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Continuity and Change: A Socio-Cultural Study of select Tamil Short Stories Translated in English

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Any society and every society is a continuation of the past, but a range of continuity is maintained even in the midst of change coming into the same society from time to time. This is how the identity of a society is maintained over a period of time. Even otherwise some continuity is essential because human nature is immutable. The notions of ascribed status, hierarchy, ritual purity and impurity have been the basic ingredients of Tamil social structure. These have been attacked from time to time by social and religious reform movements, secularization process and host of others. But the system seems to have a remarkable resilience. It yields some ground but returns again. For instance, when caste is sought to be

dislodged from the religious (ritual) domain, it enters into the political process and caste consciousness comes back with a vengeance through urbanization. In the face of scientific temper, religiosity and ritualism also increased and a substantial segment of the modern educated class shows latent and sometime overt acceptance of the religious phenomenon sometimes steeped in irrationality and superstition. The joint family norms instead of fading away in the face of urbanization and industrialization may still be retained by adapting to the process of democratization and acceptance of dissent. The joint family today is more democratic and the traditional autocratic authority head of the joint family has become a thing of the past. All these examples point to the past.

Another dimension of continuity in Tamil society may be explained through the continuity of Traditions. Even among the modern, educated urban people, during sickness in the family, a modern physician visits the patient in the morning. Tamilnadu's village is the puja for the tractor bought by a farmer, invoking the blessings of the local deity, performing *aarti* and applying *pottu* to the tractor, a product of modern technology. Not only the continuity between the Traditions and also in everything, even two different Traditions may go together or get fused into one another. Praying in a temple is not unusual or mutually contradictory. It does not dilute their beliefs. It tells us that there is something inherent in Tamil tradition which facilitates the cultural continuity. "Kameshwara iyer had offered a lot of dowry and gifts at the wedding. Rukmani's in-laws were very satisfied. After the marriage, her mother in law would often take Rukmani away to her house" ("Peepul by the Tank" P.7)

In the story of *peepul by the tank* by va ve su iyer portrayed marriage ceremony and dowry system. Still it exists in our society.

The biggest and the most secular festival of Tamilnadu is the Pongal. Which marks the successful harvest. Newly harvested rice is cooked and partaken of by one and all. The Pongal is said to mark the beginning of the sun's Northern course in the heavens. Pongal

cooked rice is offered to Surya on the Sun god. A new pot is decorated with saffron. Fresh produced from the fields and vegetable Gardens such as sugar cane, pumpkin and the *valli* Tuber are spread out ceremoniously.

The pot is then put on a fire build up in the courtyard in the house or in the street itself and filled with milk and water. As the milks boils up, the eldest or the youngest member of the family available that day, piously puts into the pot of the newly harvested rice. The rice is allowed to boil in the pot for sometimes and when it is cooked, spicy items are added to give it suitable flavour and taste. This is followed cries of Pongal Pongal (Hail Pongal). The cooked rice is then placed on three leaves and offered to the Sun god. In this tradition even this twenty first century still we have follow from the sangam age. “If it is Pongal tomorrow , only this evening they will buy the pot. There are some who buy the pot on the day of pongal also. A new life dawns. This time no one no one went to buy the pot at the weekly market in *Margazhi*” (Clay P.108) In the story *clay* by La Sa Ra portrayed about preparing pot for the pongal and our cultural festival in the month of *Thai* (January)

Among the factors of change in Tamil society discussed in this section, independence from hierarchy rule, democratization adult franchise, constitution as a vehicle of change (state sponsored change), industrialization and urbanization modern education and increase in education, legislative and administrative means may be the most important factors of change. Urbanization has contributed to the increased occupational mobility and disorganization of joint family at least structurally; new system of stratification based on achievement rather than ascription has emerged. But, as pointed our elsewhere in this section, these changes have not taken place through wholesale replacement of traditional structures. But the craving for retaining and strengthening the traditional social institutions such as caste and religion along with modernization pose a threat of breakdown or ‘Cultural Lag’ to the process of modernization. The increasing level of communalism and casteism along with violence, use

of modern technology like television to promote religious animosity and growth of separatism may be cited as examples. Contemporary Tamil society is undergoing a trauma of change and is confronting a series of dilemmas and paradoxes. While some aspects of tradition will survive because of their vitality and usefulness, the past will have to be eradicated and structures of exploitation. The road ahead is long, the process may be painful, but every citizen of Tamilnadu has a stake in the future.

Impact of education and mass media has been very important agents of social change and modernization in village. Education is a great leveler of social and economic status. It has contributed to the growth of an intelligent, which is eager for social and cultural reforms. It has helped the educated sections of masses to break the barriers of tradition to adopt modernity. It has contributed significantly towards the empowerment of the weaker sections of the rural society.

Mass media such as radio, films and television hold a place of special importance in the life of Village. Under the conditions of mass illiteracy only the traditional media such as folkdance, drama and puppetry used to be the main channels for dissemination of information, ideas and entertainment. But the technological innovations facilitated the entry of modern forms of mass media. The radio has already covered rural population while more than sixty percent of the population has come under television coverage, both reaching the people in different regional languages. In many rural areas tea stalls happen to be the symposia grounds for rural people where they discuss the information they receive through radio and television. These have emerged as popular instruments through which information about fertilizers, seeds, insecticides, cropping pattern, new goods and services, new living patterns are disseminated to the people living even in far-flung villages.

