

# TAMILS IN MAURITIUS

By

T. Ammigan

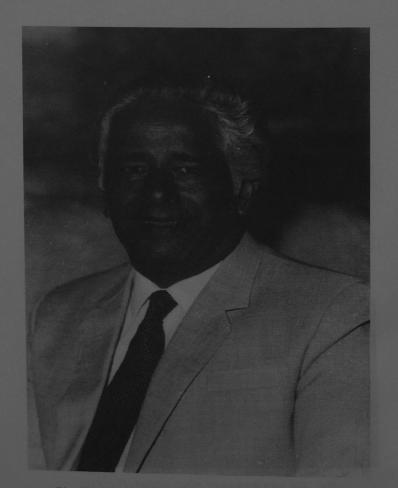
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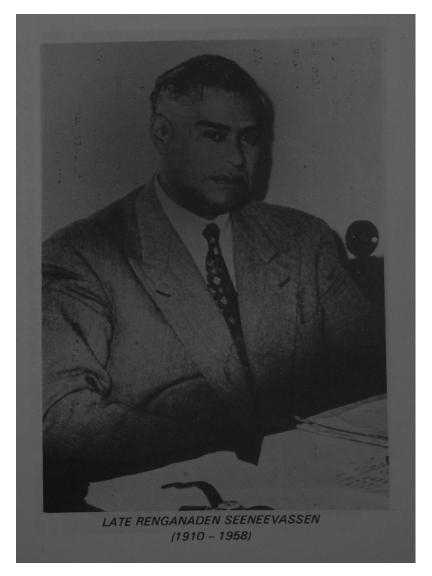
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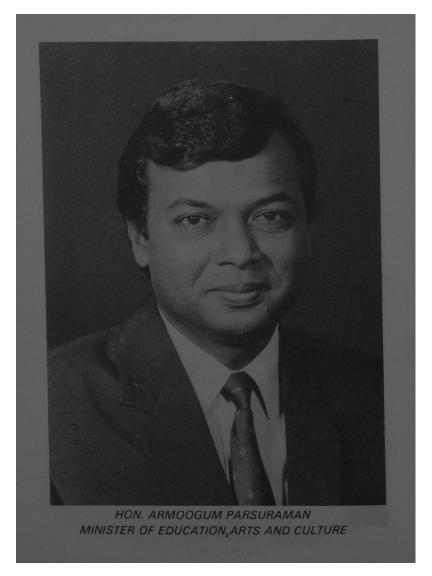
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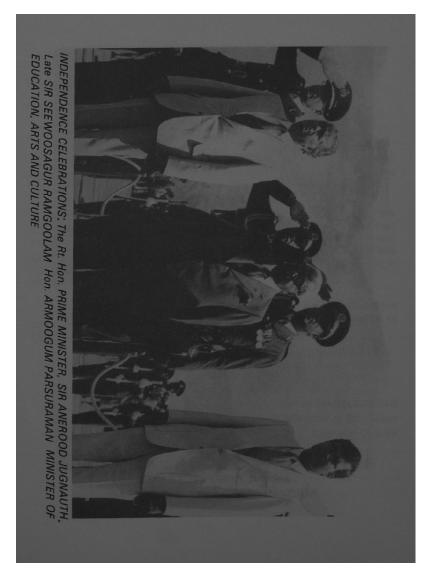




The Rt. Hon. Sir ANEROOD JUGNAUTH, K.C.M.G PRIME MINISTER OF MAURITIUS







HON. R. PYNEEANDEE M.L.A. PARLIAMENTARY PRIVATE SECRETARY

# PREFACE

Despite the meagre source materials available on the history of Tamil speaking Mauritians, T. Ammigan has been able to compile some interesting records to make his book entitled "Tamils in Mauritius".

His work comes at a most propitious time when we stand ready to host the prestigious Seventh International Conference — Seminar of Tamil Studies. All the efforts and achievements of our Tamil brothers and sisters in the field of cultural development for the past years will culminate into this International Conference-Seminar, a great event in the annals of the history of Tamils in Mauritius.

I wish to express my appreciation to the author for his contribution in unveiling to all components of our rainbow-nation some highlights of Tamil culture and history in Mauritius.

I wish the book all the success it deserves.

A. PARSURAMAN Minister of Education Arts and Culture

## INTRODUCTION

Mauritius has a population of one million for an area of 1860 Sq. Kms.

The Mauritian population has four main communities namely the Hindu community, the Muslim community, the Sino-Mauritian community and the General Population. The General Population comprises persons of African descent, of mixed descent, of Franco-Mauritians and of those who do not belong to the other three above-mentioned communities.

The existing languages are Arabic, English, French, Gujrati, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. While English enjoys the status of official language, French is quasi-official in that it is widely understood, spoken and written. Creole trancends all the ethnic distinctions because it is a dialect spoken and understood by all Mauritians. It is the linguafranca. Together with Creole, there is Bhojpuri which is also quite popular among the people of Indian origin.

The four great religions are Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism.

The Cultural life of the Tamils in Mauritius in the 1980's is extremely interesting since it saw an awakening of the temple-associations and socio-cultural organisations as well as of individuals in their endeavour to promote their cultural values. Together with the other ethnic components, the Tamil community made a successful move to contribute their part in the building of pluricultural Mauritianism. The urge for cultural exchanges among the communities so that the various groups could come to know and understand each other's values better is widely felt. This attitude adds to the strengthening of the phenomenon of unity in diversity which is now reflected in almost all walks of Mauritian life. The ideal of unity in diversity is clearly expounded by Mr Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, Ex-director-General of Unesco. He wrote:

".....diversity is not purely negative; it expresses the attachment of different groups of people to their own values and culture through which they affirm their identity as human beings. This diversity must be preserved at all costs. Only then can we achieve the true unity of mankind based on the right of all peoples to pursue their own ideals and to find their own way to fulfilment."

Tamil culture is one of the chromosomes of the Mauritian multicultural society. Its imprint is so vivid that it can hardly go unnoticed in the everyday life of Mauritians.

The Tamil community plays a significant part in the social, cultural and economic fabrics of the country. As such it is one of the pillars that unphold the spirit of unity in diversity.

Geared to a historical background that covers French and British colonisations and the twenty-one years of our independence, the Tamilspeaking Mauritians have planted the signboard of their cultural identity, the values of which are being shared, transmitted, understood and acquired by many of us.

The book "Tamils in Mauritius" focusses some facets of the past and the present history of the Mauritian Tamils who represent ten percent of the total population. I hope it will succeed in a small measure in making the history of the Tamils in Mauritius known to the world.

#### T. AMMIGAN

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to the making of this book.

To Messrs. Krish Ponnusamy and Peter Craig go my thanks. They have kindly gone through the manuscripts with a critical eye. They have helped me to reassess my conclusions through their invaluable comments.

Mr. Teklall Gunesh has kindly read the proofs.

To Mrs. Vijayanti Appadoo I owe a dept of gratitude for she has devoted time and energy to type my manuscripts.

I must also thank Hon. A. Parsuraman, Minister of Education, Arts and Culture for his usual sympathetic interest in the history of all the ethnocultural components of our Mauritian Society.

This has been a real source of inspiration to me to write this book which I must say is a record of events helping the readers to evaluate the significance of the arrival and stay of the Tamils in Mauritius.

To Mr. A. Proag who has been generous with his time and advice. He has provided the photograph of the Sri Sockalingum Meenatchee Ammen Tirukkovil for the cover of my book.

To Miss Emavadee Poincosamy, and all those who in one way or the other have helped me in this venture.

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# 1. A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TAMILS

Some historians are of the opinion that the authors of the Indus Valley civilisation that existed 2,500 years B.C. in the North West region of India were the Dravidian people. The languages of the Dravidian people are Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kanarese etc, as they have been identified by R. Caldwell in his book, "The Grammar of Dravidian Languages."

Father H. Heras, a dravidologist, had deciphered the Harappan scripts and he found that the people of Harappa who were Dravidians might have spoken a very primitive form of Tamil.

