

# **CULTURE AND HERITAGE OF THE TAMILS**

## **AND MAINTAINING THE TAMIL IDENTITY IN THE UK AND IN THE WEST**



***Dr Siva Thiagarajah***



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By

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## PREFACE

The Tamils of Sri Lanka has a long and distinguished history and heritage for over two and a half millennia as confirmed by the recent archaeological excavations and epigraphic discoveries at Kantarodai, Jaffna Fort, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and the Vanni regions. But after Sri Lanka gained independence from the British, and following the hegemony of one ethnic group over the others, with the intent of making it a Sinhala Buddhist state, led to the civil war between 1983 and 2009 costing an estimated 200,000 lives. This conflict had made millions of Tamils to flee the country to all over world, in some instances to save their lives, and in others to provide a better future for their families, children and children's children.

At present, there are more than 300,000 Tamils of Sri Lankan origin living in the United Kingdom. Another 20,000 Tamils of Indian and Malaysian origin have made this country their home. About 200,000 Tamils live in the greater London area concentrated mostly in East Ham, Ilford, Harrow, Edgware, Kingston (New Malden), Tooting, South Wimbledon, Wandsworth and other areas. All these people speak the Tamil language at home and share the same heritage.

Among the Tamils of Sri Lankan origin, there are 16 Borough Councillors (2016 tally), 20,000 Tamils work in high-grade posts as professors, engineers, accountants, information-technologists, lawyers, legal workers and nurses. A staggering number of 6,000 doctors work in the National Health Service. Another 15,000 Tamils run their own businesses – all contributing to the economy and welfare of this country.

Most of the youngsters of Sri Lankan Tamil parents belonging to the second and third generation have never visited Sri Lanka, and are unaware of the two thousand five hundred-years-old heritage of the Tamils. These younger generation Tamils have permanently settled in the UK contributing in an enormous way to the economy and health services of this country. Several younger Tamil children take effort to study the Tamil language, Tamil Culture and Arts in the community organised schools. Some children do have an inferior notion about learning and speaking Tamil. One of the purposes of this booklet is to induce the parents to infuse their children from a younger age, the antiquity of the Tamil language and their esteemed culture, and for them to be proud to be a Tamil.

This monograph begins by defining Tamil culture and heritage in all its ramifications, the traditional views about culture and its modern interpretations. The middle part of the paper is aimed at parents, teachers and others, for their understanding about our younger generation being exposed to the cultural diversity prevalent in the host countries and guiding our children about growing up in a multicultural society. The last part of the paper looks at the ways and means of promoting Tamil Culture in the U.K. and in the west in the context of growing-up in a multicultural society. As this is a short work only the bare essentials of Tamil culture, history and our way forward are mentioned.

If culture is the distilled essence of the way of life of a people, then, in the case of the Tamil people, the distillation process has covered a time span of more than two thousand years. And, today, the Tamil people living in many lands and across distant seas acquire strength from the richness of their own cultural heritage, not only because that culture has something to do with their own roots and their way of life but also because as the Czech Professor Dr. Kamil V. Zvelebil pointed half-a-century ago, that they believe that their culture has a significant contribution to make to this world, for it to be a better place.

This monograph was first written in 2018 at the request of Mr Varadakumar, director of the Tamil Information Centre, Kingston-upon-Thames and issued by him as a desk-top publication. This is a revised version of that monograph. I am thankful to Mr Joseph Vilvaraj for his constructive comments and pointing out some defects of the earlier edition, which I have amended in this revised version.

This monograph is written exclusively for the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora – parents, teachers, guardians, schools and other interested organisations to provide some guidance as to how to propagate our culture and heritage among our younger generation, and for its future preservation in the UK and in the west.

In 1972 Ceylon was re-named as Sri Lanka. When referring to earlier times, I have used its earlier name Lanka in this book to denote that country.

**– Siva Thiagarajah**

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. TAMIL ETHNIC IDENTITY

#### SRI LANKAN / EELAM TAMILS -

The Tamils of Sri Lanka forms a distinct 'ethnic' group. Ethnicity is a social attribute and not a physical one. A convenient definition of the *ethnos*, the ethnic group, accepted by historians and archaeologists, provided by the Cambridge University archaeologist Colin Renfrew (Renfrew 1996:181) is as follows:

*A firm aggregate of people, historically established in a given territory, possessing in common relatively stable peculiarities of language and culture, and also recognising their unity and difference from other similar formations (self-awareness) and expressing this in a self-appointed name (ehonym).*

From the above definition the following factors are relevant to the notion of ethnicity.

1. Shared territory or land.
2. Common descent or 'blood' (A collection of specific genetic groups)
3. A Common Language
4. Community of Customs and Traditions or Culture
5. Community of Beliefs or religion.
6. Self-awareness or Self-identity
7. A name (ehonym: *Sri Lankan Tamils / Eelam Tamils*) to express the identity of the group.

In several countries the people are identified from the name of the country where they live in, the people living there and the language they speak. The order is 1. the land, 2. the people and then 3. the language. e.g. Greece, Greeks and the Greek language. But the Tamils from the early Sangam days identified them and the land where they lived in from the **Tamil language** they spoke. *'The good land between Venkata Hills in the north and the Cape Kumari in the south where Tamil is being spoken'* is described as their country in *Tolkappiyam*.

However, the identity of the *Eelam Tamils* is slightly different to the South Indian Tamil identity. Although the prime factor which identifies the Tamils as Tamils is their language there are differences in the social stratification, family relationships and life values.



Among the South Indian Tamils, the caste system still plays a dominant role with the 'Brahmins' dominating as high castes, while the very low castes labelled as 'untouchables'. Among the Sri Lankan Tamils, there was only a class system based on labour; and this did not play a dominant hierarchical role.

The separation by the sea, an economy maintained through Oceanic trade and farming, a caste system not dominated by the Brahmins and formed on a different labour-based system, a dialect resembling the Sangam Cen-Tamil unpolluted by the other Indian languages, the elevated social status given to some of those involved in different trades identifies the Eelam Tamils as separate from their South Indian counterpart.

The discriminatory policies adopted by various Sri Lankan governments against the Tamils and the recent civil war has disrupted the very fabric of Sri Lankan Tamil identity and culture.

## **2. THE TAMIL CULTURAL IDENTITY**

### **(A). TRADITIONAL VIEWS ABOUT CULTURE**

#### **Definitions of Culture:**

These are some of the definitions of culture of an ethnic group provided by scholars over the centuries. It includes a broad category of characteristics of the group.

Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behaviour; that is – the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted – a behaviour cultivated through social learning.

A culture is a way of life of a group of people – the behaviours, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, sometimes without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action.

