

# Migration and Identity Maintenance

— A case study of a family from Karaikal, South India —

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## Abstract

The paper describes the case study of a single family whose members traveled out of Karaikal, South India, to elaborate the outcomes of transnational migration on their identity. By examining the kinship structure of the family's migrants to Singapore, Malaya and France, the study demonstrates three conclusions with reference to transnational migration and identity maintenance. Firstly, contrary to popular acceptance, women as matriarchs have played key roles in advancing the social and economic status of their families in Karaikal society. Secondly, kinship based identities are retained as long as they are renewed constantly by marriage to members affiliated to the natal areas. Finally, the *uur* (village or community) as a concept is highly useful in focusing the narratives of migrants as it provides a superior theoretical insight into migration studies than the contemporary usage of nation-states and gross statistical data.

**Key words:** Transnational migration; familial identity; Tamil kinship; Tamil *uur*; Karaikal; South India; Singapore; France.

## Introduction

People from the Indian subcontinent live as worldwide communities (Sandhu and Mani, 2006). Most of the literature written about them, however, describes only the British colonial legacy as having been the major cause for migration in the last two hundred years (Ravindra K. Jain, 2002). Only discerning scholars understand that the Indian subcontinent had also Portuguese and French colonies besides the predominant British presence in India.

Most research on migration use macro-level data to elaborate the outcomes of migration (Castles and Miller, 2003). This paper, however, will use the study of a single family whose members traveled out of Karaikal from the early twentieth century to different destinations around the world.

This paper is centered on some key questions in order to understand the dynamics of family migration and identity maintenance. Some of the key issues raised in this research are as follows: (1) The effects of migration on the socioeconomic status of the migrants; (2) The transformation in

their identities pertaining to cultural and political identities; and, (3) The effects of migration on marriage, kinship and earlier social identities of the migrants.

### **The French in India**

Karaikal and Pondicherry are culturally and historically a part of Tamil Nadu or as scholars of Tamil world would extol, they are part of *Thamizhagam* (Tamil Homeland). In contemporary India, Pondicherry is a Union Territory with its own legislature. Geographically and culturally the Pondicherry region merges into Tamil Nadu. As a Union Territory, Pondicherry is not a contiguous territory, but consists of four former French colonies of India. Pondicherry thus consists of the larger territory in Eastern India surrounded by Tamil Nadu. Karaikal lays 140 kms south of Pondicherry and one has to travel across Tamil Nadu State to reach Karaikal. Both areas are located on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal. The other parts of present day Pondicherry are Yanam on the east coast in Andhra Pradesh state and Mahe on the west coast in Kerala state. In addition to the above, the French also had Chandan Nagar, a small town in the West Bengal state on the Hugli River. This small town was surrounded by colonial urban Calcutta. In 1951, however, this town was ceded to India and became a part of Calcutta city.

Under an agreement with France, India took over the administration of the four enclaves of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam and Mahe on 1 November 1954. A treaty ceding the French settlements to India was signed on May 1956, but it was not until August 1962 that the formal transfer occurred. Despite some agitation to merge the enclaves with the states surrounding them, the territories now constitute Pondicherry which remains under the administration of the Central Government of India.

The French dream of an Indian empire had taken life at Pondicherry, but also rapidly came to an end at the same place. It became widely known with the arrival of the French on 4 February 1673 that they were keen to carve out an empire in India. Twenty years later, in 1643, the Dutch took over Pondicherry. With the signing of the 'Traite de Ryswick', it returned to the French in 1699. In 1742, Joseph Francois Dupleix, became Governor of the French India. At the same time, war broke out between France and England. The situation in Europe and the ambitions of Dupleix stirred up the Anglo-French conflict in India. During the next 70 years, Pondicherry was the focus of conflict between the two colonialists. Pondicherry was finally left to the French in 1814 and remained with them until 1954.

### **Society in Karaikal**

As the focus of this paper is to explain the effects of migration on a family from Karaikal, an attempt is made here to elaborate on the history and geography of Karaikal. The first census of Karaikal was conducted in 1852. As registration of births, deaths and marriages were made compulsory in

1854, the French were able to conduct regular census ratings from 1891. The census figures indicate the changing composition of society at Karaikal. The famous papers of CORDIER (Adminstrateur of Karaikal), throws some light on the population between 1791 and 1891 (See Table 1). Reliable data of the ANNUAIRS (Annual Reports) since 1838 also provide relevant information of the society at Karaikal.

Between 1851 and 1971, the population of Karaikal underwent major fluctuations. Beginning with a population of 59,872 people in 1851, it declined to 52,643 in 1861. Over the next five years, the population showed spectacular increase to reach 92,704 people which amounted to an annual rate of increase of 16 percent. This increase could have been possible as a result of the French policy to encourage emigration to its other colonies, which in turn attracted the population from the surrounding regions in Tanjore district. The Tanjore district itself was undergoing tremendous social change as a result of British mercantile capitalism with landless labour being attracted to out-migration to other parts of South India including going overseas. As the 'order of 17 June 1859' permitted emigration of population of Pondicherry and Karaikal to Reunion, Karaikal became a staging point for landless labour to go overseas. The population declined gradually over the next twenty years and became 60,700 people in 1889. On 10 February 1898, the posts of Controller of Emigration in Pondicherry and Karaikal were abolished. This marked the end of large scale migration. The population remained unchanged for more than five decades. In 1941, the population stood at 60,555 people. Karaikal has often been ravaged by epidemics like small-pox and cholera. In, 1918 and 1919, the influenza epidemics decimated a sizable population.

**Table 1 : Population of Karaikal between 1791 and 1819**

Year	1791	1817	1819
Males	8,827	9,331	9,819
Females	10,198	10,280	10,990
Boys	3,973	3,690	3,986
Girls	3,104	3,716	3,342
Slaves	583	0	0
Total	26,685	27,017	28,136

Source : <http://karaikal.nic.in/Administration/People/People.htm>

As the definitions of the categories in Table 1 are unclear, it is assumed here that the French were using European definitions of adult males and females. Despite the non-clarity in the definition of the categories, the table is useful in indicating some sociological features of society at Karaikal. Adult females outnumbered adult males. Eighteenth century Karaikal society had also slaves besides its stratified caste structure.

In the twentieth century, the population of Karaikal increased gradually. Table 2 shows the

population of Karaikal in the twentieth century. It will be evident that females have outnumbered males in Karaikal for many decades. This could have led to family heads being females as would be evident in the family being taken up for comment in this research.

**Table 2 : Population of Karaikal between 1901 and 2001.**

Year	Total Persons	Decadal Variation	Males	Females
1901	56,595	-	N.A.	N.A.
1911	56,577	- 0.03	25,640	30,937
1921	54,356	- 3.93	25,325	29,937
1931	57,394	+ 5.59	N.A.	N.A.
1941	60,555	+ 5.51	N.A.	N.A.
1948	70,541	+16.49	33,982	36,559
1961	84,001	+19.08	40,859	43,142
1971	100,042	+19.10	49,458	50,584
1981	120,010	+19.96	59,367	60,643
1991	145,703	+21.41	72,557	73,146
2001	170,640	+17.11	84,365	86,275

Source : <http://karaikal.nic.in/Administration/People/People.htm>

Majority of the population in Karaikal have always been Hindus. In 1961, Hindus accounted for 75.37%, while Christians formed 10.75% of the population. The rest were Muslims.