Pandit Jawaharlall Nehru in his book 'The Discovery of India' wrote about the culture of the people of the Indus Valley who were indigenous and whose roots could be traced in South India. Jawaharlall Nehru also mentioned the views of some scholars who found some similarities between the people of the Indus and those who are considered to be the descendants of the Dravidian race now found in South India.

Jacques Dupuis, a French scholar, wrote on the level of attainment of the Indus Civilization which had contacts with the Romans. The people of the Indus were also seamen. They explored the seas and reached the Persian gulf and the Indian Ocean.

The typical features characterising the Dravidian man are described by Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat. Both of them agreed that the Dravidians were samples of the indigenous people of India and they gave a picture of the physical characteristics of the Dravidian man namely the shape of his head, the colour of his eyes and skin and his nose.

Archaelogical excavations, sarcophages on granite and treatises on literature produced by the Third 'Sangam' (3rd Tamil Academy) gave some valuable clues on Tamil civilization and the Tamil country in antiquity.

The Sangam and Epic literature unveils the past of the Tamils. We learn a lot about the life and territory of the Tamils in Tholkappiam' and other literacy productions of the 'Sangam' period such as 'Patitta pattu' (II), Manimekalai (Canto XVII,62) and Silappathikaram (III,37).

The Tamils in India have known a glorious past. They enjoyed commercial ties with ancient Egypt, Babylonia, Summeria, Rome etc. South Indian Kings sent representatives to these countries. Strabo, a Greek historian, wrote that King Pandya sent his ambassadors to Rome on the occasion of the Coronation of Emperor Augustus.

The Chola King had his country represented in China.

The 'Tholkapiam' is one of the literary treatises which has survived the ravages of time. It is one of the most ancient books of the Tamils. The Tamil land in ancient days extended from 'Vengadam' (Tirupati) to 'Kumari' (Kanyakumari) covering the kingdoms of the great Tamil dynasties of Pandya, Chola and Chera.

Modern India is the abode of a great civilization which is a product of the miscegenation process between the Aryan and Dravidian peoples which took place more than two thousand years ago. This phenomenon began when the Aryans entered India by way of the north through the Sindh. There are references in the Rig Veda on the Aryan's invasion of the north west of India which they called 'Brahmavartha'. They moved southward. They drew to their fold the influential representatives of Dravidian culture and even adopted some of the elements of that culture. The Tamil religious men (melor), kings (uyarndor) and the sages (arrivar) contributed immensely to the merging of Aryan and Dravidian values through language and culture. One of the champions of this merging process was the sage Agastya or Agattiyan who is known to have written the first Tamil grammar. Great Tamil poets like Kabilar, Paranar and Marey Malay Adigal mastered Sanskrit. Ramanuiam and Sankarachariya contributed a lot to the philosophy and literature in Sanskrit.

The religious structure of India today is fundamentally a synthesis of Aryan and Dravidian thoughts. Many Dravidian gods and goddesses hold a place of pride in the Hindu Pantheon. Siva, Muruga and Kottravai are tangible examples. The synthesis of Dravidian and Aryan languages, faiths and religious values have merged into Hinduism. Thus the Dravidian culture prevalent in the south is a perennial spring whose waters flow in the great ocean of Hinduism but its identity is being preserved through language, culinary art, dress and way of life. This inevitable synthesis and fusion of Dravidian and Aryan values forms as a whole the majestic Indian culture.

# 2. ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST TAMILS IN MAURITIUS

At the very outset of French occupation the lack of skilled labour in the islands was badly felt. Requests were made to the Directors of the French East India Company to provide the islands with workers. Governor Benoit Dumas went to Pondichery and intervened personally for the provision of manpower to the colonies. From Pondichery and the Coromandel coast some workers were recruited and were sent to Bourbon. These workers were engaged in the construction of stone buildings.

In 1729 some 169 skilled workers and helpers came to lle de France.

On the 4th June, 1735, Mahe de Labourdonnais reached the island on board of 'Duke de Bourbon' as Governor. He enjoyed the full support of the French East India Company. His dream was to make Port Louis the centre for maritime and commercial activities which tied the Mascarenhas group to India. With Port Louis as his headquarters, Labourdonnais had a commanding view on the different maritime activities. He watched closely the affairs of the colony and he administered the commercial and agricultural set up of the island. His other ambition was to make Port Louis a strong military base.

Skilled workers in masonry, carpentry and welding came from Pondichery. The genius of the Indus Valley civilization are reflected in the road infrastructures of the capital built by Tamil workers who came from Pondichery, Karaikal and the malabar and Coromandel coasts. The contribution of South Indian Labour to make lle de France emerge as a civilized centre right from 1740 should not be underestimated.

Under Governor Decaen's administration (1803-1810) many workers came from India. Several of them were Tamils. They built schools, hospitals, houses and sugar estate chimneys and edifices.

# 3. THE TAMILS UNDER BRITISH RULE

By the end of the French rule the capital of Port Louis became 'a commodious and readily accessible port' in the Indian Ocean.

After having captured Rodrigues and Bourbon the British accosted lle de la Passe. A three day battle was waged against the French in August 1810. The British were under the command of Captain Willoughby and the French battalions were placed under Captain Duperre. The battle saw a victory of the French over the English.

The English kept on consolidating their army at Rodrigues and on 29th November 1810 there appeared a fleet of 74 ships with 14,000 men and 8 cannons in the north of the island. The soldiers marched towards Mapou. Captain Decaen asked for an armistice and negotiated a capitulation treaty. The British accepted the principle of capitulation which contained

ten articles. The treaty was signed on 3rd December 1810 at 1 a.m.

One of the articles guaranteed the safeguard of the property of the inhabitants, their religion, their laws and customs.

The population of the island at the time of the capitulation was as follows: Whites: 7,000; French slaves: 7,500; Slaves: 60,000 and Indians 6,000.

## TAMILS SOLDIERS IN THE BRITISH ARMY

The role of the Indians in the British conquest of Mauritius is meaningful in that about 9,000 of them formed part of the British battalions.

Madras pioneers and troops from Bombay and Bengal helped the British soldiers to conquer Mauritius for the British. Furthermore Nicholas Pike wrote about the Madras engineers who helped Commodore Rowley to land safely on the coast which was surrounded by coral reefs: 'The great obstacle opposed to the attack on the island was the difficulty of landing in consequence of the coral reefs which surrounded every part of the coast. By the indefatigable exertions of Commodore Rowley assisted by the several Madras engineers, this hindrance was removed'.

Dr K. Hazareesingh, in his foreword to the French edition of his book "Histoires des Indiens à L'Ile Maurice" wrote on the participation of the Indian soldiers in the British army during the battle of 1810.

In the British conquest of Mauritius Indians have played a great part and the Tamils who came from Madras had, with their counterparts from Bengal and Bombay, fought for the British Crown.

## SUGAR ESTATES OWNED BY TAMILS

In the early years of British rule, some Tamils were sugar estates owners or co-proprietors. There were many others who were landowners.

## VELIVAEL ANNASAMY AND RAMA TIROUMOUDY (Bon Espoir Sugar Estate)

Velivael Annasamy came to the island in 1792 at the age of eighteen. He obtained a job as 'storekeeper' in the Navy shortly after the British conquest of Ile de France. Later on, he left the job to take up employment at the Audit Bureau.

V. Annasamy knew some Indian languages and a little French. He offered his services as interpreter in courts.

Annasamy and his associate Rama Tiroumoudy Chettiar bought the Bon Espoir Estate near Piton in the District of Rivière du Rempart in 1854. He was among the sugar industry owners who deponed before the Eastern Enquiry Commission. He signed the petition addressed to the Directors of the East India Company to stop the ban on Indian Immigration. As a notable he attended the farewell banquet party held in honour of Governor Sir William Nicolay.

It has come to light that Annasamy was one of the 52 members of the colonial committee in 1827.

# WIDOW ARLANDA AND MOONISAMY

#### (Clemencia Estate)

Large portions of another estate known as Clemencia where the first temple was constructed by Songor (Singaron) are supposed to have been the property of widow Arlanda and Moonisamy and Co. in 1868.