Culture is symbolic communication. Some of its symbols include a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives. The meanings of the symbols are learned and deliberately perpetuated in a society through its institutions.

Culture is the sum of total of the learned behaviour of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation. It is this collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

Based on the above definitions the traditional views about culture can be classified under the following headings:

## **SOCIAL ORGANISATION**

### **Community Living**

Community living began with the introduction of agriculture, when the earlier hunter-gatherer population settled in huts/cottages near their farmland, leading to the formation of early villages. They began to rely on each other for specific skills known to some among them, leading to specialization of these skills and the subsequent division of labour.

### **Classification of Society**

*- Division of Labour, Class, Laws and Customs.*

### **Social Customs**

*- Dowry system, Wedding Ceremony, Age-attaining Ceremony.*

### **Land Laws:**

#### **Thesavalamai Laws**

The Thesavalamai laws, which is still a part of the legal system, applies to the Tamils of the Northern Province. *Muthusomis* the ancestral property of the husband; *Seethanomis* the property given to the bride on her marriage as dowry; and *Theddamis* the property acquired by a husband and wife after their marriage. These three properties cannot be combined, and each considered as separate entities. When dividing parental property all *Muthusom* was inherited by the sons, and all *Seethanom* of the mother by the daughters. *Theddamor* acquired property was considered common to all children.

## LANGUAGE

### *Tamil - the dialects / the language / the script*

The Tamil language spoken in Lanka evolved from the Greater Family of Dravidian languages spoken by the people of West Asia (Sumer, Elam, parts of Persia) and South Asia (Mehrgarh, Indus Valley) since ten thousand years ago. Modern day population genetics and DNA studies attest to this fact and indicate the passage and spread of this language family into India along the spread of agriculture. This dialect would have come to Lanka with the arrival of Megalithic Culture around 1200 BCE.

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Modern rounded script 'Vaddezhuttu' of the Tamil Language

According to modern linguistic studies, Tamil evolved from proto-South Dravidian around 1500 BCE (Kamil Zvelebil 2003: 698). Tamil Brahmi writing found in potsherds obtained from Adichanallur (500 BCE), Porunthal (600 BCE), and Anuradhapura (700-500 BCE) give an average date of around 500 BCE for the commencement of Tamil Brahmi writing. (Deraniyagala, S.U. 1992; Rajan, K. 2015: 404). These dates precede the Asoka Brahmi by more than 250 years.

In Lanka Tamil Brahmi writing dated between 500-200 BCE has been found in seals, coins and potsherds discovered from north to south at Kantarodai, Anaikoddai, Poonakari, Anuradhapura, Akurugoda and Tissamaharama.

## **INSTITUTIONS**

*Family*

*Social Institutions*

*Educational Institutions*

*Marriage*

*Religious Institutions*

*Literary Institutions*

The Tamils became exposed to western influence under the British rule (1796-1948). Freedom of worship and expression, the rule of law and a general advancement in education were the hallmarks of British colonial rule. It provided for the regeneration of Tamil society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An unprecedented progress in general and higher education, the revival of Saivism and the Tamil renaissance were the principal developments. An exposure to western influences had provided the impetus for the flow of modern ideas chiefly through the activities of the Protestant missionaries from England and America. The work of Americans was exclusively confined to the Jaffna Peninsula and the neighbouring islands (Pathmanathan, S. 2017: 72).

The Wesleyans and Anglicans built schools in the Peninsula. Evangelical enterprise in the Eastern Province became a monopoly of the Wesleyans. The missionaries embarked on a programme of establishing primary and secondary schools. In 1823 the American missionaries established the Batticotta Seminary, which was deemed to have attained the standard of some European universities. Greek and Latin, Tamil and Sanskrit, Natural and Physical sciences, Christianity and Hinduism, English Literature and Composition were the fields of study. Another unique institution was the Medical College established by Dr Samuel Fiske Green at Manipay, which was the first one of its kind in the whole island. Because of these developments the Tamils became the foremost community in education (Pathmanathan, S. 2017: 72)

The following is a passage from the Illustrated London News Supplement, April 25, 1863: *“The flower of the Tamil race is perhaps to be found in the north of Ceylon. Here undoubtedly the purest Tamil is spoken in the present day; and since Madura, in the Madras Presidency ceased to be a seat of learning under the repeated aggressions from the barbaric hordes of Hyder Ali and Tippoo Sahib, Jaffna the capital of the north Ceylon, has become the focus of the Tamil savants. Here Oriental learning yet flourishes side by side with Occidental seminaries and colleges. There are few places in the East where one could find a community of men as orderly, intelligent and industrious as the Tamils of Jaffna”.*



Public Library, Jaffna.

## The Wedding Ceremony

Among the affluent Tamils weddings are conducted on a grand scale at great expense. In earlier days weddings were conducted at the homes of the brides with rituals performed by the Brahmin priest in front of invited guests, relatives and friends. The couple sits in a cross-legged manner on a lavishly decorated arched pavilion. The bride wears a silk saree with elaborate embroidery and an abundance of golden jewellery, which is part of her dowry. The bride-groom too wears expensive silk garments and a turban. The tying of the golden *Thali* around the neck of the bride is the culmination of the ceremony. This is followed by feasting, music and festivity.



Tying of *Thali* at a Hindu Tamil Wedding.

### **The Age-attaining Ceremony**

A custom peculiar to the Tamils of Lanka is the post-puberty ceremony conducted after a girl attained age. The girl is adorned with expensive dress and jewellery and the ceremony is conducted in front of invited guests. Nowadays some of the educated girls in the west scorns this custom of celebrating their menstrual onset – a normal physiological process – as of very poor taste and refuses to be subjected to this ceremony.



Age attaining ceremony



## RELIGION / COMMUNITY BELIEFS

*Religious Culture - Hindu Temples, Churches, Mosques, Buddhist Shrines*

*Religious Ceremonies – Navarathri / Christmas / Ramadan etc.*

*Community Ceremonies – Thai Pongal/ New Year / Deepavali Festivals -*



A Hindu Temple.



A Village Church



Islamic Mosque in East London



Buddhist Temple at Wimbledon

Majority of the Tamil speaking population of modern Sri Lanka (Eelam) are Hindus. Several of the ancient Hindu temples of Lanka were believed to be built by the Nagas, who were speakers of the Tamil language. When Buddhism was introduced to Lanka during the third century BCE several Tamils adhered to this religion. During the seventh century, with the popular rising of the Bakthi cult in Tamil-Nadu and the persecution of Jains and Buddhists, several Tamil speaking people who followed the Buddhist faith migrated to Lanka. After the Pandya and particularly Chola invasions of Lanka, Hinduism was actively propagated. During the medieval period when religious fanaticism dominated

the language, the Tamil Buddhists of the north migrated to southern Lanka and over the years became Sinhalese speakers.