Television has proved very helpful especially for school teaching and for agricultural improvement programme. Through a number of programmes new values and new ideas are

adopted but at the same time through religious mythological programmes irrational values may also be perpetuated and superstitions strengthened. Films are another effective audio-visual medium of entertainment of ideas. It has also promoted change in dress pattern, hairstyle, spoken language, mannerism and social norms. The extent to where social change is being influenced by all the minor and major technological innovations is for anybody to guess. This mass media spoiled and transmit our family and children to another world yes of course our traditional games and traditional sports are totally loosed.

Family based on blood relations extending over three or more generations known as extended family acquires a slightly different form of a joint family when this structural form is subject to certain cultural norms converting it into a corporate group. A joint family has vertical as well as horizontal extensions and has a bigger size than only vertically extended family. The main characteristic feature of the joint family is the indivisibility and common sharing of the property. The property belongs to the family. The family members have the obligations to maintain it and share the benefits of property commonly. Since this requires proper management and someone to be responsible for it, right to manage the property and the responsibility. As the manager or the Karta of the joint family, he also wields authority and enjoys the respect and the confidence of the other family members. A joint family may also sometimes include distant kins. Not all members may have similar capacity and skill to work. The rule of distribution of work according to capacity and skill and disbursement of benefits according to the needs has made it as a source of social insurance for such members who are physically disabled, mentally abnormal or the victims of protracted illness. Their wives and children have nor to suffer because of the disability of the breadwinner. It is also characterized by a common kitchen and a common code of conduct for all the members. This family system has been compatible with agrarian background of Indian economy with

predominantly male preference for many privileges, women enjoyed little of status or freedom in such a system.

Now a days changes which had a long-term influence on this family institution. The first and the foremost has been the western education which has brought in a value system in which individualism acquires the prime motive for all the behaviour and which also opened up the opportunities for the women in education and right in property .This was a severe blow on the prevailing philosophy of life, which sustained the institution for a long time. Industries and companies have increased. There was mass scale exodus of people from rural joint families to grab these opportunities. Thus, industrialization and urbanization made erosions in the structure of the joint family so that the system is on the verge of collapse if not totally broken and set apart. Joint family is converted into nuclear family so in our society plenty of old age homes increased and old age people lives alone in house.

Velusami had suddenly converted to Christianity, at the behest of few friends. Outraged that Velusami had become Ambrose, Chinuvu had wept. Ignored her tears, ambrose had left Town and gone away to Nagercoil. A fellow who visited every year suddenly wrote a letter to say that he was married. And stopped coming (“Alms” P.505).

In the story *Alms* by Azhagiya Periyavan mainly discussed about problem of Nuclear family and Old age people how they suffered for losing our tradition and culture.

Tamil Nadu is known for its ancient cultural heritage. It is worth mentioning that Tamil language, one of the official languages of India, is one of the oldest language in the world still in use. The state of Tamil Nadu is home to many spectacular cultural activities. Folk dances form an integral part of these activities. And ‘Puliyattam’ is one of them.

I can do tagar foight, saar. My name itself is tagar-Foight Kadar Saar.

What is that Tagar Foight? Tagar Foight Saar Tagar ...Tagar, you don't know ?

All of us Attentive. But it made no sense at all.

He said in Tamil , *Puli Saar, Puli. Puli* Foight.

O tiger fight –aa? Tiger fight. (“Tiger Artiste” P.140)

In the story *Tiger Artiste* by Asokamitharan rightly pointed out the life of tiger artiste.

Puliyattam is considered a very ancient folk art dance of Tamil Nadu dating back centuries ago. Old Tamil literature has recorded version of *Puliyattam* dance. In Tamil, ‘*Puli*’ means tiger and ‘*Attam*’ means dance. Hence the word ‘*Puliyattam*’ literally translates to ‘Tiger Dance’. *Puliyattam* is performed mainly in the districts of Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli. The *Puliyattam* is performed usually at village festivals.

This vigorous and euphoric folk dance imitates the graceful movement of the majestic and awe-inspiring tiger. Dance form usually comprises a troupe of 6 male performers imitating the movements of the majestic, predatory tiger. Their bodies are painted by the painstaking efforts of local artists in vibrant yellow and black to resemble that of a tiger. Usually ferocious eyes are painted on chest and roaring mouth of tiger is painted on abdomen area (belly). Once the painting is done all over the body, then the head gear or mask of the tiger with ferocious eyes and feline teeth is all fixed. There is also a false, long tail that is fixed on the backs of the dancers. With this the complete tiger dressing is complete and they are ready for the *Puliyattam*. The thunderous roars of drums beating wildly along with several local instruments reproduce the snarls of the regal predators and complete the picture. Sometimes to incorporate a touch of reality, a goat is tied to a nearby pole and the pouncing movement of tiger is vividly enacted by *Puliyattam* dancer. Apart from the tiger the dancers are often adorned in the beautiful spots of a leopard or the eerie dark shades of a black panther.

The art nowadays is slowly declining in Tamil Nadu. The body of cultural practices and beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation. In every aspect of our lives are in some aspects and changing in other respects they remain constant.

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