### V. AYASAMY (Melrose Estate)

V. Ayasamy & Co. bought lands at the Melrose estate and was its coproprietor. Many Tamils bought lands in the different estates.

Among the land-owners, Arunasalon and V. Sinnatambou owned 55 arpents of land at the Belle Vue Mauricia Estate. R. Soobrayen and S. Pillay had 25 and 103 arpents respectively at St. Pierre. At Moka, Nallatamby owned 382 arpents.

In the South, Coomarasamy Murdanaigum, Chellendy and J.B. Nadachellum were owners of plot of lands.

Cathan Kistnen, R. Vingta, M. Sandapa, Kistnen, Adi Ramsamy were among the principal landowners in the north.

### THE FIRST TAMIL TEMPLES

In 1811, almost a year after the British Conquest of Ile de France, the Tamils of Souillac worshipped Goddess Ammen at a place called Terracine. In the same place, to-day stands a beautiful Temple where devotees meet to offer their prayers to the Goddess.

The first Tamil Temple was built in 1843 at Terre Rouge by V. Sinnatambou, a merchant and a great social worker. This temple offered shelter to Tamil Immigrants persecuted under the vagrancy Act. Up to this day the temple is known as Sinnatambou but its real name is Shri Krishnamoorthy Draupadai Ammen Temple. Another Temple was built on the Sugar Estate at Bon Espoir by V. Annasamy.

The Temple of Clémencia is one of the first Tamil temples built before 1855. It is called Aroul Migoo Bala Dhandayuthabaniswami. It is believed that this temple was constructed by one Songor Itty, a sirdar on the Clemencia estate.

A temple dedicated to Lord Shiva was built by the traders in 1854 at Nicolay Road, Port Louis, bearing the name of Shri Sockalingum Meenatchee Ammen Temple. This temple is now a "magnificant example of Dravidian sculpture".

Governor Sir Arthur Gordon made the following remarks on Tamil Temple:

"It is impossible to travel many miles in any direction without coming upon idol temples, many of them handsome and substantial structures of stone and lime."

The Royal Commmissioners had also written some lines on the Tamil Temples which are as follows :

"On Stanley Estate we saw a Roman Catholic Chapel built for and by the immigrants in their camps; but on the other hand on Stanley as well as on several estates, there are Hindu temples. There is also a large Hindu Temple in the suburb of Port Louis on the Nicolay Road of which Rajaruthnum Moodaliar was the manager....."

The other Temples built from 1850 to 1900 are the Siva Soopramaniar Temple of Plaine de Roches, 1859; the Mare d'Albert Draupadi Ammen Kovil, 1859; the Sri Siva Soopramaniar Temple of Rich Fond, 1869, Shri Kaliamen Temple, Bell village, Port Louis, 1870; Sri Siva Soopramaniar Temple of St. Julien d'Hotman; Sri Draupadai Ammen Temple of Rose Hill 1878; Sri Siva Soopramaniar Temple of the Corps de Garde Mountain, Quatre Bornes, 1894 and Corps de Garde Mountain, Quatre Bornes, 1894 and the Shri Mariammen Temple of Port Louis, 1902.

## SAVINGS AND BELONGINGS OF THE TAMILS

Some Tamils opened savings accounts in the banks. Mootooveeren Coolen had £15.0sh. and 10d. After his death his wife petitioned to the government for an order to enable her to withdraw the money.

The Royal Commissioners received a letter on the 23rd September 1873 from Rajaruthnum Mudaliar, concerning the sale of the personal effects of the late Millapoor Moonisamy, another social leader of the Hindus. His belongings were sold for the sum of £630.82sh.

## **TAMIL MERCHANTS**

A few Tamils had distinguished themselves in trade and business during the early years of British rule. They came from Madras, Pondichery, Tanjore, Cuddaloor and other places from the south. Sinnatambu, Tiroumoody Chettiar, Arlanda, Moonisamy, Soobrayen, Annasamy are some of the early Indians who were prosperous merchants.

The following are the names of merchants from the Mauritius Almanach and the Colonial Register of 1886: A.S. Ayassamy, A.R. Nalletamby, M. Poonoosamy, Arumuga Chetty Co., V. Sooprayen Co., Soopraya Chetty & Co., Vyaboury Chetty Company, I. Valaydon & Co. and Irla Poulle and Co. Many of these merchants left the island to go to South Africa in 1860. Others went to Pondicherry, Reunion and Madagascar.

# WELCOME ADDRESS TO THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH

When His Royal Highness Prince Alfred Ernest Albert, Duke of Edinburgh paid a visit to Mauritius on May 24th 1870, the Tamils presented a welcome address in a letter on behalf of the Indian population of Mauritius.

The letter was signed by V. Rajaruthnum, V. Sinnatambu, M. Virrapa, M. Casaven, K. Srinivasa, A.S. Ayasamy, C. Kooshalee, D.A. Sinnatamby, Moosoobraya Chetty, Cohabeer, S. Sockalingum, R. Soknada Chetty, F. Maleeapa, F.A.P. Meyeba, M.L. Mootoo, D.A. Darion, F.M. Mannikon, F.Iyavoo, P.A.R. Nalletamby, B.S. Potichetty, S.Moorgan, Soosababady Chetty, N.R. Aroomoogum, V. Rungiah Chetty and fourteen hundred and forty six others.

## **TAMIL CIVIL SERVANTS (1885)**

The Tamils held good posts in the Civil Service as interpreters of District Courts, Clerks, headteachers and teachers.

The following remarks are made by the Royal Commissioners on interpreters and other Courts employees in some districts.

FLACQ: An excellent interpreter: Mr Vinay translates Tamil and Hindustani into English.

BLACK RIVER: An interpreter who understands Tamil very well and Hindustani less.

PAMPLEMOUSSES: John Sornam Pillay translates Tamil into English.

**GRAND PORT:** The messenger spoke and understood Tamil. There were also many messengers in the Port Louis and Pamplemousses Courts who were conversant in Tamil.

SAVANNE: Joint District Clerks knew Tamil and Telegu.

In the Mauritius Almanack (1886) we find J. Appasamy and F. Mootoo as Deputy Post Masters.

In 1886, L. Saminaden was appointed clerk in the survey branch drawing a salary of Rs. 1,500/-- per annum.

At the Civil Hospital the Assistant Dispenser was L. J. Mootoo; Head Warder, F.A. Savriacooty; and the clerk, Mr Barriacooty.

In schools among the Head and Assistant teachers we can find the following names, Tamby Narena, D. Curdasamy, L.J. Mootoo. M.E. Mootoo, E. Mootoo, N. Mayevaram.

At the Immigration Department G.L. Appasamy held the post of Assistant Deport Printer and P.A. Mayeppa was acting clerk.

The first doctor who came to the island was a Tamil by name of Maleappen Sinnapoule. In the English period, Naletamby and Sinatambou practised in Port Louis and Savanne respectively.

#### Job contractors

On the sugar estates there were many job contractors. Their names and places of work were as follows:

Names	Places of work
Ayasamy Arnachellum	<ul> <li>Rivière du Rempart 1872</li> <li>Beau Vallon Estate</li> </ul>
Coomarasamy	- Antoinette Estate in Pamplemousses

- Coomarasamy Calaven Poonoosamy
- Grand Port
- Black River Estate

# EARLY TAMIL SOCIAL LEADERS

#### **RAJARUTHNAM MUDALIAR**

The name of Rajaruthnam Mudaliar is closely associated with the struggle to put an end to the unjust treatment of the Indian Immigrants by the planters. As leader of the Indian community and Professor of Tamil at the Royal College in 1871 Mudaliar translated into Tamil, De Plevitz's petition signed by 9,401 persons addressed to the Governor asking the latter to look into the various cases of injustice meted out to the Indian Immigrants on the sugar estates.

Mudaliar was an influent person of great intellectual capacity. On many occasions he was convened by colonial authorities to give explanations for his outspoken declarations in favour of the Indian workers. Together with De Plevitz he was among the first persons to fight for human rights in the colony.