Girls in a school in Jaffna preparing to conduct Saraswathi Pooja - a Hindu Ceremony.  
(Photo Courtesy: S. Thevarajan)

The Arab traders who came to Lanka over several centuries since the Common Era, settled along the coastal regions, married the Tamil women and their descendants became part of the Muslim population. Apart from that there were migrations of Muslims from Kerala as well adding to their population. After the seventh century they became followers of the Islam religion. Since the days of the Jaffna Kingdom, the Muslims demarcated themselves as a separate ethnic community.

Christianity was introduced in India following the arrival of Thomas the Apostle's arrival in Kerala in 72 AD. Because of its close geographical and commercial ties with Lanka, it arrived in the island from Kerala during the first century. According to the Christian traditions St. Thomas did come to Lanka to preach the Gospel. The discovery of an ancient cross at the Anuradhapura excavations indicate that this religion was known from the Christian Era. Roman Catholicism was introduced in the island by the Portuguese after 1505 CE. In modern times *Thai Pongal*, *Deepavali* and *Christmas* are celebrated as community festivals irrespective of their religious persuasions.



## **ARTS & CRAFTS**

### ***Traditional Skills & Technology***

#### ***Village crafts***



Basket weaving and other Village Crafts from Lanka

There are numerous village crafts practiced among the Tamils over the centuries. Some of the ancient crafts were cotton weaving, dyeing, pearl fishing, pottery, basket weaving, thatch weaving from coconut palm leaves, pottery, carpentry and gold work by smiths.

During modern times art work, basket making, ceramics, embroidery, block printing on clothes, decorative painting, leather crafts, metal crafts, jewellery, home décor, stone and wood work and furniture making are being undertaken at village level.

Some of the crafts previously done in villages like garment manufacture and embroidery, brick and tile making are now undertaken in factories built at urban sites.

## **PERFORMING ARTS**

*Drama – kooththu, kuravai, drama.*

*Dance forms - folk, traditional, kummi, kolattam, classical natyam etc.*

*Music - traditional, classical, temmangu, punnisai.*



A Bharata Natyam performance.

## Bharatanatyam

*Bharatanatyam* is a major genre of Indian classical dance which originated in Tamil Nadu. It has been a solo dance that was performed exclusively by young women and it expressed South Indian religious themes, spiritual ideas and mythical stories. Its existence by 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE is recorded in the Tamil epic *Silappadikaram*, while temple sculptures of 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century CE indicate it was a well-defined art form by the mid-first millennium CE. It is the oldest classical dance tradition of India. The sculptures at Isurumuniya suggest this dance form was known in Lanka from ancient times.

The dance style is noted for its flexed upper torso, legs bent, or knees flexed, combined with spectacular footwork, a sophisticated vocabulary of sign language based on gestures of both hands, eyes, facial muscles and neck movements. The dance is accompanied by music and a singer, and typically a guru or teacher is present as the director and conductor of the performance. The accomplished dancer dissolves her identity in rhythm and music, makes her body into an instrument of expression of her spirit.

The traditional dance has been a form of an interpretive narration of a mythical legend or a religious theme. The repertoire of Bharatanatyam includes *Nrita* (rhythmic movements which give life to the performance), *Nritya* (expressions) and *Natya* (dramatic postures combining *nirta* and *nritya*). The traditional order of this dance recital is *Pushpanjali* (prayer to God, troupe and audience), *Alarippu* (means blossoming of the bud – slowly emerging individual movements combining to form complex ones), *Jatiswaram* (combination of movements to the beat of drums and vocal music ending in fantastic postures), *Saptham* (leisurely movements paying homage to God or the king in whose presence the dance is performed), *Varnam* (dance reaching a crescendo combining *nritham*, *nrityam* and *abhinayam*), *Padam* (poetic part depicting various emotions), *Tillana* (last part of the dance combining rapid leg movements and hand postures) and *Mangalam* (prayer at the end).

## Kolattam and Kummi

*Kolattam* is a popular form of group dance beating with sticks to rhythm, along with a combination of rhythmic body movements in varying formations to the varying parts of the song and music. This dance is very popular in Tamil Nadu, Lanka and Andhra Pradesh. In early days the dance was performed by women only, gradually the changes occurred in this dance and now the dance was performed by both male and female. In the villages of Jaffna and Batticaloa, Kolattam is also called *Vasanthanor* *VasanthaNadagam*. Usually, this is

performed during village festivals, Thai Pongal and Tamil New year celebrations.

*Kummi* is an ancient form of folk dance popular in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Lanka. This is danced by Tamil women standing in a circle. This dance could be very simple or imitate activities like harvesting, praying or dancing in jubilation. This dance is accompanied by songs to the beat of drums. This is danced during festivals, harvesting and other auspicious occasions.



*Kolattam* or Dancing with sticks beating to the rhythm of music.



*Kummi*, Traditional Folk Dance of the Tamils.

## The Music of the Tamils

Traditional music, which had its origins in ancient times had gone through a process of modification and refinement over the centuries. The *nadhaswaram*, *thavil*, *mridangam*, *veenai* and *pullangulal*(flute) are the principal instruments. They are played according to the rhythmic notes of *Carnatic Music*.



The *nadhaswaram* is recited on auspicious occasions at homes, public ceremonies and at temple festivals. These artistes are resident in some of the villages like Alaveddy in Jaffna, traditionally reputed for propagation of this art. In recent times faculties of Fine Arts in the universities of Jaffna and Batticaloa are training students in classical instrumental music and Carnatic Music.



Various types of drums like *Murasu*, *PerikaiMuzhavu*, *Parai* and *Udukku* have been in use by the Tamils. The *Murasu* was the most popular percussion instrument. During festivals the sound of *Murasu* conveyed joy, gaiety and elation. *Muzhavu* and *Udukku*, two types of percussion instruments accompanied singers. The drum was also used as the war-drum, calling people to arms. *Parai* was used to convey official messages to the public, as well as used in funerals.



## TEACHING LIFE VALUES TO CHILDREN



Paying respect to your elders.

The Tamils are expected to follow certain life-values for an honest and honourable living. The children from a young age are taught the virtues of life-values. Avvaiyar, a learned world-wise old lady in her celebrated poem for the children *AathiSoodi*, narrates a list of life-values to follow. Some examples:

1. Learn to love virtue, 2. Control anger, 3. Don't forget charity, 4. Promote philanthropy, 5. Don't betray confidence, 6. Don't forsake motivation, 7. Promote learning, 8. Feed the hungry and then feast, 9. Speak no envy, 10. Don't forget gratitude. Another similar work for children is *KonraiVénthan*.