The caste structure of Karaikal society shared similarities with the surrounding Thanjore district. The French having come as traders did not interfere in matters of customs and practices. Even after they established themselves as rulers of Karaikal they allowed the natives to continue with their customs and practices. When the French Civil Code was extended to Karaikal on 6 January 1819, it ensured that Hindus shall be governed by the provision of the Code only in matters not contrary to Hindu customs. Christians on the other hand, were fully governed by the French Civil Code on all matters.

### **Theoretical and methodological considerations**

The significance of family-based migration is more of post-war phenomena for Tamils. It stems from the priority accorded to humanitarian and human rights considerations (Castles and Miller, 1993: 95). As most Tamils who migrated as unskilled labour before the second-world war were either recruited under the 'indentured' or '*kangani*' system, there was always an imbalance in the sex ratio with fewer females than males in the destination colonies. Reflecting on the narratives provided by informants in this research, it must be noted that all initial migration to Singapore and France were

by males. As these early male migrants were either skilled or educated, they were able to bring over their families much quicker than most Tamil labour migrants. Thus the first author's great-grand father, Soosey Das, who migrated to Singapore was already literate and trained in carpentry, a skill much needed in Singapore at that time in the construction industry. He was able to bring his wife and have children born in Singapore. Similarly the uncle, mother's younger brother, who migrated in the late 1950s to France was already literate in French, and in a matter of three years married a French female to form his family. As he sponsored his brothers and sisters to France, all were able to return to Karaikal to marry a relative and form nuclear families in France.

Following Hall (1992), we can distinguish three main approaches in the study of identities. The first, inherited from the Enlightenment, views identity as a relatively fixed and autonomous form of selfhood, an inner personality largely immune to outside influence. The second approach, symbolic inter-actionism, developed during the early decades of the twentieth century, puts the emphasis on social influences in the construction of more malleable personal identities. Theorists of postmodernism have argued for an unanchored, constantly open and self-generating form of identity. One of the main difficulties attached to the term 'identity' is the fact that in everyday usage it is often understood to denote something fixed, whereas social psychologists and other researchers have produced abundant evidence to show that few if any human being may be said to have an entirely stable, unchanging identity.

If we define identity as the pattern of meaning and value by which a person structures his or her life, it is clear that this involves a dynamic process rather than an immutable condition. Individuals construct meaning and value with the aid of cultural codes shared by particular groups. Personal identity is in this sense inseparable from –though not necessarily reducible to socio-cultural identity. It is not uncommon for a person to switch between codes. By the same token, he or she moves between a range of socio-cultural identities.

Socio-cultural ties based on collective origins distinct from those of other groups are the foundation of ethnic identities. The cultural codes associated with ethnic identities have been described by Geertz as 'primordial attachment' (Geertz, 1963: 109). There are at least three senses in which this description might appear apt. First, the cultural codes on which ethnic identities are built tend to be of a fundamental nature, setting a general framework of meaning within which particular acts are constructed. This applies to language, for example, as well as to religious beliefs. Second, cultural codes of this kind are usually, though not always, learnt at an early age, and in this sense enjoy ontological primacy. Third, they are by the same token associated with deep-seated affective ties which may make them difficult to dislodge or replace. New codes may be learnt in later life, however, and in certain circumstances may supersede those acquired at an early age. Moreover, code-switching is not necessarily an essentially affective affair. Individuals or groups may invoke ethnic identities in a calculated fashion, sometimes with the aim of achieving objectives which owe relatively little to the original codes inherited by ethno-cultural groups. This is sometimes referred to as an instrumental (as against a primordial) form of ethnicity. Ethnic

allegiances owe more to this kind of calculation than to primordial sentiments.

The behavior of all human beings is marked by a mixture of rational and affective features. Measuring the strength of ethno-cultural groups is no easy task. It should be remembered that these are not the same as an ethnic group, whose members are defined for the purposes of the present study simply on the basis of shared territorial origins.

The central role of subjective processes in the constitution of cultural groups raises even more fundamental difficulties. Unlike employment and housing patterns, which are in principle open to direct empirical observation, ethno-cultural belonging revolves around intellectual and attitudinal processes which cannot be directly apprehended by an outside observer. Traces of those processes are visible in behavioral pattern, but their interpretation is by no means a simple or mechanical task. It is, of course, possible to ask people about their values and beliefs, but this always involve complex methodological problems and there is no guarantee that potential interviewees will be willing to respond to questions in such personally sensitive areas or if they do, that their replies will be wholly truthful.

In considering the various techniques available for research, Parita Mukta (2002) provided the best solution to the type of research technique for this study. Her 'Shards of Memory' is a complex fabric of individual lives and global trends, lovingly entwined with sensitive art and subtle analytical powers across three continents and four generations. Parita Mukta moves back and forth between the story of her grandmother's (Ba) adolescence and youth, her arranged wedding to a man whose first gift to her was paper and ink so she could write to him (quickly confiscated by her family), her life and that of her family in Kenya, her old age in Britain, and a vibrantly critical history of the fate of widows in traditional culture (and women in all cultures).

Listening, as we know, is the heart of oral history; its task is not, as is often described, 'give voice' to the 'voiceless', but to lend an ear to voices that are there but not being listened to, and perhaps amplify them so that others can hear them, as well (Nirmala Puru Shotam, 1998). Listening with respect and holding her sources close to her heart, Parita Mukta traces the roots of her own understanding of this history and of herself, of her acute need to know and understand. The book then becomes a journey to the sources of pain and meaning in four generations of lives: 'Why do cultures place so much emphasis on marriage as well as on love absolute and transcendental, while shackling the hearts of women and men?'

The 'Shards of Memory', then, are made up of feelings. The author describes lovingly her aunt's 'imagining of love', and illuminates their lives, and those of three generations of women in her family, through the folk narrative of the *dosima* (an unwanted old woman), who managed, with the help of her daughter, to outwit the wolf, the lion, and the bear, just as the woman in the book manage with one another's help to allude, overcome, learn, deal with snares and challenges of migration, cultural change, class and gender roles.

Pain and meaning are not embodied only in data, events, and documents. Parita Mukta uses all the instruments at her disposal: family narratives, photographs, archival documents, myth, folklore,

music, literature and poetry. There is much more in this book. There is the 'story of hungry', the 'hungry' of the family and 'hungry' of the poor amidst the greed of a system that is bent on 'eating the world'. These are accurately sketched and referenced narratives of social struggles in Kenya and religious conflict in India, of the setting of Indian migrants in the heart of England.