De Plevitz was living with one of his relatives, Mr Rivet on a sugar estate at Pamplemousses. He came to Mauritius in 1858 and he stayed here for 17 years. After having witnessed the immoral and inhumane treatment of Indian labourers on the fields, he decided to forward a petition to Governor Hamilton Gordon. This petition resulted in the appointment of a Royal Commission of Enquiry. He associated himself with Mudaliar and the two fought the cause of the oppressed.

The Royal Commissioners shortly before leaving the island received a letter from Mudaliar and they wrote :

"Our attention was forcibly drawn by the evil of such persons in a letter addressed to us not long before our departure from Mauritius by Rajaruthnam Mudaliar, one of the leading members of the Hindu community in the island in which he directed our notice to certain letters which had in the time past been written by him and published in the Commercial Gazette....."

#### **VENGTASSA SINNATAMBU**

Vengtassa Sinnatambu was another champion of the Indian cause.

The 'Vagrancy Act' made many victims. Those who travelled without a pass from one place to another were severely punished by the authorities. The Indians were brutally harassed and chased.

In one year, 30,000 Indians were arrested on the precints of the temple constructed by Sinnatambu. He sent a letter of protest to Governor Hamilton Gordon. Consequently, it was decided that Indian Indentured labourers were no longer to be arrested in places of worship.

#### LABOURERS FROM INDIA

Attempts at importing workers from India were made before 1834 when Adrien d'Epinay, proprietor of the Haute Rive Estate recruited some Indian workers in 1825 to work on his estate.

500 Tamils came together with 400 chinese in April 1829.

On 21st September 1829 some 500 Indian labourers from Madras came to Port Louis on board 'Albion'. Shortly afterwards there followed other Indian Labourers from Pondichery, Tranquebar and Calcutta.

The number of these workers reached one thousand and one hundred in 1829. They acquainted themselves easily with the free Indians already here.

In ten years (1874 — 1884) some 33,926 Indian Immigrants from Madras came to Mauritius. Most of them came from the Madras districts of Tanjore, Trichinapalli and Godavary.

The bulk of the India Immigrants bought under the indentured system formed one race, one voice and one creed on the various sugar estates where they worked from dawn to dusk in a quasi-slavery condition. Muslims, Hindus and Christians irrespective of their languages spoken or their religious beliefs lived in harmony and brotherhood. This spirit strengthened their common faith in the hope that one day the light of freedom would spring from the pangs of darkness and would shine on their offspring and on Mauritius as a whole. Their hope became a reality and today it is with pride that the ideals of unity and the safeguard of the cultural heritages which are the life-blood of our pluri-cultural Mauritianism are being promoted.

Indian Indentured Labour was interrupted in 1910 following the Report of the Sanderson Committee. There were repeated requests from the colons of the island to reopen this system. Not until 1923 did Indian Indentured Labour restart under certain conditions laid down by the Indian government.

R.K. Boodhun and A.K. Fokeer opposed the reopening of Indian Indentured Labour and wrote to Mahatma Gandhi. They got the support of S. Rengachariar, a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly. The Government of India authorised the reopening of the Indian Indentured system for one year only in conformity with the Government Notification Bill No 487 of May 14th 1923.

A year afterwards the Government of India appointed Sir Kunwar Maharajsingh to inquire on the state of the Indian Indentured Labourers in Mauritius. He came on 19th December 1924. This visit was a land mark in the history of Indians in Mauritius,

# GANDHI'S VISIT TO MAURITIUS IN 1901

When Mohandass Karamchand Gandhi came to Mauritius on 30th October 1901 on board of the Ship 'Nowsherra' he was a young Indian barrister who was touring South Africa keeping an investigating eye on the conditions of the Indians. In Mauritius he visited many places and got acquainted with the situation prevailing here. He wrote the following in his autobiography: "So I sailed for home. Mauritius was one of the ports of call... I went ashore and acquainted myself fairly well with local conditions."

During his two weeks' visit he visited a Tamil by name of Samy who lived at St. Pierre near the police station. Up to this day a branch road in Moka is given the name Samy in remembrance of this Indian who hosted Gandhi, A Mauritian settled in South Africa called Tambi Naidoo helped Gandhi a lot in his liberation and Satyagraha movements in South Africa, Gandhi placed an absolute trust in Tambi Naidoo.

A great reception was held in Gandhi's honour at the Taherbagh, Champ de Mars, Port Louis. Among those who formed part of the organising committee there were some Tamils whose names are as follows: Messrs V. Armoogum, J. Valaydon, N. Appavou and Narainsamy.

Gandhi lived in a humble style in a flat near the shop of Appavou at Place d'Armes, Port Louis. He travelled by coach through Pailles to Moka and St. Pierre. Another reception was held for him at Gentilly, Moka.

After the visit of Gandhi, many Indians began to be aware of their status in the political and economic fields. They started to take an active part in politics. Sakir, Nalletamby, Narainsamy, Boodhun, Gujadhur, Atchia, Seerbookun, A.L.M. Osman, etc. came forward to the political score and championed the cause of the Indians.

#### TAMIL TEACHING (1840-1940)

Tamil and Bengali were taught in schools before 1859

On 22nd March 1854, there was a proposal made by the Mauritius Church Association to Governor Higginson for the building of a school in Port Louis for education in the Tamil and English Languages.

There were other proposals such as the appointment of teachers from India to teach Indian languages because no experienced teachers were available in the island.

Tamby Narena was a brillant Tamil student who came out first in the pupil Teacher's Competition which was held in December 1864. He was appointed teacher in Government schools in 1866. By the time Tamby Narena became master, Professor Rajaruthnum Mudaliar held the chair of Tamil at the Royal College enjoying all the facilities and the same status as other professors of European languages. In 1864, Tamil was taught in some Government schools found in Port Louis, Mahebourg and Pamplemousses. Five years later Indian languages were taught in twenty six schools. Fifteen of these schools were run by Government and eleven were aided.

The Government Gazette of February 1865 reported that twelve new schools were opened during the year for the benefit of the Indian population. Mr. Coumbe Braune, Inspector of schools, submitted a scheme for training Indian teachers to Governor Arthur Gordon.

In the report of the Royal Commission 1875, it is found that Tamil was not only being taught in Government or aided schools but also in private school running evening classes. These classes were conducted in small huts or temples and were destined for the children of the Indian Immigrants.

On the state of Bon Courage owned by Mr Piquenard, the Commissioner reported that there was a temple and close to it there was a hut in which an old Indian used to teach Tamil and dancing.

At Terracine, the Commissioners visited an Indian school and wrote:

"The only feature of unusual interest to be observed here is a small Indian school in which was found an Indian master instructing a class of fifteen young children (one of whom was a girl) in reading and writing Tamil and in the rudiments of cypherings....."

The French Traveller L. Simonin wrote on the schools in Mauritius during his visit. In one school he found pupils reciting lessons which they knew by heart. The Indian children who frequented the school recited some lessons in Tamil and Bengali.

In the Mauritius Almanach and Colonial Register of 1886 and 1891 some names of teachers employed in the Government schools are as follows: M. Mayaveram, B. Cundasamy, Ramsamy Govinden, R. Narainen, R. Vengtasamy and P. Lutchmaya.

# 4. PROFILE OF TAMIL CULTURE IN MAURITIUS

Ever since the Tamils set foot on the Mauritian soil, they started safeguarding their religious and cultural traditions.

Tamil language was in the early days used on warning signboards at Railway Stations.

In 1876, bank notes of R 1, Rs 5 and Rs 10 bore Tamil inscriptions which are still to be found on our notes of Rs 5, Rs 10, Rs 50, Rs 100, Rs 200 and Rs 500.

Many streets in our capital bear Tamil names. A street, a public place, the Moka Eye Hospital and a road in Rose Hill are named after the famous Indian National poet Subramania Bharati.

As institutional supports we have the Arts and Culture Division of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute which provide all facilities to artistics and cultural expressions. Various socio-cultural associations and organisations found in almost all parts of the country run schools where music, dance and Tamil language are taught.

#### TAMIL IN OUR SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

The foundation for economic and social advances rests on a system of education which must respond to the needs of the people. The human right to improve the quality of life and to feel free to blossom in society through the traditions, culture and religion and at the same time trying to understand the other existing cultural values should be among the targets of a progressive educational system.