Paying respect to the elders is one of the basic themes taught to children. The elders have plenty of experience in life and they can teach us about enduring change and handling life's challenges. They have a great amount of wisdom and knowledge to share with us. It is important for the younger generation to learn the significance of respecting elders by listening and spending quality time with them. We must treat our elders with respect, even if their bodies or minds are beginning to fail them. The elderly had been industrious, creating all the comforts of modern life that the younger generations take them for granted.

## TEACHING LIFE VALUES TO ADULTS

*Thirukkural*, considered to be one of the greatest works ever written on ethics and morality, is known for its universality and secular nature. It is also a treatise on the 'art of living', guiding us to live a meaningful and useful life. We are born only once and should make the best use of our lifetime to be useful to your own-self, to your family, to your community and to the world. *Nāladiyaris* another such work in Tamil narrating similar themes. Such guidance on the principles of 'useful living' is a unique feature of Tamil Culture over the past two thousand years.

## THE TAMIL CULTURAL HERITAGE

**Cultural heritage** is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

Cultural Heritage refers to the passage of the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group thinking, striving, achieving and passing this wisdom or systems of knowledge to the oncoming generations and shared by a relatively large group of people.

1. HISTORICAL      Traditions  
(these are passed on from generation to generation)
2. BEHAVIOURAL    Learned Behaviour  
                         Shared Behaviour  
                         Learned Habits
3. NORMATIVE      Ideals  
                         Values - Family values  
                                - Social values  
                                - Life values  
                         Collective Thoughts
4. FUNCTIONAL      Adapting to the Environment  
                         Way of Living Together  
                         Way of Solving problems
5. MENTAL           Ideas  
                         Collective Thoughts
6. SYMBOLIC           Arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by the society.

While considering the cultural patterns of the Tamil people living in Sri Lanka, it is important to consider the cultural traits exhibited and transmitted to their children by the Up-country Tamils, the Muslim population of the region and the Sinhalese living in the predominantly Tamil areas.

## (B). UNESCO CLASSIFICATION OF HERITAGE

The UNESCO organisation has classified heritage as

1. NATURAL HERITAGE

2. CULTURAL HERITAGE : A. Tangible Cultural Heritage  
B. Intangible Cultural Heritage

**NATURAL HERITAGE** refers to the elements of biodiversity, including flora and fauna, ecosystems and geological structures.

e.g. (with reference to Eelam Tamils)

**Traditional Plants:** Palmyrahpalm, Mango, Jack Fruit, Margosa, Banana etc.

**Cultivated Plants:** Rice, *Thinai*, *Samai*(Millet), *Varagu*, *Kurakkan*, *Medicinal herbs* etc.

**Food:** *Arici*(rice), *Inchiver*(ginger), Spices.

**Clothing:** Dhoti, Shawl, Saree,

**The Land:** Traditional names for land-plots in villages.

**Lifeways:** Traditional Dwellings, Transport

**Markets:** *Angadi*, Village Markets

**CULTURAL HERITAGE** is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

This includes buildings and historic places, monuments, artefacts etc. which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. These include objects significant to the archaeology, architecture, science or technology of a specific culture.

This leads to 1. Preservation of the Artefacts.

2. Maintenance of a Cultural Museum.

### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The term ‘Cultural Heritage’ has changed its content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by the UNESCO. Cultural Heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants.



These include *Oral Traditions, Performing Arts, Social Practices, Rituals, Festive Events, Knowledge and Practices concerning Nature and the Universe, The Knowledge and Skill to produce Traditional Crafts.*

While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of the different communities helps with *intercultural dialogue* and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

Intangible Cultural Heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it. Without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.

“The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself, but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State and is as important for developing states as for developed ones” (UNESCO).

## **(C). MODERN VIEWS ABOUT CULTURE**

During the late 20th century, the views about culture among the scholars have changed. Culture is now defined as *the values and beliefs among an ethnic group that determines the quality of their life.*

Jacques Derrida's *philosophy of deconstruction*: Does your religious beliefs, the arts, crafts, dance and music help to elevate the quality of life of your community, your children and children's children? *Your Culture should be a means to improve the quality of the life and economic prosperity of your community.* (This is a modern definition of culture).

This have made the modern thinkers and scholars to delve into the traditional views of culture, to deconstruct it, and they found that old ideas associated with culture linked to traditional values, language, religion, arts, crafts, dance and music are no longer the measurements which determines the quality of life of an ethnic group.

One of the foremost thinkers in this respect is the Indian economist and Nobel-prize winner professor Amartya Sen, a professor of economics from three continents. He was a professor at the University of Calcutta in the sixties, a professor at Oxford in the seventies and a professor at Harvard in the nineties. The western scholars always maintained that development and progress of a nation depended on the economic success of the land. Dr Sen revised this view and forwarded the concept that national development is linked to its culture and not to the economy alone. Of course, economic prosperity is a part of the culture. Since this revolutionary view, ***Culture and Development*** have now become the keyword of many western academic institutions.

This thinking is not new. During the 1960s Chairman Mao of China wanted to improve the living standards of his people and devised his economic plan *Great Leap Forward*. When this plan did not work, he went back to the drawing-board, analysed his plan, and found that the fundamental defect was in the *Cultural Deficit* of his people. He brought in the ***Cultural Revolution*** which in turn led to the economic prosperity of his land and people. The rest is history.

The following has been identified as the more important aspects of Culture for the modern times, more important than the traditional notions of it.

1. DIET - NUTRITION
2. HEALTH
3. EDUCATION
4. SOCIAL EQUALITY - Caste, Creed, Dowry etc. need to be revised.
5. GENDER EQUALITY - Equality between males and females.
6. PRESERVATION OF NATURE
7. ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

### **THE DUAL TENDENCY OF CULTURE**

Every culture has a dual tendency, a tendency towards stability and a tendency toward change. Change is important to adjust from time to time and generation to generation to accommodate the prevailing needs of the society. ***The Tamils too need to revise their Cultural Criteria combining the best of traditional views with the current views mentioned above, in order to progress in the modern world.***

## II

### GROWING-UP IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN HOST COUNTRIES

*Cultural diversity* refers to people who identify with particular groups based on their birthplace, country of origin, ethnicity, language, values, beliefs or world views. This does not mean that everyone from a particular cultural group will hold exactly the same values or do things in the same way. Showing support for cultural diversity involves talking with people to build relationships and finding out how best to include them and respect their cultural needs. Valuing and respecting diversity encourages people to see differences among individuals and groups and accepting them.