Parita Mukta's book was instrumental in choosing oral history as a major method with photographs, letters, and documents to complement the research. Fieldwork for this study was carried from October 2003. Initially, besides reading related materials, the first author tried to conduct interviews with her mother. She was rebuffed many times as being too young to be told everything about the family history. This impasse was overcome by using her elder sister Christine, who was knowledgeable about the family's kinship links in Singapore, Karaikal and France. As she was trusted more with family information, the first author tagged along with her to gather information from ten members of the widespread diaspora from Kottucherry. As the study was more about locating the family in transnational social processes, the size of the oral interviewees was found to be adequate (Morrison, 2000). Beyond the family's worldwide kin network, the information became 'saturated' after the interviews with key members of the kin-network. Together with the interviews, family photographs, marriage notices and other documents were gathered to give form to the people in the kin-network.

### Origins of the Family

The early members of the family were all Hindus, probably Saivites like all Tamils in the Tanjore region. Their caste affiliation was that of Vanniyar, which identifies them as belonging to middle-status caste and being petty farmers with cultivable land.

Around 1920, the un-named patriarch gradually began to lose his meager wealth. His farm failed, and all the cattle were decimated. He is said to have blamed all the Hindu gods he worshipped for his failure. His wife too might have died as there is no mention of her in the family's oral history. In desperation, he marched his children to the Catholic Church and converted himself and his children to Catholicism. The first author's great-grandfather, who was born in 1914, was baptized into Catholicism when he seven years old. Thus, the year in which the family's earliest conversion to Catholicism must have taken place could be 1920 or 1921. The great grandfather's father was born in the village of *Ariyankuppam* (now known as *Ariya Maanagar*) on the way to Kadaloor. He had two brothers and two sisters. It appears that the two girls could have been older and married, as the family narratives reveals that their husbands too were converted during the family's mass conversion to Catholicism. Soon the great-grandfather died and the three brothers were sent to the Catholic orphanage as was the custom then for orphaned Catholic children. Having converted to Catholicism, they must have lost the kinship network that would have tied them to the other *Vanniyar* caste kinsmen. My great-grandfather was among the three brothers.

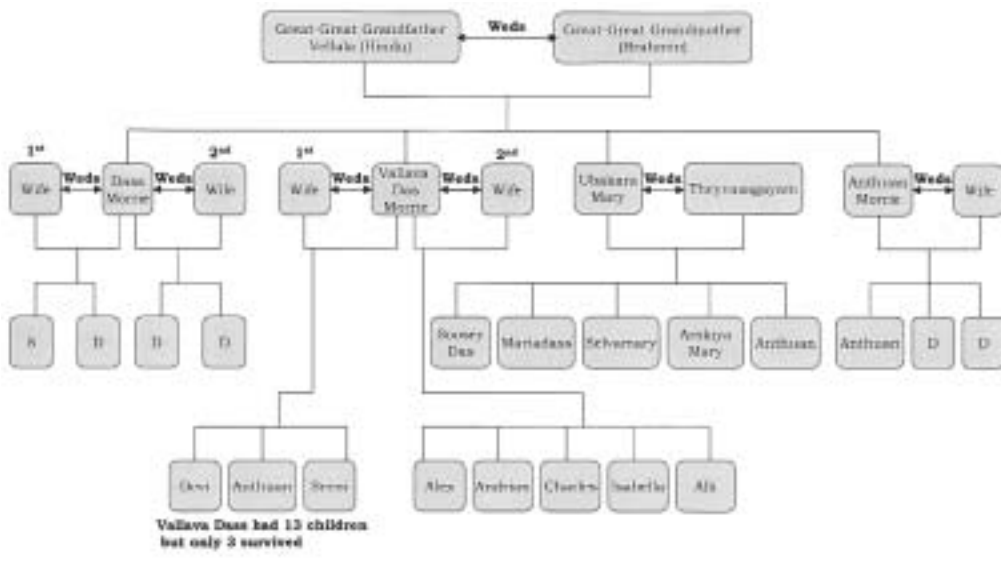
He stayed at the orphanage for eleven years, and was fed rice and 'rasam' everyday. It is

narrated that he never wanted to have ‘*rasam*’ (Milagutanni) for the rest of his life. At the orphanage, the brothers were trained for a vocation and were taught carpentry. The great-grandfather and another brother learnt carpentry diligently, while a third brother did not care to learn.

The great-grandfather left the orphanage at the age of 20, and began working for a police inspector doing carpentry work for the police station. The inspector liked him so much that when he retired he recommended the young man to be recruited as a police man instead of his own son. As retiring officers were allowed to recommend a kinsman for the government job in those days, the first author’s great-grandfather at the age of 22 became a policeman for the French police in Pondicherry. His name was Arokia Samy. Details about his siblings are a mystery.

As compared with the great-grandfather’s family history, more detailed information is available about my great-grandmother. Her name was Ubakara Mary. As shown in Figure 1, we are able to trace her family history from her mother’s generation. The parents of my paternal and maternal great-parents are the same couple. This is due to Tamil kinship patterns of marriage among cross-cousins. The great-grandparents were Ubakara Mary and Theyvasagayam. Nothing is known about Theyvasagayam, the husband. Ubakara Mary is the only daughter among four children born to a Hindu couple who were of different castes. Her father was a Hindu Vellalar while the mother is reported to be of Brahmin caste. Their marriage would have excommunicated them from their respective *jati*’s, and probably they converted to Catholicism to avoid further social exclusion and persecution. French law as applied to all Christians in Pondicherry would have protected them and

Figure 1 : The Early Family Tree, 1904-2004



Note: S = Son; D = Daughter



given them the economic means to survive in non-agricultural occupations. Two of the brothers of my great-grandmother joined the French Army and had served as soldiers in Africa.

Figure 1 shows the details of Ubakara Mary's brothers' marriages and their children. Two of the brothers had married twice. Within a generation, the kinship group expanded from a family of four siblings, to twenty grand-children. Ubakara Mary [See Photograph 1] is depicted in the family tales as a woman of towering strength and shrewd abilities in caring for her family. It is told that she was married to a Vanniyar Catholic who was 20 years older than her. Even though she was sent to Bangalore (about 500 kms from Karaikal) to live with her husband, she returned to Pondicherry when she found that it was not a happy marriage. She worked in the households of Vanniyar caste members for food and low income. Eventually, she was employed at the house of a lawyer at Pondicherry. She stayed in that household long enough to be recognized by others as working for a powerful person. Her husband visited her once in two years, and after each visit she gave birth to a child. She had five children of three males and two females.

**Photograph 1**  
**Arokia Mary with her family (circa late 1950s)**



Seated (Left to Right): Anthneth Arulmary (Sitarasi), ArokiaSamy, ArokiaMary, UbakaraMary, Angeline Regina (Queen).  
Standing (Left to Right): (Durai), Antoine (Albert), Noeline (Thangam), Ratchaganathan (Gasper), Thiruthuvarayan (Thambi).

As she found it difficult to bring up the two daughters, she 'donated' them to the Catholic nuns to be brought up by the church. The act of 'donating' girls to Catholic nuns appears to have been practiced by poor families unable to look after them. Such girls did a lot of errands for the nuns, and received some education. Many of them did not become nuns, but were encouraged to marry Catholic men who could not obtain suitable partners owing to their poverty or lack of family status.