The Mauritian system of education goes along this line. It is in this context that Tamil finds its place in the educational school curriculum.

The State encourages the teaching and learning of Tamil in schools. Besides being taught in 63 evening schools by 102 teachers, Tamil is taught in Primary and Secondary schools also. 219 Government Primary Schools Teachers are presently teaching in the 187 primary schools having a total of 8,794 pupils from Std I to CPE. Education Officers teach Tamil in our State Secondary Schools and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

Messrs A. Pushparatham M.A (Tamil) and P. Tiroumalechetty M.A (Tamil Linguistics) are presently conducting classes at post secondary levels. Messrs A. Chinappen, M.A; K. Sornum, M.A and G. Manikkam, B.A; are education officers. Miss V. Tiroumalechetty, B.A, Miss Muthiayen,L.Sornum, B.A. and Mr. J.Chemmen have recently completed their studies in Tamil Nadu.

### WRITINGS ON TAMIL CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Writings on Tamil also knew some development in the period of British colonization.

Since 1853, the Tamils wrote in either English or French. But the great Tamil poet Permal Soobrayen translated into Tamil a French novel written by Guy de Theramond. This was a feat in the literary life of the colony and it won him appreciation from everywhere. Permal Soobrayen was a cultured man and he left his intellectual imprint still shining in Mauritius.

"Permal Soobrayen translated into Tamil a French novel in the early twenties. If one considers that even among the French writers in a country where French is spoken and understood by a vast majority no one has dared to translate a single English novel into French, one cannot but agree that this contribution is of no mean importance. He had many admirers in South India where his works were published. His was an elegant style. His felicitous expressions won him respectable number of readers."

Permal Soobrayen was a great Mauritian. His teacher (Guru) was Navalar V.A. Tulasinga Nayanar. He wrote a poem on Anjalay who died in a fusillade at the Belle Vue Harel Estate on 27th September, 1943. He died in 1952.

Literary Works on Tamil are G. Venkatasamy's, "Sidha Lutchmee" (1927); Arounasalam's, "Kaleimagal Phodanam" (1940), S. Mudaliar's "Tamize Mannen Koumaren" (1940), G. Seeneevassen's "Vocabulaire Tamoul-Français (1911) and R. Nursigadoo Naidu's "World's Religions". Vadivel Chellen was another writer and poet who embellished Tamil literature.

Mootoocoomaren Sangeelee O.B.E. and Ramoo Sooriamoorthy M.B.E. have brought in some valuable contributions through their works mostly written in French. Ramoo Sooriamoorthy has written on the history of the Tamils in Mauritius in French, "Les Tamoules a l'Ile Maurice". M. Sangeelee, in addition to his articles in the newspapers and magazines, has translated the 'Tirukkural' into French. 'Ethiques du sud de L'Inde', 'Bouquets de Sagesse' and translations of the poems of Subramania Bharati and Pandit Permal Soobrayen are among his works.

There are also other writers like T. Canarapen Pillay, Varsen Lutchumanen, S. Pyneeandee and L. Sornum who are coming up.

In the field of poetry and drama, Navalar V.A. Tulasinga Nayanar, S. Mudaliar, V. Chellen, S. Poinen, Sivan Tiroumalechetty, M. Sangeelee, R. Chengannah and many others are known for their dedication to Tamil letters.

The contribution of late Rajaruthnum Sangeelee who was an outstanding figure of Mauritian Tamil literature stands out most prominently. He was an eloquent speaker, poet and a dedicated social worker whose action and thought were based on the teachings of the Tamil sage and prophet Tiruvalluvar.

#### PERFORMING ARTS

Music is the art that deserves to be mentioned here. Supported by the State, parastatal bodies and professionals it is cultivated at erudite and popular levels. There is a tendency now for music to meet popular needs.

To date we have some half a dozen of young people who have successfully completed their studies in carnatic music and classical dances. They are contributing to various musical achievements. Recently the participation of our artistes in U. Bissoondoyal's "Hymn to Woman", a dance-drama, could stand as a testimony to their Potentialities and artistic skills.

The Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, private institutions and individual teachers hold regular classes in vocal instrumental music and dance (classical and folk).

## A NEW RELIGIOUS APPROACH

'Koyil illaa uril kudi irruka vendaam' (Do not live in a place where there is no temple)

Religion which is one of the most effective social controls has acted as a binding factor of the Tamil community. Women have played a significant role in the preservation of our religious traditions : Religious festivals and rituals are regulary conducted in the temples. The Tamils have been able to stick to the words of their elders who kept saying since centuries : "Koyil illa uril kudi irukka vendaam" (Do not live in a place where there is no temple).

For more that one and a half centuries, the Tamil priests (pusaris) and the Tamil women have been preserving the religions rites in the temples. They have safeguarded the rituals. But with the growing interest to acquire religious knowledge, the young generation which is far more educated than its predecessors is in quest of the philosophical meanings underlying the practice of rituals. The concept of God as interpreted in the mythologicals is being explained philosophically.

M. Sangeelee, R. Sooriamoorthy, K. Armoogum, G. Mannikkam, R. Mannick and many others are proponents of this new trend in the religious approach.

The Saiva Siddhanta Church was established in Mauritius officially in 1988 by virtue of an act passed in Parliament. One of its objectives is to protect, preserve and promote monistic Hinduism. The founder and Guide of this Church (Tirucchabay) is His Holiness Sivaya Subramanuniya Swami. Regular classes in saivite philosophy are run by 'Sadakas' and 'Ministers of the Church' in different parts of the island. Messrs Retnon Velvindron and attorney-at -law Manogaran Mardaymootoo, fervent disciples of His Holiness Sivaya Subramuniya Swami, head the local branch of the Saiva Siddhanta Church which is more bent on Saiva philosophy.

The 'Tirukkural' of Tiruvalluvar, Tirumular's 'Tirumanthiram' Sekkilar's "Periapuranam", the "Meikanda Shastras" and Swami Ramalinga's "Tiru Arutpa", are among the sacred books that Tamils in Mauritius have recourse to for the acquisition and understanding of their religious philosophy. In the Population Census of 1983 the Tamil speaking population, by religion is recorded as follows:

Arya	Samaji	st (Tam	il speaking)	_	159
Dravio	lian			_	166
Tamil					66,773
Sana	tanist	(Tamil	speaking)	-	1,495

TOTAL	_	68,593
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The Tamil temples of Mauritius are affiliated to the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation, a body created in 1960 to look after Tamil religious and cultural development. Government's grant to the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation for the year 1987-88 amounted to Rs 539,000. This sum is distributed to all the member temples as subsidies.

The number of temples affiliated to Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation (1987-88) are as follows:

(District-Wise)

Plaines Wilhems	20
Port-Louis	7
Pamplemousses	5
Black River	3
Savanne	17
Moka	9
Grand Port	10
Flacq	10
Riviere du Rempar	t14

The other important religious association known as the Hindu Maha Jana Samgam was founded in 19744 by A.G. Pillay and it was incorporated in 1946. It has seven temples, most of them being very ancient, and its first President was Mr. Nadarajan Sivaramen, attorneyat-law, founder of the young Men's Hindu association and one of the directors of the 'Advance' newspaper.

#### TAMIL CHRISTIANS

The bulk of the Indian workers who came during the French period and earlier were subject to Code Noir if they were not yet converted into Christianity. Louis XV wanted all his subjects to follow his creed. The free Indians who came had already embraced Christianity which was rooted in India most especially in the French Province of Pondichery. Most of them who came from there lived at Camp Malabar and a South Indian J. Dennis Pitchen was appointed as Chef des Malabars.

During the early period of British rule, protestantism was implanted and Reverend Hobbs came to preach the gospel to the Indian immigrants under the church missionary society who ran primary schools as from 1889. 65% of the pupils in these schools were Indian children.

Reverend Hobbs opened a Tamil school at Creve-Coeur.