Multicultural Society of London

## Effects of Trauma

When migration is prompted by particularly stressful experiences, as is the case for refugees, there can be additional challenges for resettlement and wellbeing. Traumatic experiences may have occurred through being exposed to violence, war or torture. Children and families may have lived under threat and in fear, they may have witnessed the deaths of relatives or friends, or experienced hardship and danger in coming to the host country. Some may have received harsh treatment in immigration detention on their arrival here. These kinds of highly stressful circumstances can affect people long after the events have passed. Some of the common reactions that may occur in children who have been through traumatic events include an increase in fear and anxiety, which may lead to clingy behaviour, re-experiencing the trauma when feeling threatened, or difficulty in trusting and connecting with others. Such painful experiences may lead to children experiencing difficulties trusting others, making it difficult for them to form relationships with adults or with their peers. For some children who have been traumatised, feelings of pain and anger can sometimes be seen in their behaviour, for instance, some children may tantrum or show high levels of emotional reactivity (eg. become upset very easily). Difficulties associated with past trauma and resettlement can affect the learning and school performance of children who have been traumatised. (cf. PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)

## Discrimination and racism and Learning to value Diversity

Some people may resort to harmful words and behave negatively toward others from different ethnic backgrounds as a way of coping with their fears and lack of understanding about the cultural differences. This is called **Cultural Discrimination**. Discrimination impacts negatively on individuals and entire communities. Being subject to discrimination can be a difficulty faced by many people from diverse backgrounds. This can be an issue especially for minority groups, such as those who look different from the majority of a population. Both **direct discrimination** (eg name-calling, bullying) and **indirect discrimination** (eg ignoring or excluding others from important events) can leave people feeling shut out and powerless. This can then have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. Racism increases children's sense of difference and vulnerability by devaluing their culture and making them feel unwelcome. The effects of racism and discrimination can make life more difficult for families, and create undue stress and social disadvantage.

**Valuing Diversity:** Adults should set an example to the youngsters by being open and accepting the diverse cultures. Valuing diversity and being inclusive helps to promote respectful relationships and reduces the likelihood of discrimination and isolation.

## **Language and communication**

Language can be a major barrier for newly-arrived families. Difficulties communicating in English can cause challenges for families and undermine people's confidence. This may make finding a job or learning at school more difficult, and contribute to social isolation. Concern about language skills can make communication with schools and other services more difficult for parents and carers.

Communication issues can arise in other ways as well. When the experiences, customs and beliefs of children and families from different cultural backgrounds are not recognised or valued, it can lead to miscommunication. For example, making eye contact when speaking to someone else may be considered a sign of respect in some cultures; however, in some other cultures respect is shown by lowering eyes or looking away. If these differences are not understood by both parties, it can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding on both sides. It is very important that families have access to support in the language they are comfortable with and are able to develop their communication skills if they so desire.

## **Parenting across Cultures**

Cultural differences in parenting practices can lead to misunderstandings and be stressful for families. Common differences in parenting practices can relate to the ways affection is shown to children, attitudes to physical punishment, and how much emphasis is placed on family responsibility, compared with promoting children's independence. Some cultural practices can have very strict codes of behaviour according to age and/or gender.

When children from foreign backgrounds are exposed to different cultural values, parents and carers may find practices that once worked in the home culture may no longer be effective. This can create confusion and miscommunication and may also become a source of family conflict and tension, especially as children grow into their teenage years. Families might also be concerned about children losing their cultural identity through contact with children with different cultural backgrounds or through the influences promoted in the media, or at school.

Questions of cultural identity are common themes causing tensions within migrant families, as family members may try to maintain their own cultural values while adapting to the range of cultural influences found in the wider community. It takes time and effort for families and individuals to work out how to keep their own cultural traditions and, at the same time, understand and find a place within the culture of the host country.

## Diversity and Belonging

Respect for diversity is related to people's sense of belonging. When diversity is valued, and respected, people are more likely to develop a sense of belonging to their community and social connections to others. People who have supportive and positive relationships in their life (e.g., people to talk to, trust and depend on) are less likely to experience feelings of depression and anxiety compared to those who have fewer social connections. Feeling cared about and respected is a protective factor for mental health and wellbeing.

A sense of belonging to a community and being socially connected to others acts as a buffer to stress when people are experiencing difficulties. Children's connection to their culture develops through their experiences. In particular, warm and secure emotional connections with the adults who care for them help children connect with their cultural identity. Having a strong sense of their own cultural history and the traditions associated with it helps children build a positive cultural identity for themselves.

## How does diversity influence children's mental health?

Babies and young children learn and develop through their early experiences and relationships. As children get older, they begin to develop a sense of who they are and where they belong. For example, when children develop positive relationships with other children and educators, it helps them feel where they belong. This early learning about themselves and others lays the foundation for their future health and wellbeing.

This means that children today will form friendships, learn with and interact with other children from many cultures different to their own. When children grow up to understand, appreciate and respect the cultural, racial and ethnic diversity around them, this builds a positive and accepting community. A community such as this supports children to develop skills and attitudes that will assist them in their relationships and contribute to their social and emotional wellbeing. By working together, families and *early childhood education and care services* (ECEC: available in some countries like Australia) can create supportive environments for children from majority and minority racial and ethnic groups. This includes understanding ways to promote positive attitudes, counter negative attitudes and respond to racism if it occurs. Supportive environments like these help children from all cultural backgrounds to understand, respect and appreciate cultural differences. When adults are open and accepting, children learn to respect diversity and embrace cultural differences. Everybody needs to feel accepted, respected.

## The role of schools in Managing Cultural Diversity



Children from varying ethnic backgrounds integrating in a School in London.

Schools play a central role in the lives of students and their families. The experiences of children and families from different backgrounds within their school communities can have significant effects on their sense of inclusion or exclusion and subsequent quality of engagement within the wider community. In order to meet the learning, social and wellbeing needs of students and their families from diverse backgrounds, it is important for schools to understand their particular circumstances. These may include migration, refugee and resettlement experiences as well as different cultural values and styles of communicating and learning. Schools can play a critical role in supporting and engaging students and families from diverse backgrounds.

They also have a significant responsibility to promote values of mutual respect and understanding, and to effectively address problems of discrimination when they occur in the school setting. By actively promoting the needs and interests of students and families from culturally diverse backgrounds and building relationships of trust and understanding with parents and carers, schools can make a positive difference to these students' mental health and wellbeing.

Having a positive sense of belonging in both settings helps children move between cultures with greater ease and confidence and increases their motivation and engagement at school. School staff can support children when they respect and understand that they come from diverse backgrounds and have different cultural identities (including specific expectations of behaviour and communication). Under these circumstances children and their families also feel more comfortable in and valued by their school.