The great-grand mother's children were Soosey Das (Male), Maria Das (Male), Selva Mary (Female), Arokia Mary (Female) and Antuan (Male). It is possible that the three male children could have also been left at the Catholic orphanage to receive some vocational training. Great-grand mother appears to have kept in touch with all of them as they married and formed their nuclear families in Pondicherry and Karaikal.

Arokia Mary (first author's grandmother), by her first marriage to Antonne Samy had a few children, and later married the Catholic policeman who was from the Catholic orphanage, and as he had no family status, found a wife in Arokia Mary. More children were born to Arokia Mary through Arokiasamy. The links with Selva Mary, the third child of Ubakara Mary was always weak. However, the key role played by her was to tie the kinship of this generation closer through cross-cousin marriages. Later sections of the paper will show how cross-cousin marriage was to cement kinship ties of the first generation's off-springs as well as enable them to progress economically and spread across the world.

Thus, the early origins of the family history lie only in the memories of the five children of the great-grand mother. Very little is known of the great-grand mother, except that her life had made her a towering personality who could direct the lives of her five children.

In this paper, the lives of Soosey Das and Arokia Mary will figure prominently as the first author is closely related to them. Soosey Das, being the paternal grand-father, and Arokia Mary, being the maternal grandmother, and their off-springs will be commented upon while reporting on how others figure.

### **Identity of the family in Karaikal.**

It is important to note that kinship among Tamils is established through *jati* relationship (Mani, 1977, 1979). In the 1920s even though many Hindus converted to Catholicism, their kinship status was closely aligned to their original Hindu *jati* identity. Thus, Vanniyar, Vellalar, Mudalliyar would be acceptable as non-polluting castes within the Tamil Catholic community of Karaikal (Oddie, 1981).

Thus Soosey, the eldest son of Ubakara Mary, could easily trace his Hindu caste status of his own grandfather and could lay claim to being originating from the non-polluting caste of Vellalars. Similarly, his wife Raasathi, could lay claim to her origin as having descended from Mudalliyar (petty shop-owners) caste.

Despite their claims as having originated from non-polluting castes, the first generation could

not claim higher status even among other Catholics until married along their original Hindu caste groupings. It would have been impossible for them to marry into Catholic families who were totally unmixed and retained their original Hindu caste purity. Thus, all of Ubakara Mary's children would have married spouses of mixed-castes, but middle-status and non-polluting castes.

In such a social setting, status origins played an important role in enhancing one's economic chances of survival in Pondicherry. This had the effect of pushing such people to seek jobs with the French colonial government or migrate to French colonies or to even British Malaya. Such move allowed them to be categorized as Tamil Catholics than having to compete with caste origin statuses in Pondicherry and Karaikal.

Kottucherry was not the original place that the family of Arokia Mary had stayed. Ever since Arokia Samy, the first author's maternal grand-father had joined the French police force in 1936, he had always been transferred from place to place within Pondicherry. In 1940, he was transferred to Karaikal and in 1942 was posted to Thirunallaru. From 1946 to 1950 he worked as the only policeman in the village of Setthur. The family had stayed at Thirunallaru from 1950 to 1958. When the French left in 1954, the father was transferred to Thirumalai Rayan Pattinam. In 1957, he was eventually transferred to Kottucherry and the family followed in 1958. At Kottucherry, the family rented a house at Chenniyar Street. Kottucherry at that time had a population of 3,000 people with about 200 Catholics amongst them. Kottucherry was attractive to the family as it had a Catholic church. Soon the owner of the rented property wanted to repossess the house for selling it. Even though the family expressed interest in buying the house, the owner refused to sell to a Catholic family. A lady who stayed across the street, owing to the friendship with the family, volunteered to sell her property and the thatched hut on it to them to move in. Neighbors were furious in having a Catholic family own a property in the street. But the lady, known as Annathatchi (a Hindu) persisted and sold her property and hut to them. Thus, house number 14, a thatched hut, became the residence of the family. At that time Kottucherry had 14 streets and was the only area in Karaikal that had a Catholic church. When Arokia Samy retired from his police service in 1966, the family stayed put at Kottucherry.

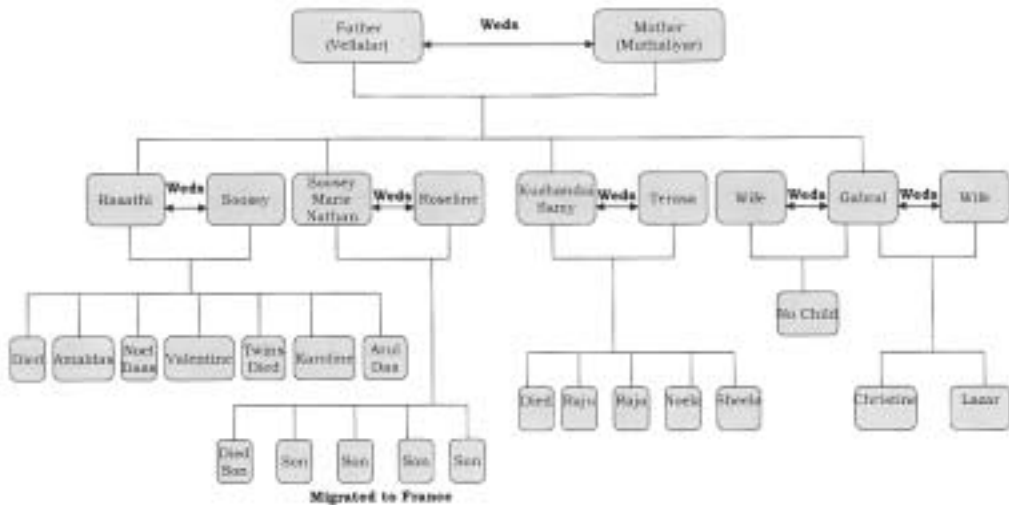
The above explanation is very important for understanding how Kottucherry within Karaikal remains the natal place to which all descendants of the original migrants refer to as their place of origin. Most members of the family returning to Kottucherry, hardly spend anytime anywhere in between their current place and Kottucherry, in their journeys. They land in Chennai (formally Madras) and take the hire-car and travel six hours to reach Kottucherry than break their journey by staying at a hotel at Chennai. Only after reaching Kottucherry that they plan on other tours. Such is the 'pull' of Kottucherry as the '*Uur*' in the minds of all members of the family.

The conceptual fixation of 'Kottucherry' as the '*Uur*' or the natal area is important in understanding the migration and identity of the family members across the two continents. The family, from its hazy origins, had Ubakara Mary, the great grand-mother, as the matriarch around whom the future generations began to take shape. As shown in Figure 1, Ubakara Mary (GGM)

had three sons and two daughters, namely Soosey Das (eldest son), Maria Das (2<sup>nd</sup> son), Selva Mary (3<sup>rd</sup> daughter), Arokia Mary (4<sup>th</sup> daughter) and Antuan (5<sup>th</sup> son). Of the five children, Soosey Das (eldest son), was to become the first author's paternal grand-father, and Arokia Mary became the maternal grand-mother.

