network with other Tamil Women in the region having common interest.

**Implementation Strategy**

- (a) Setting up of a steering Committee in view of elaborating an action plan with set frame.
- (b) Sub-committees in view of implementing the special targeted clinics.
- (c) Decentralised cells in the different regions for immediate and concrete actions.



## PART VII

### FINAL OBSERVATIONS

In this chapter we shall attempt to encapsulate the unsubstantial from the general atmosphere which prevailed during the Conference and the various exchanges between the delegates from the various countries.

One can hardly describe the conviviality that spontaneously emerged after the inaugural speeches. The President of the Organising Committee did a splendid job when he surveyed the Tamil Diaspora in their respective geographical regions and drew attention to the upsurge of interest in Tamil Culture generally in the islands of the Indian Ocean. The region would draw inspiration from what was being done in India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. The Deputy Prime Minister, through his supportive remarks and his holistic approach to the study of language, religion and culture gave a further boost to the participants. Morale was very high all through the conference. This facilitated the interaction at plenary and in the groups. Participants felt no inhibition at expressing their dreams at what the future should be. Indeed, less time was spent on weaknesses than on strengths and the way ahead. This, however, did not prevent a few walking down memory lane and expressing nostalgic thoughts about past wealth and glory.

A strong resurgence of Tamil brotherhood inspired the closing part of the Conference.

A number of publications were exchanged. Votes of thanks to the Tamil League were expressed by the various delegates viz:

1. "The Development Dilemmas of Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka" by L. Vijayanathan – a FCT publication, 2007; and
2. Copies of the monthly "Magazine de Tamil Sangam" of Reunion Island.
3. Copies of the Tamil League magazine on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations

Mementos were presented to the Representatives of the various countries by members of the Tamil League Executive Committee.

A special word of thanks was conveyed to Mr Retnon Payendee for his support and encouragement to all the activities of the Tamil League. The participants unanimously congratulated him, the Chairman and the Secretary of the Organising Committee and all those who, in one way or another, had contributed to the holding of the Conference.

***It is now time for action  
So long then, until the next Conference***

July 26, 2007