### **Things parents and educators can do to promote respect for diversity**

1. Provide opportunities for children to listen to people from a range of backgrounds and their perspectives.
2. Respect individual differences and acknowledge that membership of a particular group does not mean everyone from that group has the same values, beliefs, rituals and needs.
3. Promote and model inclusive behaviour, for example having notices available in a number of relevant languages for families and encouraging everyone to contribute their skills and interests to the service.
4. Encourage opportunities for families and educators to develop social connections with each other. For example, notice their strengths and the ways they contribute to the service.
5. Expand children's awareness of difference through social events, books, songs or play materials.
6. Research biographical stories of local people and people from around the world and introduce who they are to children (bring the world to the children!).
7. When families speak more than one language, learn keywords in their home language.
8. Utilise the skills of educators who speak multiple languages.
9. Link families with appropriate local services to provide support and assistance.



## Developing relationships

Developing relationships across cultures requires good communication and flexibility to support children's wellbeing. It is particularly important to recognise that there may be very different understandings of mental health and a range of ways of expressing difficulties across cultures. For instance, children's emotional or behavioural difficulties should be considered within their cultural context and discussed with families in a supportive and non-judgemental manner. Positive relationships between families and school staff convey respect for diversity and strengthen children's mental health and wellbeing.

## Cultural competence and children's wellbeing

*Cultural competence* begins from the understanding that we are all influenced by the different social, educational and organisational cultures in which we live and participate. Recognising that our beliefs and values are not the only way of seeing or doing things opens us up to learning about other perspectives. Exploring similarities and differences in our cultural expectations improves our capacity to understand and relate to others and helps to build a sense of belonging amongst children and their families.

Some cultures (and some families) emphasise relying on family rather than outsiders to resolve difficulties. This can make parents and carers reluctant to discuss their concerns about children with school staff. Families may also be structured differently. For example, in some families, grandparents, aunts or uncles may be centrally involved in making decisions affecting the children. Parents and carers from culturally diverse backgrounds should be made to understand and comply with the idea that parents, carers and school staff can work together to support children's learning and development.

### **III**

## **PROMOTING THE TAMIL IDENTITY AND TAMIL CULTURE AMONG THE DIASPORA IN THE UK AND IN THE WEST**

A common identity for the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora should be built upon with the future of our people and children living all over the world in mind. Many countries with multiple ethnic communities among its population are promoting and helping them to maintain their individual cultures.

A sense of belonging to the Tamil community and being socially connected to others acts as a buffer to stress when people are experiencing difficulties. Children's connection to their culture develops through their experiences. In particular, warm and secure emotional connections with their parents and other adults who care for them help children connect with their cultural identity. Having a strong sense of their own cultural history and the traditions associated with it helps children build a positive cultural identity for themselves. This also supports children's sense of belonging and, by extension, their mental health and wellbeing.

Babies and young children learn and develop through their early experiences and relationships. As children get older, they begin to develop a sense of who they are and where they belong. For example, when children develop positive relationships with other children, it helps them feel where they belong. This early learning about themselves and others lays the foundation for their future health and wellbeing.

This means that children today will form friendships, learn with and interact with other children from many cultures different to their own. When children grow up to understand, appreciate and respect the cultural, racial and ethnic diversity around them, this builds a positive and accepting community. A community such as this supports children to develop skills and attitudes that will assist them in their relationships and contribute to their social and emotional wellbeing.

It is important to work out how to keep our own cultural traditions and, at the same time, understand and find a place within the culture of the host country. When diversity is valued and respected, people are more likely to develop a sense of belonging to their community and social connections to others.

Culture is not a static phenomenon. It changes from time to time depending on the needs of the people at any one time. This is why one speaks about ***Cultural Pluralism*** within the same community in space and time.

It is for the Diaspora community to devise the ingredients necessary to bring about the ***cultural revision*** necessary to improve the life of our children and children's children within a multicultural society.

## **Role of Tamil Homes and Parenting Duties**

Educating, nurturing and sustaining a sense of culture to the younger generation should begin at home when the children are young. Imbibing a sense of belonging to the Tamil community and culture should begin at a younger age at home before the child begins to attend the nursery or beginner's school. A child from 3 years onwards is capable of learning new languages, and words in Tamil language could be introduced at home in addition to the language of the host country. When attending school, the child will identify Tamil as a different language to the one spoken at school with his mates and teachers. He uses Tamil to speak to his parents and grandparents and begins to associate it with his home, his colour and his ethnicity. At an early age the child is made to understand that he is living in a world of 'Cultural diversity'.

Children should be made to participate in all traditional festivities conducted at home like Thai Pongal, New Year, Deepavali etc in Hindu homes and similar festivals in Christian and Tamil Islamic homes. To make this happen the parents should take an active role. They should be made to understand that their child needs a Cultural Identity. Otherwise, when children from other cultural backgrounds speaks about their own cultures your child will be at a loss. It is only with a sense of his own cultural belonging the child begins to appreciate and respect the cultural, racial and ethnic diversity around him or her and this builds a positive and accepting community. A community such as this supports children to develop skills and attitudes that will assist them in their relationships and contribute to their social and emotional wellbeing.

***The parents should be made aware of the Cultural Diversity around us and be made aware that it is part of their parenting duties to prepare their child to face the world of cultural, racial and ethnic diversity around us when he steps out of his sheltered home, out of their wings.***

The involvement of elders sharing stories and experience provides a means of unity among families.

## Role of Tamil Schools

The Tamil schools littered all over London which has a Tamil population of 200,000 people has a major role to play in preparing our children to face life in a multi-ethnic society. Apart from teaching the Tamil language and Tamil culture, they should prepare the child to be ***Culturally Competent***.

***Cultural Competence*** begins from the understanding that we are all influenced by the different social, educational and organisational cultures in which we live and participate. Recognising that our beliefs and values are not the only way of seeing or doing things opens us up to learning about other perspectives. Exploring similarities and differences in our cultural expectations improves our capacity to understand and relate to others, and helps to build a sense of belonging amongst children and their families. One cultural expectation that may be new to many parents from culturally diverse backgrounds and carers is the idea that parents, carers and school staff can work together to support children's learning and development.

***Tamil Schools play a major role in initiating, promoting and maintaining the Tamil Culture and Cultural Competence among the Diaspora children.*** Such schools must be organised in countries where there is a substantial Tamil population without such schools.

## Language and Culture – Implications for Language Teaching

The relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted. Language is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. Different ideas stem from differing language use within one's culture and the whole intertwining of these relationships start at one's birth.