Protestant mission developed progressively and we could find in Reverend Amedee Nagapen's book the following informations:

No. of Baptism		Year		
	78	1855	_	1857
	368	1857	-	1864
	2,580	1865	-	1880

Missionaries like Taylor and John Baptist from the Bible Society of Madras distributed 2,750 copies of the bible in Tamil and Reverend Hardy went throughout the island preaching the bible in Tamil.

It should be noted that the Christian missionaries were the first people who introduced a system of education for the oppressed masses. They rendered a great service to the Indian immigrants.

To-day The Indo Mauritian Catholic Association (IMCA) furthers christian teachings among catholic Tamils but retains some of the ways of life pertaining to Tamil culture. For example the IMCA stresses upon the wearing of the sarees, the celebration of important Tamil Festivals and the learning of Tamil language.

#### TAMIL FESTIVALS

Hindu festivals abounds in Mauritius. The main ones which are celebrated by Tamils are Cavadee, Varusha Pirappu, Purattasi viratham (Govinden), Aadi, Timithi, Deepavali, Maha Shivaratree and Pongal (Sankranti).

#### (a) CAVADEE

The Thai Poosum Cavadee and the Sittirai Cavadee celebrated in the months of 'Thai' (January/

February) and 'Sittirai' (April/May) are dedicated to Muruga, one of the most ancient dieties worshipped by the Tamils.

Muruga known under different appelations such as 'Subramanian', 'Kartigeye', 'Velayuden', etc. is represented as 'Vel', the spear that destroys ignorance and evil. Muruga is another substitute for the glory and power of Shiva and finds a due place in Saivism.

After the holy bath in rivers or pools usually situated at some distance from the 'Kovil', procession of devotees with the 'Cavadee' on their shoulders walk towards the shrine of Muruga in joy, prayer and devotion.

The milk which they carry to the temple is poured on the statue of Muruga as Abhishegum (holy bath).

It is all a scene of beauty, love and purity symbolised by God Muruga on the day of Cavadee.

On 'Sittirai Cavadee' thousands of devotees go uphill the Corps de Garde mountain. On one of its peak stands the majestic Siva Soopramaniar Kovil first built in 1914. People from all nooks and corners of Mauritius come there on the day of Sittarai Cavadee.

It is a day of unparalleled religious fervour.

#### (b) VARUSHA PIRAPPU

Varusha Pirappu ushers in the Tamil New Year. After prayers in the morning at home and at the Kovil, the Tamils give way to rejoicings. Cultural shows are organised in the localities to mark this occasion.

A cycle of 60 years measures time in the Tamil calendar and each of the year in the cycle bears a name. It always starts with 'Prabava' to end with 'Akshara'. On the day of Varusha Pirappu or Aandu Pirappu, priests read the calendar (Panjangam). The Tamils used to gather in temples to hear what is in store for them during the year.

## (c) GOVINDEN OR PURATTAASI VIRATHAM

The GOVINDEN (Co — Cow, Vindhen — Master) festival is being widely celebrated these days in honour of **Govinden** the shepherd God Vishnu, Venkateshwara, Kannen (Krishna) or Thirumaal.

The devotees undergo thirty days fasting during the whole month of Purattaasi (September/October).

During the holy month of 'Govinden' great mass prayers are held in temples and at the seat of organisations. These prayers are accompanied by rituals and prayers around the traditional lamps, Devotional songs (Bhajanam) are performed by youngsters as well as the elders. Pilgrimage to Kovils are undertaken by hundreds of pilgrims.

## (d) AADI

The Aadi Padinettaampere is a festival celebrated by the Tamil womenfolk. On that day the wife prays for the well-being of her husband.

The 'Thaali' (wedding jewel) which the wife wears round her neck is venerated.

This shows the respect, love and faith that the wife bears to her husband.

This festival also brings to light the virtue of chastity and love prescribed in the 'Karpu' section of Tirvalluvar's 'Tirukkural'.

On this day the wife performs ceremonies. The newly maried couple go to the in-laws and a feast is held. The bridegroom receives presents and both families share the meals in joy.

Young girls also are initiated on that day.

## (e) TIMITHI (walking on fire)

The festival of Timithi is dedicated to Draupadee Ammen, the heroine of Mahabharatha. It is the triumph of self sacrifice over evil and bad thoughts.

Devotees walk on fire to cleanse themselves of sin and to defy the advancing waves of evil that dare come on their way.

The festival is widely celebrated in Kovils dedicated to goddess Ammen.

### (f) DEEPAVALI

Deepavali is one of our national festivals. The Tamils celebrate it with lavish joy, pomp and rejoicing.

Light pervades everywhere piercing the darkness of ignorance and evil it is really a festival of light as every home is adorned with myriads of rows of lamps. It is the victory of good over evil.

## (g) MAHA SHIVARATREE

To Sivapperuman, the most ancient God of the Tamils is dedicated Maha Shivaratree, the Great Night of Shiva. This festival is celebrated by the Hindus. Long processions of 'Kanwars' from all parts of the country converge to Ganga Talab or Grand Bassin two or three days before the festival.

The waters of the Grand Bassin are empowered with the sacredness of the Ganges. Devotees bring the water and poured it on the 'lingam' in the temple.

In some Tamil temples prayers are said all night on the occasion of Maha Shivaratree.

### **PONGUL (SANKRANTI)**

The Pongul festival marks the great event when man's gratitude to God, nature and the animal is manifested. On this auspicious day rice and milk are cooked (pongul) and flowers, fruits, etc. are offered to God. This tradition is kept alive in Tamil Nadu as well as in the places where Tamils have settled. Offerings are made to God in the morning. While seeing the rice and milk boiling the family all gathered around would shout "Pongalo Pongul!". It is a sign of indebtedness to God for having provided man with health, courage and means to earn his livelihood. The first yield of the crop is offered to Him who governs the world and the Universe and who is the one Supreme Being.

## TAMIL SOCIO-CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

The social life of the Tamils in Mauritius is to a certain extent animated by the socio-cultural organisations. These organisations set up self-help projects, run Tamil evening schools and music and dance classes, celebrate religious festivals and group together the members of the Tamil community region-wise.

In 1908, the Young Men's Hindu Association strove to promote Tamil language and culture and literacy among labourers, to show the way to the succeeding generation to unite and to stand together to fight the cause of our cultural entity.

The Second Tamil Scouts at Rose Hill was a nursing from where most of our Tamil elites of to-day had received their first social formation.

At present about 50 socio-cultural organisations are operating. Region-wise they are as follows : North - 10; Moka-Flacq - 6; Port Louis -8; Plaines Wilhems - 20 and South - 15.

Among the main socio-cultural and religious organisations we have, the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation, The Hindu Maha Jana Sangam, The Parama Bhakta Suguna Vilasa Bhajana Sangam, The Union Tamoule de Maurice, The Tamil League, The All Mauritius Tamil Examinations Syndicate, The Dravidian Cultural Association, The Annadurai Ladies Association and The Tamarai Ladies Association.

#### MASS MEDIA

One of the popular medium of mass communication is Radio and Television. The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, our national station, aims at 'stimulating all-round socio economic and cultural development to bring about the mobilisation of the creative energies of the people towards the building of a strong and united nation, to foster the integration of the diverse communities by facilitating the process of cultural synthesis and social humanization and to promote the dissemination in areas like education, health, agriculture and industry, etc.'

Radio and Television are the most readily accessible means of communication to the population.

Press, books, cinema are also effective mass-media. Efforts are being made to satisfy the various communities in the varied aspects of culture namely music, language, drama, etc. through the medium of Radio and Television.

The Tamil press has also a gripping history which dates as far back as 1861. There is an article written in Tamil which appeared in 'Le Mauricien' of 20th June, 1861.

'La Lumière (Oli), the cultural paper of the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation, appeared in September 1980. Written mostly in French, the paper highlights the activities of the Federation and carries topics related to Tamil culture.

'Saktivel' was another monthly cultural paper launched in December 1985.

Below is a list of the various Tamil newspapers which appeared since. -1868.

The Merchant Advertiser (1868) Mimic Trumpeter (1911) Tamil Kalvi Kazagam (1934) Tamil Maha Sangam (1947) The Peacock (1961) L'Eclaireur (1963) Tamil Voice (1964)

Souvenir magazines are published regularly by Tamil socio-cultural organisations.