Soosey Das stayed in Karaikal for sometime, and worked for the French government as carpenter. He married his wife Rasathi, and stayed in Karaikal. The first author's father and his brothers were born in Karaikal. In 1941, when he was almost 15 years old, he took the ship from Nagapatinam, a few miles from Karaikal, to go to Singapore a British colony. Some relatives have postulated that he was upset with French authorities, and wanted to start a new life in the British colony of Singapore. It is evident that his wife's brothers were instrumental in getting him to Singapore. However, many remarked that he was going to Singapore as the Second World War was looming. His wife Rasathi was the eldest in a family of four siblings. Figure 2, shows the family tree of paternal grand-mother Rasathi. Rasathi's parent's history is untraceable, except that they must have been Catholics at the time of their marriage. Her father traced his Hindu origins to Vellalar *jati*, while her mother's *jati* was Mudalliyar. As Catholics they were able to marry across equal status *jati* groups.

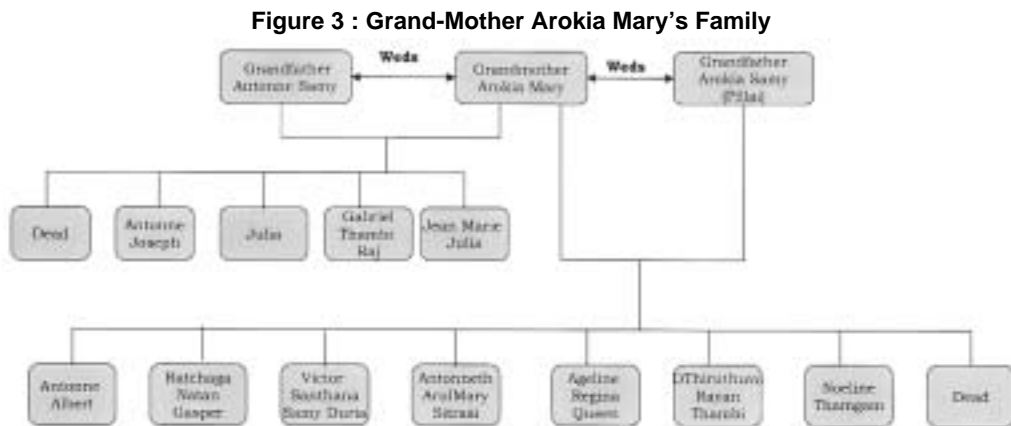
**Figure 2 : Paternal Grand-Mother Rasathi's Family**



Rasathi's parents or her relatives have had closer links to Malaya (which included Singapore), and this led herself and her siblings to migrate to Malaya. While the paternal grand-father, moved to Singapore and later brought Rasathi over, her two younger siblings also moved to Malaya. Her third younger sibling, Kuzhathai Samy married Teresa and moved to Kuala Lumpur. Rasathi's youngest brother, Gabriel married twice, both marriages being at Karaikal. As he had no child by the first marriage, he abandoned her and married another wife, by whom he had a son and

daughter. Gabriel too moved to Singapore. As long as the grand-mother Rasathi lived, her Kuala Lumpur brother with his family and Gabriel with his family used to visit the first author's home. Kuzhathai Samy died earlier than grand-mother Rasathi, and Gabriel too died in a road-accident in Singapore. Their children continue to live in Malaysia and Singapore. Rasathi's second brother, Soosey Maria Nathan stayed at Karaikal, married Roseline and had four sons. All his sons later migrated to France. Thus, within two generation none of the siblings of grand-mother Rasathi stayed at Karaikal. While one of her brother's sons went to France, the rest of them were born and lived as residents of Malaya and Singapore until these two territories gained their independence. As described above, Soosey Das, grand-father, and his wife Rasathi migrated from Karaikal and lived with their children in Singapore. There is a family story that Rasathi never went to her 'Uur'-Karaikal after she arrived in Singapore. Similarly, my grand-father Soosey Das returned to Karaikal only once, and that too to take his wife and children to Singapore. The first author's aunt Valentine was born in Singapore. They never left Singapore again for Karaikal.

Figure 3 shows the family-tree of the maternal grand-mother (Mother's Mother) Arokia Mary, who was closer to Ubakara Mary, the matriarch of the family. Arokia Mary also emerged as a leading figure. She was first married to Antonne Samy, with whom she had five children. Of the four children who survived, the first author's mother Julia was the second in the family and was born in 1933. The fourth son, Jean Marie Julia (his Tamil name was Sugirtharaj), was later to emerge as mentor to all the children of Arokia Mary. When Arokia Mary was widowed after four children by her marriage to Antonne Samy, she was quickly rushed, probably by Ubakara Mary, to marry Arokia Samy, the police man. With her second husband, Arokia Mary gave birth to seven children. In total, she had eleven living children.



The family of Antonie Joseph, the eldest son of Arokia Mary ended his first marriage in separation as they had no children. Then he married Selvamary, a Vellalar Catholic by *jati*. Their family tree is shorter as he had a son and a daughter. The son remained unmarried while his

daughter had a child by her marriage. Antonie Joseph did attempt to go to Singapore in the 1940s. As preparation for his passport were on-going, he went around boasting, and someone appears to have informed of the irregular way he was trying to leave Karaikal. He never received his clearance and had to remain forever in Karaikal.

The second son of Ubakara Mary, Mariadass married in Karaikal, but had no offspring. He, however, did not separate from his wife and lived with her until death. Selvamary, the eldest daughter of Ubakara Mary, married her husband in Karaikal. They had five daughters and one son. As Selvamary and the first author's grand-mother Arokia Mary had ill-feelings towards each other, their families were not well-connected and links between them never developed. Selvamary's family has continued to live in Karaikal and Pondicherry. Nothing much is discussed about her in the family gatherings.

Anthuan is the youngest son of Ubakara Mary, the matriarch of the family. Anthuan married Selva Arasi, and they had seven living children. Ubakara Mary, the matriarch was very close to her second daughter Arokia Mary and her last son Anthuan. Anthuan was the poorest among Ubakara Mary's children, and she ensured that food and other essentials were continuously passed from Arokia Mary's household to that of Anthuan's family. Ubakara Mary's brothers had already served as soldiers in the French Legion, and had retired to enjoy their pension at Karaikal. She kept in touch with them and brought leftover food from her brother's families to feed her grand-children. Ubakara Mary played a key-role in cementing marriage ties for her grand-children and thereby fosters closer kinship ties between the children of Arokia Mary and Anthuan.

Soosey Das, Ubakara Mary's eldest son sent word from Singapore that he is seeking a wife for his son Amaldas among the daughters of his two sisters. Ubakara Mary planned with Arokia Mary to have Julia, the first author's mother, arranged for him. Thus, Ubakara Mary was able to send one of her grand-daughter to marry into her eldest son's family. By her brilliant maneuvers in managing kinship network, she solidified the kinship network density among three out of her five children. The families of Soosey Das, Arokia Mary and Anthuan still stay connected with each other owing to Ubakara Mary's far sightedness. A photograph of Julia was sent over to Singapore in 1955, and everybody agreed that Amaldas should marry Julia. When the time came, Amaldas (first author's father) was sent to Kottucherry to marry Julia (first author's mother) and take her to Singapore. Both were cross-cousins. They were married at Kottucherry in 1958 and immediately left for Singapore.