When an infant is born, it is not unlike any other infant born, in fact, all infants are quite similar. It is not until the child is exposed to their surroundings that they become individuals in and of their cultural group. From birth, the child's life, opinions, and language are shaped by what it comes in contact with. Brooks (1968) argues that physically and mentally everyone is the same, while the interactions between persons or groups vary widely from place to place. Patterns which emerge from these group behaviours and interactions will be approved or disapproved. Behaviours which are acceptable will vary from location to location (Brooks, 1968) thus forming the basis of different cultures. It is from these differences that one's view of the world is formed. Hantrais

(1989) puts forth the idea that *culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression.*

Therefore, everyone's views are dependent on the culture which has influenced them, as well as being described using the language which has been shaped by that culture. The understanding of a culture and its people can be enhanced by the knowledge of their language. This brings us to an interesting point brought up by Emmitt and Pollock (1997), who argue that even though people are brought up under similar behavioural backgrounds or cultural situations but however speak different languages, their world view may be very different. As Sapir-Whorf argues, different thoughts are brought about by the use of different forms of language. One is limited by the language used to express one's ideas. Different languages will create different limitations, therefore a people who share the same culture but speak different languages, will have different world views. Still, language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next (Emmitt & Pollock 1997).

From this, one can see that learning a new language involves the learning of a new culture (Allwright & Bailey 1991). Consequently, teachers of a language are also teachers of culture (Byram 1989). The implications of language being completely entwined in culture, in regards for language teaching and language policy are far reaching. Language teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage, choose culturally appropriate teaching styles, and explore culturally based linguistic differences to promote understanding instead of misconceptions or prejudices.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage. If one teaches language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols, or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught. The students, when using the learnt language, may use the language inappropriately or within the wrong cultural context, thus defeating the purpose of learning a language.

Because language is so closely entwined with culture, language teachers entering a different culture must respect their cultural values. As Englebert (2004) describes: "...to teach a foreign language is also to teach a foreign culture, and it is important to be sensitive to the fact that our students, our colleges, our administrators, and, if we live abroad, our neighbours, do not share all of our cultural paradigms".

## **SOME ACTIVITIES TO MAINTAIN THE PROPAGATION OF TAMIL CULTURE**

Most of the following measures are already in place in several regions and whatever procedures missing can be taken soon without much long-term planning. Individual organisations can take an active role in carrying out these measures.

### **Hindu Temples, Tamil Churches and Tamil Mosques**

Religious institutions belonging to Tamils play an important part in maintaining the cultural needs relating to religion among the Tamil adults and children. It is important for the parents to take their children to the Temples and Churches from a young age. This helps them to associate them with other children belonging to the same faith, to know about the religious festivals, to know about their gods and lead a morally sound life.

### **Drop-in- Centres / Day Centres**

There are several Drop-in-Centres in the country run by Tamil institutions which help to promote Tamil Culture. They promote traditional dances like Kummi, Kolattam and dancing; promote speeches and debates of cultural and literary merit; celebrate cultural festivals throughout the year and some of them celebrate an annual Cultural Festival or Kalaimalai to promote traditional cultural activities.

### **Dancing Schools / Music Schools**

There are a few dancing schools in London which train young children in 'Bharata Natyam' and other traditional dancing. These are conducted by professionals in classical dancing. Similarly, there are musicians who train young children in Carnatic music as well as playing instruments like '*tabla*' '*gadam*' 'flute' and the 'violin'. The children once they become proficient display their dancing skills and musical talents at 'Arangetrams' (premieres) held at various centres during the year. These schools help to train new talents among the new generations and help to maintain this heritage.



Tamil Traditional Kolattam dance staged at a Kalaimalai Cultural Festival by the Centre for Community Development, Kingston in 2013.(Photo: Siva Thiagarajah)

### **Tamil Literary Associations**

There are a few literary associations in London with members who meet on a monthly basis to discuss subjects of interest, discuss new literary works published during the month and promote writing among members. Several of these members have become writers and have produced works of considerable merit which has been recognised in other Tamil speaking countries.

### **History and Heritage Societies**

There are a few history and heritage societies whose members meet on a monthly basis to discuss historical subjects relating to the history of Tamils. The main functions of these societies are collecting, preserving, researching and interpreting historical information.

These societies should have a building where books and documents relating to history and heritage are preserved and children must be encouraged to attend these societies to learn about their roots, culture and heritage, so that they can pass it on to their future generations.

## **Role of Media: Radio, TV, Films, Magazines, Newspapers**

Media is a very powerful medium of modern times. Radio, television, film, newspapers and the other products of media provide materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; and of "us" and "them." Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture.

Media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence, and who is not. They dramatize and legitimate the power of the forces that be and show the powerless that they must stay in their places or be oppressed.

We are immersed from cradle to grave in a media and consumer society and thus it is important to learn how to understand, interpret, and criticize its meanings and messages. The media are a profound and often misperceived source of cultural practice. They contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire – and what not to. The media often teach us how to be men and women. They show us how to dress, look and consume; how to react to members of different social groups; how to be popular and successful and how to avoid failure; and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices, and institutions. Consequently, the gaining of critical media literacy is an important resource for individuals and citizens in learning how to cope with a seductive cultural environment. Learning how to read, criticize, and resist socio-cultural manipulation can help empower oneself in relation to dominant forms of media and culture. It can enhance individual sovereignty and give people more power over their cultural environment.

## **Cultural Events: Cultural Festivals, Sports, Carnivals**

Festivals celebrated by Tamils are centred on some characteristic aspect of their community life relating to religion or traditions. *ThaiPongal* is associated with harvest time, *Tamil New Year* with new resolutions, *Saraswathy Pooja* with education and *Deepavali*, the festival of lights to light one's life and future, to name a few.

Cultural festivals like '*Kalaimalai*' serve to fulfil specific communal purposes providing entertainment with dances and traditional art forms. Historically they were important to local communities before the advent of



mass-produced entertainment. Festivals that focus on cultural or ethnic topics also seek to inform community members of their traditions and heritage. Some festivals serve to fulfil specific communal purposes, especially in regard to thanksgiving.

The Sports meets and Carnivals conducted by the Tamil Communities apart from the entertainment they provide offer a sense of belonging contributing to *group cohesiveness*.

### **Promotional Publications: Book Launches, Exhibitions, Book shops**

Publication of books in Tamil as well as books in English relating to the history, culture or communal life of the Diaspora Tamils, as well as Tamils in the home countries help to gain more insight into their culture. Such books are made available at Book launches, Book exhibitions, libraries and book shops.

More importantly children gain a lot of insight through Children's books. Students go to the classroom with very different experiences and circumstances, yet they are expected to transcend all differences, focus on the curriculum, and meet the objectives established by the state. They need help if they are to transcend this wide range of socio-economic, cultural, family and health circumstances, build understanding and succeed in school. Using children's literature, teachers can help their class through difficult situations, enable individual students to transcend their own challenges, and teach students to consider all viewpoints, respect differences, and become more self-aware.

