

***Social Mobility and Cultural Transformation
of an Indian Middle Class Family
in Peninsular Malaysia***

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INTRODUCTION

An attempt is made in this paper to bring out aspects of cultural transformation economic changes and erosion of ethnicity of a specific Indian migrant family over four generations. More specifically, this family will be analyzed along the following angles:

- (a) ethno history-origins and reasons for migrating;
- (b) their cultural and social changes in their country of adoption;
- (c) social mobility - an analysis of intergenerational mobility of four generations.

It is hoped that this micro-study¹ will reflect the overall picture of the larger section or segment of the Indian community along the above themes.

METHODOLOGY

The bulk of the data was derived from in-depth interview with the respondent, ie. the family head and his wife. They were chosen for this study because they represent the Indian middle-class who achieved socio-economic mobility. This respondent was also chosen because he had a clear mind and could tell vividly the family history.

The family chosen for this study is from Buntong, Ipoh.² The name of the family is Pandian David. The father is 62 years old and is officially retired as a chief clerk in a local English firm. Currently, he is employed as a part-timer in the capacity of an accounts-clerk. His wife is 55 years old. In the scheme of this study they are considered to be the third

generation migrants from India. The man's parents are dead but he has vivid memories of his father and mother (considered second generation). Two of his children are working in Ipoh. It can be said that they are the products of the New Economic and New Education policy. Thus, they have directly or indirectly experienced the impact of the new policies. Three of their children are of marriageable age and their marriage choices and strategies adopted by their parents will throw some light on the aspect of cultural transformation. There will be a greater focus on the fourth generation but the main source of information will be the 62-year-old father. Thus, an analysis of this family will answer some of the research questions posed earlier.

THE STUDY

Immigration: Generally Indians were brought to Malaya primarily to serve the economic interest of the British. The British had capital, land and managers but lacked the manpower to tap the rich raw materials available in her distant colonies. India appeared as a very good source of manpower for the British because of her teeming millions.

A systematized form of migration, which can be categorized into two, was organized during the colonial period. They were the assisted and non-assisted immigrations. The immigrants who came through various forms of assistance were usually Indians who belonged to the lower rungs of the Indian society. Whereas, Indians who came in the second category, i.e., the non-assisted category were better off socio-economically. There were two kinds of migrants - labour and non-labour. The people belonging to the non-labour category were clerks, priests, the business community and the professionals. The majority of the Indians who came to Malaya were South Indians.³

The reasons for the coming of Indians into Malaya are many and varied. However, for the purposes of this study the process of migration will be focused only on the specific family under study, i.e., the Pandian family.

PANDIAN FAMILY : ORIGINS, MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

ORIGINS:

The Pandian family hail from a little village called Maruthakolam. This little village is in the Southern tip of India in a district called Tirunelveli. Maruthakolam means a place with a pond. The predominant occupation of this village was padi growing and palmyra tree

climbing. This village is also in the southern tip of Tamilnad and this district is bordered on the West by the Western Ghats, rising in height from three thousand to five thousand feet and dividing the two southern states of Madras and Kerala. The district Tirunelveli takes its name from the Central town of Tirunelveli. Tirunelveii in Tamil meaning "sacred paddy hedge."

The people in the village of Maruthakolam were not in a state of abject poverty. They lived from hand to mouth. They had enough to eat and the basic needs of life was met such as food shelter and clothing. It was a typical Indian village shared by a population of 3 to 4 thousand. They enjoyed a sense of belonging and a community life. In this village everybody knew each other and were also related to one another. They also belonged to the same caste of jati group. But the majority of the villagers were Christians unlike other villagers where the majority were Hindus. Tirunelveli district was one of the earliest place to feel the impact of missionary activities and Maruthakolam was no exception. Conversions were taking place from the 1850s.

Many became Christians in the context of 'mass movements'. The connotations of this term are not only it involves a large number of persons, but more importantly, the converts in such a movement belong to the same caste within a region so that the adoption of a new religion is more a collective one than a personal act. Further, it does not entail any significant changes in traditional social norms and relationships within a group. As Pickett suggests in his monumental study of Christian mans movements, their characteristic features are group decisions and the consequent preservation of the converts' social integration.⁴ His own estimate is that as many as four-fifths of all Protestants in India entered the faith in this way.⁵ The mass conversion enabled the Christians belonging to the same caste or group to reproduce themselves by endogamous marriages and to retain their blood purity. The Christian Castes usually married their own kind. A typical example is the Nadar Community and the Pandian family belonged to this caste.

THE FAMILY STRUCTURE:

The joint family system predominates in most villages in India and Maruthakolam is no exception. The joint family is usually governed by the head of the family and its conduct is regulated by a large number of traditional rules and observances. There are elaborate rules and observances. There are rules for the ceremonies to be followed at crisis points, such as marriage, which mark the transition from one stage of life to another. There are extensive rules for the whole range of social relationships. Members of the family and the caste clan

are expected to attend family festivals and other occasions. Especially when somebody dies in the family, the failure to attend is bound to be viewed seriously and may mark the beginnings of a family quarrel. Thus, any break in family norms and traditional conventions is analyzed negatively.

While joint families are regarded as ideal, it is common for sons to separate from their parents after they are married and have children. The causes of separation could be due to several causes such as domestic quarrels and arguments. As a result, the sons might partition their family house or build a new house which is close to their family house. Thus, they develop into separate units. Nevertheless, close connexion is maintained with the main family unit after some time.

Most of the dwelling units are grouped closely together, rather than being spread out in the farmland. Many of the families have tiled-roof houses with mud and stone or brick walls. These houses are built in a quadrangle. The main entrance leads to a hall opening on to the rooms on two or three sides. So, two or three family units belonging to one joint family make the house a rather crowded one. Here they cook, eat and sleep. There is an enclosure at the backyard for the dwellers to bathe.

MIGRATION:

As mentioned earlier, the Indians in this village lived from hand to mouth, belonged to one religion and the same caste and their predominant occupation was paddy growing. They were also tradition bound in terms of obligations and family structure. Amidst such physical and socio-economic background of the said village 'maruthakolam' did the Pandians decide to migrate. Some of the Indians from Maruthakolam responded to the call made by the British to come to Malaya. Thus, began a slow trickling of Indians into Malaya from this particular village. Along with the band wagon came the first generation Pandians filled with frontier spirit. They viewed themselves as birds of passage. The reasons for their coming into can be seen from a general as well as from a specific angle.

The cause of migration can be discussed in terms of the theory of migration. According to this theory, inferior socio-economic conditions tend to push people out of their own country to a place where the socio-economic conditions are much better. In addition to this, during the colonial times, the British government and private investors played a pivotal role in the process of migration. They provided a lot of incentives, such as free passage to places of destination and the promise of many good things upon arrival.

But the primary motivating cause could have been the negative factors that prevailed in India. According to Kondapi⁶ the decline of the handicrafts industries was a major factor contributing to people moving out. The industrial revolution in England transformed India from a manufacturing power to that of a market for the supply of raw materials and the consumption of British manufacture. This affected people who were in the domestic occupations and simple crafts such as the weaving and spinning industry. Constant recurrence of famines added to the already dismal conditions. A large proportion of the people depended on agriculture which, besides being subjected to violent seasonal fluctuations, provided work only for a third of the year. In view of this they faced serious economic risks, families and uncertainties that made everyday living miserable. The majority of them could not do any intellectual work as they were not educated. Thus, as a way out migration appeared to be a good alternative.

The inherent social structure in India was another factor that caused Indians to migrate. The lower castes were unjustly subjected to threats, violence and too many prohibitions.⁷ They were not allowed to wear ornaments of gold and silver. Males should not wear clothes below their knees and above their hips. The upper parts of the body should not be covered and children were discouraged from having education which retarded socio-economic mobility. Thus, Indians belonging to the lower social strata were more prone to migrate to ease themselves from depressed and degrading social conditions. There was also a segment of people with English education who did not find employment in India. They also wanted to migrate.

In the context of the Pandian family (first generation) there were many Christians migrating from their village, Maruthakolam. The possible causes stated above for migration could also apply to the people of this village. The people who migrated from this village usually arrived in a place called Buntong in Ipoh in the 1890s. This village is filled with Christians from Maruthakolam. The people in this village in the earlier stages were working in the Public works and tin mines. It had a substantial number of Christians and they were practically of the same caste forming a kinship clan. It was the idea of the British to make this village also look like a Christian village in India. In this way the people will feel homely and there will be a steady supply of manpower. Thus, many churches were built and Indian Christian priests were imported from India and thus the first generation Pandian (Gnanamuthu) came in this context - i.e., as a priest in the 1890s. Gnanamuthu and his friends usually followed one route when they came to Malaya. After leaving their village (Maruthakolam) they reported at a Port called Nagapatinam. From there they boarded a ship and usually arrived in Penang.

SETTLEMENT - BUNTONG

Buntong soon became a settlement for Gnanamuthu and the second, third and fourth generation. A brief social census of Buntong serves as a background. Buntong has a population of 12,000 out of which 2,000 are Chinese, 1,000 Malays and 9,000 Indians. Almost 40% of Indians in this settlements are Christians. It is essentially an residential area of the lower income groups of two major races - the Chinese and the Indians and to a lesser extent the Malays. There were no many Malays in this area before as the Municipal labour lines were mostly occupied by Indians. There are some very light industries such as the making of furniture and steel gates which are mostly operated by the Chinese. The Indians who live here are in all kinds of jobs such as labourers, clerks, teachers, and government servants. Most of them work in Ipoh town.

The predominant buildings in this area are the police dwelling units. There are several community centres. There are also other main buildings such as temples and churches. The churches in Buntong are a predominant feature.

SECOND GENERATION - DAVID

Gnanamuthu, (1st generation) upon establishing himself a little more firmly from the economic stand point in Buntong, Ipoh decided to bring his son David from India. David belongs to the second generation in the scheme of this study. David had two sisters in India and both of them were medical doctors who got their degrees from England. One of them died in an accident and the other sister continued her practice very successfully in Central India in a place called Nagpur. David, being the youngest arrived in the year 1906 in Buntong. He was given secondary education in the Anglo-Chinese School, Ipoh. David was a bright student and secured a place in Singapore Raffles College to do medicine. He studied in this college as a medical student of three years and left without obtaining a degree because of acute financial problem. It was the war years and the father could not take care of the family in India as well as David's medical studies. David's sisters' medical training expenses were taken care by the British government. They managed to get scholarships through the help of missionaries.

Pandian migrated to Malaya first and not his sisters because in the early stages of migration only the males arrived first. As mentioned earlier, Pandian could not complete his studies, but he was accepted as a full-fledged Dresser in Kuala Katil Estate near Sungai Patani in Kedah. In the scheme of hierarchy in the estates, the dresser was considered a

rather important personnel. Thus by the year 1916, David was in a sound financial position which made him a very eligible bachelor.

David like all others in his peer group went to India to get married. Love marriage was not in vogue during these times. The marriage partner was arranged. David nevertheless made it known to his parents that he wanted to marry a fair girl and his wishes came true. He married a girl from his own caste and religious denomination as well. It was a customary and a rigid practice that one should marry his or her own caste. In the case of David it was the Nadar caste. There were already a number of Nadars in Buntong. Thus, in the year 1916 David returned to Malaya with his wife to start a family and made Malaya his home. He returned to Kuala Katil estate with his wife. He was responsible in enlarging his circle relatives in Kuala Katil Estates and Kedah. He achieved this in two main ways: First, he brought forth into this world seven children - five boys and two girls (third generation in the scheme of this study). Secondly, he played the role of a recruiting agent for the estate that was managed by a British firm. He brought in many relatives and labourers to Malaya. For instance he was responsible in bringing three of his wife's brothers. He got them jobs as Tamil school teachers and estate supervisors in Kedah. Soon they too went to India to get married and brought back their spouses. This is how the clan grew in Malaya. These relatives of his are still in Kedah doing fairly well. They are all a close knit community. Perhaps this was an unconscious move to achieve a feeling of emotional security in an alien but hospitable land.

David was economically sound and leading a happy life in the Kuala Katil Estate with his wife and children. They were provided with a nice big house and servants were easily available. As a dresser he commanded high social status in the plantation sector. By the year 1940, many of his children were attending primary school and displayed high scholastic ability like their father when he was in Anglo-Chinese School, Ipoh. But, the lurking danger of the Second World War and the would be invasion of the Japanese of Malaya twisted the bright future of the seven children (3rd generation). David sent back his wife and all his seven children to India before the impending Japanese invasion for security reasons. The Indians especially the middle class could not make up their minds whether to stay put in Malaya or go back to India. So, like David, the men stayed behind and sent back their family. Thus, during this period there was a large exodus Indians to India.

David sent his wife and children to his father's (Gnanamuthu) village. Pandian was one of the 7 children who went back to India. They continued their education in India. They received the minimum education i.e., up to Form V. But none of them studied to be profes-

sionals as in the previous generation. There was a lack of emphasis on education. Perhaps it was due to the unseen circumstances of the time. A few years after the war, five out of the seven children slowly made their way back to Malaya. One of the girls returned but as a married person to a Christian priest in Buntong in the year 1948. She then invited her younger sister and Pandian to stay with her in Ipoh in the year 1952. Later she invited her youngest brother to come to Ipoh. Finally one other brother went to Singapore. The remaining two brothers in India got married and led a rather quiet life.

Pandian and the others had stayed in India for some 10-12 years before returning to Malaya. But this time their residence was once again Buntong, Ipoh and Perak as a whole. One of the brothers went to work in Ulu Bernam Estate, Lower Perak as a field conductor. Pandian got a job as a clerk in a local British firm and another got married in Ipoh. David, Pandian's further who was retired stayed with his eldest daughter who was married to the priest. Finally David returned to India - his father's village Maruthakolam and died at the age of 92. In summary, the Pandian's family was reestablished in Buntong once again.

THIRD GENERATION - PANDIAN DAVID

When Pandian David returned from India in 1952 he was 22 years old. Pandian was very good in games and was a gifted musician. He could play the violin and had a appealing bass voice. But he was not involved in politics or active in clubs or associations in the beginning of his career. Later on he became a member of the Malayan Indian Congress and his caste association (Nadar Associations). He started with a salary of \$400 which was considered a very decent amount as the cost of living was very low at that time. Pandian worked for four years and when he was 26 years he decided to get married. At this particular point of time i.e. in the mid-50s Indian brides were available in Malaya but of limited choice especially from his own caste and religion. After some local attempt at bride hunting with the help of his eldest sister he decided to go to India to get married.

He felt that a bride from India will be traditional and will suit him more. In any case even in the late fifties Indian men usually went back to India to get married. This was practiced among Indian to get married. This was practiced among Indian Christian in Ipoh. The other reason being, they could get a girl of their own caste, village and religion. The argument was that if they married their own kind they will have less marital problems. Even if they had problems it could be solved within the clan. The conservative Indian Christian Nadar was still governed to a large extent by the demands of his caste associations - Nadar or Nalliar Association. This association functions as a marriage broker. They bring about arranged

marriages. The idea is to maintain group cohesion. It sometimes finances the education of intelligent children and its main aim is to uplift the socio-economically deprived.

Thus, Pandian married the bride of his choice and one who could be possibly well accepted by his clan and friends. Pandian's family who has never been out, i.e., beyond the frontiers of her domain was extremely traditional, religious and fairly well educated in Tamil and could speak and write in English. In the initial stages of her stay in Malaya she did not know a word of Malay and generally shunned Chinese food.

Pandian's wife strictly led a two cornered life, i.e., she cared about her home and was very regular in attending a Tamil church where the members were also of her clan. Being fresh from India she felt secure and warm leading this two cornered life. She must have just felt as secure as living in her own little village in India. Slowly but surely she was able to adapt to the Malaysian way of life.

In the year 1959, they had their first son (fourth generation in the scheme of this study) who was born in Buntong, Ipoh, followed by a second son in the year 1960. The third and fourth who were both boys arrived in 1965 and 1968 respectively.

It can be concluded that the first three generations maintained their group solidarity to a certain extent in terms of caste, religion and language. The marriages that took place over the three generations were also arranged and very strict customs were observed in the life-cycle rites. Careful strategies were adopted so that no one falls out of the kinship and caste boundary. Moving out of the kinship group was almost unthinkable. In her initial stay in Malaya Pandian's wife totally rejected the idea of inter-racial marriage. The relationship among relatives were very close and the caste factor played an important role in cementing them together. The caste consciousness among Malaysian Indians was rigid in the first, three generations. Members of the same caste worship in the same church. On the other hand the caste barriers could also fall in the fourth generation. It could be due to the following factors. First, Indian Christians do not live like their counterparts in India in predominantly Christian areas where they are influenced by Hindu notions of caste. Caste expressions are discouraged in churches as egalitarianism is expressed in churches. The existence of Indian Christian caste associations such as the Nadar Association demonstrates a contradictory trend towards castelessness. But these associations are more interested in the socio-economic problems of the members. It may reflect an attempt to be more self-reliant and to achieve progress through solidarity. In any case more children in the fourth generation went to multi-racial schools which off set caste rigidity. Socio-economi-

cally speaking Pandians family struggled a little, although they belonged to the lower middle class category. They lived in a rented house for a long time.

FOURTH GENERATION - PANDIAN CHILDREN

I shall now examine the directions the fourth generation is taking in terms of economic performance and cultural changes. It can be said that the fourth generation was subjected to the new economic policy. It should be noted that all the 4 children were born after Independence and therefore were subjected to a new system of government. It was a new era. The Independence Day of 1957 also gave birth to a multi-racial society. The creation of a plural society led to teething problems as any young nation would face with regards to national unity. This was because there were cultural, economic, religious and language differences among the various races. In order to bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth and redress the existing economic imbalances, the New Economic policy was introduced in 1970 and implemented vigorously stage by stage in the 1970s and 80s to uplift the masses within a generation.

The main focus of the New Economic Policy was to increase the proportion of corporate wealth owned by the Malays from less than 3% in 1970 to 30% in 1990. The non-Malay share of the corporate wealth was planned to be increased to 40% by 1990. The NEP was also targeted at eradicating poverty regardless of race or creed. It was to restructure Malaysian society so that the identification of race with economic function and geographical location is reduced.⁸ In general terms the response to NEP by Indians was immediate especially by the middle class as they began to support for the first time economic programs of the Malayan Indian Congress and thus many benefited directly or indirectly. The Malayan Indian Congress helped to raise the consciousness of Indians with regards to their economic plight. MIC for the first time came out with a "Blue Print" in 1974 stating the status and projecting the economic future of Indians in Malaya. Thus, in over-all terms this awakened Indians in the country and how this affected Pandian David's family will he explored now.

Pandian's 4 children are well educated. Whilst they were studying in Ipoh, all the 4 boys like their grand father (2nd generation) went to Anglo-Chinese School in Ipoh to receive their minimum education before going to college or work. The first son has obtained a degree in Science from University of Malaya and is currently employed as a lecturer in the teachers' training college in Kuching Sarawak. The Second son is a bank officer in Ipoh. He studied up to form six and upon joining the bank, sat for promotional banking exams and made his

way. The third got his medical degree from Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. He is now serving as a medical officer and the last son has got a diploma in Electronic Engineering and is currently in the United States during a degree Course in Computer Engineering.

According to Pandian, the New Economic Policy did not hinder nor help in a great way towards the achievement of his four children in the sphere of education. In his view opportunities were wide open and they made use of it. Two factors made it possible for Pandian to send his children to University. First, MIC was helpful in getting scholarship for both his sons. Pandian being a member MIC sought the help of top level leadership of MIC Perak. They in turn recommended his children for a scholarship. Pandian was not an activist but an ordinary member. MIC generally helped if there is a financial need on the part of a party member. Besides MIC, Pandian's Caste Association also gave an initial loan of \$1,000 when his eldest body was entering University the first year. One of the aims of this association is help out students if they needed the money. Thus, the Pandians indirectly gained from the government.

Some conclusions can be made with regards to trends in socio-economic mobility of the four generations. A study or investigation on this aspect will cover areas such as education, income, residence and health. The impact of the New Economic Policy can be evaluated or seen in a better light with regards to the fourth generation. A comparison of the socio-economic status at least the trend of the second, third and fourth generation will be made. Kelsall defines social mobility as either intra-generational or inter-generational mobility. The former occurs when comparing someone's position in the social scale in his latter, as against his earlier, adult life, if he is found to have risen or fallen. The latter occurs if someone's position at birth (at which point he is assumed to have in the status of his father) has risen or fallen in the social scale.⁹

H. Goldhammer also defines social mobility as the movement of individuals, families and groups from one social position to another. The study of social mobility relates a present to a past social position. Studies of inter-generational mobility compare the social positions of parent and off-spring.¹⁰ According to a well-known sociologist.

“Social mobility could also mean a movement, either upward or downward, between higher and lower social classes, or more precisely, movement between one relatively significant social role and another that is evaluated as either higher or lower. This movement is to be conceived as a process occurring over time, with individuals (and their family units) moving from one role and social class position to another

because of what they have done or what has happened to them in various kinds of social inter-action such as in the family or in their work organization, or during war or socio-economic expansion in their society.”¹

Social class position in this context could also be related to occupations. Occupations could be broadly divided into manual and non-manual worker. In this paper, the trend of socio-economic mobility of the four generations will be determined by their occupation pattern mainly. Using the above concepts, one could analyse the social factors contributing to the rise and fall of the family under study.

Thus, chart in Appendix C, which displays the type of occupations the various generations were involved in over the last 100 years throws some light on the aspect of socio-economic mobility. It appears that the first three generations seemed rather static but the fourth generation is doing well and better in terms of education and socio-economic status when compared with the first three generations. The reasons for their upward mobility could be due to the following reasons: First, they are firmly rooted in this country as compared to the first three generations. The fourth generation was sure of which country they were going to make their permanent homes. The earlier generations considered themselves birds of passage and failed to buy property. The lack of commitment to any one nation prevented them from making concrete plans. This was so with the first two generations. Two World Wars also disrupted their livelihood and opportunities to succeed were severely curtailed. As a matter of fact, it can be said the third generation actually took a dip in the scheme of socio-economic mobility. This was because, the seven children (including Pandian) were sent back to India and plans in terms of career was disrupted. Thus, the second and third generation were affected by the wars. Their education was disrupted.

With Independence, the outlook of the third and fourth generation could have changed. There was greater commitment on the part of parents towards the welfare of the children. In the case of Pandians family they responded to change very realistically. They gave the children, the right kind of education in terms of medium of instruction as well. All the four children were sent to national primary schools instead of Tamil schools which to a large extent retarded socio-economic progress. This is because Tamil has very little economic value as compared to English education or national education. In Malaysia the majority of the working class sent their children to Tamil schools and the middle class to national schools. The majority of the Indians in Malaysia belong to the working class.^{1 2} Thus, the Pandians avoided being trapped in a cycle of poverty by sending their children to national schools.

CULTURAL CHANGES

As the family was improving socio-economically. There were also visible changes in the cultural front. This is seen in the attitudinal changes of Pandian and his wife who were more or less locked up in their clan managed church responding to a number of changes in life situations which has cultural bearings.

First, their eldest son was already in love with a girl of Chinese origin in Sarawak. She was a teacher in Kuching who was also from West Malaysia. They met through a mutual friend. Their relationship deepened and the question of marriage was before them. This meant the approval of Pandians family. There was no apparent objections to this marriage and it was accepted as though it was the will of God. The mother was positive towards the marriage because the bride was a Christian. Thus, the dominant factor that got the approval of the parents was Christianity. All other considerations because secondary. They viewed themselves as Christians first and Indians second. The father, Pandian, who had mixed with other ethnic groups in his place of work agreed that Malaysia is a multi-racial country and mixed marriages are bound to happen and that there should be room for integration.

On the other hand, close friends and relatives did not accept this marriage whole-heartedly. Thus, they actually went against the general wishes of the community. But in contradiction, Pandian and his wife lost no time in arranging a marriage in a traditional manner for their second son with an Indian girl from their own caste, religion and denomination. Perhaps, they were in a state of dilemma and afraid of facing rapid changes in the traditional home front. Therefore they sought refuge in their second son's marriage to play it safe. They now live with their second son's family.

Second, cultural transformation can also be seen in the decline of the use of the Tamil language. The first three generations could read and write in Tamil and speak but not the fourth generation. The fourth generation could speak Tamil but cannot read or write. They spoke and wrote in Malay and English fluently.^{1 3} Being town dwellers they were also exposed to neighbourhood clusters of other races as well. Three out of four of Mr. Pandian's children could speak fluent Chinese.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

An analysis of Mr. Pandians family to a certain extent reflects the overall situation of the middle/lower class Indians in the urban sectors. It is based on the following

observations. First, the Indian middle class was more adaptive in the sphere of culture. They like the Pandian family hardly sent their children to Tamil schools in Malaysia. They felt that it retards socio-economic mobility drastically. This is because there is no continuity in the Tamil system of education. After six years of education in the primary school, the children get into the main stream schools. New scholastic demands have to be met such as proficiency in the Malay and English language. Many face problems in these areas and drop out of school by the time they reach form two. Thus, Tamil schools prepares them for blue collar jobs. Besides, in the Malaysian economic context Tamil has hardly any economic value. The job opportunity structure is not wide. Children who went to national schools did much better. This is because they are better equipped to fit into more jobs. Thus, middle class families always sent their children to the main stream schools. They were willing to trade in their cultural identity to forge ahead in economic terms. They were not in a state of dilemma regards the choice between cultural identity and economy mobility. Where as, the working class Indian families were more interested in cultural identity and lost out in the economic front.

Second, it is obvious that there has been a leap in their economic success in the post-independence period. It is more so with the fourth generation just like the case of the Pandians family. They did benefit from the New Economic Policy because of the allocation of a 10% quota to universities and so on. Thus, there was ample opportunity to enter universities and at the same time scholarships were made available. Job opportunities were also there for people with the right kind of education. The three children of Pandian did not have any problems getting jobs. Indian middle class families are placed in fairly good residential areas and many have bought or are in the verge of buying houses.

Thirdly, with the passing of time and unconscious exposure to various races and cultures in their jobs and residential areas, ethnic consciousness is being rubbed off slowly but surely among the urban middle class as evidenced in the Pandian family over the last 4 generations. They are more ready to fit into the Malaysian environment.

Thus, on the whole the economic and cultural changes seen in the Pandian family is also experienced to a large extent by the lower/middle class Indians in Malaysia with some variance. Their life-style has changed tremendously in comparison to their times in the Indian villages of the 1890s. This is so especially in the sphere of economics and culture.

FOOTNOTES :

- ¹ In this paper, the lower middle-class family will be studied as the base family.
- ² Buntong is a place where many Indians settled from the year 1890s.
- ³ To get an over all picture of the general process of Indian migration to Malaya see K.S. Sandhu, Indians in Malaya: Immigration and Settlement 1786-1957, Cambridge, University of Cambridge, 1969.
- ⁴ J. Waskom Pickett, Christian Mass Movements in India, Lucknow, Lucknow Publishing House, 1993, p. 22.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 315.
- ⁶ C. Kondapi, Indians Overseas 1838-1949, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 2.
- ⁷ J.H. Hutton, Caste in India: The Nature, Functions and Origin, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 205-206.
- ⁸ Government of Malaysia, Third Malaysia Plan, 1976-1980, Kuala Lumpur, Government Printer, 1979, p. 7.
- ⁹ R.K. Kelsall, Stratification, London, Longman Group Limited, 1974, p. 104.
- ¹⁰ Herbert Goldhammer, "Social Mobility", in David L. Sills (ed.), International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 13, 1972, p. 429.
- ¹¹ Bernard Barber, Social Stratification, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957, pp. 356-357.
- ¹² See Appendix B for a percentage breakdown of classes among Indians in Malaya. The total population of Indians according to the 1980 census is 1,087,561.
- ¹³ Pandian's children went to National Schools. They avoided Tamil Schools.

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APPENDIX A

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MALAYSIAN INDIANS 1985

Category	Occupation	Percentage
1	Professional/Managerial	10
2	Clerical & Sales	15
3	Industrial & Manual Group	75

Source: Derived from Insan (Institute for Social Analysis), "Sucked Oranges - Indian Poor in Malaysia", Kuala Lumpur, Insan, 1989, p. 4.

APPENDIX B

Education and Occupation of Four Generations 1890s – 1990s

Generation	Name	Year	Education	Occupation
First	Gnanamuthu	1890s	Basic Tamil & English Education	Christian Priest
Second	David	1920s	3 years course — Raffles Medical College	1st Class Dresser
Third	Pandian	1950s	Form V (India)	Chief Clerk
Fourth	Pandian's Children:	1990s		
	First	1990s	B Sc Hons.	Lecturer
	Second	1990s	Professional banking	Bank Officer
	Third	1990s	Degree in Medicine	Medical Officer
	Fourth	1990s	Computer Engineering	Engineer