The fourth child and son Jean Marie Julia, applied himself to learning French and planned to move to France. As a teenager, he felt that he had no future in India. As the French had given the option to all people born in Karaikal to apply for French citizenship, he applied for his travel papers and left for France in 1956. After his training to be a teacher, he was posted to Algeria to work as a teacher in a remote town.

Until the 1950's, those relatives like the brothers of Ubakara Mary who went overseas to serve in the French Legion returned home to live in Karaikal. All the grand-children of Ubakara Mary

attended school. In the case of the maternal grand-mother's family, all the children went to school. Among them Jean Marie Julia was successful in learning French and was the first to move to France. He was to play the role of Ubakara Mary in further cementing kinship ties and enhancing the economic status.

As this generation was closely linked to Kottucherry, all of them married equal *jati* status spouses, and worked in the non-farming sector of Karaikal. They were literate and urbanized. Most of the male siblings were gainfully employed, and two of the uncles Antonne Albert and Thiruthuvarayan Thambi went to France to seek their fortunes. Two of the male siblings became civil servants in Karaikal and two daughters moved to France through marriage. Those who remained in Karaikal became absorbed into the local Catholic Vellalar community.

### **Family and Identity at Singapore**

The first author's grand-parents Soosey Das and Rasathi extended the family from Kottucherry to Singapore. They had eight children of whom four survived. The nuclear family of Soosey Das and Rasathi that migrated to Singapore from Karaikal had three sons and a daughter.

Besides the first author's father, Amaldas, they had three other children. Amaldas, as the eldest son, had to listen to the grand-father Soosey Das and married his cross-cousin Julia from Kottucherry. As mentioned before, Soosey Das and Julia's mother Arokia Mary were siblings. As it customary for the children of brothers and sisters marry, the marriage of Amaldas and Julia was used to strengthen the family kinship. Noel Das, the second son married Thayalnayagi, a Chetty Hindu by *jati* and nurse by profession. Noel Das converted from being a Catholic and became a Hindu and he was totally immersed into the kinship network of his wife. They had three children, one male and two females. All the children had Tamil Hindu names. Ravi, the eldest son, married an Australian (Caucasian) by the name of Iris. They divorced with no children. Then Ravi married another Australian (Caucasian) by the name of Angeline. They have two daughters, and have been named in Tamil as Jaya and Ammani. The second daughter of Noel Das and Thayalnayagi is Sabrina. She married a Tamil Hindu employed at the Singapore Police Force. They have three children. The third daughter of my uncle, Latha, is married to a Tamil Hindu by the name of Sekar. Both have ventured into business and have one daughter. The third child and daughter is Valentine. Valentine like Noel Das fell in love and married a Tamil Hindu. Her husband, Rajagopal, was a white-collar worker who worked at the British Navel Dock Yard at Sembawang in Singapore. When Rajagopal passed away, she fell in love with a New Zealander (Caucasian), by the name of Torcher. When Torcher left for New Zealand she stayed with her children in Singapore. Later, it was rumored that she divorced Torcher. By her marriage to the Tamil Hindu, Rajagopal, she had four children, three males and one female. Even though the aunt married a New Zealander (Caucasian) upon her first husband's death, she never had children by her second marriage. Her eldest son married a Tamil Catholic and has three children, two boys and a girl. The aunt's second



son has led a colorful life. He has three wives. The first wife is an Indonesian (Javanese) and has two daughters from the marriage. The second wife is a Tamil Hindu. By the second marriage he has one son and one daughter. The third wife is an Australian (Caucasian), and he has an additional two daughters from the marriage. He is still wedded to all the three women, except that he spends most of his time with his Tamil wife. The aunt's third child is the only daughter. She married a Norwegian (Caucasian) and has migrated to Norway. She has a son and a daughter. The aunt's last son married an ethnic Malaysian Chinese. They got divorced in 2004, and it is rumored that he may marry again another ethnic Chinese. The last son of the first author's grand-parents is Aruldas. He also fell in love and married a Tamil Catholic named Anthuan Mary. They had two daughters and one son. The eldest daughter married a Tamil of a former untouchable *jati* group. The similarities in their economic status allowed for their marriage. Thus, except for the eldest son who married his cross-cousin from Kottucherry, all the other siblings married spouses who were born in Singapore. A new trend in the kinship pattern was beginning in the family. This was the out-marriage from Tamil Catholicism into Tamil Hinduism. The first author's uncle and aunt married Tamil Hindus. Both gradually became Hindus in their religious orientation.

The first author's parents Amaldas and Julia had four children, three females and one male. Karoline, the eldest daughter studied in Singapore and at the age of twenty one married her uncle Thiruthuvarayan Thambi in France. Thiruthuvarayan Thambi is the youngest sibling of the first author's mother. The marriage proposal was initiated by Jean Marie Julia (Sugirtharaj), another brother of first author's mother who went to France. The marriage was held at Kottucherry in front of all the kinfolk. Mariadas, the son, completed high school and fell in love with a Tamil Hindu Thevar *jati* female. Even though she nominally became a Catholic, first author's brother was drawn very much into the Tamil Hindu kinship of Chelvi, first author's sister-in-law. They had a son and a daughter, and both are learning Tamil as a second language in their school curriculum. Their names are closer to Christian names used by many Chinese who want to have 'modern' sounding Christian names. The first author's older sister Christine who has received tertiary education married a university professor who is a Tamil Hindu Pathar by *jati*. Thus, except for the eldest daughter who married her uncle, all other siblings have married into Tamil Hindu *jati* groups.

It will be evident from the family kinship network in Singapore that identities are rapidly shifting. The clarity observed in the kinship structure at Kottucherry is not evident. This does not indicate the inherent weaknesses in the nature of kinship, but of the larger social processes taking place in Singapore. Living in a multi-cultural Singapore, where the government 'disciplines' all people into four 'racial' groups as Indians, Malays, Chinese and 'Others' (Nirmala Puru Shotam, 1999), the Tamil Catholic Vellalars (Jacintha, 1994) do not have the 'modus operandi' to exist as an endogamous *jati* groups as at Karaikal. By categorizing all kinfolks as 'Indian', familial relatives are affected by the larger processes in the South Indian community of Singapore. As there is a clear divide between north Indian groups and South Indians in Singapore, Tamil language and Tamil Hindus have come to form the dominant community markers for South Indians in Singapore (See



Mani, 2004).

The Karaikal Tamil Catholics to which the family claims its origins has undertaken some steps to reinforce its communal identity. One event that brings them together is an annual prayer meeting organized by the family of Soloman, related to the first author's paternal grandmother Rasathi. He is one of the sons of Rasathi's brothers who settled in Singapore. They brought a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus from Karaikal in 1955, and once a year they invite all the relatives to a prayer meeting at their home. A Catholic priest is invited to officiate at the prayer meeting and the event is well attended by most relatives from Karaikal.

Another event that attracts the relatives is the annual festival dedicated to *Velankanni*, a personification of Mother Mary at *Velankanni* in Tamil Nadu. The four day festival held at the Toa Payoh Catholic Church attracts most Tamil Catholics in Singapore. The family's relatives too attend this event in great numbers.

The Lady of Lourdes Church at Ophir Road also attracts many of the relatives. As it was started in 1898 for Tamil Catholics in Singapore, all Tamil Catholics in Singapore patronize it and play a dominant role in its festivals and management. The family's relatives attend this Church for its Sunday services in Tamil.

Despite all the above events to bring Tamil Catholics together, the kinship group is undergoing rapid change. As the number of families in the kinship group is limited, the younger generation often marries into the dominant Tamil Hindu equal status *jati's* to avoid marrying lower *jati* status Tamil Hindus and lower achieving Tamil Catholics.

The larger political and economic processes in Singapore as well as the dominant social processes within the Singapore Tamil Hindu community, has thus affected the Tamil Catholic Vellalar community from Karaikal.

### **Family Identity in France**

France and French language had always been held in high esteem by Tamils at Karaikal. The high pensions received by those who had worked for the French Legion inspired others to look to service in France or its overseas cantons.

The first family member to make a concerted effort to go to France was Jean Marie Julia (Sugirtharaj), first author's mother's younger brother and the forth child of Arokia Mary, the maternal grandmother. The French in handing over the sovereignty of Pondicherry to India, had passed a regulation that those born in the French territories of India could apply for French citizenship by 1958. Sugirtharaj obtained a form and applied for French citizenship with his father's signature. The French Embassy granted him a French passport to travel to France. As he had already learnt French and passed his high-school examination, he joined teacher training in France. Later, he was recruited to the French Education Service and was posted to Algeria as part of Frances's effort to prepare Algeria to become an independent state.

While in France, he discovered from other Karaikal Tamils that even if people in the Indian French territories had missed the dateline to apply for French passport, there was a loophole in the law. A rule provided for children of people in former French territories to apply for a passport, if they could prove that at the time they were born they were in other parts of India. They had to prove that they were born in India and were outside the French territories for some reason when the exercise to issue French passport was being conducted. He contacted his father, and asked him to arrange for his next brother Antonne Albert to acquire a birth certificate from one of the villages in India near Karaikal. Albert obtained a birth certificate stating that he was born in India and was not in a position to obtain the French passport by the dateline imposed by France. With the money sent over from France by Jean Marie Julia (referred by all as Sugi uncle), he was able to arrive in France with a French passport. As he arrived on the day Sugi Uncle was leaving for Algeria, Sugi gave him adequate money and arranged for his stay while he was away. Sugi became the main benefactor and mentor in helping all his brothers and sisters to progress economically with many even going over to France. He sent money over to Julia, his sister in Singapore, to enable her husband and children to visit Kottucherry. As the first author's mother was then only a housewife, the money sent by Sugi Uncle raised her status and dignity in the eyes of her in-laws.

He sent money regularly to his parents to enable the family to get out of poverty and sent all his brothers and sisters to school. He sent money for their marriages, their children's expenses and even bailing them out of their debts. He sent money to enable them to build a brick house on their land at Kottucherry. Almost everyone benefited financially from his generosity to his family members. Later he would help bring over his sister Thangam and the last brother Thiruthuvarayan Thambi to France, and eventually arrange their marriages. In Algeria, Sugirtharaj Uncle met a teacher by the name of Jeanette. Jeanette was French and had an illustrious family history of being the daughter of a French civil servant. They fell in love and decided to get married. They had three children, two females and one male. Marie Jose, the eldest daughter, married a French man and has a son. Christine, the second daughter also married an ethnic French man and has a son and a daughter. Jean Paul, the son, sat for the French Civil Service Examination in 2005, and was successful. He is planning to marry his fiancée, a French girl who is a lawyer.

Sugi Uncle's next brother is Antonne Albert, commonly known as Albert Uncle. When he arrived in France, his French was not up to standard, and so he joined the French Legion and became a soldier. Before he left Karaikal, he was asked to swear that he would promise to marry his cross-cousin Fatimah, the second daughter of Anthuan, the youngest brother of Arokia Mary. As promised, he returned to Karaikal and married his cousin Fatimah, and brought her over to France. Fatimah was able to guide Albert Uncle and enable him to become rich. They had three daughters. All the daughters were highly educated in France. Later, they married their eldest daughter Selvi to the brother of Fatimah. This 'niece-uncle' marriage, a part of Tamil form a kinship formation, produced a son and two daughters. The second daughter married another Karaikal Tamil in France and has three sons. The third daughter, at the time of this study is still a student.

Albert Uncle upon his retirement from the French Army, returned to Karaikal with his wife and lived a happy life in Karaikal with his army pension. Their children spent more time in France, but kept visiting Karaikal. Albert Uncle died from a road accident in 2002.

The third migrant among the first author's family members to France was the youngest brother of Sugi Uncle. Thiruthuvarayan Thambi migrated to France in the 1960's, and stayed for a while with Albert Uncle and Fatimah aunt before moving on to a job. In 1978, he came to Kottucherry and married the first author's eldest sister Karoline. This wedding, an Uncle-Niece marriage, was arranged by Sugi Uncle to cement the ties between his siblings. As Julia, the first author's mother, and Thiruthuvarayan Thambi were siblings, the marriage of the eldest daughter to her brother fostered a new linkage in the kinship. Sugi Uncle funded everyone's travel to Kottucherry for the wedding, and when one Catholic Church refused to conduct the wedding, he found another priest who dispensed with the church's opposition to marriage amongst close kin. The sister left for France immediately after the marriage and visits Singapore once in five or ten years. She has two sons, who are not fluent in Tamil and very much unaware of Tamil Catholic familial culture.

France is full of other relatives from Kottucherry. As they do not live in a single town and are spread all over France, they do not constitute a single community. However, whenever there is a wedding reception, all the relatives from Karaikal meet each other to exchange news and views. These events do not attract the children born in France. Beyond the first generation and their children who married spouses from Karaikal, kinship network is not dense. The kinship network becomes thinned whenever the spouse is an ethnic European.

For the relatives in France, Kottucherry still is their '*Uur*'. Recently there are cracks in this conceptualization. After Albert Uncle's death, his children spend more time in France. The children born in France and lacking knowledge of Tamil may not continue to cherish Kottucherry as their natal area. The first author's elder sister's sons hardly view Kottucherry as their '*Uur*'

Sugi Uncle's two younger brothers in Kottucherry have recently cheated him of his property. Sugi Uncle bought a property in Karaikal in the same street of his parent's house, and built houses for Gasper Uncle and Durai Uncle to live in. As they had lived on the property, for more than 12 years, they changed the ownership of the property to their own names and declared Sugi Uncle as non-owner. This had soured the faith Sugi Uncle had on his siblings.

Despite the rising tension among the relatives in France, Kottucherry still occupies a central place in their historical memory. There is a catholic graveyard in Kottucherry where many of the dead in the family have been buried. The maternal great-grandmother Ubakara Mary died in 1970; the maternal grandmother Arokia Mary died in 1974; the maternal grandfather passed away in 1984; Mariadass, one of the sons died in 2002; the sister Oueenie died in 2003. What is significant is that all of them are buried on the same spot in the graveyard. Even in death, the relatives at Kottucherry lie in the same grave signifying the unity of kinship in life and death. Only Albert Uncle has been laid to rest in another graveyard of Anthuan's family, as wished for by his surviving

wife, Aunt Fatimah.

## Conclusion

This paper has described the spread of the first author's relatives from Kottucherry to Singapore and France. Kottucherry still remains the natal area to which all family members show allegiance to. The political and social processes in Singapore and France have definitely affected the identity formation amongst the descendants of the first generation's migrants. It is highly probable that the children brought up in France and without attachment to kinship may slowly forget the memory of Kottucherry (Anjali Kurane, 1999). As kin marriages become fewer, only those having close kinship ties may cherish the worldwide links that Kottucherry has generated in the last one-hundred years.

Of the three approaches to the study of identities, Hall's (1992) use of symbolic interactionism and post-modernism best explain the processes that the family migrants in this study underwent. The symbolic interactionism perspective partly explains the changes seen among family member both at Karaikal and overseas. Social influences both in France and Singapore as well as in Kottucherry have affected the identities of the family members. Family members who are located in Singapore are influenced by the nation-building processes introduced by the government in Singapore. In the public arena, they live in public housing apartments with neighbors who are neither Tamil Catholic Vellalars nor Tamils. At school, they study Tamil as a second-language together with children of the larger Tamil community. This has encouraged more affinity with the wider Tamil community in Singapore. The festivals celebrated by the Tamil community, like Deepavali, Pongal, Thaipusam are well known to the family members via the mass media as well as through direct participation when invited by friends and Hindu relatives. The mass-media, mainly television and radio, integrates the family members with the ethos of the larger Tamil community in Singapore (Mani, 1998, 2004). At school, the English language and nationalistic curriculum integrate the Tamil Catholic Vellalars into the larger Singapore society. Even at the Catholic church, the family members are integrated into the larger Catholic community, comprising of Chinese, Filipinos and other Indians. Thus, the larger social processes in Singapore are dominant in the lives of the family members living in Singapore.

At Kottucherry and France too, the symbolic interactionist perspective is useful in explaining the changes to the identities of the family's migrants. As indicated in the previous sections, the family members at Kottucherry are adjusting to the larger social milieu of Tamil Nadu. *Jati* is still a meaningful concept for kinship network (Srinivas, 1962), but education and the economic status are important in spouse selection for marriage. In France, the migrants have adjusted to the social and economic conditions in France.

Postmodernist theories may be used to explain that there is an unanchored, constantly open and self-generating form of identity among the members of the family both in their natal place as well as in France and Singapore (Saheeda Hosein, 2002). The members of the kinship group seem

to have been experts at it since early twentieth century. Though the early members were born as *jati* Hindus, they were open to becoming Catholics, and since then have been adapting to the constant changes they have faced in the societies they were in. This is especially the case among the descendants of the migrants to France and Singapore. In Singapore, the Tamil Catholic Vellalars identity is loosely held as more and more of the descendants marry into Tamil Hindus, Europeans, Chinese and Indonesians. In the case of France, children have largely moved to loosening their identity and becoming French citizens. As France has more migrants from Southeast Asia and Africa, the Kottucherry migrants can hardly hold on to any form of identity except become a French person of foreign parentage. Even this identity is fluid and open to change.

If the conceptualization and actualization of '*uur*' among Tamils are not to be taken as socio-cultural ties based on collective origins distinct of other groups, then they come close to the type of identities described by Geertz as 'primordial attachment'. We can examine this description of the family members in at least three aspects. First, are there cultural codes of a fundamental nature that sets a general framework of meaning to the actions of the family members. If language and religious beliefs are to be used to measure this aspect, then we see interesting changes. At Kottucherry, language and religious affiliation has remained largely constant to posit the agreement that there is 'primordial attachment' to identity.

In France and Singapore, this framework has undergone change. While the first generation migrants can be said to be bound by their affinity to Kottucherry by kinship and marriage, children of these migrants are marrying outward, often losing their language and religious affiliation and adapting to the social, political and economic processes that are dominant in their respective societies. Their allegiance to Kottucherry and their 'primordial attachment' is becoming weaker with each passing generation (Patrick Simon, 2003).

The second aspect associated with primordialism argues that the cultural codes be learnt at an early age. This kind of ontological primacy is only partially available in Singapore and France. The family environment may teach certain codes of food-taste, dressing and rituals amongst many others. These families, however, are located in societies where the constantly expanding role of the state in education and welfare impinge on them in variety of ways. Thus, primordial identity codes may be learnt only partially, and when faced with the larger societal processes of identity creation, may even become compartmentalized to be used only in familial and kin related situations.

The third aspect of primordialism argues that deep seated affective ties may be difficult to dislodge or replace. For the family migrants in France and Singapore, this may be true to an extent. As they all have learnt new cultural codes, they resort to code-switching and invoke their *uur* identity in a calculated fashion. At times this may become instrumental than primordial as they find themselves in a situation of an ever-diminishing minority in both France and Singapore. In Singapore they are absorbed into the Tamil Catholic identity than claiming as Tamil Catholics from Karaikal. However, when necessary, Kottucherry is useful for choosing spouses. Similarly in France, the descendants from Kottucherry are dispersed, and the children of these descendants are

becoming French citizens.

If 'primordial attachment' to the *uur* is not sustainable as an identity marker, what then is? Kottucherry as the *uur* for the family members has given a 'sense of place and sense of time' (J.B. Jackson, 1985: 157). Kottucherry has become 'the sociotemporal order which regulates the lives of social entities' of the families. In the minds of the migrants from Kottucherry, Kottucherry as the *Uur* has become a landscape that is a social and cultural product. As Berger (1976) argues,

'Landscape can be deceptive.

Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtain, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal (Berger, 1976: 13-15).

As demonstrated in this paper, Kottucherry became a setting in which the narrators of their life stories described their struggles and achievements. Kottucherry as the *uur* is reconstructed again and again by each migrant and is clearly remembered and cherished for the events that took place in it.

This study, by using a single family's transnational migration has shown the following conclusions with reference to transnational migration and identity maintenance: (a) Contrary to popular belief, women as matriarchs have played a key role in furthering the social and economic advancement of their families in Karaikal society; (b) Kinship based identities can be retained as long as they are renewed constantly by marriage to members affiliated to the natal area; and (c) The *uur* as a concept is highly useful in focusing the narratives of all migrants, and it provides a superior theoretical insight into migration studies than the current use of nation-states and gross statistical data.

Despite the above achievements, the study is temporal. It is valid as far as the lives of the migrants described in this study are concerned. It may not be possible to repeat this study or generalize it to the study of all family based migration. Kottucherry as the original place associated with the migrants in this study is a 'sense of place and sense of time'. It gives a sense of measurement against which all migrants as well as those living in Karaikal describe their life struggles and achievements.

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