### **Tamil Heritage Month**



In 2016 Mr Gary Anandasangaree, Member of Parliament for Scarborough - Rouge Park introduced a motion in the House of Commons, calling on the Canadian Parliament to officially declare the month of January as the Tamil Heritage month. “This will provide Canadians from coast to coast the opportunity to celebrate our rich Tamil heritage, culture, language and history”.

A unanimous decision was made at the House of Commons on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 2016 declaring the month of January as Tamil Heritage Month under the ‘Tamil Heritage Month Act’, M-24. The motion will “recognise the contributions that Tamil-Canadians have made to Canadian society, the richness of Tamil language and culture, and the importance of educating and reflecting upon Tamil heritage for future generations by declaring January, every year, as the Tamil Heritage month”.

The British Tamils need organise a concerted campaign at different regions to lobby their local Members of Parliament to make January a Tamil Heritage month in Great Britain. As a first step we can request the local County Councils where Tamils live to recognise January as the Tamil Heritage month.

## **SOME RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Tamil Associations to hold 'Communal Forums' with parents to instruct them about 'parental functions' in preparing their children to face life outside home in a multi-cultural society and impart them with a sense of their own culture. Also, discussions about Cultural Revision, caste, dowry etc. can be held at these forums.
2. Tamil Schools to take an active role in propagating Tamil Culture in the context of living in a multi-cultural society.
3. History and Heritage societies must be initiated in towns where large number of Tamils reside. These societies not only help to educate and disseminate culture but helps to propagate it through subsequent generations.
4. Tamil Associations and Societies should hold an Annual Cultural exhibition in each town for the children to show their roots and glorious past and educate them to be proud of their ancestry. This should be made a regular event in their social life.

# LONG TERM PROJECTS TO MAINTAIN THE PROPAGATION OF TAMIL CULTURE

## 1. Creation of a Tamil Heritage Centre

Creation of a *Tamil Heritage Centre* in the UK, is one of the biggest dreams of the British Tamil Community. This should be organised to include a library; a museum; an archival centre; an auditorium to stage cultural performances, seminars, exhibitions etc., an indoor gymnasium; Language and Educational Services; Mental Health and Disability Programming; and Women's Services. Some of these services could be used by other communities as well.

The Tamil Heritage Centre will be a signature event in the history of the British Tamils and its creation will be possible only with contributions from the British Government and the local government of its acceptance of a multi-cultural British Society working for the welfare of all the subjects. To make it feasible all the Tamil organisations need to make a united appeal to the government through their local members of parliament. This would need elaborate planning and execution.

This is not an impossible dream. As you may be aware, the National Government of Canada and the Provincial Government of Scarborough have donated a substantial sum to create a Tamil Community Centre in Scarborough in Canada. The City of Toronto has provided land valued at \$25 million, which is leased to the Tamil Community for just \$1, in a year. This Centre at 311, Staines Avenue, Scarborough, once completed will have a gymnasium, outdoor playing fields, a library, a museum and an auditorium. As the North Scarborough Mayor John Troy stated "The North Scarborough neighbourhood has a diverse community and home to a large number of families. This new Community Centre will serve the Tamil community, provide new opportunities to socialise and be a valuable resource to help improve vital services to the entire community".

## 2. Creation of a Tamil Archive Centre and Library

As the creation of a Heritage Centre is a very long-term project, an Archive Centre cum Library can be built in each city with the help of the mercantile sector and the religious organisations. Although London has so many Hindu temples for the benefit of the Tamil population, we do not have even a single Tamil Archive Centre to preserve our valuable documents relating to our

history and culture. A library housing books relating to the history and culture of the Tamils is necessary for the education of the younger generation. Without a library in each town or district we cannot expect our youngsters to learn our history and culture.

### **3. Creation of a Museum**

For the long-term propagation of our heritage, it is important that the younger generation has to visually see the artefacts relating to more than two thousand years of Tamilian history. Without the presence of a museum, it is not possible to educate the youngsters for over many generations to come. Again, all the Tamil organisations in different parts of the country need to organise this, even in a small scale with the financial help of the traders and the temples.

### **4. Creation of a Model Village**

Long before urbanisation, our forefathers lived in small villages, mostly in huts or dwellings with thatched roofs, surrounded by thatched fences, drew water from wells dug in the ground using well-sweeps made of palmyra timbre, maintained their livelihood through farming and animal husbandry, travelled using bullock carts to carry their goods, bartered their farm products at local markets and carried on with their lives raising their children. It is important to create at least a single modest village of the Tamils in some remote corner of England, with an adjacent hotel facility, where the parents can take their children to see for themselves how their forefathers lived. This would be more educational than all the books they can read.

### **5. Tamil Department at SOAS - University of London**

Tamil was taught at SOAS from the School's inception in 1916 until 2010 when it could not continue due to government funding cuts. Reinstating Tamil at SOAS is vital for the Tamil diaspora and Tamil enthusiasts to pursue Tamil Studies to sustain the language and culture in the United Kingdom.

In 2017, Dr Navtej Purewal, former Deputy Director of the SOAS South Asia Institute requested the support of the High Commission of India, London, for the wider campaign to reinstate the study of Tamil within the Languages Department of SOAS in order to address the growing demand for Tamil Studies at SOAS.

Towards the end of 2017, a founding committee was set up. The intention was to identify a UK University (among Oxford / Cambridge / University of London) where the campaign for Tamil Studies could be launched. The vision is for the Tamil language to be taught within a Languages Department. This would enable dedicated staff to work on standardising the syllabus for Tamil schools, to lobby for further recognition of the Tamil language, and to monitor the quality of such programmes.

After two months of studies and consultation with the experts, the committee chose to partner with SOAS by considering its heritage, its vast Tamil manuscripts and rare books collection, its location being in Central London which is easily accessible to the 200,000 Tamil people living in and around London, proximity to British Library, and most importantly it fulfils all the criteria established in the selection process.

*Tamil-Studies-UK* is a fundraising campaign to reinstate the study of Tamil within the Languages Department at SOAS University of London, for our young and aspiring Tamil learners to pursue Tamil at university level. Moreover, the academics focused on Tamil at SOAS would be instrumental in standardising the syllabus for Tamil schools, make recommendations for UCAS points and conduct examinations in Tamil, and monitor the quality of the programme.

A long-term endowment of £10 million is required to reinstate Tamil Studies within the Languages department at SOAS and sustain it for the University's lifetime. Out of this £10 million, £6 million will fund academic positions, and £4 million will endow Tamil Studies scholarships. Once the £10 million endowment is secured, SOAS will be able to establish Tamil Studies at SOAS. We as Tamils should contribute whatever we can spare to make this campaign a success.

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## PROFILE OF THE AUTHOR



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