# TAMIL WORDS IN OUR'LINGUA FRANCA

Tamil words have entered our dialect and are widely utilised by all Mauritians. Some of these words are as follows:-

- Muluktani Milagutannir (a tasty soup of pickles)
- rasson rassum (a soup)
- carupile Kariveppile (a leaf used in curry)
- pipengaye pirkangaye (a vegetable)
- vettiver vettriver (a plant)
- cottumalli cottumalli (a scented plant used in curry)
- puttu pitdu (a cake)
- unday urunday (a round cake)

# 5. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE TAMILS TO A FREE DEMOCRATIC MAURITIAN SOCIETY

"The Tamils have fully contributed and are contributing in every walk of our Mauritian Society." This statement by the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Mauritius reflects the significant role played by the Tamils in the educational, socio-cultural, economic and political fields.

# ON THE ECONOMIC SCENE

The members of the Tamil community are not indifferent to the new wave of industrialisation. Many are those who have already started business through small scale industries and have now become important partners investing in textile, hotel, agricultural and fishing industries.

Tamil merchants like the Appavoo's, Sivapragassen's, Sunnassee's, Soondron's and many others have known their hay days in our capital of Port-Louis. But now there is a good number of traders and businessman emerging in the rural areas.

In a nut-shell there is a marked tendency to shift from the once prized white-collar mentality to that of a industrially-oriented self-employed status.

### TAMILS IN MAURITIAN POLITICS TO-DAY

In the field of Mauritian politics thespians like the late Renganaden Seeneevassen, late K. Sunnassee, Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo, D.A.Patten, K. Tirvengadum, A.V. Chettiar have passed over the heritage to an arsenal of young upcoming members of the new generation in the ruling party as well as in the opposition party.

To-day Hon. Armoogum Parsuraman is Minister of Education, Arts and Culture. He is heading the biggest spending ministry. Endowed with an innate and sincere desire to serve, Hon. Parsuraman has been holding the helm of this key-ministry for the past six years. In a speech on the occasion of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the arrival of the Tamils in Mauritius, our Prime Minister said : "The contributions of the Tamils to the cause of a free and democratic society in Mauritius have been significant. I am reminded here of the late Renganaden Seeneevassen, of Hon. Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo, and of so many other sons and daughters who joined the struggle to preserve freedom in this country. My colleague and friend, the Minister of Education, Arts & Culture, Armoogum Parsuraman, has been keeping the flag flying very high and is an example of true Mauritian who, while leaving no stone unturned to enhance the prestige of the Tamil community in Mauritius does at the same time work towards the consolidation of our unity."

In the ruling party we have also ex-trade-unionist Hon. R. Pyneeandee, Parliamentary Private Secretary. In the opposition party Hon. J. Cuttaree is no less a dynamic social leader, having made a mark in the legal profession.

Other names which have been shining on the political fields are G. Venkatasamy, F.S. Chadien, Vèle Govinden, T. Narainen, V. Venkatasamy, R. Dyalah, Dr. C.M. Pillay, V. Rungasamy, K.C. Pillay, N. Kistnen, B. Teeroovengadum and Miss V. Seenyen.

<sup>'</sup>Tamils elected at the past municipal elections are Hon. R. Dyalah and Mr. M. Veerabadren (Port Louis): Hon. J. Cuttaree and M. Vencatasamy (Beau Bassin-Rose-Hill): Mr. Vella Cumousamy, H. P.P. Kistnen and M.A. Pillay (Quatre Bornes), Mr. V. Baloomoody and M.P. Naiken (Curepipe); M. S. Ramsamy (Lord Mayor of the Municipality of Vacoas-Phoenix).

Among our Tamil Ladies who have taken an active part in politics, we can find Mrs R. Poonoosamy. She was nominated as member of the Legislative Assembly on 10th June, 1975 and she became the first Mauritian Lady to assume the office of a Minister. She was given the port folio of Women's affairs, Price and Consumer Protection in the Cabinet headed by Late Prime Minister Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam.

# HOMAGE TO RENGANADEN SEENEEVASSEN (1910-1958)

Port Louis Centre is the cradle of Renganaden Seeneevassen, who was born in a modest family living at the corners 13, Bourbon and 7, Leoville l'Homme streets on the 11th April, 1910.

His father was a market auctionneer. Renganaden was admitted in a primary school run by the Young Men's Hindu Association.

Renganaden was ten years old when his father died. This meant a life of austerity for a family of eleven members.

Renga, as he was affectionately called, showed all signs of a brillant child. He pursued his secondary education at the Royal College Curepipe. After his secondary education, he taught for some time at the Royal College and the Bhujoharry College.

He went abroad in 1936 and four years later he obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Law at the London University.

Renganaden Seeneevassen was a self-made man who proved himself to be a true leader of men also.

Drawn to the political arena after his return from his studies abroad, Renganaden had a public life which spanned a period of only eighteen years during which he was propelled at the height of the people's esteem and admiration.

Together with Dr. S. Ramgoolam, he was elected to the Municipality of Port Louis in 1946. He was nominated to the Legislature the following year. In the 1948 General elections he was elected with his colleagues, Dr. Millien, Guy Rozemont and Benjamin Emile. Re-elected in 1953, he represented Mauritius at the Coronation Ceremony of Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II. He participated in and contributed heart and soul to negotiations on constitutional reforms held in London in 1955 and 1957.

He took the helm of the Ministry of Education and Institutions and introduced the Education Ordinance of 1957, the stepping stone for a revolutionized education policy.

## **THE EDUCATION ACT OF 1957**

In the field of educational reforms, the most noteworthy development in 1957 was the promulgation of the Education Act. This Act embodied the establishment of equal rights in education.

One of the main objectives of the Act is "to promote education in the colony, to consolidate and amend laws relating to education, supervision and control of schools, the teaching therein, and for purposes connected therewith".

## **KEY POSITIONS HELD BY TAMILS TO-DAY**

Tamil speaking Mauritians thrive in the various walks of the socioeconomic life of the country. Able administrators, accountants, bankers, engeneers, doctors, lawyers shine in the public as well as well as in the private sectors.

Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo is the Governor General of Mauritius. He had been a close companion-of-arms of late Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, ex-Prime Minister and ex-Governor-General of Mauritius. Gifted with a well of experience in politics and law, Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo is having an eye on the affairs of the country as the representative of Her Majesty the Queen. Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo is one of the luminaries of this country. He got his first inspiration to join politics from the Late Renganaden Seeneevassen.

Mr. Viswanaden Sooben C.M.G. is the Chairman of the Public and Police Service Commission. After a long fruitful career in the Public service, he was called upon to assume such a high post-a well deserved position as he is known all over the country for his integrity and his long years of loyal service. Before him Late Sandragassen Mootoosamy was the Chairman of the Public and Police Service Commission and also the first Mauritian Ombudsman.

Sir HarryKrishna Tirvengadum is the Managing Director of the Air Mauritius Ltd., our national airline company. His prowess in handling management effectively since many years has brought the company to national as well as international forefront.

Captain Mooroogan is another distinguished Tamil speaking Mauritian who is heading the Cargo Handling Corporation.

Mr. K. Varaden is Post Master General.

Mr.V. Rungasamy was chairman of the District Council of the south for nearly five years. He is now a member of the Local Government Service Commission.

Miss D. Venkatasamy is now acting director of the Mauritius Institute of Education, M.N. Kistnassamy is Managing Director of the State Investment Cooporation. Messrs. D. Soopramanien, P. Padiachy and S. Veerasamy are the chairmen of the State Trading Corporation, the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute Council respectively.

Many Tamils are elevated to ranks of honour for services rendered in the political, social and economic fields by her Majesty the Queen.

## CONCLUSION

Tamils in Mauritius, to-day, face a challenge. They are concious of the fact that it is high time for them to play a meaningful part in the wide campaign for the promotion of multi-cultural Mauritianism and national development through state-assisted as well as self-help cultural projects which are viable and realistic.

The Tamils of Mauritians have a rich cultural identity which they have been preserving since two and half centuries ago. Their cultural profile is quite distinguishable from the other cultural components. Their spirit of mutual tolerance, sharing and understanding of other's values is perhaps unique in the world.

Tamil culture definitely adds more colour to our rainbow nation. And as such it has to be preserved, promoted and propagated.

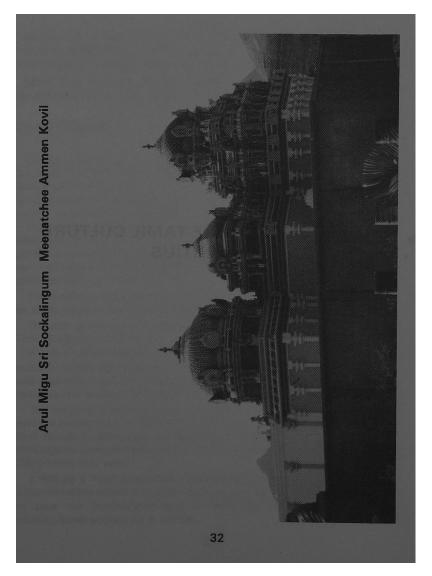
The aim of this book is also an invitation to think on the future of the Tamil Culture in Mauritius.

A line of action has to be spelt out, taking into consideration our multi cultural midst, the objectives targetted, the necessary structures to be laid and other realistic plans to ensure the real and progressive march towards the fruition of Tamil Culture in Mauritius.

The holding of the International Conference on Tamil Culture in 1980 and the celebration in 1985 of the 250th anniversary of the arrival of the first Tamils in Mauritius will definitely culminate in the holding of the prestigious seventh International conference seminar of Tamil studies in December, this year.

It will be a most propitious occasion for us all to tie ourselves to the determination which is to help fostering our culture and at the same time to love our motherland and to work for the betterment of our multicultural society as a whole.

# 6. SOME FACETS OF TAMIL CULTURE IN MAURITIUS







Nataraja, the cosmic dancer

The eternal dance of Siva Encompassing the universe Causes the planets to obey The sun to shine, The wind to yearn, The earth to move, The waves to toss And the heart to beat. O Siva, the cosmic dancer You are here and everywhere.

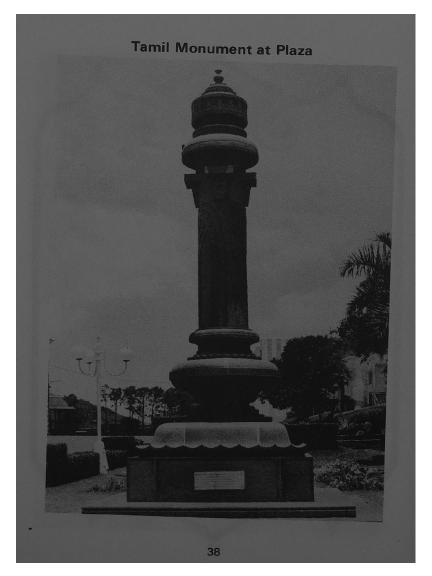




#### Cavadee

To you, O Lord, the Blessed One, We, arrayed in drenched pink clothes, Come as one at your feet To bow and ask for your grace With our heart imbued in the whiteness of milk, Light and for ever Youthful.





Momument commemorating the 250th anniversary of the arrival of the Tamil-speaking indians in Mauritians at Plaza, Rose-Hill.

This wonderfully-hewn granite Tells the living tale of the rich presence Of Tamils who came, two centuries and a half ago, To the motherland of ours.

Tamil entity is one of the raised arms Of our mother Goddess, Bent to build a strong nation— A small world in a big one— For the motherland of ours.

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Anjalay, a Tamil woman Labourer who fell under the bullets during a strike on the Belle Vue Harel estate on 27th September, 1943.

From a woman worker to Anjalay

Dear sister, Your feet knew not tinkling 'patlis. They knew the hurting chains of dawn-to-dusk labour with the 'pioche'.

Your neck was not yoked with golden necklaces But with sweat-absorbing-saffron plaited thread That fasten securedly domestic life.

Your body smelt no artificial feminine fragrance But the perfumes of an island Garlanded with an ocean of perspiration.



Your heart was not a bed of dreams But a crater of torches That set alight the voices of the working class.

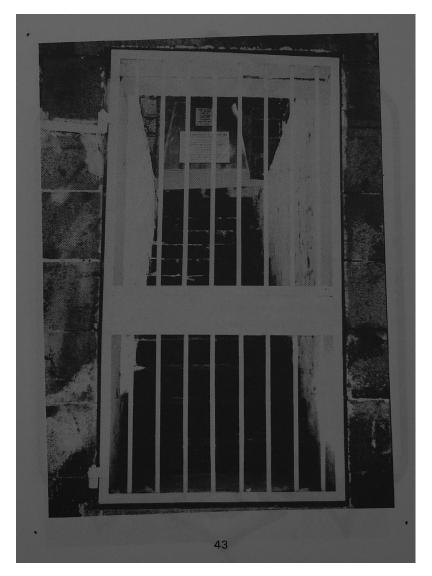
Your life was not a stagnant pool But an ever gurgling spring That cleaned with ever fresh waters A large piece of hard rock that lay listlessly on its bank.

It is this rock, my dear friend, That we have taken to make a monument Which keeps recalling to our mind The fetters you broke The motherhood you sacrificed on the altar of workers' rights

The oceans of perspiration that fell like rain The heart that knew no fear of bullets The life whose regular beats I still hear from the unfathommable depth of this rock.

For me, dear sister, you live still.



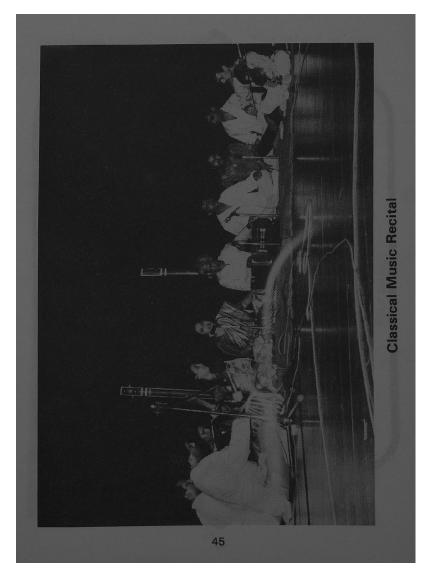


C

#### Appravasi (Coolie) Ghat

Look my son, that is from where The bulk of our ancestors saw for first time The Mauritian sun. On hearing they had come The sugar-cane fields far away Were singing joyful songs Because the season had come for them To lay the foundations of a nation With the blood, sweat, tears, courage and muscles Of our forefathers, my son.





## A classical music recital

If music is a way of life Share it, give us plenty of it. We need not be necessarily well-versed in the sa re ga ma To know its valour and grandeur. It is as simple as the soothing winds The freshness of which we enjoy.

It is like the sunrise chirps of the swallows, The sounds of which wakes us up.

It is like the young sunrays, The warmth of which opens up the virgin buds.

At last, it is like saying smilingly: "Bye, see you again", A way of life, peaceful and forever friendly.





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## Author's note :

- Mr Rama Poonoosamy was Minister for Arts, Culture and Leisure from June 1982 to March 1983. He was also Municipal Councillor of Port-Louis in 1977
- On page 24 please read 'nursery' instead of 'nursing' as printed by error.



T.Ammigan, a former teacher of Tamil, holds a diploma in journalism. He has followed a certificate course in Tamil culture at the Tamil University of Tanjavur in 1982. He also holds a certificate in journalism from the Commonwealth Association of Journalists (1988).

The book, written in 1982, entitled 'Subramania Bharati' which was brought out on the occasion of the birth centenary celebrations of the national poet of India is one of his publications.

He is one of the editors of 'La Lumière', the monthly cultural newspaper of the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation and he has been, collaborating to various newspapers of Mauritius like 'Le Mauricien' and 'Week End' on topics related to Tamil culture. He attended the sixth International conference seminar of Tamil studies which was held in 1987 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

He is at present attached to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture

