Remembering Burma

Tamil Migrants & Memories

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Abstract

This thesis examines the meanings of memory for a group of interrelated Indian Tamil families, who belong to a Western-educated middle class, or "salariat" (Alavi 1987). Encouraged by the colonial authorities, these families migrated to Burma between 1890 and 1922, but were forced to return to India when the Japanese invaded in 1942. Despite their distinctive position – separated socially from their colonial masters, the Burmese people and from the mass of labouring Indians – these families belong to a group which, except for Chakravarti's (1971) political and economic study, has been ignored.

Nowadays anthropology and history are recognised as supporting one another, yet memory, which is recognised as an important component of history, has largely been disregarded in anthropology. Following an introductory first chapter, Chapter 2 falls into two parts, which provide a necessary background to the whole work. Part 1 describes the three families with whom the thesis is chiefly concerned. These families have been migrants for generations, so Part 2 is on anthropology and migration. In Chapter 3 I define and discuss various ways of recalling the past. In addition to history, these include oral traditions, individual memory and social memory. I show how different kinds of memory are important in allowing people to put forward their own interpretation of the past. Taken together they allow for a "thicker" description than would be possible using only historical sources. Moreover, memory is selective; what is recalled gives meaning to the present and guidance for the future.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 (Aspects of life in Burma, Relations between Burmese, Indians and British and The evacuation from Burma), I examine differences between written texts and memories of life in Burma. Thus, I offer an account of the social organisation and values of these families during their Burma years, contrasting their recollections with historical accounts written by British, Burmese and Indian writers. In Chapter 7, The return to India and after, I show how different kinds of memory continue to influence these families. Personal memories teach a pattern of individual behaviour which the families believe should be copied. I argue that social memory, by which information about appropriate behaviour for family members is transmitted, has been turned into cultural capital, through which the past is recreated and reinterpreted to transmit a paradigm for present behaviour which has enabled them to recover from the losses

incurred in fleeing from Burma and also taught them how to cope to their own satisfaction with the contemporary experience of diaspora.

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The co-operation of many members of the three families who figure prominently in the following pages, has been vital to my research. I have much to thank them for. Several of them have given me hospitality and friendship, in addition to sharing ideas, memories and information with me.

My immediate family has been a great support. My husband has quietly encouraged me in a number of ways. It was through discussions with my daughter, Anandi, and my son, Krishna, that I first began to understand the importance of social memory for the people I write about. I also want to express my gratitude to Krishna for his ready help in solving my problems with the word processor and for producing the final version.

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MEMORY

is a glorious and admirable gift of nature by which
we recall past things,
we embrace present things,
and we contemplate future things through their
likeness
to past things.

[Boncompagno – Rhetorica novissima (1235), quoted in *The art of memory*, Frances A Yates (1966:58)]

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is about the significance of memory for three large and interrelated Tamil¹ speaking families – whom I refer to as **The Families** – who migrated from South India to Burma over the years between 1890 and 1922, settling there until 1941 or 1942 when the Japanese invasion of Burma forced their return to India. They belonged – and indeed, still belong – to what I call the salariat, a term which Alavi (1987) uses to designate a section of the urban middle class, with educational qualifications and aspirations for jobs in the state apparatus and the bureaucracy, as well as urban professionals, e.g. doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists.²

The focus of this thesis is new. No ethnographical information on Indians in Burma has as yet appeared, Chakravarti's (1971) political and economic study and Baxter's (1941) statistical survey, being the only two books which deal exclusively with Indians in Burma.

The three Families are Smartha Brahmans, or as they usually say, Iyers,³ and originally came from North Arcot, in what was the Madras Presidency and is now mainly in Tamil

Although the word Tamil is often used in the literature to refer to persons, Family members are unanimous in referring to themselves as Tamilians, saying that the word, Tamil, should be used only with reference to language and culture. Standard Tamil-English dictionaries, such as Winslow (1979 repr.) and Fabricius (4th ed. 1972) support this distinction. Both dictionaries define Tamil as the Tamil language - in addition to meaning sweetness, melodiousness - while a person is described in Tamil as *Tamilan* (m) or *Tamilchi* (f). Admittedly, Daniel (1984), who describes himself as 'a native Tamil speaker, born in the Sinhalese speaking part of Sri Lanka' uses Tamil to mean a person and the phrase, Jaffna Tamil, is often used to describe Tamil speaking people from the North of Sri Lanka, but Indians, eg Subrahmanian (1989) speak and write of themselves as Tamilians. I therefore use that expression. A term such as Tamil Brahman is acceptable because it signifies a Tamil speaking Brahman rather than a Brahman from Tamilnad.

I am unaware of any Tamil expression which is equivalent to 'salariat'.

Smarthas form one of the two sections of Tamil Brahmans, the other section being Vaisnavas. Smarthas are so-called because they follow the *smrtis*, that is, 'remembered', scriptures known as

Nadu. They are defined and described more fully in Chapter 2, in The Three Families section. They are connected to one another through complex ties of kinship and affinity, reckoned according to the Dravidian system of kinship, which I describe briefly and which is comprehensively discussed in Dumont (1983) and Trautmann (1981). At this point I limit myself to mentioning that in Dravidian kinship a pattern of repeated intermarriages between a small number of families generates a multiplicity of ties of kinship and affinity amongst them. Ties of this kind link all three of The Families and recollections of these links contribute to a sense of closeness between them. The Families have a history of migration, dating back to the days long before any of them went to Burma and continuing to the present day, but the memory of the years in Burma has had a particularly deep and lasting effect upon them, probably because this period came to a dramatic and complete end during World War II. By virtue of its sudden ending, this episode, unusually for chain migrations, is easily framed in time. The second part of Chapter 2, therefore, deals with some general issues regarding migration, and draws attention to the link between migration and memory. Remembering the past is especially important for migrants who lack physical links with a place, because remembering helps them to forge an identity and to give life a sense of meaning. Few anthropologists have yet paid much attention to memory, despite its important effects on individual behaviour, on social organisation and on a sense of identity.⁴ Historians, on the other hand, have produced some notable studies (including Collingwood 1978, Clanchy 1979 and Carr 1986). In using memory to link history and anthropology I hope to contribute to the growing number of interdisciplinary studies, for these speak to the condition of the postmodern world. Breaking down the artificial barriers imposed by separate disciplines and regarding events and ideas from a multiplicity of viewpoints, reinforces the belief that no single view can ever be a complete one. The past is sometimes likened to a landscape which we look back on, but what we see is not a broad plain, it is more like a shifting landscape seen from a train, constantly changing and always with parts hidden from view. Moreover, it is a landscape with people, and each person, each group, has a unique view

the sūtras and the śāstras, as distinct from earlier Vedic literature, which is śruti, or heard, or directly revealed to its authors. Traditionally Smarthas worship both Viṣṇu and Siva; Vaiṣṇavasa worship Viṣṇu. In my experience Smarthas usually refer to themselves - and others refer to them - as Iyers (also transliterated as Aiyyar, Aiyer, etc), while Vaiṣṇavasa are known as Iyengars (Aiyyangars, etc.)

Kuchler and Melion (1991) is limited to visual representations. Errington (1979) and Bloch (1977) describe how the past affects the present. Bloch (1991) and Toren (1993) deal with theories of cognition. Fentress (Fentress and Wickham, 1992) supplies no ethnographic information.

and each one hears only a selection of many voices. The main aim of the thesis is to examine the relevance which memory has for The Families, but before looking at their particular case, I begin in Chapter 3, *Remembrance of things past*, by defining and discussing various ways that the past is recalled. The importance of the past and its influence on the present is vividly portrayed in Lowenthal's (1985) monumental work, *The past is a foreign country*. His book has three major themes – how the past both enriches and impoverishes us; how our recollections and surroundings make us aware of the past; and why and how we change what has come down to us. The breadth of his approach, the impressive number of sources cited and the thoroughness with which he examines the ways we want the past, know the past and change the past (to adapt the titles of the book's three parts), have illuminated my thinking.

Memory is not the past preserved in aspic, nor fragments of a departed time; it is selective, in a way that interprets and shapes the past to render it valid for the present. Without memory there could be no history. Collingwood (1978) defines history as essentially memory combined with "authority" – by which he means the legitimation of findings by material artefacts and written evidence. I use the term, history, in this sense. Like memory, history is selective, and must be so if it is to interpret and give meaning to the past. In various ways, throughout this study, it will be seen that memory and written history supplement and enrich each other and help to provide a "thicker" description of The Families and their lives than would otherwise be possible.

I have used written sources in the form of reports by government officials, newspaper reports, pamphlets which mention, or were written by, family members, and genealogies preserved in the memory or committed to writing by different individuals. I have read or consulted many kinds of books — histories and anthropological studies of Burma and South India, studies of migration from different disciplines, personal accounts of World War II episodes by both Indians and British, a hagiography of a saintly family member, a manuscript life of another, theses and academic papers, including some by members of The three Families. My interest in The Families' experiences in Burma goes back many years, for my husband belongs to one of The Families and I still remember how he first described to me his childhood trek from war-torn Burma. My long association with The Families (now more than thirty years) gave me an advantage in collecting information during fieldwork in India between November 1989 and April 1990, because I was — as they might say — "a known person", and so I had no difficulty in meeting people. My usual method was to visit people in their homes, often more than once, or sometimes staying for a day or two or even longer. I collected memories, which I recorded, from

about forty people, in addition to learning a great deal from informal conversations and contacts. Whenever I visited the home of someone from Burma I was treated with kindness and met with a willingness, even enthusiasm, to talk about Burma days. I did not use a questionnaire, for I was not seeking historical "facts" from them, but wanted to find out how **they** looked back on Burma. Discursive conversation and participant observation has enabled me to learn experientially about members of The Families and their way of life, over a long period of time. Indeed, this learning process has lasted throughout my married life, so I am tempted to substitute Burke's (1988:219) phrase, "participant immersion" for "participant observation". My knowledge has also been supplemented since fieldwork, by contacts with several of The Families' members who are now in England and North America.

A significant early work on memory is Bartlett's *Remembering; a study in experimental* and social psychology (1932), which was the forerunner of many works which treat memory from a cognitive, psychological standpoint, while Yates's classic, *The art of* memory (1966) deals with how we remember and mnemonics. Casey's *Remembering, a* phenomenological study (1987) shows the many different ways in which memory functions – through reminding, reminiscing and recognizing. But memory is not only a question of "I remember...", nor of memorising facts or skills, important though these are.

What Conway (1990) calls autobiographical memory and I prefer to call individual memory, I define as the unique recollection by an individual of a happening in the past. But the social memory of a group is also of major importance as a means of using the past to explain and manage the present and to plan for the future. Drawing on Fentress and Wickham's *Social memory* (1992:7), which is one of the few books on memory which has an anthropologist (Fentress) as author, I define social memory as a social activity, which is structured by language, by teaching and observing, by ideas held in common and by experiences shared with others. Although most writers prefer the term social memory, Halbwachs, who led the way in highlighting the importance of memory as a shared, social activity, called his book, which first appeared in 1950, *Collective memory* (1980). He maintained that **all** memory is collective, and that individual memory does not exist, but that whatever we remember is connected in some way with the many different groups in whose activities we participate. Connerton (1989) extended my understanding of social memory and of the importance of non-verbal memory, including various kinds of incorporated practices and experiential learning.

It was when I read Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) ideas about "cultural capital" (in which The Families I have studied undoubtedly had shares) that my attention was first drawn to memory as extending far beyond the individual. What Bourdieu calls cultural capital is surely a form of cultural memory, which exists through a person's interaction with others in a social group. By sharing and transmitting vital information to one another, members of a group achieve a thorough knowledge of practice, and through remembering appropriate behaviour, sets of rules are evolved for group members, which lead to the negotiation of shared values and expectations.

In focusing on Burma, I look at ways in which this period is remembered, not only in the memories of members of The Families but also in the way Indians in general and the salariat in particular are recalled in written histories and documents of the time. In so doing I demonstrate how different groups of people recall the same situation in different, and sometimes conflicting, ways. Like many other migrants, The Families saw their role in society differently from the way other sections of the population saw them. Looking at the way they remember their migration can help us to understand their point of view and why it may be at variance with that of a historian, a government, or of local people. I also examine the extent to which The Families' social memory, by which information about appropriate forms of behaviour for their members is transmitted, has been a factor in enabling them to recover from the trauma of leaving Burma as refugees and still stands them in good stead as they cope with the contemporary experience of diaspora.

Towards the end of Chapter 3, the section, *Voices in the chorus of history*, explores the way stereotypes influence memory – including my own – and also describes the kinds of memories which people shared with me. In order to set the scene for The Families' lives in Burma, some knowledge of where they came from and why they went to Burma is required. Therefore, the early sections of Chapter 4 (*Historical and ethnographic background*, and *The Families' lifestyle before Burma days*), provide a short historical account of the part of Madras Presidency which The Families came from and also describe something of the way of life of The Families before they migrated to Burma. To do this, I draw on both published material – including Seal (1968), Washbrook (1976) and Nambi Arooran (1980) – and personal memories, showing how, taken together, these different ways of recalling the past supplement each other and also lay the foundation for understanding why The Families went to Burma in the first place.

I refer, as appropriate, to existing ethnographical and anthropological material on South India but much of it is of very limited significance in understanding The Families. I have already mentioned (p. 9) Dumont (1983), Trautmann (1981) and Gough (1956) on

kinship. Daniel (1984) writes a fascinating account, in the words of his subtitle, of "Being a person the Tamil way", but the stress on semiotics limits its relevance for this study. After Singer (1972) little material has been published on urban Brahman families, although there have been some notable studies on women. Caplan (1985), for example, has interesting points to make about a section of middle and upper class Brahman women belonging to voluntary organisations in Madras, but The Families are not "joiners", and therefore do not quite fit her description of members of women's organisations. Wadley (1980) and Duvvury (1991) are informative on Tamil Brahman women's rituals.

One problem from my point of view, is that most anthropological studies of India, whether of the North or the South, reveal a preponderance of works on caste, hierarchy and kinship, the best known being Dumont's (1970) exposition of the over-riding importance of purity and pollution in determining hierarchy. Seen from the puritypollution-hierarchy angle, I find caste of very limited significance in discussing The Families. They are certainly aware of caste (incidentally, a word they rarely use, preferring "community" when speaking English and jāti in Tamil) but it does not obsess them as one might imagine from reading many of the books on the subject. I prefer to see caste as linked with class. Most Brahmans are middle class, but this does not mean that most middle class people are Brahmans. For the past hundred years The Families' members, like others belonging to the salariat, have become increasingly lax about hierarchy, caste restrictions and purity and pollution taboos. Yet caste, seen from the point of view of these restrictions and taboos, has loomed so large in Indian studies, it is impossible to ignore. Western writers for 150 years or so, have been obsessed with trying to describe the limitations, the restrictions and taboos, the hierarchical notions, associated with caste. In their efforts to tabulate and describe they have at times mistaken the "ideal" for the practice. Moreover, the fixed ideas in many Western minds about caste and hierarchy provide an example of what Appadurai means when he complains that certain "places have been married to ideas and images", "whereby some feature of a group is seen as quintessential to the group and as especially true of that group in contrast to other groups. Hierarchy in India", he contends, "has this quality" and the idea becomes a "metonymic prison" for India (1988:39-40), (just as the concept of honour and shame does for much of the Mediterranean world). Fortunately, some recent writers, such as Inden (1990) and Raheja (1988), point out the limitations of these preconceptions, and argue that a complex interweaving of relationships, involving the political, economic, religious and personal, has to be taken into account. Historians like Washbrook (1976) show clearly that even in the nineteenth century, economic and political dominance could not necessarily be equated with the caste hierarchy. Back in

1972 Milton Singer saw the caste changes that were taking place as cultural phenomena. Although Marriott (1965) rightly argues for the adoption of a multi-dimensional model as guide to status and behaviour, and maintains that the traditional Brahmanic model is but one of those which Hindus adopt, he betrays a tendency common in Western writers, which manifests itself in an inclination towards enumeration, minute description and classification (Cohn 1987, Richards 1993). This attitude has been castigated variously as "orientalist" or colonialist (Said 1978, Appadurai 1986, 1988, Prakash 1990). Hutton, whose Caste in India (1946) was one of the most highly regarded books on the subject at the time, at least had the excuse of being an officer of the colonial government. In my view, caste – or more correctly – $j\bar{a}ti$ provides The Families with a point of identity. As Iyers, they know, as soon as they meet other Iyers, that they are likely to have certain things in common and immediately feel a sense of ease in each other's company. They will speak the same Tamil dialect, eat the same kind of food prepared in a similar way, perform the same festivals and rituals; approve similar norms of behaviour and enquiries may well show that they are in some way connected by kinship or marriage, however distant. Caste in The Families manifests itself as a sense of identity similar to that which is found, for example, in some small, closely-knit religious sects, or in an "old boy" network. It is not a question of a sense of hierarchy, or purity and pollution, but of belonging.

A search for existing writings of direct ethnographical relevance to my study has revealed no anthropological work on Indians in Burma, and certainly nothing on the South Indian salariat there. Only Chakravarti's (1971) study includes substantial information on the middle classes,⁵ albeit from an economic and political standpoint, and deals with the period from the establishment of the British Raj up to World War II, which covers the period with which I am concerned. Baxter's (1941) *Report on Indian immigration*, prepared for the government of the time, contains a great deal of valuable statistical material. My search has included books on Burmese history for the 1920-1940 period and also relevant sections of books on Indians overseas.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I aim to contrast the story of The Families in Burma, culled from individual and social memory, with written historical accounts. Chapter 4, *Aspects of life in India and Burma*, is mainly told from The Families point of view. Personal accounts and historical accounts recall relationships and incidents in the past in different ways and

Except for Siegelman's (1962) Ph.D. thesis on the Chettiar community in Burma - but this is hardly relevant.

in Chapter 5, on Indian relations with the Burmese and British, divergent views of the past become more obvious in the contrasting ways that Western, Burmese and Indian writers, as well as some members of The Families, recount their views of Burma. As both Cohn (1987) and Guha (1983) show in their historiographical writings on South Asia, accounts of historical events differ according to the kind of language used, the attitude of the reader, and the aim of the historical account. Historians' approaches vary from the British Raj approach of Harvey (1946) to the Burmese nationalist approach of Maung Maung (1961, 1980). They include Andrew's (1933) blow-by-blow contemporary account of the 1931 riots, as recalled by a staunch supporter of the Empire, Donnison's (1970) more even-handed account of events he experienced at first hand as a British ICS officer with strong Burmese sympathies, Cady's (1958) well documented but anti-Burmese nationalist history and Taylor (1974, 1987), whose work is particularly helpful when examining the relationships between Burmese, British and - to a lesser degree -Indians. Adas (1979) uses relative deprivation theory to analyse the causes of Burmese unrest. Yet in each case Indians are mentioned mainly to say why the British used them or in relation to the problems that arose through Burmese resentment towards them. The Families' memories put the emphasis differently.

In Chapter 6 I look at accounts of the wartime evacuation from Burma, showing some of the differences between the – mainly British – written records of this episode, and personal accounts, by both the British and Indians in which individuals relate how they remember dealing with the difficulties they encountered. Hutchings (1942) and Tinker (1985)⁶ provide illuminating accounts of the chaos of the evacuation and write sympathetically of the plight of Indian refugees.

Despite frequent assertions, particularly from men of The Families, that they supported the Indian independence movement, many of them felt a strong sense of loyalty towards their colonial masters and were often employed by them. I have looked at writings on colonialism and imperialism to try to understand why and to what extent they attached themselves to their rulers. I have consulted histories of the British period, including Seal (1968) and Washbrook (1976), and also taken into account writings which seek to explicate the colonial mentality and its influence, including that attitude which Said (1978) refers to as orientalism. The writings of Cohn (1987), Nandy (1988), Inden (1990) are relevant here. The Families are particularly interesting because they are a

The lack of available Indian accounts - I know of only one, and that appeared in Tamil - arises, at least in part, because the British suppressed contemporary Indian accounts (Bhattacharya 1993).

group of people sandwiched in the middle, at once subaltern and superior. They were well aware of the danger, to them, of trying to rock the boat of the British Raj. A lot of them saw the British as benevolent and uncorrupt rulers and willingly supported them. Others conformed outwardly or during their working years, but looked for ways of showing resentment at their lack of freedom. Their social memory emphasised the inappropriateness of violence for their community, but as Haynes and Prakash (1991) point out, power may be contested without violence. Adas (1991) also describes alternative ways of contesting power. Scott (1990) draws attention to the quiet resistance that often occurs in everyday forms, its shape being determined by an aspect of socio-economic and cultural practices and in the Social relations section of Chapter 4 I describe how some informants remembered minor "arts of resistance", to use Scott's phrase, or engaged in small subversions. At the same time they, and others, were seeking to establish their place in the structure of society in different ways – through education, industriousness and kin ties, but never through confrontation. It may be argued that in this way they put themselves in a compromising position vis-à-vis their rulers; Nandy (1988), following Gramsci, demonstrates that colonisation is most complete when the colonised come to accept their rulers, not by compulsion, but with heart and mind. But is that the whole story? Instead of trying to explain The Families, in what might be called the colonialist or missionary mode – that is, as members of a static society and a rigid religious grouping, convinced of their own innate superiority in their own society and bound by tradition, subservient time-seekers in a state of tutelage towards their rulers – it is also possible to see them as demonstrably pragmatic, energetic, hardworking and showing no greater hierarchical leanings than their Western counterparts and it is the latter reading that they themselves would certainly prefer. Their self respect was not compromised by working for the British administration, in the way that it would have been if family obligations were not met. In order to come nearer to understanding what Inden (1990:5) calls their "capacity to make their own world" we are helped by looking at the ways they remember, not just individually but collectively, socially. They themselves had a tendency to reify memory, as Bloch (1991) does when he describes memory as a storehouse for cultural knowledge which has to be known in order to

It might seem that the *bhadralok*, the Bengali upper middle class McGuire (1983) writes about in *The making of a colonial mind*, were similar to The Families, but there are several differences. McGuire deals with an earlier period - 1857-1885; the *bhadralok* were Bengalis living in Bengal, not migrants or settlers elsewhere; a large proportion of them belonged to a rentier aristocracy, which was not the case with The Families; as a group they had more, and closer, contacts with the British than The Families did.

operate effectively in a specific human environment. The difficulty with this approach is that it ignores the element of renegotiation present whenever memories are transmitted. Bourdieu, on the other hand, was well aware of the problem. One reason why he chose the term *habitus* was to avoid "the common conception of habit as a mechanical assembly or preformed programme" (Bourdieu 1977:218).

In Chapter 7, *The return to India and after*, I turn to the practical problems The Families met on return to India in 1942 and look at how forms of memory helped them to cope. Despite the serious problems they had to face as refugees, they persist in remembering the Burma years positively. Finally, I examine some of the changes that have taken place in The Families in recent years, including changes in lifestyle and marriage patterns. By comparing aspects of the present lifestyles of movers with branches of The Families who have remained in Tamil Nadu and therefore have no migration memories, I argue that the some of the changes can be linked to memories of migration. Positive memories of migration have encouraged further migration and many of The Families' members are now scattered throughout the world.

In conclusion, I shall argue that memories of the Burma migration have been selected by The Families in a way that allows them to be used as a model for themselves or younger generations to follow as they adapt to changing circumstances. Memory has also contributed to the formation of The Families' sense of identity. Individual memories teach patterns of individual behaviour which The Families believe should be copied, while social memory, by means of which information about appropriate behaviour for The Families' members is transmitted, has been turned into cultural capital, enabling them to recover from the losses incurred in fleeing from Burma and now helps them to formulate strategies to settle in new lands and to cope to their own satisfaction with the contemporary experience of diaspora.

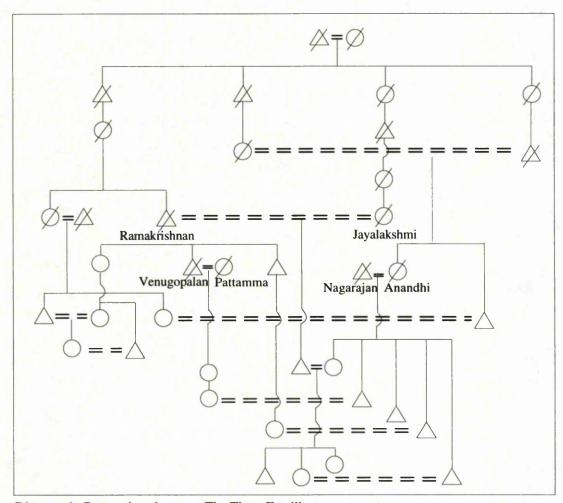


Diagram 1: Connections between The Three Families

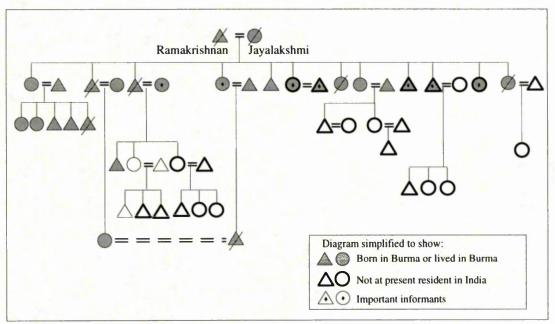


Diagram 2: The Ramakrishnan Family
Remembering Burma: Tamil Migrants & Memories

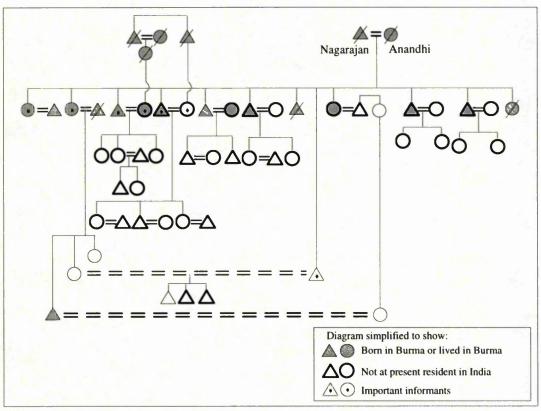


Diagram 3: The Nagarajan Family

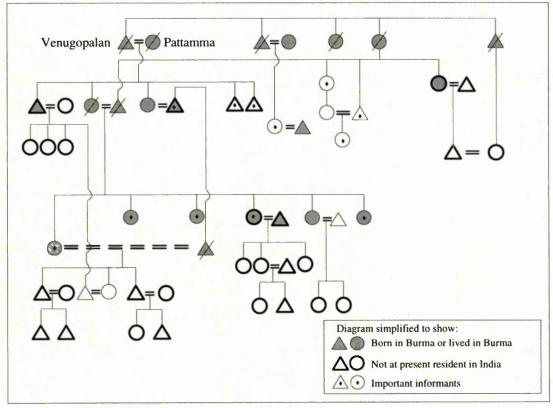


Diagram 4: The Venugopalan Family

Chapter 2

On The Families in particular and migration in general

This chapter supplies a necessary background to subsequent ones. It deals with two of the major components of the thesis, beginning with a description of The Three Families, without whose migration and memories the thesis could not have been written. In recognition of the continuing repercussions of migration in their past and present lives, the second section is a general account of *Anthropology and migration*.

The Three Families

The Families, as I call them, are those who are either direct descendants, or siblings and their descendants, of three couples whom I call the Venugopalans, the Ramakrishnans and the Nagarajans, after the three husbands, although these names, like other names which I use for members of The Families, are not their real ones. Except for one section of the final chapter, my thesis is not concerned with non-migrating relatives of these couples.

This seems a suitable place to mention the South Indian system of names. There are no surnames. A full name has four elements. First, the name of the village or town from which the father's family hails; second, the father's given name; third, the individual's given name and fourth, the caste name. When a woman marries she substitutes her husband's name for her father's as the second component, but keeps her given name. Thus, Karadikudi Subramaniam Visvamitra Iyer would be Visvamitra, son of Subramaniam of Karadikudi village, who is a Smartha Brahman. In fact, nowadays the first name is often dropped or used as an initial, the father's name is usually shown as an initial and the caste name is often dropped altogether, so the above name would in all likelihood become K.S. Visvamitra, or S. Visvamitra, or even shortened to S. V. Mitra. The names I have used throughout are intended as given names, but I should add that an older, or genealogically senior person, or anyone to whom one wishes to show respect, would - certainly during the Burma period and and also later - be referred to by the appropriate term of relationship or by a circumlocution, eg. Sankaramma, i.e. Sankar's mother. To use a person's actual name implied - and to the orthodox still implies - familiarity, not respect.

The Families are not a randomly chosen group; I have a long-standing relationship with many of them because my husband is one of Nagarajan's sons and all three descent groups are connected; the people closely related to the Ramakrishnans and Nagarajans are linked by both consanguinal and affinal ties, while those closely related to the Venugopalans have several affinal links with the other two groups. (Diagram 1). The shared experience of having lived in Burma is another bond between them all.

Ramakrishnan, Nagarajan and Venugopalan were born between 1880 and 1900 approximately. Each one married young and soon afterwards, at the instigation of an older relative who had already migrated, each went to Burma with his wife. In effect, they were all part of a chain migration which had begun about 1880 and ended in the early 1920s. The couples spent between twenty and forty years in Burma, where they brought up large families. They had no intention of leaving Burma until the advancing war against the Japanese caused all of them and their immediate relatives to return to India, where all three couples survived until the 1970s or 1980s. Ramakrishnan and his wife, Jayalakshmi (Diagram 2), had twelve children who grew to adulthood, eight of whom are still alive. Eleven of the twelve married and between them had 32 children and several grandchildren. Four of Ramakrishnan's children were among my most helpful informants and I got to know – to varying degrees and over a period of years – eleven members of the next generation.

The second couple, Nagarajan and his wife, Anandhi, became my parents-in-law. Ten of their children grew to adulthood and still survive; all are well known to me and have, over many years and in different ways, given me helpful information and provided many opportunities for experiential learning. All of this generation are married and between them they have 25 children, all of whom I know in varying degrees, and 17 grandchildren (Diagram 3). Nagarajan had only one sister. Of her eight children only one son has ever left India and for this reason they provide an interesting control group. (See *Non-movers* section in the final chapter). Nagarajan's wife, Anandhi, is related to both Ramakrishnan and his wife, Jayalakshmi.

The third couple, Venugopalan and his wife, Pattamma, had four sons and two daughters. When one daughter died in childbirth in her mid thirties, they took in and brought up her six surviving daughters also. I have met all but one of the Venugopalans' surviving children, but it is the six sisters who are the couple's granddaughters that I

know best, and they figure more prominently in the following pages than Venugopalan's own children. The six sisters are all married and between them have twelve children and ten grandchildren (Diagram 4). Four of the sisters in particular, extended friendship, hospitality and assistance to me. Age-wise the six sisters are similar to many of the second generation in the other two Families. They are linked to Nagarajan's family in several ways, including the marriage of one of the sisters to Nagarajan's eldest son and by the marriage of Venugopalan's BD to Nagarajan's third son.

Members of The Families believe relationships of kinship and affinity to be important, so at this point I want to look briefly at their system of kinship as well as what they mean by family, relations and connections - which are the words they use when speaking English - and how they express these relationships in Tamil. As explained in the Introduction, The Families are Smartha Brahmans from the North Arcot District of what was the Madras Presidency, who traditionally formed endogamous marriage alliances with other North Arcot Smarthas. The complexity of ties between individuals and branches of The Families is a consequence of the Dravidian kinship system, which is commonly followed (although with variations) throughout South India. The Dravidian kinship pattern is characterised by a basic division between cross kin and parallel kin. Cross kin are marriageable; parallel kin are not. Marriage is forbidden – in theory, although not always in practice – between two people who belong to the same kōtiram, or clan, " even if no relationship can be traced. At birth, a child automatically belongs to his or her father's kōtiram, but a woman changes to her husband's kōtiram when she marries. Thus, marriage between the children of two brothers (who have the same kōtiram) is considered incestuous and forbidden. The kinship terms used show the relationship;

This kind of slippage between generations is not uncommon. Indian men often marry much younger wives; also, if a woman marries young and continues to bear children for twenty years or more, her daughters may well produce children while she is still childbearing. As mentioned on p. 22, a man may marry his eZD.

So the older and genealogically senior sister-in-law is the niece of the younger one.

Kōtiram (gotra or clan), has been defined as an exogamous sept (Basham 1963), and a domain of mythical descent (Madan (1965). It is said that all Brahmans are descended from a one or other of the rṣis or ancient sages. Each kōtiram is named after a particular rṣi. Thus, the number of kōtiram names is limited. Belonging to a kōtiram carries no rights, any more than having a particular surname does.

children call their father's elder brother *periyappā*, or "big father" and his younger brother, *cittappā*, that is, "little father", and the children of brothers are all referred to as brothers and sisters. The children of two sisters are also forbidden to marry because a mother's sister is seen as having the same relationship as a mother (she is *periyammā*, or "big mother", to her younger sister's children, and *citti*, or "little" one to her elder sister's). The children of a brother and sister, on the other hand, not only **may** marry, but ought to marry. Indeed, a man's MBD was known as *urimai peņ*, or the girl whom he had a right to marry. A man's marriage to his MBD, or to his eZD, was, until recently, seen not only as the ideal but was common in practice, as Chekki (1974) also notes. I have traced seven MBD and three eZD marriages in The Families, as well as several other marriages with relatives, e.g. MFBD and MFBSD. It will be seen that, when repeated alliances are formed with the same families over several generations, multiple ties between these families result, as diagrams of The Families show.

Much has been written on the Hindu joint family, 13 which is usually defined as parents, their children and their married sons, together with their sons' wives and children in one household. This style of living is not discussed here, because it exists only where there is land to provide a means of livelihood; in Burma the adult men of The Families were salaried people and held no land. Also it was the young who migrated - there was no older generation there, no family house which they could turn to. Extended family households, however, were common in Burma. For example, three generations lived together in Venugopalan's household, and Nagarajan's eldest son lived for a time in his MB's household, which included his MBWM. The Tamil term, kutampam carries the same range of meanings as the English word family, both being slightly ambiguous and varying according to context. Thus, family sometimes means only the nuclear family, but often it has wider connotations and there is general agreement in The Families that it includes at least one's parents' generation of brothers and sisters and their children, as well as one's own brothers and sisters and all their children. Most people think of family as including up to three generations, as well as anyone from an earlier generation who is still living. Siblings' spouses, too, are included as family. From the time of marriage a

I have heard of a case (not in The Families) where the children of two sisters married. This was justified on the grounds that the young people did not belong to the same *kōtiram*.

Further information on the joint family is to be found in Madan (1965), Ross (1961), et al.

spouse's *kuṭampam* (natal family) become *campanti*, usually translated as "connections"; that is, people to whom one is connected by marriage, or, in common English usage, affines. When a woman marries, her family become *campanti* to her husband's family, because of the *campantam*, or alliance, formed between the *kuṭampankal* (families) of the husband and wife. Likewise, the husband's natal family become *campanti* to his wife's family. Thus, Venugopalan's *kuṭampam* are *campanti* to Nagarajan's, because of the marriage of Venugopalan's granddaughter to one of Nagarajan's sons.

I have often heard it said that it is better to marry into a known family. Given a general acceptance of arranged marriages, ¹⁴ people agree that a bride is more likely to settle easily into a family where she is already known and which has ties with her *kuṭampam*. They also reckon that a girl will be well treated by her *campanti* if the affinal family want to ensure the continued forging of marriage links between the two families.

When a woman marries Tamilians say that she "enters her husband's house". However several women of The Families said to me, "I feel I belong to two families". This is very different from the situation in ethnographies of North India where a woman's access to her natal family is severely restricted after marriage and where wife givers are seen as so inferior to wife takers that a wife's parents may not even go to stay in their married daughter's house. When the links between families have continued over generations to form a web of inter-relationships, the division between wife givers and wife takers is blurred.

"Extra" individuals are sometimes included as family. These, who are named individuals rather than a particular group, may be children brought up in a relative's household, or an older relative, perhaps widowed and with no independent home of her own. Although physical nearness may draw someone into a family – for example a child sent to live in a relative's house – household should not be confused with family; family members do not cease belonging to a *kuṭampam* because they do not all live under one roof, as more than one person emphasised. Nor can belonging to a *kuṭampam* be seen purely from physical and biological aspects; sentiments, power and the acceptance of obligations are equally important. Obligations towards members of one's own family, especially parents, siblings

As almost every one was in Burma days and many are today.

and siblings' children (and to the siblings of one's parents to a lesser degree), can be quite considerable and may well include financial help, the provision of a place to live, responsibility for a young person's education, long term or short term hospitality, or help with organising a wedding, to which parents, siblings, their spouses and children as well as a wide range of other relatives and friends, will expect to be invited.

Occasionally, a very close friendship leads to fictive kinship. In Burma, some members of a Vellala¹⁵ family were close friends of the Nagarajan family. Despite belonging to a different *jāti* (endogamous group, genus, sometimes translated as caste) or "community" as The Families prefer to put it, Nagarajan always referred to K. V. Reddy, who was his particular friend in this family, as "my brother", and indeed he did act as a brother, for when Nagarajan arrived in India as a refugee in 1942, he was taken first of all to his "brother's" house. Some relatives of K. V. Reddy still keep in touch with Nagarajan's descendants and three of them gave me help during my fieldwork.

It is possible for a person to refer to all those related to him or her, whether by kinship or affinity, by the term, <u>uravinar</u>, which The Families' members, like other Tamil speakers, usually translate as "relatives", but in practice it is more common to use the specific kinship term when speaking of an individual, so that typically an exact relationship is described. People feel a sense of obligation towards <u>uravinar</u>, but less than towards <u>kuṭampam</u>. Where there are many, scattered relatives, everyone accepts that it is not possible to keep in touch with them all. To quote a comment once made to me, "Relationships don't just happen, they have to be worked at — and it can be quite hard work". Whom one keeps in touch with may depend on a range of factors, such as whether a person lives near enough to visit, personal liking for one another, a sense of obligation for help given in the past or looked for in the future, children of a similar age, or the hope of a marriage alliance. A relationship can lie moribund but the potential for

About 25-30% of the population of Tamil Nadu are Vellalas. They include a number of *jādis* of high status, including Mudaliars, Reddys, Naidus, etc. In English Vellalas are sometimes referred to as "high-caste non-Brahmans".

Tamil has a rich variety of kinship terms, so that a relationship may be defined much more precisely than is often the case in English. For example, instead of the single word, aunt, the term, *periyammā*, (FeBW, or MeZ), *citti*, (FyBW, or MyZ)0 or *māmi* (MBW) will be used. Also certain relations which have no specific name in English, have one in Tamil, eg. FFZ and MFZ, as well as FZ, is called *attai*.

activating it is always there, maybe as a result of a visit or a marriage alliance, or moving to live within easy reach. Living in Burma acted as a powerful motivation for keeping in touch with those kith and kin who also lived there, because of the common experience, the common memories, they shared.

One recent example of reactivating a kinship link illustrates my point. During fieldwork in 1990 I went to Hyderabad and while there I visited, for the first time, Krishnan, who was my mother-in-law's FBS. It was his father who first encouraged her and her husband to migrate to Burma. At my request, we had some genealogical information photocopied. He refused to allow me to pay for it, saying that this would be wrong because, in his words, "you are my daughter". He was conscious of the obligation our relationship carried and which existed through the link between his father and my husband and in calling me his daughter he recognised his genealogical seniority to me.

The rights of <u>uravinar</u> are illustrated by the following incident. In 1990 I wanted to visit Ramu, a man who is closely related to both the Venugopalan and Ramakrishan families. His mother was Ramakrishan's WZ, his father was Venugopalan's brother, and also FB of one of my sisters-in-law. I had met Ramu occasionally when I lived in India in the 1960s and 70s, but did not know him well. I wrote, asking if it would be convenient for me to stay briefly in his house in Bangalore. He replied affirmatively, in English, ¹⁷ adding, "Relations don't ask if it's convenient; they just dump themselves".

These examples show the range of obligations that relatedness can carry and also indicate something of the kindness I received while doing my fieldwork.

The closeness of the Nagarajan and Ramakrishnan Families grew, not only because they were in Burma together, but also because of their relationship through Nagarajan's wife, Anandhi (whose parents were cross cousins), who was related to Ramakrishnan through her maternal grandfather, her paternal grandmother and Ramakrishnan's mother, who were all brothers and sisters. Ramakrishnan married his MFBZD, so there was another relationship – albeit more distant – through his wife. Anandhi's second daughter married one of the Ramakrishnan's sons, thus strengthening the relationship further. I once

English is always the preferred language for writing, except possibly for a very small minority of older women.

remarked that it was very good of a particular relative to have accepted the responsibility of arranging and financing his wife's sisters' marriages. It was pointed out to me that he had married his eZD so her sisters were not connected to him only by marriage; they were, to use an English term, his nieces and this strengthened his obligation towards them.

Despite an emphasis on patrilineality, I have observed that members of The Families often keep more closely in touch with their mother's family. For example, Nagarajan and Anandhi migrated to Burma at the urging of her MB, and perhaps because she had several relatives there while he had none, their children are closer to their mother's people. Also, the Venugopalans brought up their daughter's daughters, which meant that these girls were close to their mother's family.

Thus, the idea of the Tamil family is not of a static social unit, but a network of social relations among people who are related to one another in specified ways. Appropriate forms of behaviour and mutual obligations are defined by custom and practice, while kinship terminology indicates expected behaviour to some extent. In the end, the survival of a social network depends on the extent to which individuals are prepared to accept and discharge the duties which custom and social pressure lay on them as *kuṭampam* or *uravinar* of those concerned. The Families take pride in the extent to which their members recognise the importance of relationships and the reliance they can place on mutual support of various kinds. The importance of the ties which link members of The Families are emphasised by individual memories which stress the help given by relatives. Remembering common ancestors helps in developing a common identity which will continue into the future. Corporate activities, such as the celebration of festivals, provide opportunities to remind those taking part of a shared past. Finally, in remembering the support, both material and non-material, provided by selected members of The Families in the past, the need for unity to continue can be asserted emphatically.

Anthropology and migration

Anthropologists came late to the study of migration. The first major attempt to formulate a theory of migration was the work of a statistician, E. G. Ravenstein (Jackson 1969; Lee 1969). In his *Laws of migration*, first published in 1885, he listed the key elements

characterising migration, which he saw as a flow of population resulting from a variety of factors. He developed the push/pull model – one set of factors "push" people from their area of origin; they overcome intervening variables; another set of factors "pull" them to their place of destination. His "laws" included the assertion that the development of commerce and technology led to an increase in migration and that the main motive was people's desire, as he put it, "to better themselves in material respects". Despite some questioning of his "laws", his push/pull model is still widely accepted. Writing some eighty years later the sociologist, Lee (1969), draws heavily on Ravenstein's model.

The push/pull approach is chiefly concerned with the labour and economic aspects of migration. As Jackson (1969:3) comments, the theoretical development of the study of migration has been remarkably static. Perhaps this is because migration covers such a wide variety of situations, few valid generalisations can be made, although many studies suggest that most international migrants are young, male and migrate singly. The theoretical work available, although useful in various ways to a number of disciplines, tells us very little about migrants as individuals, their relationship either with their own or with the host community, or their own views about migration.

Several disciplines, including sociology, demography, geography, history, psychology and economics had already produced studies of migration before the topic became accepted as valid in anthropological research in the 1950s. One reason was probably an early distrust of interdisciplinary research which "spilled messily over intellectual boundaries" (Eades 1987:1). Another reason was that studies of societies in flux did not fit easily into the functionalist model, which was in vogue earlier in the century. Thirdly, most migration involves a move to towns, but anthropologists avoided urban studies until the post-World War II period. Fourthly, the study of population movement to urban areas often posed uncomfortable questions for anthropologists about whom they worked for, as opposed to whom they worked with because of the frequent involvement of government and other official funding bodies, which limited the anthropologist's independence.

The significance of this last point can be seen when we observe that most early anthropological writing on migration was on Africa. Influenced by the attitude of colonial governments there, who discouraged migration to urban areas, there was a widespread idea that the move from rural to urban areas caused a breakdown in primary

relationships, and resulted in individuals being alienated from society. As Jackson (1969:3) put it, there was an implication "that movement away from the natal place is a deviant activity associated with disorganisation and a threat to the established harmony... implied by a life lived within a fixed social framework". (I shall have more to say about the kind of language used here, later in this chapter). Yet from 1838 onwards, the British colonial regime in India had encouraged the migration of Indians worldwide, to work on plantations, to build roads and railways, to work as shopkeepers, artisans or merchants, and, as in The Families' case, to fill often lowly but essential administrative posts. One suspects that the imperial rulers in Africa were less concerned with the alienated individual than with the difficulty and cost of administering mushrooming towns. Lewis (1965), writing about America, and Mayer (1961), writing about South Africa, were amongst the first to show that different groups reacted to migration in different ways and that there was no set pattern.

Migration affects those who stay behind as well as those who leave. Others in the same family or social group are often involved in the decision to migrate. Many studies emphasise the effect of remittances on the sending society (Watson 1975; Dandekar 1986; Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987, et al.), while newspaper reports during 1991 highlighted the potentially devastating effect of the Gulf War on the economies of Bangladesh and Pakistan, countries where more than half their foreign exchange came from remittances from the Gulf States. Just as Goody (1958) points out the importance of the development cycle for domestic groups, so a diachronic view is necessary in looking at migration (Lewandowski 1980; Ballard 1987), for it is not a once-and-for-all occurrence, but a process which affects those who go and those who remain behind for the rest of their lives, as well as children unborn when the migration takes place.

An understanding that migration is part of a larger, complex process became stronger in the 1960s, as realisation grew that the decision to migrate is bound up with the social, political and economic systems under which people live in addition to family and community pressures. The Families seem to have coped well with the emotional and psychological effects of migration which Berger (1975) describes in his book on migrant workers, but their middle class connections must have helped in this respect. Nor have they been seduced by the "myth of return"; having once migrated, their migrations have been characterised by a determination to succeed in the host country, an attitude

encouraged by their long cultural memory of moving as opportunities presented themselves.

In some countries assimilation has been seen as the goal. Those who try to fit in, who assimilate, who are willing to be resocialised, are "good" migrants; others are categorised as deviants, outsiders, inclined to overuse the resources of the receiving society, or cause friction amongst the native population. For much of the twentieth century, American studies were greatly concerned with the question of assimilation, as ideas about the United States as a "melting pot" became firmly entrenched in popular and official thought. Elsewhere, including many British colonies, assimilation was strongly opposed. This was case in Burma, as well as in Fiji, in East Africa and in South Africa. In these countries, immigrant communities were kept as separate as possible from the rulers - the British – on the one hand and from the indigenous community on the other. In some countries immigrant Indians were restricted in the places where they could live and work (in Fiji and Kenya, for example). There was a very visual aspect to the "melting pot" approach; skin colour, although not the only marker of difference, was used as a means of defining political and gendered superiority or inferiority. Assimilation was avoided where there were obvious colour differences (e.g. between white Americans and Blacks or Chinese; between Indians and British), but was accepted between East and West Europeans in America.

In many parts of the British Empire, separation of communities was achieved by a variety of means; for example, in Burma there were separate personal law codes for Hindus, Muslims and Burmese. Government departments were staffed as far as possible by either Indians or by Burmese, but not by both. In Burma and in East Africa, Indians were officially encouraged to set up their own schools, where one Indian language or another held prime place and the different ethnic communities tended to live in their own "ghettos". Enormous salary differences served to a large extent to insulate the British and other Caucasians from the vast majority of both Indians and Burmese.

Despite an increasing appreciation of the complexities of migration, anthropological, as opposed to sociological, studies of migrants and migration, are still hard to find. Even Helweg, whose *An immigrant's success story* (1990) gives a positive account of a middle class Panjabi family who migrate to the United States, describes Indian migrants to Australia (Helweg 1991) as all belonging either to "old" style migrants or "new",

according to class, education, fluency in English and lifestyle. He presents us with a composite picture of one member of each group, which may be sociologically useful, but the anthropologist is uncomfortably aware of being presented with two "typical" examples; in other words, two stereotypes.

On reading literature about migrations, it is impossible to escape noticing the way migrants are so often regarded as a problem. Writers frequently stress the social, economic and political vulnerability of migrants, who may be better off than those they leave behind, but at a disadvantage in the new society they go to (Ballard 1987). They are middlemen, viewed with suspicion by local people and the first group to be turned on when things go wrong (Jain 1988). If they try to assimilate they are seen as "taking our women", or "our jobs"; if they don't, their living standards are condemned (as either too much higher or too much lower than the native population - it doesn't much matter which; this is just a way of expressing difference) and they become, willingly or unwillingly, perpetual strangers. To an extent, this is what happened to Indians in Burma, as subsequent chapters show. Migrant workers may be seen as pawns, buffeted by economic or political forces (Berger 1975); although they are encouraged at first, once they become successful, ruling powers seek to curb their influence by imposing restrictions, perhaps on where they may live or work (Bennett 1971; Mangat 1969; Kondapi 1951). There is a tendency to emphasise the negative aspects of migration and not to look at the whole structure of the situation in which migrants work. Sometimes they are seen as swept up in a tide of forces which cause them all to act in a certain predictable way, or as beings who calculate, coldly, rationally, and unemotionally, the benefits and disadvantages migration will bring, and act accordingly. As Cohen puts it, "Migrants are depicted as free-floating nebulae, attracted or repelled at their point of origin and evaluating the pluses and minuses of life at the proposed destination point" (Cohen 1986).

As already indicated, most studies of migration have stemmed from other disciplines; I have been struck by the language used in writing about migrants. To return to the short quotation from Jackson on page 29 above, we note the words, "deviant", "disorganisation", "threat" used to describe migrants. Jackson himself probably does not see them this way, but he believes many people do. It is also worth considering the different emphases given to similar words. "Immigrant" usually conjures up a picture of a poor, struggling person, like the thousands of poor Europeans who went to the United

States to escape poverty, while "emigré" denotes a person of means who has been forced to flee. Wealthy Russians who fled to France in the early 20th century were referred to as emigrés from Russia, not immigrants to France. The British who went to the Colonies called themselves settlers, not immigrants. The United States has been called "a nation of immigrants", yet status-wise, pride of place is claimed by families who have been there longest. When war caused half a million Indians to leave Burma in 1942, they were officially referred to as "evacuees", a word which to Britons of the period had associations with women and children (not healthy young men, it may be noted) voluntarily leaving the cities for the countryside to escape wartime bombing. In newspapers and official literature of the period, these Indians were rarely referred to as "refugees". The use of semantics to blur meaning continues; in the early 1990s the phrase "economic migrant" was coined to describe, in a derogatory way, people leaving parts of Eastern Europe for the materially richer West. And yet, it could be said that the phrase is tautological, considering that more than a hundred years ago, Ravenstein (Lee 1969) had already asserted that an economic motive was the prime mover in migration.

The word "migrant" is more neutral, but as a group, migrants are not admired in the host country. This whole question is tied up with ideas about ethnicity, nationalism and a deep-rooted dislike of those who are different. If they do well, rulers fear they are acquiring too much power, while the population at large often shows a peasant-like resentment towards them, believing that they are acquiring too large a slice of the cake of "limited good". The suspicion with which migrants are so often regarded by the indigenous population, the restrictions placed on their entry, occupation and movement by rulers, are reinforced by much of the writing on migrants and migration.

As I have already pointed out, many migration studies, including anthropological ones, enumerate types of migration or categorise migrants. They concentrate on what has motivated people to move, or on how the receiving society sees them. Even when migrants are perceived as members of a particular social fabric, this is often done through case studies, a method which results in people being seen as clients, not as individuals with whom the writer has an equal relationship. Yet this is surely the kind of writing which many anthropologists are now repudiating. Such studies look on migrants as "The Other" and thereby deny them equal status; they do not try to interpret migration from the migrants' point of view or recognise the partiality of writing only from the receiving society's angle.

A further limitation in many studies is their tendency to lump together all migrants of a particular ethnic origin. The demographer, Guilmoto (1993), for example, when describing Tamil migrants, concentrates on "large-scale transfers of low-skilled workers", with a couple of fleeting references to bankers and entrepreneurs. Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987) was one of the first to recognise a growing group of educated, middle class migrants with international links – in her case in the Goan community – and Topan (1993) has recently described the Ismailis in similar terms. The Families are an early example of members of an Asian group who migrated as middle class, rather than becoming middle class after migrating, (as Bhachu (1985) notes the Ramgharia Sikhs did, for example) and like other similar groups nowadays, their international links enable them to keep in touch with people and events in their home country without clinging to the idea of a permanent return.

With few exceptions, notably the sociologists Thomas and Znaniecki's account (1918-1920) of American migrants, ¹⁸ it was not until the 1970s that migration studies showed migrants as individuals, not just part of a flow of population. Sharma (1971) is an example of the use of transcripts of conversations with an Asian immigrant family. Until that time, positive references to migrants were more or less limited to pure literature and the arts. Subjective literature – letters, biographies and autobiographies and also fiction – is still valuable in helping us to understand not just what people did, but why they did it (e.g. Tan 1989, 1991; Kingston 1981; Rama Rau 1977).

The study of middle class groups of migrants began to attract more attention from sociologists and anthropologists from the 1980s, after Canada, the United States and Australia had opened their doors to significant numbers of highly educated, professional migrants from several Asian countries (Helweg 1990, Saran 1985, *et al*). From the 1960s onwards the number of professional, highly skilled migrants from India has greatly increased. Their skills and lifestyles may encourage a more positive attitude towards migrants; equally it may cause them to be envied and therefore resented. What is certain is that there is room for more studies of migrants which give insights into the way groups of people in a new land think about their experiences.

This includes a life story and letters from poor European migrants to North America, describing their new lives to relatives in the home country. Using migrants' own writings lends a special vividness to their account.

Migrants may experience difficulties, they may have to leave the land they chose to go to, as The Families did, and as the Ugandan Asians did in 1971, but this does not mean they are weak, confused people, nor that they are failures. Migration makes people stronger because they struggle to gain a niche for themselves and having gained it, they don't give it up easily (e.g. Barwick 1992). Even if they lose some of what they gained, they do not see themselves as failures, but as striving against odds, and proud of their strength in the struggle. Tensions should be seen as nodes of growth rather than points of weakness. Sometimes their efforts lead to re-migration; twice migrants are not twice as weak, but twice as strong, because they have already evolved a strategy for dealing with the problems migration brings, and have learned to survive in an alien world.

Chapter 3

Remembrance of things past

In this chapter I discuss different ways of recalling the past and the significance for the present and future of what is remembered. By drawing attention to the richness of a multivocal approach, this chapter acts as a prelude to following chapters, where I draw alternately on history and memory, to show some of the diverse voices that are to be heard in any attempt to understand the past and its continuing influence.

The past is not simply a time that is now over and dead; it is all around us, both literally and figuratively. Ollard (Independent 31.10.1992:32) notes "the indissoluble relation between past and present", while Lowenthal (1985:xv) writes of how "relics, histories, memories suffuse human experience". Through this experience we are able to manipulate and depict the past in ways that render it relevant to the present and express our hopes and fears for the future.

There are several ways that looking back at the past can be presented. I have therefore ordered my comments under the headings of memory and history, but recognise that these divisions overlap. Indeed, they are not so much different **types** of knowledge as different **attitudes** towards that knowledge (Lowenthal 1985). At the end of this chapter and in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I contrast the ways the same period in the past is recalled by historians and in the memory of The Families.

Memory

All awareness of the past, whether written or oral, individual or collective, ultimately depends on memory. As Casey (1987) reminds us, we are "steeped in memory". Every fibre of our being holds memories and the landscape and objects around us are also laden with our memories. But this does not mean that memories are carried around in our heads like groceries in a supermarket trolley, each packet separate from the others and

ready to be taken out as required. Rather, memory is a means through which the past is repeatedly reconstructed to make it valid for the present and conceptions of the future are drawn from the interaction between the remembered past and the present. Moreover, whenever the past is recalled, some selecting and ordering of what is remembered takes place to suit the present situation or the requirements of the audience to whom the memories are presented.

Individual memory

By individual memory I mean the uniquely personal memory we have of our experiences and which arises from information and feelings located within ourselves. When based on the "representation of a single, unrepeated event", Conway (1990), calls it autobiographical memory. These experiences are not necessarily linguistic, but may be based on any of the senses.

Since the 1970s autobiographical or individual memory has been studied by psychologists in some depth. They have looked at what kind of memory is most easily recalled – events, thoughts and feelings, sensory details, or time. Studies (Cohen 1989; Conway 1990) show that memories of similar, repeated events, such as going to school or work, or carrying out household chores, quickly tend to become blurred, but the unusual, the unique event stands out in our memory. Ideas and feelings affect us; we remember most clearly events that are important to us as individuals both at the time they occur and when we try to recall them. The strength of emotions affects what we recall – what we feel intensely tends either to be remembered vividly or sometimes, if the memory is unpleasant or frightening it may be repressed and shut out from the conscious mind altogether. An example of an intense recollection of a nerve-racking incident is the way one informant described to me how she thwarted an attempt by elderly relatives to arrange her marriage to a man she did not like. She deliberately behaved in a way which she knew the man and his family would see as outrageous. She called a Muslim tailor to the house and asked him to measure her for a blouse. She was a nubile girl and a Brahman; to ask a man – and a Muslim at that – to perform an action which required him to touch her body would, she knew, be seen as verging on the indecent.¹⁹ Her strength of feeling on the issue determined both her action at the time and the vividness of the memory of an event that took place more than forty years ago. Her relatives would not have thought it appropriate for a young woman to refuse directly to marry the man, but she found a way of refusing without actually saying so.

As an example of the repression of memory I cite the case of an elderly friend in England who told me how she recalled travelling to hospital – perhaps fifty years ago – with her unmarried sister. Her sister confided that she feared she was pregnant, although fortunately her fears were unjustified. In a recent conversation my friend discovered that her sister had absolutely no recollection of the visit to see the hospital doctor. "How could she forget a thing like that?" my friend asked me. This incident shows how the memory of unpleasant incidents may be suppressed.

Distinctive events are often vividly recollected but despite the apparent clarity of a memory ("I can see her standing there now", "I remember it is though it were yesterday") and the good faith of the narrator, such memories do not always tally with independent checks. One elderly informant described graphically how, as an evacuee escaping from Burma, he had met an affine at a particular point on the way. I knew from other evidence that this was impossible, because they had left by different routes, but I am sure the man telling me the story believed it. Linear time seems comparatively unimportant from the point of view of memory and often we can only place one incident in time by reference to another ("He was born the year before we left Burma" or "I was married before my brother went to college"). When Anandhi, Nagarajan's wife wrote her autobiography, two of her sons protested that in her account she had did not record correctly the dates of birth of all her children. Yet the family knew that she cared deeply for them all. She commented that she bore twelve children in eighteen years, so by the time the younger ones came along, birth was a less unusual event and the exact date no longer seemed important to her — although not unnaturally her children felt differently.

In any case, the influence which a memory exerts does not depend on what Conway (1990) calls its veridicality, or truth content; a false or literally inaccurate memory can

The usual practice, even today, is either to give the tailor the measurements, or to give him a blouse of the correct measurements and ask him to copy it.

have as powerful an effect as a memory that preserves an independently corroborated account. What counts is whether a memory is **believed** to be true. It is often the case that an event in the memory actually occurred, but not in the form that it is remembered. An example is Neisser's (1981) well-known account of John Dean and his apparently remarkable memory of the Watergate affair. Dean gave a vivid account of his conversations with Richard Nixon, which he claimed to remember in extraordinary detail, but when Dean's account was checked with tape recordings made at the time, many inaccuracies were revealed. Yet significantly, although Dean's testimony was not an exact, literal interpretation of events, he was basically correct in his description of what was going on. Dean over-emphasised his own role, a common occurrence in autobiographical memories, which the individual often interprets to increase personally relevant meanings. To be able to look back at the role we ourselves have played in making the past and interpreting it in the present gives us a sense of our own worth.

Psychologically, we need to know our past to help us understand the present. Memory is necessary to establish our continuity as individuals. Without knowing who we once were, we cannot know who we are now. The past "is integral to our sense of identity...Ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose and value" (Lowenthal 1985:41). In other words, it is an essential component of personhood. Cases of amnesia cited by Sacks (1985) and Luria (1973) add poignant support to this view, for amnesiacs suffer a sense of loss and find it difficult to come to terms with the present. It is strange to them because they cannot link it with what has gone before.

Yet memory's opposite, forgetting, is also essential, for to remember the past in its entirety would be overwhelming and confusing; we need to select and interpret what is remembered. The reasons for forgetting are often significant. We may suppress unhappy memories and there is a human tendency for groups as well as individuals to "accentuate the positive" in order to present themselves in the best light; this seems to have happened in stories told in The Families about the way they were regarded in Burma. Also, in looking back, people think they see a pattern or an inevitability in what occurred which did not strike them at the time; in this way memory helps to create order from the chaos of lived experience.

When personal recollections of the past are related orally, one telling will differ from another. Once committed to paper that version becomes the "authentic" one, frozen in

time and so inhibiting further revisions – the memory can no longer be adapted so easily to manipulate the present, because the written record remains to confront the person who remembers as well as the person who reads it. I had an experience which shows clearly the need to be chary of thinking that the written, the frozen, record of a life is necessarily the more accurate one. Nagarajan's wife, Anandhi, wrote her life story when she was in her sixties. Towards the end she states that she wrote from memory and begs the reader to forgive any inaccuracies that may have crept in. What I also know, although she does not mention it, is that she had written an earlier version which was read by someone whose judgement she respected. He commented that criticism of individuals should be avoided so she rewrote critical passages and the original version was destroyed. This incident tells us something about the social pressures on an individual, but hardly makes the written version now available more authentic than the earlier one. It draws attention to the way other people influence an individual's memories, and also to the significance of forgetting.

A recent example will demonstrate how the past may be reconstructed to tally with the expected rather than what actually took place, and also how an individual can alter the way the group will remember. In The Families modern technical and electronic methods are increasingly used to preserve the memory of an important occasion. Until a decade or two ago, this would have meant taking photographs, but contemporary events, such as a wedding or *ṣaṣtiapdapūrti* (special ceremony to celebrate reaching the age of sixty) are now usually recorded on video to ensure wide family circulation in the present and a recording of the event for the future. At a wedding in The Families in the early 1990s, one little girl — the bridegroom's FBD — who was to have been present, was too ill on the day to attend. To soften her disappointment, the next day her father videoed a short sequence of her in her finery, entering the hall where the wedding took place and later inserted this at a suitable point in the video of the wedding, so that the video showed what ought to have happened instead of what actually did happen. No-one thought the father's action odd, or even commented on it.

As the previous example shows, memory does not have to be based on words, but is sometimes visual. The past may be recalled through other senses, too. Smell, taste or sound often have the ability to bring a recollection to mind. One thinks of Proust and the flood of memories associated with the madeleine, or the significance of food "like mother used to make". One woman, recalling her childhood in Burma, told me how pleasant it

was to remember the sweet scent of *cāmpirāni*, a gum her grandmother used to burn to give off warm, fragrant fumes for her and her sisters to dry their hair by after washing.²⁰ The memory was more than just a recollection of a minor weekly event from her childhood; it recalled simple childhood pleasures from a lost way of life, which she regretted that her daughters never knew, although they were brought up in greater affluence in a busy modern city.

Social memory

Halbwachs (1980) first declared half a century ago that all memory unfolds within a social framework. He called this collective memory, but I prefer the term, social memory, to avoid giving the impression that the individual is an automaton doing the collective will, and to convey more clearly the idea of a shared, social activity. Such activity is structured not only by language, but also by experiential learning and by ideas and experiences, both unique and habitual, which are shared with others (Fentress and Wickham 1992). Several recent writers have drawn on Halbwachs's ideas about the importance of memory in the group. Connerton (1989) notes how shared images of the past are needed to legitimate a present social order.

Memories are important for any family, because recollections about one's forebears, of childhood incidents, of momentous and trivial moments, supply the glue which holds together an often diverse group of people. For migrants memories are doubly important because such families have no buildings, monuments or land to which they can point and say, "This is what my forebears built, or did", or "This is the place where... ". "Those who lack links with a place", writes Lowenthal (1985), "must forge an identity through other pasts".

As Connerton (1989) points out, bodily social memory is an essential aspect of social memory and includes both ritual performances and habitual acts. Ritual and commemorative performances often convey images of the past through bodily means. When an event is commemorated, there may be no-one present who was there when the

It is burned in a metal vessel, sometimes covered with a kind of upturned wicker basket, to keep the hair off it. Hair dried in this way would be sweetly scented for several days.

original event took place, yet actors and audience are sustained by an imaginative reconstruction of the past applied to the present. Both ritual and commemorative acts emphasise a sense of sharing and belonging to a group – whether religious, national, ethnic, political, familial or other – which helps to develop a sense of identity, of "knowing who we are". Some women told me of the great enthusiasm they brought to the celebration of Tamil festivals in Burma and how this strengthened their sense of identity, not only as Indians, but also Tamilians. Similarly, amongst members of The Families today, great store is laid on getting people together from near and far on the occasion of a wedding, when it often seems that the two people being married are simply the vehicle by which The Families' members are able to congregate and celebrate a continued solidarity, one with another.

Memory is a large part of habit. Casey (1987:149) tells us that habitual body memory involves "an active immanence of the past in the body. In such memory the past is **embodied** in actions". Like Bourdieu (1977) he makes the point that habit is not just a mechanical repetition, but a repeated re-creation, which would be impossible if we could not remember. In an effort to get away from the common conception of habit as a preformed and mechanical programme Bourdieu turned to the word *habitus* to denote "a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures" (Bourdieu 1977:76). Through habit-memory, participatory experience and embodied knowledge, we acquire memories through which we learn appropriate codes of behaviour for people in the different groups to which we belong.

Cultural assets – or, to use Bourdieu's (1977) phrase, cultural capital – include a way of remembering how a person should behave, of recalling the values of one's family and community, an awareness of status and certain expectations. Collective family memory and the myths and stories that are repeated and passed on from one generation to another are assets of this kind. As this work proceeds I shall show how The Families have used memories of various kinds, as part of their cultural capital, to help them overcome the problems inherent in moving from one place to another.

The historical approach

Traditionally, the historian's approach has been to explain the behaviour of human beings in society in terms of time, by composing a specific, reconstructed narrative of past events, while the anthropologist looked at the organisation of a society at a particular moment in time. Nowadays, differences between the two approaches have greatly diminished. As Braudel (1980) and others point out, history is a study of the whole of society, both past and present. In anthropology, Turner's processual theory, Cohn's views on ethnohistory, and Appadurai's use of Geertz's "idea of 'thick description' across major units of historical time" (Appadurai 1981:4) mark some of the moves of anthropologists towards a diachronic view of societies and groups.

If we accept Collingwood's (1978) view that "[T]he essential things in history are memory and authority... History is believing some one else when he says he remembers something", the question is, how is this "authority" arrived at? Crucial to the historical approach is the way historians support their investigations by using material artefacts and written evidence, 1 including different types of contemporary documents, such as letters, registers, reports, deeds, and so on. Such historical sources on their own do not constitute evidence; they have to be authenticated or interpreted and this is not easy, for what seem to be original deeds or records may turn out to be copies, or even copies of copies into which inaccuracies have crept. Some documents are deliberately designed to deceive, such as some government papers emanating from Burma in 1942, in which the seriousness of the war situation was deliberately suppressed. The historian makes a selection of both primary sources or original documents, and secondary sources in the

Stanford (1986:56,59) defines evidence as both that which is directly apparent - meaning presumably primary sources such as documents and artefacts - and that which is ground for belief, which, he maintains, comes at the crux between the historical event which produces the evidence and which in turn forms the basis of historical knowledge.

Here are some other examples. At a seminar at LSE in December 1991 one participant commented, "Most monks seem to have been forging documents in the Middle Ages". According to a television programme shown on BBC 2 in late October 1991, recent research shows that on his first voyage to America, Columbus kept two logbooks - one was as accurate as possible while the other was compiled to provide his sponsor, the King of Spain, with "suitable" information. We are all familiar with the rewriting of history in school textbooks in many countries and at many periods, designed to put forward an official view.

form of writings of other authorities on the same subject, and from this selection makes an assessment and draws conclusions. The particular social and historical background in which the historian is rooted affects the selection and interpretation. History cannot be written once and for all, but requires constant re-assessment and reinterpretation. As Carr comments, "the facts of history never come to us 'pure'...they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder" (Carr 1986:22). Historical evidence is not context-free; history may be written from many viewpoints and one view should not be taken for the whole landscape, to use Braudel's (1980) metaphor. Economic historians and political historians, for example, may not even select the same information as important, nor will they interpret it in the same way; moreover, each audience – whether drawn from a certain ethnic group, country, religion, political party or other group – selects its own meaning depending on its own interests.

Ideas which are widespread at a particular period exert an influence on historical writings, as is manifest in British writing on India in the days of the British Raj. Guha (1983) provides a thoughtful study of the effect of language on interpretation and meaning. Equally significant was the nineteenth and early twentieth century mania for the collection of "facts" — that is, the data of experience as distinct from conclusions. Facts were believed to be of paramount importance and they were looked on as unchanging, independent of consciousness. The rulers of India believed that if only they could collect and record enough facts, enough evidence, everything could be known.

Although historians have long since ceased to be bricoleurs of facts, ideas about the permanence of collectable information still marked British attitudes to India and Indians during the period when The Families were in Burma. The heyday of the British Raj coincided with a period of confidence that knowledge could both be controlled and controlling; there was a sense that knowledge was exploding and yet could be harnessed as the ultimate form of power (Richards 1993:7) or means of control (Cohn 1987). Ideas about unchanging "facts" encouraged the belief that Indian society was static, because once information about India and her peoples was collected, it was regarded as permanently valid. In a very real sense, the British saw knowledge as power. We can observe this in the writing of people like Risley (1891) and Thurston (1909), who were obsessed with recording and measuring, and in the enormous mass of statistical material gathered by British administrators, including the incredibly detailed censuses. Even in 1942 when Indian civil servants in Burma were being driven from one city to another by

the advancing Japanese, the British ordered their office underlings to take their files with them when they fled.

Oral tradition, myths and oral history

Up to this point I have used the term, history, to signify written history, but when the recent past is studied through informants' life histories and personal memories, it is called oral **history** (Henige 1982). It should not be thought of as a set of documents inside people's heads (Fentress 1992); it is more a way of restructuring the past and adapting it for use in the present. Such memories and their interpretation play a key role in helping us to understand people's actions in the past and their view of the present as well as their aspirations and apprehensions for the future.

Henige (1982:2) defines the oral **tradition** as knowledge "widely practised or understood in a society and... handed down for at least a few generations". In all cultures and throughout the ages the oral tradition has played a vital part in preserving knowledge of the past.

Historians often draw a boundary between history supported by tangible sources such as documents, and various kinds of oral transmission, maintaining that oral sources are unreliable because they lack documentary backup. No two tellings can ever be exactly the same, because apart from quirks of memory, what is selected for telling is context-dependent, and affected by the audience, the teller's feelings at the time, the teller's memory, the point of view the teller wishes to promote and so on. Furthermore, changes in what is spoken may well be incorporated unconsciously as a way of continually readjusting the past to fit the present (Lowenthal 1985:41).

It is indisputable that documentary sources and written histories have an independent existence, whereas oral sources exist only when spoken, and with each telling, changes may creep in, whereas documents do not change. But as I have already pointed out, what is accepted as historical evidence is also part of a repeatedly reassessed and reinterpreted selection of available information.

Vansina, whose studies (1965, 1985) have done much to highlight the importance of the oral tradition, argues that by using devices such as mnemonics, chanting, ritual repetition by specially trained members of society, etc. accuracy can be maintained. This is a valid point, as we know from the accurate oral transmission of Sanskrit religious texts, but trying to prove the validity of oral sources in this way is, I would argue, to miss the point; what is essential in assessing their importance is to understand that their value does not rest on literal or historical accuracy, but on their ability to communicate mythic or psychological truths which convey an underlying meaning so that our understanding of the significance of an event is deepened. We see this in the case of myths, in the sense of traditional stories with a veiled meaning which is more important than literal truth. The great Hindu epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata include a germ of history but their chief importance has always lain in the ethical and religious truths they contain. Amongst Indians there is a long tradition of passing on orally stories of rulers, great men, gods and goddesses. Many people told me how they heard such stories from one or other of their parents, an uncle or aunt, or from a grandparent and these stories helped to mould their beliefs and attitudes. Today, fewer people live in families where there is time and opportunity for the frequent telling of tales of this nature, but the immense popularity of these epics when serialised on television shows that the tradition is not dead.²³ More importantly, the underlying meaning they convey can change with the times; nowadays they do more than tell stories and teach religious principles; they encourage a sense of identity and Hindu nationalism.

The development of myths is not confined to the distant past. Samuel and Thompson (1990) contrast myth with what they call the "hard realities" or "exact knowledge" of the historian when they discuss what they call public myth. Thomson (1990) demonstrates

These television series were immensely popular. One Sunday morning while I was in Delhi in November-December 1989, a man who had spent many years in Burma came very late to a prearranged meeting with me at his uncle's house. The driver of the bus my friend should have caught refused to start the journey until he had finished watching the latest Mahabharat episode. I was also told by a Panjabi couple from Burma, who ran a cloth shop, that they had been forced to buy a television set for their employees to watch the Mahabharat in the shop on Sunday mornings (when the shop was normally open) because otherwise their assistants would not set out for work until the week's episode was over. In the flat where I stayed in Delhi everyone gathered round the television set on Sunday mornings - three generations of the family, their driver, the person who collected their milk from the government-run kiosk and the young woman who did the rough work of the household.

how the publicly accepted story of Anzac heroes from World War 1 is at odds with historical evidence. He uncovers contradictory elements in the memories of some of the men who fought, showing how the dominance of popular legend gradually influenced them to change their memories. It would be simplistic to argue from this that documentary evidence is right and the veterans' memories and dominant versions of the myth are wrong. Widespread beliefs of this kind are formed from what are generally believed to be "facts" (in the sense of something not to be questioned), and personal values embedded in the community. Over time they may change; "some values become seen as matters of fact and some facts become values" (Fraser and Gaskell 1990:9). Holding such beliefs in common is important because it gives people a sense of unity, but it can also lead to stereotyping and prejudice, as when people of a different culture are regarded as fundamentally inferior. British perceptions of Indians during the days of British rule were affected by ideas that were widespread at the time, as becomes apparent in the following section.

Voices in the chorus of history

In the description of any event or lifestyle there are multiple voices to be heard. Each individual voice is affected by time and place, but each has something particular to say. Historical accounts are affected by the recounter; primary sources are subject to different interpretations. The perceptions of a British colonialist, a Burmese nationalist and an Indian government servant will be at variance with one another; gender and age alter ways of reporting and understanding events as well as the way connections between past, present and future are understood. Retelling the memories of The Families adds an extra voice to the chorus of history.

To attempt to describe how "they" think about "their" story, as Prakash (1990) puts it when writing about post-Orientalist histories of the third world "seems to reek of essentialism" because it carries with it the tendency, which he deplores, to perceive the third world in "such irreducible essences as religiosity, ...nationhood, non-Westernness". "They" can easily become The Other, distanced from writer and reader in a way which, albeit subtly, brings about an unequal relationship between "observer" and "observed", as Clifford and Marcus (1986), amongst others, note. Appadurai warns us against

"incarcerating" the "native" (1988:37); that is, assuming that others are confined, physically, morally and intellectually by the place they inhabit. Inden (1990) refers to the "hegemonic" knowledge produced by Western ideas about caste, for example, or the "feminine" Indian mind. Prakash (1990) goes on to maintain that, problematic though it may be, enquiring how the Third World writes its own history is worthwhile, if only because it "acknowledges that the knowledge about the third world is historical", thus avoiding casting others as The Other in a static mould where the lack of coevalness produces a sense of their inferiority, as Fabian (1983) also points out. What is important, Prakash believes, is to "unsettle the calm presence" of essentialist categories and to look at India, as well as other Third World countries, by way of a variety of discursively articulated historical positions. By viewing from a variety of shifting positions, essentialism is avoided. Seen from this aspect, putting forward the view of The Families, intertwined with history, is a way of adding to the various positions, and of producing a "thick" description. But Geertz's (1988) warning about "ethnographic ventriloquism" should be borne in mind. Speaking about people should not be equated with speaking for them.

A belief in the need to oppose essentialist attitudes is rooted in my own memories. My childhood was coloured²⁴ by the prevailing attitude towards the then British Empire, which glorified the brave, uncorrupt British men who ruled over "the Empire on which the sun never sets", bearing the white man's burden, tutoring the childlike races under their sway and attempting to persuade them to turn from various bizarre religions and customs to which they were prone. The sum total of what I remember learning about India at school in the 1930s, concerned the commodities, such as tea, coffee and cotton, which the country exported to Britain; the horrors of the caste system; Indian women's parlous state due to enforced lack of education, child marriage and their refusal ever to see a male doctor; the bravery of Gurkhas who, like the British, ate wheat, contrasted with the effeminacy of Bengali and Tamil rice eaters, while our history books acknowledged only fighting on the Northwest Frontier, the Indian Mutiny and the Black Hole of Calcutta. I recall no mention of Harappa or Mohenjodaro, great rulers like Akbar

²⁴ 'Coloured' in quite a literal way. I can remember as a child about nine years old, standing in school assembly on Empire Day, looking at a large map of the world which was unrolled and displayed on the platform and feeling sorry for all those people who were unfortunate enough to be living in a part of the world that was not coloured pink on the map.

or Asoka, the wealth of the courts visited by early European travellers, the bravery of Indians like the Rani of Jhansi or Tipu Sultan, nor the horrors of Jallianwalabagh. M. K. Gandhi was mentioned in the newspapers, but the trouble he caused the British government seemed inexplicable to us as children. The first inkling of an idea that Indians might actually *like* being Indian and prefer their own country, as I did mine, came from reading Kipling's books between the ages of about twelve and fifteen. Although often condemned nowadays for his imperialistic attitude, his writings did communicate to me a love of India and the Indian landscape and, especially in *Kim*, a sense of what Fabian (1983) might call the coevalness of Indian and British people. As I grew up in the years preceding Indian independence, I began to see things differently as I imbibed ideas about equality, learned why India wanted to rule herself and experienced a growing realisation of the errors of British rule.

Although I probably would have denied it vehemently at the time, I now realise that I continued to be influenced by widespread ideas about the unchanging nature of India and her people and the wisdom of the British in training Indians to be able to rule themselves. It was only after marrying into a Tamil Brahman family that I realised the extent to which I had been influenced by stereotypes and how little these reflected the people I knew. If Indians were less capable and energetic than the British during the years of imperial rule, how to account for the many intelligent, hardworking and achievement-oriented Indians of earlier days that I now learned about and those I began to meet in the present? If Indians were steeped in unchanging traditions, how was it that the people I knew were so pragmatic and adaptable? How could a people with a long tradition of migration be characterized as static? If Indian women were downtrodden, meek and subservient, how was it that the family I knew included so many strong-minded and capable women? If Indians celebrated the birth of a son, but mourned the coming of a daughter, why was I told, "Girls are as welcome as boys in our house". If caste were so unalterable in all its manifestations, why did I see around me people who were adapting to new ways and

This view has been contested by some critics, including Said (1993), who point out that before the end of *Kim*, the young Irish boy asserts command over the lama - the Britisher over the Indian. I accept that this is so, but can only say that at the time this did not strike me and what stays in my memory is the way the two of them shared and travelled together, and Kipling's attachment to India which the book evoked.

²⁶ 'House' is used here in the sense of extended family.

quietly abandoning supposedly immutable taboos and prescriptions? If Brahmans always considered themselves superior to other communities, why did my father-in-law refer to his non-Brahman friend as "my brother"?

The folly of gross generalisations has been amply demonstrated by many writers, yet even in these postmodernist, reflexive days, dismissive and essentialist stereotypes abound.²⁷ In South Asian affairs the expression of colonialist views was dominant until the break up of the British Empire. After that, nationalist writings came to the fore. Recently, a great deal of interest has been shown in giving expression to the voices of the poor and oppressed. Little attention has been given to the people in the middle, and there is a tendency to dismiss those who worked for the British as collaborators or, to use Harvey's (1946) phrase about Indians in Burma, "camp followers of the ruling race", without trying to understand their motives or to see them as human beings rather than exemplifying a particular attitude towards their colonisers. Yet surely understanding of any situation whether historical, social or any other, is flawed if the views of certain participants in the context are deliberately excluded.

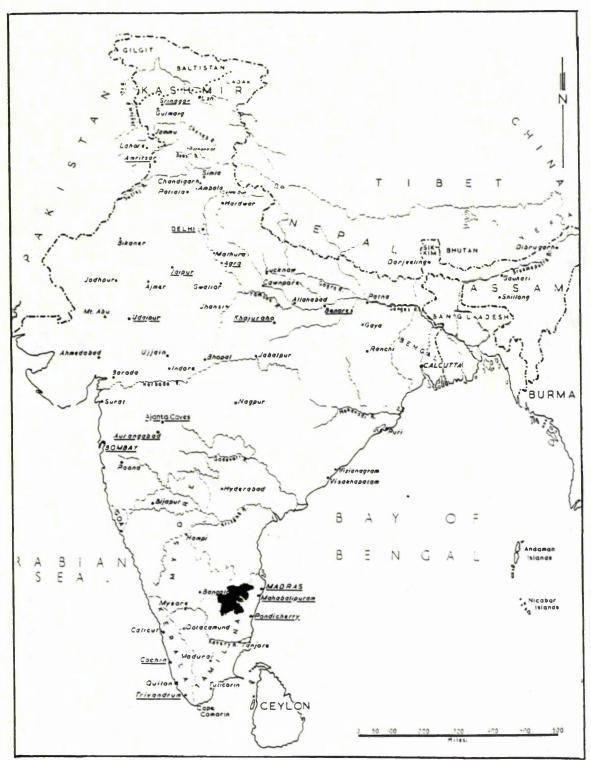
Interweaving individual memories with historical accounts is one way of allowing their voice to be heard. I am well aware that I am writing about a restricted group of people, namely, an extended family grouping, who may not typify a wider community, but this should help to demonstrate the variety and individuality to be uncovered and strengthen the need to avoid an essentialist approach.

It is not simply that personal memories help to bring to life government documents, newspaper reports and so on, although this in itself can be interesting. For example, the mortality figures in the decennial census help us to understand why many people talked of the death of a close family member. What is important is the way the actual selection of memories helps us to recover another voice, heard neither in government and colonialist accounts nor in nationalist writing and helps towards an understanding of a group's actions and an awareness of the values and ways which they saw, and to a significant extent still see, as important.

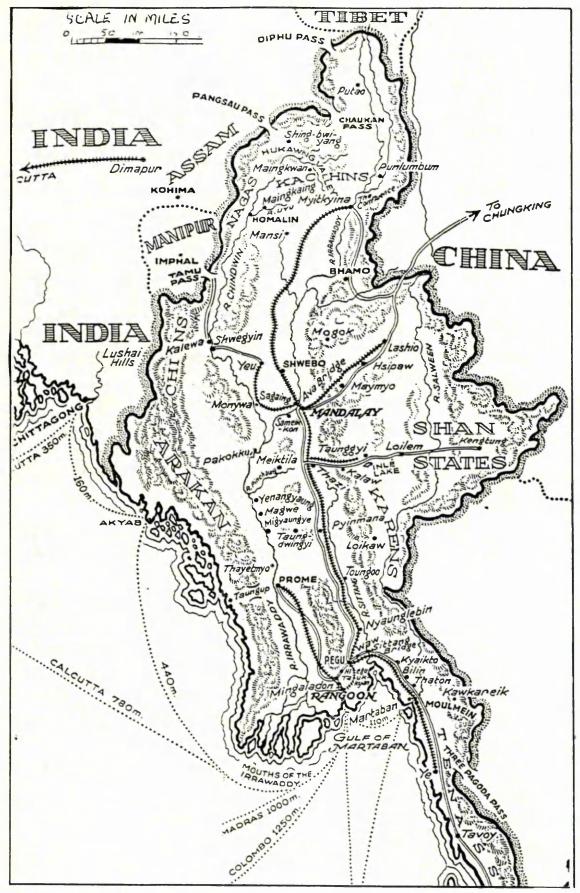


I have heard recently such statements in academic circles as "Brahmans never divorce", "women of high caste are confined to the home", "Brahmans are large landowners", as if such generalisations could be applied across the board.

I should make it plain that those who talked with me about their past should not be seen as backward looking because they spoke of days gone by. I encouraged them to talk and they were pleased to share their memories with me, in part to help me and in part because they felt it was worth recording something of a way of life now irretrievably lost. In addition, some of the older men, who had been employed in Burma, sincerely believed they had contributed to the country's development. However, although younger family members agreed that the older people liked to talk about Burma I was also made aware that "the elders" do so infrequently. They live in the present and look forward to the future; they do not dwell on what they lost when they were forced out of Burma, nor the changes in fortune they have faced since then. The younger generations are still conscious of belonging to "a Burma family" and it was often they who told me of other people they knew — friends, teachers or neighbours perhaps — who were also from Burma. Although it is now fifty years since the evacuation, the sense of belonging to a family from Burma remains strongly fixed in their social memory.



Map of India showing position of North Arcot (shaded portion)



Map of Burma (adapted from Collis 1956)

Chapter 4

Aspects of life in India and Burma

This chapter begins with a brief history of the area in South India from which The Families came, followed by a description of the lifestyle of their forebears.

The remaining sections of this chapter deal with particular aspects of their lives in Burma, drawn from memory. In *Arriving in Burma*, I record memories of memories; that is, the way The Families and their friends remember what older people told them of the migration and the opportunities they saw ahead of them. In this section, and in subsequent ones, I draw not only on individual memory but also on memory of another kind, on social memory, which indicates that past experience helped them to develop keen practical judgment about attitudes and values that best suited their migrant position.

Historical and ethnographic background

Brahmans have always been movers. Hinduism began in the north of India as the religion of the Aryan invaders and the four *varna* (category; often inaccurately translated as "caste") social structure of Brahman (priest and scholar), Ksatriya (ruler, warrior), Vaisya (trader) and Sudra (worker), so often associated with India, scarcely applied in the Dravidian South, where social divisions were originally based on the type of land where a person lived, namely, hilly tract, pastoral, arable, littoral or desert. (Cohn 1990; Nambi Arooran 1980). Brahmans migrated into the Tamil country in waves over two thousand years. When varna classification was attempted, all except the "imported" Brahmans were classed as cultivators of one kind or another and labelled Sudras of various *jātis*. Ksatriyas and Vaisyas have always been virtually non-existent categories amongst the Dravidians, as census returns show. In the 1901 Census of Madras Presidency, 3.4% of the population are entered as Brahmans and 94.3% as Sudras, of whom Vellalas (who counted as *sat*, or pure, Sudras), formed the largest group, around

30% of the population. Even today in South India caste Hindus are usually spoken of as simply either Brahman or non-Brahman.

For centuries Brahmans presented themselves as the only ones fit to study the sacred texts and able to perform effectively the many rituals and ceremonies which their religion called for. As Hinduism spread south, kings and rulers offered Brahmans land and/or employment as ritual specialists or ministers (where their ability to keep accounts or read texts proved valuable to rulers) and migration continued over the centuries. From medieval times Brahmans in the south worked as priests or teachers, and in the bureaucracy. They acquired a reputation for work involving accounting, clerking and bureaucratic procedure (which they did their best to monopolise), and learned to adjust to whatever government was in power in a region of numerous small, independent kingdoms; they were quintessentially clerks and civil servants; they rarely aspired to become rulers. They were more interested in survival than dominance and to this end learned to be pragmatic and to move from place to place if this could bring some advantage.

Although I have no definite information, there are historical clues to the reason for at least one move in The Families. According to genealogies gathered from oral and written sources, ancestors common to the Ramakrishnan couple and to Nagarajan's wife's family lived at one time in Salem District in Tamil Nadu, migrating from that area four generations before 1900 to settle in Kanchipuram (or Conjeevaram, as the British called it) in Chingleput District. Allowing 20-25 years for each generation, we get back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was the end of a period of great turmoil throughout the Carnatic, caused by power struggles between several forces, including the Mahrattas, the Muslim ruler Haider Ali, the French and the English. These events were superimposed on the traditional political system of South India which was a "multicentered system of power" (Stein 1969, quoted in Wolpert 1982:99), where "little kingdoms" (Dirks 1982), which had formerly co-existed, now lost their power. By the time the English finally gained supremacy over the region, the countryside was devastated. The country was "a cockpit of wars" and Thomas Munro, soldier and onetime Governor of Madras, wrote in 1797, that the region was reduced "to such a state that a rich farmer was nowhere to be found" (Ramaswami 1967:77-78). Long after the fighting stopped, the people suffered from disease and food scarcity. Famines were frequent. 1812, 1823-24 and 1832-33 were all declared by the British to be "very bad years", especially 1832, when 14,000 people died of cholera (Cox 1894). Small wonder that those who could, moved to the comparative safety of urban areas, where opportunities were more diverse. Kanchipuram was, and still is, a sacred centre, with many temples, including the great Kamakshi temple. Opportunities for a Brahman to earn a living there must have been greater than in a ravaged village.

The ruling British believed that Brahmans exerted domination in all walks of life, but research now shows (Subramaniam 1969, Washbrook 1976, Subrahmanian 1989, Haynes 1991) a much greater complexity in the structure of Indian society than the British understood. They believed that the hierarchy of the four varnas was absolute, whereas there was a complex interaction between different groups and superiority in one sphere, such as the religious, did not automatically signify high social or economic status, nor political power. Subramaniam (1969:1133) maintains that Brahmans occupied a place in society that was "respectable but not central". Although they were generally recognised by Hindus as ritually superior, they often wielded less political and economic power than some other groups, such as wealthy merchants. Even as religious leaders they were not undisputed; for example, the leaders of the Saivite bhakti movement and the early Vaisnavite movement were non-Brahmans. So far as land ownership was concerned, many Brahmans owned some land but few were large-scale landowners as some Vellalas were. Despite claims of one member of the Ramakrishnan Family, who told me his ancestors once "owned vast lands", I have not been able to discover corroborating evidence of this piece of oral tradition which seems to refer to the days before British rule when, as my informant put it, "the country was ruled by small fiefdoms". Only one of The Families now owns a modest acreage of dry land. In any case, until the eighteenth century land had rarely been owned outright; it was more likely to be held in usufruct. In British days holdings became fragmented as families grew and the land was divided between descendants. It seems possible that eagerness to migrate to towns and take up new jobs under the British was stimulated by owning insufficient land to support dependents. Indeed, the need to earn a living was the reason I was always given for the migration to Burma; some whom I questioned struggled to suppress astonishment that I should ask a question which seemed to them to have such an obvious answer.

Some Brahmans achieved important positions in the administration, but according to Subramaniam (1969), records show that prior to the nineteenth century the majority of

ministers were, in fact, Vellalas. Observing Brahman interest in learning, the British appointed them to judicial positions, attempting in the process to impose brahmanical law on the entire population. The British saw Brahmans as holding the key to Indian knowledge in the fields of law, religion, philosophy and government (Cohn 1987) and therefore encouraged their appointment to the government bureaucracy, believing that this would help them to strengthen British control.

After 1835 the British decided to encourage English language education in order to train Indians to serve as lawyers, clerks, civil servants and engineers; many Brahmans eagerly took up the study of English in order to take advantage of the new employment opportunities this brought. They were "prepared to study and understand the new social situation without prejudice, sulking or regret" (Subramaniam 1969:1134). Indeed, this sums up the attitude of The Families throughout the present century, an attitude characterised by a willingness to study, to work hard and to be flexible. Statistics demonstrate vividly the effects of Brahman eagerness to adopt English style education. In 1921, 28% of Brahman males were literate in English, but even amongst Vellalas and Chettiars²⁸ – who, after Brahmans were the groups that most favoured English education, only 2.3% of the men were literate in English (Nambi Arooran 1980).

During the period 1890-1910 Brahmans began to gain some political and legal leadership. The British soon came to mistrust their growing power in the administration, seeing them as a potential threat to British supremacy (Irschick 1969). Yet locally at least, economic and political power was often in the hands of wealthy merchants, who, as likely as not, were non-Brahmans (Washbrook 1976). After having at first encouraged Brahman advancement the British gradually became nervous and began to lend their support to non-Brahman groups of the Dravidian movement which began in Madras Presidency in the early twentieth century. This movement had various strands – cultural, legal, linguistic and political. Despite their long stay in the South, Brahmans have never been completely accepted by other Tamilians as native to the Tamil country. Followers of the Dravidian movement maintained that Brahmans were not true Dravidians, but

The Chettiars were a wealthy, powerful caste group of bankers and moneylenders in South India who played an important role in Burma in British days.

northern immigrants, who wanted to show their superiority to others and who were trying to corner professional posts for their own community.

Some landmarks in the rising tide of awareness of Dravidian nationalism were the foundation of the Madras Non-Brahman Association by a group of lawyers in 1909, the publication of the Non-Brahman manifesto and the foundation of the Non-Brahman Movement in 1916, the start of the Self-Respect Movement, which was allied to the Justice Party, in 1917 by E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, or *Periyār* (Great man), as he was known to his followers. He was vehemently anti-religious and anti-Brahman.²⁹ Having originally been great supporters of Brahmans, the British now realised that Brahmans were few in number (between 2% and 2-3% of the total population) and less influential than they had at first thought, so in an effort to seek favour with the majority, they began to impose various restrictions on Brahmans. For example, in 1921 and 1922 the Madras Government issued Standing Orders, obliging returns to be made of the caste affiliation of all government appointees, so that the entry of Brahmans could be monitored. There was a sharp drop in the percentage of Brahmans appointed from about 90% in 1913 to about 22% ten years later. Selection boards were set up by 1922, which voted to restrict the number of Brahman students in the Government College. Ramaswamy Naicker continued his campaign against religion and against Brahman influence. He founded the DK (Dravida Kazhakam) as an association for promoting Dravidian culture. In the 1940s his disciple, C. N. Annadurai founded the more directly political DMK (Dravida Munnettra Kazhakam, or Dravidian Forward Assembly) which led anti-Hindi demonstrations in 1965 and became the ruling party in Tamil Nadu in 1967.

Although undoubtedly there were some Brahmans who saw themselves as innately superior and the Sanskrit language as greater than Tamil, others were involved in social and cultural issues and worked for a more egalitarian society and a greater pride in Tamil culture. From 1921 onwards some actively supported the reservation of more government posts for non-Brahmans. Rukmani Devi helped to reawaken interest in South Indian classical dance. U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar played a notable part in the development of the Tamil literary renaissance in the late nineteenth century. Others were

He is usually presented this way, although Washbrook (1976:278) states that his political contacts were largely with Brahmans. And he did marry a Brahman woman.

active in social reform movements, such as Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, who worked for so-called Untouchables to be admitted to Hindu temples. Sister Subbalakshmi started a home for widows, the writer A. Madhaviah wrote novels demonstrating the need to raise the status of women and several writers were active in the Independence movement (journalist V. V. S. Iyer, the poet Subramanya Bharati and the writer and worker for Indian independence, C. Rajagopalachari, to name but a few). Yet despite the work of individuals for social and political change, members of the Non-Brahman Movement persisted in viewing Brahmans as alien, as Aryans who thought more highly of Sanskrit than Tamil, and who sought to claim power for themselves in a Dravidian land.

The overall effects of the Dravidian Movement were not simply political. Young Brahmans were often refused admission to colleges within the state, and they began to be passed over in the quest for government jobs. Both factors encouraged their migration to other areas. At least one migration in The Families was a direct result of this policy. Additionally, the stress on $t\bar{u}ya$ (pure) Tamil resulted in the Brahman dialect, which is heavily Sanskritised, falling into disfavour, so that it is now little used outside the home.

The Families' lifestyle before Burma days

In the days when the founding members of The Families migrated – that is, roughly between 1890 and 1922 – people's horizons were narrower than they are now and their options fewer. It is difficult to know how much the memories passed on to them were idealised, but when The Families' members look back on what their elders told them about life in those days they declare that children were brought up to believe their aim in life should be to fulfil their *dharma*, "that unique word which means religion, law, duty and responsibility" (Wolpert 1982:66). People looked for the opportunity to fulfil their religious obligations (which for Brahmans involved time and expense). Married couples wanted a son, and the ability to care for the daily needs of their dependants. A job for the husband, education for sons (and sometimes daughters) and the ability to arrange and perform their children's marriages in what they saw as an appropriate manner, were uppermost in their minds. If sons were well settled, they could be expected to help to care for dependent relatives and look after their parents in old age. Daughters were a big responsibility and an expense, because they had to be married before puberty and even if

no dowry were given, a girl needed saris, gold jewellery and certain household items to take with her when she went to her husband's house. Children were brought up to believe that the satisfaction of the individual should be subordinated to the welfare of the group. It was a way of life that provided a modicum of security in a world of severely limited resources where most people had few choices.

Material possessions were few; whatever people owned could usually be stored in "boxes" or tin trunks. Houses had virtually no furniture, for mats were used in place of beds, tables, chairs, but people did not miss these things because no-one they knew had them. Water was more likely to be drawn from a well than come from a tap.

The society in which The Families and their forebears moved in those days had scant time for anyone bent on pleasure seeking or who shirked responsibility. In a country with a high mortality rate, no social security, no life assurance policies and few pensions, society in general and families in particular exerted strong pressure on wage earners to ensure that sufficient income was set aside to support non-earning family members. Looking after the family's needs occupied – and for some even today occupies – all one's time and effort.

From my research it appears that most people in The Families accepted that hard work and thrift were needed if they were to do their duty by their family and to survive without getting into debt. A few people did not have very successful careers but I heard of only two cases of individuals in The Families deliberately opting out in pre-Burma times. (If there were others, significantly, they have been expunged from The Families' memory). Next to one name in a genealogy of Ramakrishnan's family is written, "whereabouts not known since youth". Stories about another relative tell how he would leave his wife, sometimes for years at a stretch, to go to Varanasi (Banaras), telling no-one where he was.

I was told repeatedly, "A Brahman's wants are few", and even in today's more materialistic age, learning and education are admired and a flashy lifestyle eschewed by most of them. Gough comments on how "Sanskrit religious tradition includes an emphasis on otherworldliness" and "ascetic control on libidinal and aggressive impulses" (1956:827). Even if they did not all follow this tradition, their social memory included admiration for such a lifestyle and the sense that it was worth aspiring to. Children were brought up to respect this ideal. Such a way of life was not incompatible with earning a

living, but rather an acceptance of the basic appropriateness of the old Aryan division of life into the four āśramas, or stages, of brahmacārin (celibate student), gṛhastha (householder), vānaprastha (hermit) and finally sannyāsin (homeless wanderer). Translated into more modern terms this meant (and often still means), study hard when young, accept family responsibilities as you get older, and when you have discharged them, turn your thoughts to less worldly matters and to your religious duties.

A non-materialistic attitude is not unusual amongst some groups of educated Indians generally reckoned to be of high social standing; Vatuk cites the case of an elite Hyderabadi Muslim family who characterise themselves as "simple" people, and their living habits as "abstemious, eschewing ostentation". One told Vatuk, "in our family it is said that unlike other people we keep our books in cabinets and pile our clothes on the floor" (Vatuk 1989:121). I can well believe that there are some older people in The Families who would accept the validity of such an attitude. As Vatuk goes on to observe, a feature of this Muslim family's discourse about themselves is a tendency to present group qualities which others might see in a negative light, as attributes which in their case are worthy of admiration. Like The Families, they attempt to show the intrinsic superiority of learning, which they possess and which cannot be taken away, over mere material possessions which are not permanent. Likewise, in describing families in nineteenth century Surat, Haynes comments that "To a Western eye at least, high-status Hindus and Jains lived lives of considerable personal restraint, practising vegetarianism, abstaining from alcohol, maintaining simplicity in dress and housing, and refraining from overt expressions of sexuality" (Haynes 1991:57). This shows no understanding of the extent to which a disciplined, restrained lifestyle can be used as a basis for self esteem and good standing in the community.

In any case, in India The Families did not have the financial resources for a more ostentatious lifestyle even if they had wanted it. It was the urge to be sure of enough to live on that took them to Burma in the first place. No doubt many people were worse off than they were, but even so, financial security was elusive. Joint family living became the exception. As they moved to urban areas, the founders of The Families lived in nuclear or extended families, but accepted wider financial and familial responsibilities. Having invested money and effort into settling their son, parents expected a young man working

in a town or city to remit part of his salary towards the support of family members in the $\bar{u}r$ (native place)³⁰; where sisters or sisters-in-law³¹ waited to be married, brothers and nephews needed education and indigent elders and widows had to be supported. All this meant a considerable drain on the young man's resources. If a household had only one breadwinner, his early death would result in straitened circumstances for the family left behind; if a mother died leaving young children, the options open to her husband were to marry again, or to send the children to be looked after by relatives; both courses of action brought their own problems. Even if the financial situation was secure, there were emotional and psychological changes to contend with, because a step-mother might make life unpleasant for her husband's children; others were not pleased to have the responsibility of caring for the children of a dead relative. Nagarajan was not happy living with an uncle32 after his mother died and his father remarried; his wife, Anandhi, was made to leave school and help with household work after being sent to her MB's house when she was left motherless at the age of twelve. 33 Some were fortunate; Venugopalan, who had himself been left fatherless at fifteen, saw to it that after his daughter died, her six children had a happy childhood with him and his wife.

The examples just given were not rare cases of a parent's untimely death. In fact, few children grew to adulthood without facing the death of a parent or sibling. The first two wives of Venugopalan's brother both died young and his third wife brought up the children from all three marriages. Another relative was adopted by his paternal uncle when he was left fatherless as a child. Venkat, a close friend of a member of The Families, told me his father had married five times and was survived by the last wife, a

 $[\]bar{U}r$ (Tamil) or *muluk* (Hindi), usually translated as "native place", means the place of origin of one's father's family. When people ask, "What is your native place?" they mean, roughly, "Where does your family come from?"

On p. 22 I comment on the extent of intermarriage encouraged in the Dravidian kinship system. A man who married his ZD, his MBD or his MMBDD - all favoured as spouses - would be related both consanguinally and affinally, to his wife's family, and would therefore have responsibility towards those who were, looked at in one way, his in-laws.

A relative on his mother's side. I have been unable to establish the exact relationship.

She made it clear when she wrote her life story, that it was not her MB, but an older female relative, living in the household, who stopped her attending school.

young woman of nineteen and bride of six months. In all three of The Families there are records of children dying young.

Examination of the 1911 Census indicates why many informants mentioned the death of a close relative. At that time in Madras Presidency half the female children born did not survive to reach their twentieth birthday, while half the males died by the age of fifteen. About one fourth of all infants born died in their first year; of the number of females alive at twelve years (a marriageable age in those days), 38% were dead by the age of 40 and 53% by the age of 50. Of the males alive at eighteen years (again, a marriageable age), 31% died before reaching 40 and half died by 50. This shows that there was a high chance that one, if not both, parents of dependent children, would not survive to see their children grow up. ³⁴ Parental deaths led to economic stringency and often to the splitting of a nuclear family.

Access to the production from land was severely limited. For example, the land that Nagarajan's family held in North Arcot, was unirrigated and frequent droughts meant that it was unproductive. Famine conditions recurred repeatedly in the northern part of Madras Presidency throughout the latter half of the nineteenth and into the early years of the twentieth century. Between 1895 and 1905 "combined [economic] depression, famine and plague took ...a devastating toll of life" in "the stricken South" (Wolpert 1982:267). Income from land declined drastically. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards the power and prosperity of Brahmans who kept to the traditional roles of priests and temple servants declined as customary gifts and payments decreased in value (Radha Krishna 1987). One close friend of one of The Families described how his father

The Census of India for 1911 gives the following figures of survivors for each 100,000 infants born in the Madras Presidency:

Male		Female	
Age	No. Living	Age	No. Living
1	72,607	1	74,298
12	51,459	12	55,010
18	48,214	18	51,058
20	47,134	20	49,792
30	41,277	30	43,364
40	33,444	40	35,338
50	24,484	50	26,120

originally worked as a priest but gave it up to start a business as an agent for imported magazines because otherwise he could not support his wife and children.

Brahmans are sometimes referred to as an elite. They may have had high ritual status, although even this is contended by some present day writers (Radha Krishna 1987; Sharma 1973), but this did not automatically bring high economic status and as time went on the hierarchies of caste and class increasingly came to be seen as separate. In the nineteenth century many Brahmans were priests, scholars, or government or village officials, but not all held such posts. As far back as 1881 Cox noted the variety of occupations Brahmans followed – from proprietors of land, priests, teachers, writers, accountants, merchants, to "using the plough", railway station porters and "not a few" living by begging. "Few of them", he comments, "are in affluent circumstances but most are fairly well off" (Cox 1881:264).

Small wonder, then, that men in The Families, in whose homes study was traditionally encouraged, took readily to English medium education and the new opportunities it offered. From the mid-nineteenth century the middle classes grew in strength. Misra (1961) divides them into four groups – the commercial middle class, the industrial middle class, the landed middle class and the educated (i.e. Western style) middle class, which I call the salariat. It was this last group that supplied entrants to the professions and government administration. Bureaucratisation encouraged the growth of this class, which reached its peak in the early twentieth century. The expansion of services deriving from the colonial administration – the railways, the Post and Telegraph services and civil engineering projects run by the Public Works Department, necessitated employees with technical and administrative skills.³⁵ The Law Courts needed legal workers who could

The following items from the Report of the Commissioners of the Royal Commission on the Public Services in India, 1917, indicate the scale of the expansion in two areas.

Railways				
1889	15,245 miles			
1913	33,599 miles	Railway traffic quadrupled during this period.		
Post and te	legraph			
1890-91	8,394 P.Os 11,999 letterboxes			
1912-13	18,789 P.Os. 48,524 letterboxes	During the same period letters and cards carried increased from 280¾ million to 892 million.		

administer British style law. Allopathic medicine, favoured by the British to the detriment of research in Indian medical systems, provided a more prestigious and better paid way of earning a living than the practice of Indian medical systems such as *āyurveda*. Thus, it could be said that the greatest economic advantage possessed by Venugopalan, Nagarajan and Ramakrishnan – the founding males of The Families – was education; English style education could open the door to some of the new occupational opportunities that resulted from British rule, albeit at a modest level. They remembered this in Burma, where they repeatedly emphasised the importance of education to the next generation.

However, in India education alone was not enough. As employment opportunities increased, so did the number seeking higher education, until there were more educated young men looking for jobs than there were jobs available; many of the educated unemployed were forced eventually to accept poorly paid jobs because nothing better was available. Venugopalan worked for Rs.15 a month and Nagarajan had a badly paid Post Office job in Madras, "the sort of job you take when all else fails", according to his wife.

To sum up; by the turn of the present century, the decline of opportunities in rural areas, the inability to support an increasing number of dependents on decreasing land holdings, and the possibilities opened up by English medium education, caused several members of The Families to migrate to Madras, to take advantage of jobs available there. They took up work such as engineering, Western medicine, clerking and accountancy and looked with favour on government service, whether well-paid or not, because of the security it brought. Some found employment in British firms, for example as accountants or inspectors. They had already abandoned priestly and teaching occupations, which yielded insufficient income to keep and educate family and dependents.

In reports, the British began to express concern about rising tension between Brahmans and non-Brahmans. Restrictions began to be placed on Brahman recruitment and the Non-Brahman Movement increased in strength. Surely awareness of the situation must have swayed The Families' members when the possibility of going to Burma was first mooted. Venugopalan and Ramakrishnan left for Burma before this movement was fully underway, but by the time Nagarajan and his wife set sail for Rangoon in 1922 the crunch on recruitment of Brahmans into higher education and government service was

making itself felt. Yet when I questioned people about why their families went to Burma, no-one mentioned the rise of the Non-Brahman Movement, nor British duplicity in first encouraging and then putting obstacles in their way, a point I return to in the later sections on Burmese-Indian relations. The first generation of migrants to Burma all avoided direct political involvement – since the British provided so many of them with the means of livelihood, this is hardly surprising. The only reason any of them recognise for going to Burma is to secure better job prospects. If individuals ever had other reasons, they suppressed the memory of them.

Arriving in Burma – personal stories

Whenever I listened to stories of how people I knew, or older relatives, had first migrated to Burma, I was struck by the way all these memories underlined the pooryoung-man-makes-good theme. There were always references to education, diligence and hard work, combined with help from some relative. Such stories often started off by describing how, following a visit in India from a male relative, the young man concerned left Madras by steamer for Rangoon. He would take little with him on the journey, which was variously estimated at lasting between three and ten days; one took "not even a coat"; another, it is said, took no food for the journey and was afraid to eat the food prepared on board because animals were being slaughtered there and he was a strict vegetarian; a third, I was told, was given a blanket by other passengers who took pity on him; another took with him "only a small box"; another took "two changes of clothing and a small box". In fact, I heard of no-one who took other than a minimum of luggage and very little money on first going to Burma. Apart from the probability that young migrants had few personal possessions, it would not have been possible to transport much baggage on the crowded steamers, especially if – as was all too likely – they were deck passengers. In any case no-one would want to be encumbered with much luggage on arrival, because at first they would have to put up either in a relative's house or in temporary rented accommodation. Besides, when a migrant landed in Burma he had to find a job. Although there was plenty of work, a job could not be arranged in advance but had to be secured only after arrival, so a certain amount of occupational uncertainty had to be faced. It is worth noting that the selection of memories acted to reinforce

values commonly held in migrant families – thrift, industriousness and the importance of "sticking together".

Here are three examples of these tales from the past.

Venugopalan's case shows how a combination of English education, family responsibilities, poverty and encouragement from a relative led to his migration. He was the eldest in a family of three sons and five daughters. His father died early, leaving him to shoulder the main responsibility of the household, of his brothers' education and the marriage of his sisters. Some time in the 1890s, when he was between fifteen and eighteen years old (accounts vary), an uncle, who had already settled in Burma, came to see Venugopalan and urged him to leave his Rs.15 a month office job in the small town of Chingleput, and migrate to Burma. His uncle promised to support him in Burma until he became financially independent. His descendants say that the very day of his arrival, his uncle gave him a book to study in preparation for an examination which would take place shortly and which would qualify him for government service in Burma. Indeed, one of his granddaughters told me the exam took place the day following his arrival, but I think this may have been a case of the collapse of time between events, often noticed when memories are retold. In any case, he studied hard, passed and immediately got an administrative job in government service where he earned Rs.75 per month from which he was able to remit a regular allowance to his family in India.

Here is Nagarajan's story, based on his wife's account of their early married life. Around 1918 or 1920, when Nagarajan was about 26 years old, he was married and working in Pune (or Poona, to use the colonialist spelling), where he had a temporary job in the military accounts department. Although he was trained in civil engineering, he had been unable to find a job in that field. His father died suddenly in Madras so he had to return there because he was the only son and it was his duty to perform the death ceremonies and sort out family affairs. He could not take extended leave, so this meant giving up his temporary job. Not only was he now unemployed, he had to support his wife, his young stepmother (who was actually younger than he was) and her daughter, his half-sister. In addition, he had to take on responsibility for his sister (who was married, but still living

in her father's house as was the practice in those days when girls were married young).³⁶ Nagarajan's wife, Anandhi (he would never have called her by her given name, any more than she would have used his, for to do so would have been a gross breach of etiquette), recalled their difficulties after her father-in-law died:

Everybody has some problems, but we had many. Not only were there loans to be paid off and money to be given to the widow, but we had to send my sister-in-law to her father-in-law's house with appropriate gifts. My husband decided he would have to sell some land, so that he would have enough money to give to his step-mother and send his sister to her in-laws... After the debts were settled there was just enough left to pay his step-mother...

who asked for more money to get her own daughter married. He told her he could not pay her more at that time, "I have no job and no money even to buy food for us to eat". It was only by selling some of the jewellery his wife had brought with her at the time of their marriage that they were able to manage. Eventually Nagarajan got a poorly paid job in the Post Office, where his father had also worked. One day in 1922 they were visited by his wife's uncle, Radhakrishnan, while he was on a visit to Madras from Burma. Radhakrishnan told them of the opportunities available in Burma, persuaded them to migrate and provided accommodation when they first arrived. In this case husband and wife went to Burma together; in many cases the man went first, while the wife stayed behind with his or her family, but Anandhi's natal home had broken up when her mother died about six years earlier and to stay with her step-mother-in-law was not an option, so she accompanied her husband. In addition to Radhakrishnan she knew she had other

Girls did not go to their husband's home before puberty, and sometimes considerably later. One elderly woman I met in 1989 (the mother-in-law of a descendant of Venugopalan) told me she was her "father's pet" and although she was married as a child, her father refused to let her go to her husband's house, except for short periods, until she was 25 years old.

Possibly gifts promised at the time of marriage. It is interesting to contemplate the tensions with which Nagarajan had to cope. On the one hand, his British boss presumably thought his first allegiance should be to his work and he was not permitted extended leave. On the other hand, he clearly saw his primary duty as that of a son who had to manage family affairs and was ready to sacrifice his job and his land to fulfil his immediate duties.

Anandhi's parents were cross cousins so this uncle was both her FB and her MFZS.

relatives in Burma who would help her, including another couple belonging to The Families, Ramakrishnan and his wife, who were both related to her. Shortly after arrival in Rangoon Nagarajan got a job, again in the Post Office, but Radhakrishnan encouraged him to study for a government examination and after passing it, he was able to get a better post, as a draughtsman in the Burma Public Works Department. In this case, support from the wife's relatives was crucial in the decision to migrate and the success they made of it. It helps to explain how, in a supposedly patriarchal society, their children were always closer to their mother's side than their father's. Like the memory of Venugopalan's migration, this recollection stresses the help given by relatives and the need to be ready to study at any time.

Seal (1968) declares that Indians filled the lower ranks of government service, but were badly paid. Compared with the British, of whom the lowest paid earned several times more than Venugopalan or Nagarajan, they were indeed badly paid,³⁹ but compared with the salaries they might have earned in India, they saw themselves as fortunate. The case was similar for those who took up jobs with British or American companies. A son of K. V. Reddy, Nagarajan's great friend – his "brother" – wrote to me about his parents' migration to Burma in 1882. Reddy went to Burma on his own initiative, as his son describes.

Just about this time, 1882, my father as a young enterprising youth was running here and there in Madras in search of a job, which could fetch him about Rs.10 to Rs.15 a month for settling down in life. He was helpless; all his efforts proved futile...[then one day] my dad happened to see a notification on a compound wall, stating labour, both skilled and unskilled, was urgently required in Burma...

According to the Civil List, in 1923 when Nagarajan's monthly earnings were Rs.155+Rs.60 local allowance, the British Chief engineer earned Rs.2,750+Rs.665 allowance per month. In 1932 the highest paid Burmese in the PWD received Rs.625 pm+Rs.105 for BA. There was one Indian who got Rs.1,025+ Rs.135, which was about what the lowest paid Briton received. Few Burmese or Indians earned anything approaching this sum. Even in 1940, Nagarajan's monthly salary was only Rs.240, which explains the need for economy especially because by then he had a large family.

Despite opposition from his family, and fearful of the ten to twelve days which the voyage took at that time, husband and wife left for Burma. On arrival in Rangoon, as they emerged from the docks, various officials approached passengers to find out if they wanted a job and what their skills were.

One American official from the American Baptist Mission Press advanced towards my father and gave him a visiting card and asked my father to see him (the official) during working hours in his office in a couple of days...

The couple then took a hackney carriage to the "area where Tamil people were residing" (probably East Rangoon) and found some relatives, who helped them find "an apartment consisting of three living rooms, a kitchen and balcony with an open terrace common for all the tenants of the building", for a rent of Rs.5 per month. The young man secured a job at the American Baptist Mission Press with a salary of Rs.30 a month. Although a staunch Hindu, he continued working at the ABM Press for many years, selling the books the press published and he sent his sons to the ABM School.

The account continues:

My dad's joy knew no bounds! Rice was very cheap then. A bag of 40 viss [56 kg] of rice was sold for Rs.5. A bag of rice used to last for nearly three months. Milk was sold at Rs.1 per measure of 8 alaks [about 4 pints]. Vegetables, fruits and flowers were selling dirt cheap.

Although these prices relate to the 1880s, they changed little over the next half century, according to people's recollections. Inflation was not a problem in those days.⁴⁰ Considering the famine conditions obtaining in much of Madras Presidency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the scarcity of jobs and the higher cost of living, it is no wonder that Burma was seen as a land of opportunity.

Some stressed the need for study and training in order to get a good job, especially for government posts in Burma, which were secured by public examination. Others told how

Prices - and salaries - seem to have changed little over the years The Families were in Burma.

easy it was to get work in Burma and how much better paid they were there than in India. Men told me how, around the turn of the twentieth century, agents from different British or American companies went to the wharf to meet incoming steamers; these agents would offer a job to any man with a few years of education and a knowledge of English. Educational qualifications were needed for entry into the lower and middle ranks of government service. I began to understand more fully the significance of a remark made to me so often by older members of The Families, "Brahmans have nothing but their brains" (although Brahmans were not the only middle class migrants). It was not a boast about their cleverness so much as a recognition that it was their "brains", or education, which gave them access to much-needed jobs. The message behind the memories stressed characteristics and qualities that enabled a poor young man to leave home and, through education, diligence, hard work and a little help from his relatives, to make good and be able to repay the support he had received by helping other family members. In this way he was fulfilling his *dharma*, his duty.

Until 1940 Indian emigration was "free", i.e. without restriction (Baxter 1940:93). Burma's population was small (only 17 million even in 1940) and until about 1930 only a limited number of Burmese knew English well and were willing to work for an alien government. The increase in openings in the administration and rapidly expanding allied services as well as jobs available in industry and commerce, brought a need for workers of many kinds, from the unskilled labourer to the educated professional. No wonder I was often told (by mission-educated Hindus who must have remembered their Bible lessons), "Burma was a land flowing with milk and honey". There was a regular steamer service from Madras to Rangoon and jobs were available for those willing to work hard. Not only that, so many Indians lived in Rangoon, "You didn't feel you were living in a foreign country", more than one person said to me.

Steamer fares between Madras and Rangoon fluctuated. One friend of The Families told me his father paid Rs.16 in the early years of this century. Another said that when his father migrated in 1898, two steamship companies plied. One kept undercutting the other until, for a time, one company gave a free passage, plus a free *dhoti* (loin cloth) and towel, to each passenger. This soon forced the other company out of business, then fares rose again to Rs.8, but his father had already taken advantage of the free travel by this time.

"Rosy" Burma

One woman referred to her "rosy childhood" in Burma – a significant metaphor, suggesting as it does rose-coloured spectacles - seeing the world in "too favourable a light", as Chambers' dictionary defines the phrase. Certainly life in Burma is often recalled with pleasure. Again and again I listened to positive remarks about Burma, such as "Nobody could dislike Burma; my wife and I were both happy there", "People were friendly", "Everything was cheap", "Burma was cleaner than India", "Burma was more cosmopolitan and people helped one another", "The schools were better than in India", "School fees were low", "Girls had more freedom there", "In Burma people were more broadminded", "Indians from Burma can always be identified, they are more willing to help others" (than those who didn't go), and so on. Nor were comments like these restricted to members of The Families. I met Panjabis and Anglo-Indians who expressed similar sentiments. During field work in Delhi in late 1989 I became friendly with a Bengali family who confessed that they usually found South Indians very conservative, but "people from Burma are different", they said. There is a group of - mainly Bengali ex-residents of Burma, who arrange an annual social gathering in London, where they and their families get together for a pleasant day and, more specifically, to remember the good times they had in Burma. (I attended their gathering in the summer of 1989). In his book, Burma (1970), F. S. V. Donnison, a British official who spent many years in Burma, recounts an anecdote describing how he met a Sikh member of the Indian Viceconsulate "near the Eastern border of Persia" in 1960. On hearing that Donnison and his wife knew Burma well he told them how he had been born and brought up there, and although three out of five of his immediate family had died as a result of the walk from Burma after the Japanese invaded, he told the Donnisons, "I would go back to Burma tomorrow if I could".

In relating their memories, The Families' members were sensible enough to admit that life in Burma had its flaws. They were often separated from wider family support; Anandhi disliked the possibility of her husband being transferred to a town where she knew noone and no-one spoke Tamil, or where there was no good school for the children. But the positive aspects far outweighed the negative ones and people were happy to be in Burma and sorry to leave. The Families saw themselves as settlers, rather than migrants; the children born there knew no other home and I never spoke to anyone who expressed

a childhood longing to go and live in India. It was enough to visit it occasionally during school holidays, when they would stay with relatives.

Migration to Burma meant earning a better living; if they had noted the rising strength of the Non-Brahman Movement, they would still have seen it in economic terms; that is, as making it more difficult for Brahmans to earn a living. Earning a better living did not mean acquiring luxuries, it was more a question of fulfilling obligations, especially towards the family. This was done by providing for the old, educating the children, being able to pay for girls to be married "decently" (a word commonly used to signify the ability to perform a wedding with appropriate ceremonies, hospitality and gifts, but without extravagant expenditure), to have enough for doctor's bills and school fees, and so on. Not only had remittances to be made to India, by the 1930s there were so many dependents in the Venugopalan, Nagarajan and Ramakrishnan households, that although they believed they were better off than they could have expected to be in India, thrift was still important. Despite being better off, much better educated and belonging to a different social class from the coolies, artisans and small tradesmen who formed the bulk of the Indian population in Burma, they still lived in a manner which people in the West today – and many in India, too – would now regard as extremely basic.

Some people recalled the sort of economies that were practised. Nagarajan's wife, Anandhi, used to relate how she would buy three lengths of cloth – one of white cotton from which she cut and stitched shirts for all her sons, the second of stronger khaki material for the boys' shorts, and a third length for girls' clothes. It was cheaper to buy in bulk and make the clothes herself. The boys wore white shirts and khaki shorts for all occasions; there was no question of separate leisure-time clothes. As a draughtsman in the Public Works Department, Nagarajan used sized cloth for civil engineering plans. When these plans were no longer needed he brought home the cloth to be thoroughly boiled until it was soft and white and could then be used to make blouses and handkerchiefs. Food was never wasted and Anandhi, like other wives, knew how to prepare nourishing and tasty meals from simple, inexpensive ingredients. Food that could be stored was bought in bulk to last a whole season. Coffee is an important item in a South Indian household, not just for adults in the family but as a mark of hospitality to guests; she bought green beans and roasted them at home, because green beans were slightly cheaper, and besides, she could roast them until they were very dark and this way less coffee was required for a full-bodied brew. There was only one table in the house. The children sat at it to do write their homework; at mealtimes they sat cross-legged on the floor and ate with their fingers. Books were either schoolbooks or books on religious subjects. Nagarajan's son, Venkatraman, told me that he remembered his father sharing a daily newspaper with a friend. He did not know who paid for it, but was sure that his father shared it for reasons of economy. More significantly, when war came, the lack of money to buy tickets for everyone in their large family meant that by the time they were ready to leave for India, the last steamer had gone and they had no option but to trek north with many other refugees, carrying whatever they could, to reach India by way of the Naga Hills.

The homes of all three Families were sparsely furnished; beds, or "cots", as they were called, were only for adults; all the children slept on mats which they rolled up and put away during the daytime. One woman in Venugopalan's family remembers visiting a relative in the 1930s who had a flat furnished in Western style. "He was the first person we knew who had a dining table", she said. At that time, Venugopalan and his family lived in Bauktow, a suburb of Rangoon. One of his granddaughters told me that they had no running water and no electricity, "but we didn't mind, we were happy there", she added.

Education was important to them, yet some had to forego tertiary education if money was insufficient. One of Venugopalan's sons abandoned plans for a college education in order to go out to work and help to balance the family budget after Venugopalan's granddaughters went to live with them. Similarly, Ramakrishnan told his son, Ravi, that he would have to give up the college scholarship he had won so that he could earn money as soon as possible to help family finances (Ravi was one of fourteen siblings), and so at the age of fifteen or sixteen he started work as a blacksmith for the Burmah Oil Company.

However, limited money did not mean an absence of the arts and culture. Nagarajan's son, Venkatraman, remembers that they had a wind-up gramophone and his two elder sisters had singing lessons – not surprisingly considering that both Nagarajan and his wife were fond of Carnatic music. Indeed, it was Anandhi's ability to play the violin and to sing that first prompted Nagarajan to agree to marry her. In Venugopalan's family, the arts held an important place. Their second daughter (the one who died young) won prizes for singing and two sons took up careers in the arts. The children were

encouraged to be creative, to learn crafts, to act and sing, to listen to their elders telling stories from the great epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

I know of only two branches of The Families who could be called wealthy. One was Venugopalan's sister's son, as his son and daughter, who are now both elderly, told me. The son, Arthur Sharma, married his sister's daughter and all three now share a modest flat in Delhi. The brother and sister described their comfortable life in Rangoon, with servants and in the 1930s, even a car. Their father, who was an accountant, earned well, "about Rs.1,000 a month", they thought. If their memories are accurate, this was indeed a very large salary, which is certainly not reflected in their present lifestyle. Some relatives criticised them, saying they adopted a superior attitude because of their wealth; according to their own story they were friendly and helpful towards other sections of their family. The other wealthy relative, a more distant relative of Venugopalan, was a diamond merchant, who brought up the children of his wife's dead sister in Burma, but lost a lot of his wealth at the time of the evacuation.

People rarely talked about anyone who did not succeed. I discovered one, Varadarajan, whose brother, Radhakrishnan, withdrew his support after a year because on arrival in Burma Varadarajan showed no inclination to look for a steady, humdrum job, but became a journalist and wrote anti-British articles that drew questions from the authorities. I think such behaviour was generally reckoned to be foolish, rather than wrong, because it put one's family at risk, either because of insufficient freelance earnings, or because it could put a breadwinner's job on the line if government officials took his subversive activities seriously. Another possible reason why "failures" were not mentioned is that with a regular steamship service anyone who did not do well could easily return to India and a kind of social amnesia set in regarding those who went back.

Social relations - The Family and beyond

When people talked about Burma they constantly stressed the openness of society and the way people helped one another there. These aspects were just as important as material possessions in making life enjoyable there. They all — especially women, appreciated the more open lifestyle, some relaxation from oppressive taboos and a sense of greater control over their own destiny than they were likely to have had in India. For

instance, older girls and boys could be seen in one another's company in a way which could – and did – cause comment in India. Arthur Sharma's sister told me that they had a car when she was at college. If she was out in their car and saw a college friend, they would stop and give a lift, to either a boy or girl. Such behaviour would not have been acceptable in India. At least two women told me how adverse comments were made in India when they were seen out with male cousins; in Burma nobody minded. After going to India in 1942, some girls chafed under a more restricted lifestyle and found that there was much more pettymindedness. In Burma, they maintained, people were more inclined to allow others to get on with their own lives without always watching to see that they behaved according to the strict dictates of caste and custom.

At weddings strict codes of practice were relaxed so that it was easier to mix with people of other "communities" (*jātis*). In India during the 1920s and 1930s, wedding guests were usually segregated according to caste at the wedding feast, but no such thing happened in Burma where, I was told many times, the guests "always sat in one line".

More than once I heard comments to the effect that there were so many Indians in Rangoon, it wasn't like living in another country. Hindustani was the most widely spoken language there and it was quite possible to live in an Indian area like East Rangoon, and lead a completely Indian life, with Indian neighbours, Indian shops, Indian lawyers, Indian schools, Indian doctors and so on. On a day-to-day level I am sure it was possible to get by in Rangoon in this way, just as there are areas of cities like Leicester and Bradford nowadays, where groups of South Asians live more or less isolated from the population of the country at large. Like migrants everywhere, their primary aim was to adapt their own lifestyle to conditions in their new country, not to try to live as local people did. But there were differences, one being the position they saw themselves occupying in the wider community, and I comment on this in the chapter on Burmese-Indian relations. Moreover, those who lived outside Rangoon had to get used to greater changes, because there were fewer Indians in other towns and cities. In places such as Moulmein or Mandalay, there were large Indian communities, but in Pakokku, for example, where Nagarajan was transferred in 1927, only three Tamil families lived there.

There was a general move among both men and women in all branches of The Families to drop any pretensions to superiority on grounds of Brahmanhood, which they saw increasingly as a matter of ethnicity, rather than religion or hierarchy. No doubt the situation on the ground encouraged flexibility in this respect. I have mentioned the strong anti-Brahman movement in the Madras Presidency, and although those who were children in Burma may not have been aware of it, adults must have known that the Brahman hegemony that may once have existed, was rapidly dying away. Marriages, however, continued to be arranged with other Smartha Brahmans (preferably originating from North Arcot). "In Burma we gave up caste", said one of Nagarajan's sons. He insists that it was only when he went to live in India at the age of thirteen in 1942 that he learned what caste he belonged to. One way they demonstrated their willingness to gloss over their Brahman status was by dropping their final name of "Iyer", which signified that they were Smarthas. This is the way Anasuya's brother Kumar, felt about being a Brahman:

Originally any intellectual could be a Brahman – only later was it decided by birth – but of course the way you are brought up does make a difference.

Perhaps this sounds rather like hedging one's bets, but it does demonstrate some flexibility.

They made friends with Tamil speaking people from non-Brahman communities. This was the case for Nagarajan's Family in particular because in some places where they lived, there was only a small Indian community. Several people they got to know were not just superficial acquaintances, but, like K. V. Reddy, became lasting friends. "Such a friend!" Anandhi wrote of another, S. T. Naidu, 41 in her autobiography; "he was so close to us we doubted whether even our own kin would do as much for us as he did", showing again the importance of the idea of family ties. It was to S. T. Naidu that they turned for help when they first took steps to leave Burma at the onset of war. "To find a friend like her is rare", Anandhi commented on another Naidu friend who helped her when her fourth child was born.

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Naidu, like Reddy, is a "high-caste non-Brahman" name.

How women adapted

There is a Tamil proverb which says, *Pen illai*, *kuṭampam illai* – without a woman there is no family - and the importance of women to family life is widely acknowledged. In Burma, for the first time, a few of them began to have a life outside home and community. For young women who grew up in Burma, education and a freer lifestyle were a part of the natural course of events and they could be expected to be adaptable, but it was the women who had gone out to Burma from India after marriage who had the most adapting to do. Boys and young men had always been allowed more freedom than their female counterparts; they had already adapted to working in the new professions which followed in the wake of the British, and were exposed to new ideas through learning English. For girls who grew up in India it was not so easy; they usually had less education, and that, too, only in their mother-tongue. Their lives were to a large extent circumscribed by home and family and their movements were severely restricted -"good" girls did not "roam about" - and an early marriage was arranged so that the responsibility of seeing that she did not stray from the path of virtue was shifted from her father to her husband. The people she met socially would usually belong to the same "community" - which for The Families meant Smartha Brahmans - except for those she met in school, and even there a disproportionately high percentage of pupils were Brahmans. It was important for a girl to know the proper code of behaviour towards others and to learn how to discharge a woman's domestic responsibilities, including the upbringing of children. She was also expected to learn how to celebrate rites and festivals and how to prepare the special food eaten on these occasions. Whatever parents felt privately, they would bring up a daughter in a "proper" (i.e. traditional or conservative) manner, otherwise it might be difficult to find her a good husband. She would have to be prepared to adjust to her husband and try to gain his family's approval when she got married. Service to others and the upholding of "traditional values" were high on the list of what she was taught to regard as essential.

Yet it may well have been aspects of a girl's conservative upbringing that helped her to change her ways in Burma. "You have to adjust", is a comment I have heard made repeatedly by women in India. A girl is brought up with the idea that she will one day go to another family and that it will be her duty to fit in with them. This precept must have stood the young women who migrated to Burma in good stead, the difference being that they now had to adjust to life in another country, not just in another family.

When she migrated to Burma a woman had to settle in a new community; even if she had relatives and caste fellows there, they were not as numerous as in India, and fewer belonged to the older generation - which is the group to which she would have turned for advice in India. She had to make new friends. She also had to drop certain practices and caste restrictions. Often, practices involving only the individual were retained (e.g., menstrual taboos), while practices involving those outside the family were modified. For example, children from different castes and communities were allowed to play freely with one another; they accepted water from anyone "so long as it was clean", and ignored many traditional restrictions about food transactions. Venugopalan's wife, Pattamma, is often held up by her family as an example of tolerance and adaptability. She and her husband brought up their own children and their granddaughters to be tolerant of other castes, religions and ethnic groups and taught them to try look for a rational explanation for customs and religious practices, not just to obey them blindly. When Venugopalan started a night school for poor children she took their vegetable vendor's son into their house, (he belonged to a low caste) so that he would have an opportunity to study. She freely accepted newcomers temporarily into her home to give them time to settle down. She had very limited education, and that only in Telugu, but as she grew older and found no-one had time to read to her, she taught herself to read Tamil so that she could read the books and magazines that came into the house.

Padmavati-ammal, mother of Anasuya, accepted with both hands the opportunities which came her way in Rangoon. Despite her own limited education she was determined that all her children should be well educated. At a time when education for girls was not considered important — or even desirable — in India she agreed to Anasuya's marriage only on condition that she would be allowed to continue her education (in India it is more common for the "boy's side" to make that kind of stipulation). Her husband was an accountant and earned well, so she could afford help in her household duties. She used the free time this gave her to do what is usually referred to in The Families as "social work". This included raising funds for charitable purposes, helping to run the Hindu Social Club, arranging educational visits for women to factories and other places of interest, giving assistance to immigrants and helping Indians who suffered during riots. In the 1930s she was invited to Calcutta to give a lecture — in English — about purdah, which was a considerable achievement, because she learned English only in middle age.

For those who lived outside Rangoon, there was a lot to get used to. Take Saraswati, the third wife of Venugopalan's brother, P. D. Swaminathan, for example. She was married to him in 1923 at the age of fourteen, after the death of his second wife. He was much older than she was. She had spent all her childhood in a village in North Arcot and left school in the Third Standard. Her family was poor and her mother was chronically ill, so from her parents' point of view it must have been a relief to find a good-looking, god fearing husband with a well-paid job for their daughter. He was one of the two or three men in The Families, mentioned earlier, who ever mixed with Europeans, so her early life was vastly different from the way he was living. It was "a shock", she confessed, to leave her family and go alone on a steamer to Yenangyaung, where her husband worked for the Burmah Oil Company. She was amazed when she first saw the oilfields. From the beginning she had to look after her three-year-old stepson. She felt lonely and missed her family and the boy wept because he missed his mother. She said at first she used to cry with him, not knowing what else to do. Occasionally she was able to visit relatives or friends, but it was difficult to get to know people, because her early life had not prepared her for the cosmopolitan society she found in Yenangyaung. Later she made friends with those who lived in the "ten or twenty" houses nearby and in time she settled down, but for a village girl with little education the change in lifestyle and the responsibility, as a fourteen-year-old, of caring for her stepson, looking after her much-older husband and adjusting to a new lifestyle must have required a lot of inner strength and a determination to adjust.

Anandhi is another example. Like Saraswati, she had been born and brought up in an orthodox Brahman family in Tamil Nadu, as a vegetarian and subject to restrictions on mixing, eating and drinking with other castes. As a child in her aunt's house she had even been made to bathe before re-entering the house after school (her mother, when alive, had been less strict) because she had been mixing with Christians and lower-caste Hindus. She described how she had to learn new ways, first in Moulmein in 1925 and a year or so later when they went to Pakokku:

There was the problem of obtaining water in Pakokku. There were no taps there, only wells. The wells were so deep you couldn't see the water at the bottom. To get the water out a man used a rope with a bamboo scoop tied to both ends. While one scoop emptied at the top, the other would be filling at the bottom. It was the custom for a Burmese to collect the water and

take it to each house. The man who came to our house always had a six-inch long cheroot dangling from his mouth. I was very upset by this because I was extremely orthodox⁴² in those days, but what could I do? In the end I adjusted... At first [in Burma] I would not even accept water in a Mudaliar or Naidu house, but I decided there was no point in thinking about these things, for in Pakokku such orthodoxy could not be maintained.

Both these women, like many others, accepted the need for change; they brought up their children in a more open way and were willing for their children to be exposed to new influences. Indeed, in later life, Anandhi's regret was that she had not changed even more. She had insisted that her husband should begin the search for a husband for their eldest daughter when the girl was thirteen. "Things were not like they are nowadays", she commented later, "and I did not have the courage to leave the girl to get married when she wanted".

Some said that the greater freedom traditionally given to Burmese women affected the attitude of Indians towards their own women. This may have been so, but in addition we may note that those who migrated had already shown a willingness to change, simply by leaving India, because in those days even to cross the sea was anathema to some orthodox Hindus.⁴³

At that time Hindu widows in India led a grim life; their heads were shaved, they were forbidden to wear coloured saris, they could eat only one meal a day and were in general considered inauspicious beings. I asked several people how widows were treated in Burma. Most suggested that a woman without a husband was likely to go back to India. I could not find anyone who actually knew a widow there in pre-World War II days.

She had to put up with a doubly polluting practice - accepting water from a non-Brahman and from a man who was smoking. At no time does she ever imply that her husband was upset by these practices.

For those who adhered strictly to the Hindu code of behaviour, crossing the sea was a sin which could only be absolved by performing purificatory rituals. In his autobiography, *The story of my experiments with truth* (1946) M. K. Gandhi describes how he was made to take part in a ritual purification when he returned to India from abroad, at a later date than The Family migrations to Burma. However, I have not met anyone in The Families who knew of any objection to a relative's migration on the grounds that they should not cross the sea.

According to the 1931 Census there were 2,306 Hindu widows living in Rangoon in 1931, but there is no breakdown of this figure by caste, region or social status. I heard of only one woman who was widowed in Burma. She was young and returned to India, where she continued her education and later became a teacher. The fact that my informants could not remember any widows in Burma, suggests that either such women returned to India, or were not treated as inauspicious beings, as was the case in India at that period.

Religion in The Families

The Families have an identity within Hinduism which guides both their behaviour and their beliefs. The importance they place on study and learning is a part of this identity, because it stems from the belief that, of the four spiritual paths of Hinduism, jñana-yoga, or the way of knowledge, is the appropriate one for Brahmans. As Smarthas they have been brought up in the advaitist (non-dualist) tradition, a religious philosophy developed by the sage, Sankaracarya, in the ninth century. In advaita the divine is recognised as cosmic force, as spirit, immanent in the human person, whose identity then becomes a balanced union between human, spirit and motive force. Sankaracarya did not believe in barren ritualism and held the view that the only path to mukti (salvation or liberation of the soul) lies in developing discrimination through acquired knowledge. Advaita is essentially tolerant of other views and recognises that each school of philosophy has some truth in it, although the view of each is partial.

The idea that only a partial knowledge of the truth is possible has encouraged them to look with an open mind on other systems of belief. Because they believe that ritual is less important than knowledge, they have stressed the philosophy of religion, rather than ritual and adopted a pragmatic attitude to religious practices. To take one example. Apart from special occasions at temples, or on pilgrimages, Hinduism is a religion where private practice, usually within the family, is more common than public worship. Each family has a room or area set aside for $p\bar{u}j\bar{a}$ (worship). If a separate room is not available sacred pictures and images are often kept in the kitchen. This is because the preparation of food is regarded as requiring ritual purity, so the kitchen becomes a ritually pure place and suitable for holy images and worship. In order to obey purity-and-pollution rules, a

person should be ritually pure when preparing food; in other words, one should bathe first. Yet most women in The Families get up in the morning and cook before bathing. This makes practical sense in a tropical climate, where one gets hot and sticky from cooking, but is ritually incorrect because it involves preparing food in a ritually impure state.

As Singer (1972) records, religious practice often assumes greater importance for women than for men. It is often women who ensure that festivals are celebrated and that the daily $p\bar{u}j\bar{a}$ is performed. They are more likely to take on the responsibility of teaching children about their religion, although this is not invariably the case; Venugopalan's granddaughters have vivid memories of his teachings. The particular enthusiasm with which religious festivals were celebrated in Burma, arose from more than their religious function; they were a means of strengthening identity through performative action and formed a part of what Connerton (1989) calls habit-memory.

Food, too, is important in religious practices and in stressing identity. Food is offered regularly to a deity, after which it is returned to the worshipper as *prasād* (sacramental food). Even ordinary, daily food is significant, for the kind of food eaten determines the kind of person one becomes. *Rajasik* ("passion-producing") food is "hot", energising and right for the person of action, the fighter or the physically powerful, while *sattvik* ("virtue-producing"), vegetarian food, is right for Brahmans, because it helps to develop thought and mental faculties. Vegetarian food, prepared according to traditional recipes, is seen as "proper" food. Food is not just a way of staving off hunger; it is ritually and traditionally important and provides a daily opportunity of emphasising one's identity and remembering one's religion and customs. Knowing the special food to eat on particular occasions, traditional ways of preparing food and acting accordingly, are a part of habit-memory; each time food is prepared or eaten, its significance is recreated in the memory.

There were different emphases on religion in each of The Three Families. Ramakrishnan, I was told, was a self-proclaimed atheist when he went to Burma and (whether because of his influence I do not know) his wife did not teach their children much about religion. Three of their daughters (none of whom lives in South India) have told me on different occasions that neither parent taught them prayers nor how to perform any rituals. Yet they did learn them, and nowadays follow them, not only for religious reasons but because in doing so they remember "who they are" and their sense of identity is

strengthened. Ramakrishnan must have had an interest at least in the philosophy of Hinduism, because there is independent confirmation that he attended a series of religious discourses in 1925. Then one day in 1932 an incident took place that was to have a lasting effect on that family. Here is Ramakrishnan's son, Ravi's account of what happened:

One day I ran out of the house, annoyed that I had been wrongly accused of some childish misdemeanour. I climbed up a guava tree, then I heard a cracking noise and looking down I saw the misty figure of Sai Baba⁴⁴ in the fork of a jackfruit tree. I was frightened and called my mother who was drawing water from the well. She came and looked and then called others.

The configuration of Sai Baba of Shirdi in the fork of the tree in Ramakrishnan's compound, sitting in the pose in which he is even today typically portrayed, (with one leg drawn up over the other knee) remained for several days before it faded. Many people – friends, relatives and neighbours – came to look at it. When Ramakrishnan saw it, he was very moved and decided to make a pilgrimage to Shirdi. The result was that he and his family, and also Nagarajan and his family, became devotees of Sai Baba.⁴⁵

Venugopalan was a Theosophist and greatly admired Annie Besant, both as a Theosophist and a fighter for Indian freedom. The esoteric ideas behind Theosophy do not seem to have had much effect on him; what he drew from the religious side of Theosophy was an ability to see similar teachings in all the great religions and a rational approach to many Hindu customs. For example, he taught his granddaughters that it was as appropriate for women to perform $p\bar{u}j\bar{a}s$ and ceremonies as for men. He also told them that the idea of pilgrimages bringing solace or healing probably arose because usually pilgrimage places are in high and healthy regions and the exercise people get from

Sai Baba was a holy man, who went to Shirdi, a small place in what is now Maharashtra, in Western India, about 1872. There he attached himself first to a Muslim fakir and then to a Hindu guru. An important aspect of his teaching was the tolerance he preached between Hindus and Muslims. He attracted followers from both religions and encouraged them to join in each other's festivals. He died in 1918 (Osborne 1957).

Some have remained so; others have become devotees of the man recognised by many as his reincarnation, and known as Satya Sai Baba.

walking there will be good for their health and help in developing a clear mind to sort out problems. He said that if circumstances prevented a ritual or festival taking place on a particular day, then it was all right to perform it on another day. He was concerned to teach young people to remember religious occasions and learn religious teachings primarily from a moral point of view.

Caste cannot be completely divorced from religion, because the way religion is practised is caught up in the attitudes and beliefs associated with a particular $j\bar{a}ti$. Yet during the years in Burma and since, being Smartha Brahmans has come to be a focus of identity for The Families, in the sense that it provides a sense of belonging to a group, but not a way of insisting on a place at the top of the social hierarchy. What they do have is a cultural memory of a common system of values. Migration has encouraged them to adapt but even when religious practices are changed or dropped, identification with the community and its values remains.⁴⁶

Education in Burma

So many of my respondents recalled their schooldays in Burma, and attached such importance to education, that I am dealing with it separately. Almost everyone in The Families who now remembers Burma, went to school there, so it is a part of everyone's individual memory. Like many other Brahman families, they saw English education as a key to the kind of employment, mainly in pensionable government service or the professions, which they sought at that time. Education was not only the means by which they could earn a living, for migrants it was a cultural asset which they could take with them wherever they went. It formed a part of their *habitus*; if the idea of the importance of education could be transmitted to their children, they had a tool for survival. Emphasis on the education of girls could be seen as a way of acknowledging that, especially for migrants, everyone in the community is important. Education is a bulwark against

cf. N. Subrahmanian's (1989:194) rather amusing comment, "In the case of the brahminical brains going abroad, the brains remain after the brahmin has disappeared, just as in the experience of Alice in Wonderland the grin remained after the cat had gone".

unforeseen disaster, for movers are always more vulnerable than the indigenous population (and history bore witness to this, as the events of 1941-2 show).

When the British arrived in Burma in the nineteenth century they found that the percentage of literates was much higher there than in India. The 1931 Census (1:Pt.1:326) shows that in Burma nearly 37% of the population were literate, against just under 11% in Madras Presidency. In India generally there was stubborn opposition to female education at that time. The Madras Presidency was no exception; only 1.3% of females were literate there, against 6.38% in Burma. However, the traditional-style Burmese schools were religiously based and run by *pongyis* (Buddhist monks), and did not provide either the kind of modern education nor the level of English teaching which the British needed if they were to find enough recruits to help them run Burma as a colony of a capitalist empire. Government officials wanted to train "brown Englishmen" and missionary bodies wanted to make converts; to this end many Christian missions, British and American, had set up schools in Burma by the early twentieth century.

About this time the number and quality of Burmese monastery schools began to decline steeply and mission schools became increasingly popular in all large centres of population. In Rangoon some of the best known were St. Paul's, Cushing High School, Methodist Girls' and Methodist Boys' Schools, the American Baptist Mission (the ABM) and the Seventh Day Adventist School. The names clearly indicate their missionary origins. These schools were known in government jargon as Anglo-Vernacular Schools, and were intended for the children of Burmese and Indians. Strict rules were laid down to govern academic standards. The mission schools were a place where children from different communities and with different mother-tongues - Burmese, Karen, Tamil, Gujarat, Bengali, English, Hindi, Chinese and so on, had an opportunity to meet one another. Many of my respondents spoke appreciatively of the education provided in these schools and the ease with which children from different backgrounds mixed there. Like the pupils, the teachers came from many backgrounds. U Ba U, who later became President of Burma, tells in his autobiography (1959) how he was taught in the mission school he attended, first by a Burmese teacher, next by "a Christian Madrasi" and later by a Sino-Burman. The parents of children belonging to a religion or denomination other than the one running the school, had to be informed of their right to withdraw their children from religious observances or assemblies. Interestingly, few seem to have taken advantage of this proviso, the attitude being that a dose of moral instruction would do no harm and that religion in any case was taught in the home, which was seen as a more potent influence.

In 1990 I visited a younger brother of Nagarajan's Vellala friend, K. V. Reddy. He had clear memories of the American Baptist Mission School which he had attended for eleven years, more than half a century earlier. He also wrote to me later, and in conversation as well as in his letter, I was struck by the fascinating mixture of biblical and Victorian moral precepts which he had imbibed and mixed with Hindu teachings. One letter included the following, "Honesty is the best policy", "Do unto others, as ye would that others should do unto you", "St. Paul's exhortation to women to regard their husbands as their lords is literally followed by the Indian ladies" (a rather nice twist to the colonialist attitude that condemned the blind obedience of Indian women as a sign of the inferiority of Hindu culture). He remembered his Hindu roots, for further on in the same letter he writes, "We follow the [Sanskrit] adage, *Ahimsa parmo dharma* (Non-violence is the prime duty)".

On the positive side, the schools provided a sound knowledge of English which people were able to use to good advantage in later life and enjoyed the opportunity to mix with children of different backgrounds. On the negative side, English, the medium of instruction, was presented as superior to what were disparagingly called "vernaculars", which included all Burmese and Indian languages. Only British history was taught and even the texts for the apparently neutral subject of English literature, were selected with a view to demonstrating the moral and intellectual superiority of European civilisation, at the same time downplaying the value of Indian – or Burmese – literature and morals (Viswanathan 1989).

Another way of downgrading anything non-Christian and non-English, was to compel children at some schools to take a Christian name, so that Ganesh became Garnet, Ramachandran was Reggie and so on. I was surprised that this did not cause resentment. Even today one man is still known by his "English" name — "Arthur Sharma", who belongs to the once wealthy branch of Venugopalan's family now in Delhi, has this English form of his name on the nameplate outside his flat in Delhi and he took pleasure in telling me that the Bishop of Rangoon had given him his name. He did not think this made him any less Indian — it simply provided him with a name that many people,

including Burmese and North Indians, found shorter and easier. He could still use his long South Indian name whenever he wished.

There were other schools which catered primarily for children from a particular region of India, such as the Arya Samaj School, which laid stress on Panjabi, a Bengali School and the Burma Educational Trust School – BET School –, which Venugopalan was involved with after retirement and where Tamil was taught. At these schools Indian children learned about their own history, culture and religion, but even there the colonial influence was present. One of Venugopalan's sons recalled that the first lesson in the Tamil reader at the BET school translated as "Our king is George. He is a good king".

Some, who went on to schools in India, commented that their Indian school was not as good, or that they were given "double promotion" (i.e. skipped a class) when they arrived there, but I have no way of measuring standards objectively. The point is that so many believed that schools, in Rangoon at least, were superior.

Only two people admitted to being unhappy at school. Both were girls who were related to Venugopalan. One was critical of the teachers in the mission school she attended for a short time, saying that her class teacher favoured one little girl whose golden hair she would stroke gently, "but she called me 'Darkie' because of my complexion. I vowed then" she went on, "that I would never show favouritism to any child" and she said she kept her vow when she grew up and became a teacher. In any case, she did not stay long at the mission school, but at her own request, soon transferred to the Tamil-oriented Burma Educational Trust School, where she was happy, learning about her own festivals, language, history and culture. Another woman, who attended the Methodist Girls' High School, said the Burmese girls at the school didn't talk to the Indians. And yet other women told me how happy they had been at the same school and remembered particularly the way children from the different communities mixed easily. At this distance in time, it is difficult to know whether these two cases illustrate a general anti-Indian attitude or the attitude of a few individuals. Influences in the girls' home life may have had something to do with it; Venugopalan and his relatives gave more emphasis to Tamil culture, compared with the felt need to fit in to a more cosmopolitan society in the Nagarajan and Ramakrishnan Families.

Venugopalan and Ramakrishnan both lived with their families in Rangoon or its suburbs, but Nagarajan's job in the Public Works Department meant two-yearly transfers and

therefore changes of school for his sons and daughters. They attended schools in Rangoon, Maymyo and Meiktila, where they were living when war broke out. On first going to Meiktila the children attended the Seventh Day Adventist School, then about 1939 transferred to a Burmese National School.

These National schools were started by the Burmese about 1930, in different parts of the country, in an effort to counter foreign influences. They were attended mainly by Burmese children and Burmese was the first language. Not many Indian children went to these schools, but Nagarajan decided to send his children there. The children also adapted their names to Burmese forms. The reason he and his wife, Anandhi, gave their children for the change, was that their father might be transferred to a place where there was no good English school; if they spoke fluent Burmese, a school was sure to be available, wherever they lived. Since there were mission schools in towns of any size, it seems to me unlikely that this was the only reason; the change seems more likely to have been a result of Nagarajan's awareness of increasing Burmese nationalism and an attempt to adapt to changing circumstances. However, all those who went to the Burmese National School remember the reason as the likelihood of their father being transferred.

All The Families accepted the need for a good education for both boys and girls. According to the 1931 Census⁴⁷ the total population of Rangoon was 400,415, of whom 140,458 were Indian Hindus. Of these, 38,318 were literate in one language or another. 9,440 males, but only 1,045 females, of whom 422 fell into the 5-15 years bracket were literate in English. Even allowing for the probability of some increase throughout the 1930s, it seems that, because they were literate in English, the girls in The Families, formed a part of a very small minority. I write, "it seems", because there was a big change in one generation; most of the mothers of children born in Burma were educated only in their mother-tongue. This is how Venugopalan's eldest granddaughter, Savitri, put it:

In the early part of the century women [of our community] could read and write Tamil or Telugu but they were not educated. My

Unfortunately, all records relating to the 1941 Census were destroyed during the Japanese occupation.

grandmother could only write in Telugu, 48 but this generation sent their children, both boys and girls, to schools where Tamil was a subject. In the early 1900s the average education for a girl was 4th or 5th Standard. By the time she was ten or twelve they'd start looking for a husband. By the time she was fourteen or fifteen, if not earlier, she'd get married – to be educated up to 7th Standard was a big qualification in those days. My mother studied up to 6th Standard. Then the marriage age rose to sixteen or seventeen so that a girl could finish matric. Sometimes they even completed it after marriage, as I did...Even when girls were educated beyond matric, marriage came first.

She goes on to mention four older women related to her whose higher education took place in Burma after marriage. Another example was Kamakshi, who became a medical doctor (see p. 114 and p. 148).

North Arcot District, where The Families originally came from, lies on the border between Tamil and Telugu speaking areas.

Chapter 5

Relations between Burmese, Indians and British

In the previous chapter I describe how life in Burma appears in The Families' memories. In contrast, this chapter examines the variety of views expressed in texts written by British, Burmese and Indian writers. I begin with a general account of why Indian migration developed under colonialism and a brief survey of the Indian community in Burma, then turn to the major political developments that took place while The Families were in Burma. Tensions between Burmese and Indians are repeatedly mentioned in texts but rarely appear in The Families' memories. I show how people and events in the past are recalled in different ways, depending on the person recording or interpreting the information. The two final sections deal with The Families and their relations with the British and with the Burmese.

When reading the literature it is impossible to avoid realising that Burmese resentment towards Indians had gone on for a very long time. I give several reasons for this in the section *Reasons for anti-Indian feeling*, but the basic problem was that Indians were irrevocably tied to the British, because the British were responsible for their migration to Burma in the first place, and salariat Indians at least, believed it was their duty to serve conscientiously. They repeatedly pointed to their own contribution to the development and economy of Burma, to their diligence and so on. In other words, they emphasised the very reasons why the British had taken them there.

Indian migration and colonialism - general

Indian migration was not confined to Burma. Indians began to migrate to other countries in response to the needs of imperial rule almost immediately after the abolition of slavery in British colonies in 1833. In the 1830s labourers were taken to Mauritius and British Guyana, as plantation workers. By the end of the nineteenth century Indians had been encouraged to go and work in many other countries, including South Africa, Trinidad, Fiji, Malaya, British Guyana, Kenya, Uganda and nearer home, Ceylon and Burma.

Although labourers and plantation workers formed by far the largest group, they were by no means the only migrants. In East Africa, for example, many Indians migrated as shopkeepers, artisans, petty contractors, merchants and bankers (Bennett 1971). A few migrated to East and South Africa as professionals, but the only countries where the British actually recruited substantial numbers of recently arrived Indians straight into the subordinate and middle ranks of government service, were Uganda and Kenya in East Africa, and Burma in Asia. In Burma, most of them were Tamilians or Bengalis, while in East Africa they were usually Goans or Parsis (Mangat 1969).

Reasons why the British encouraged such migration are not far to seek. In their eyes, India had a large "surplus" population and taking some of her citizens to other colonial territories had several advantages for the Raj. Migrants provided extra labour which facilitated the expansion of production in rice fields and plantations, as well as the building of railways, docks, and the rest of the infrastructure which helped the British to open up territory in newly conquered lands and expand their trade. The removal of some of the desperately poor could be justified on the grounds that it gave poor individuals the means to earn more, and also lessened the headache of British officials whose job it was to see that work and food was available in famine areas. Famine was all too frequent and widespread, as the government itself admitted, and food scarcity increased the likelihood of the spread of disease. The number of British in India was always proportionately small (never more than 30,000 at one time) and without the conscientious work of Indian officials to help them, they could not have maintained their rule, but by the second decade of the twentieth century there were more educated men in Madras than the labour market could absorb. A discontented educated class was a danger to be avoided; to provide work elsewhere where qualified people could be useful to the British seemed a satisfactory solution.

Indians in Burma - historical summary

The British conquest (or, as the colonialists put it, "pacification") of Burma was completed in 1886 at the end of the Third Burmese War. For British convenience India and Burma were placed under a single administration and although the Burmese smarted under this union, Burma was not granted separate status until 1937.

The country was sparsely populated with few large urban centres and a fertile southern, deltaic area. After 1852 when the British gained control of Lower Burma, much of the land of the Irrawaddy delta was cleared for cultivation so that by the 1930s seven million

acres were under rice, three quarters of it grown for export. The export firms were all foreign — mainly British, some American, Chinese and Indian, but not Burmese. Rangoon, built mainly by Indian labour between 1852 and 1872, was the only international port. The sudden, marked increase in rice production, combined with the concomitant expansion of the infrastructure especially in and around the Rangoon docks, brought a great need for extra labour to cope with the increased flow of work. Indian *maistries* (contractors), who controlled labour in the rice mills, railways, ships, port trust, public works and mines (Kondapi 1951) were employed to recruit Indian labourers who often came from areas where near-starvation conditions obtained. These poor, illiterate men served one or two year contracts in Burma, often in appalling conditions, after which they returned to India. Labourers like these formed the vast majority, perhaps even 99% (Chakravarti 1971) of the one million Indians who were living in Burma in 1940. Most of them were young men; there were few women. Despite the poor pay and conditions most of these workers managed to save enough to send remittances back to India.

About 250,000 Indians entered Burma annually in the 1920s and 1930s, but because most of them were male, contract labourers the overall number of Indians did not rise dramatically. In fact, the percentage of Indians born in Burma declined from 71.9% in 1901 to 59.8% in 1931, clearly showing an increase in the percentage of temporary migrants (Baxter 1941). Three quarters of all Indians lived in Lower Burma where they numbered 763,043 or 11.1% of the total population in 1921 and 849,381 or 10.9% of 17 million in 1931.

The censuses of 1921 and 1931 mention the imbalance between the numbers of Indian males and females in Burma. Indian women formed a little over one quarter of the Indian population and only about 2.5% of the country's total female population. There were big regional variations. Only about 5% of Oriyas, but 35% of Tamilians, were women. One reason for this difference was the higher percentage of Tamilians who were middle class and therefore more likely to be settlers with families, than short term, male migrants.

In an analysis of race relations of overseas Indians in countries under British rule, Jain (1988) points out that colonialism, race/ethnicity and class are all linked to one another. He shows how particular class and race/ethnicity relations develop in a plural society where mutually distinct but equivalent segments, in this case Indians and Burmese, are subordinate to the ruling power. Migrants form a middleman minority, as Indians did in Burma, and their interests increasingly conflicted with the growing number of Englisheducated Burmese. Another factor is continuing the importing of cheap labour after a depression (as in Burma in the 1930s). The middleman minority's role is increasingly

questioned and resented as they appear unwilling to integrate into the mainstream. In prosperous times the middleman minority is relatively secure but they become scapegoats in times of stress. This is exactly what happened in Burma. But as Jain points out, antagonisms which appear to be racial – such as between Burmese and Indians – are based on the economic system which developed because of colonialism. Groups of different race but similar class or economic status are seen as threatening one another.

It is not surprising that Rangoon was often said to be like an Indian city. Twenty-one per cent of all Indians in Burma lived there. They accounted for 53% of the population and Hindustani was the lingua franca (Baxter 1941). Indians had their own representatives on the Rangoon Council, they paid more than half the taxes, they set up their own schools and their own social clubs, they had their own doctors and lawyers, and their own personal law. Divisions between Indians and Burmese extended to government departments; for example, the Forestry Department was completely staffed by Burmese while the middle and lower ranks of the Public Works Department where Nagarajan worked, were almost wholly Indian. When Nagarajan was working as a Superior Draughtsman in the PWD in 1923, he was one of 22 in the same grade, eight of whom were South Indians and seven were Bengalis or Panjabis; not a single Burmese name appears in the Civil Lists. Gradually, over the years, Burmese names creep into the lists, almost all in the lower grades. Even in 1940 when there were three Burmese on Superior Draughtsman grade, there were still ten South Indians (Civil lists 1921-1940).

Indians in Burma cannot be lumped together as one group. They came from different regions (Orissa, Madras, Bengal, Gujarat, Panjab, and elsewhere), spoke different languages, belonged to different castes and religions (in addition to Hindus there was a sizeable Muslim community, as well as smaller numbers of Parsis and Christians). Their economic status varied from a very large percentage of poor coolies on short term contracts to wealthy bankers whose families had been settled in Burma for generations.

From available statistics it is difficult to gauge exactly the number of middle class Indians. Having examined the figures in Baxter's (1941) report, I suggest that Chakravarti's (1971) estimate of 1% is too low and that more likely 2%, or about 20,000 would fit this description. A high proportion of the salariat class were Bengalis or Tamilians. Many were employed in the medical or legal professions or in low to middle-ranking civil service jobs. Middle class Panjabis formed a small but significant group amongst army and police officers and also professionals, especially in Upper Burma. Many of the traders and businessmen were Gujaratis. The Chettiars formed the most powerful, commercial group. They were a close-knit, prosperous caste group, who came from the Madras Presidency and who were moneylenders and bankers. Until World War

II there were some individual Burmese moneylenders, but no indigenous banking community, so the British encouraged Chettiars to provide finance for agriculture, the shipping industry, the railways and the Rangoon docks (Fisher 1964) as well as Burma's banking, insurance and exchange business.

Reasons for Burmese anti-Indian feeling

It is widely reported that the Burmese had always despised Indian labourers who were prepared to work for extremely low wages and live in appalling conditions, and because they formed about 90% of the Indian community there was a tendency to stereotype Indians as coolies. The first serious example of racial tension occurred in 1930, when Indian coolies, dismissed from their work in the docks during a strike and replaced by Burmese workers, were re-employed and the Burmese dismissed when a settlement was reached; the Burmese rioted and killed nearly 200 Indian workers.

The high percentage of Indians living in Rangoon other large towns caused Burmese to complain they were being "swamped" by Indians, a claim declared "unfounded" both by Marten (Census of India 1921, v.1 Pt.1) and Chakravarti (1971). On the level of personal life there were two causes of friction. One was marriage between Burmese women and Indian men, which the Burmese in general opposed. The separate personal law of the two communities meant that if an Indian husband died without leaving a will, his Burmese widow inherited nothing; all he owned went to his family in India. The second was a dislike of the long-standing Zerbadi community from the Akyab area — which evolved from marriages between Indian Muslim men and Burmese Buddhist women — mainly because the women had to convert to Islam when they married.

An issue with serious economic and political implications was resentment against the Chettiar moneylenders who increased their ownership of agricultural land throughout the 1930s as the rice trade began to collapse because Burmese agriculturalists could not repay their loans. In 1930 Chettiars owned 6% of the land; by 1938 they had acquired 25%.

Burmese resented the predominance of Indians in the police and armed forces, recalling how much the British relied on Indian troops and police during the Burmese Wars, during rebellions and riots and in policing generally. Indians employed in the bureaucracy, other than the Police and Prison Departments, are mentioned in the literature less than many other categories of Indians and do not seem to have been the focus of any particularly strong feelings from the Burmese. In any case, throughout the

1930s the number of Burmese in government service rose as fewer Indians were recruited.

Despite some early collaboration with the Indian National Congress and some notable Indians, co-operation between Indians and Burmese in the struggle for greater political autonomy was always limited, so that when separation from India was proposed in 1932, a majority of Burmese voted against it, believing that, once separated, India would be granted more rights than Burma. The main Burmese political platform throughout the 1930s had a distinctly anti-Indian tone. Serious anti-Indian, mainly anti-Muslim, riots occurred in 1938, after a pamphlet, first published in 1931 and said to be anti-Buddhist, was republished. Anti-Indian feelings were whipped up by nationalist pongyis (Buddhist monks), and inflammatory articles appeared in a section of the Burmese press. A mass meeting was held in July 1938, after which the crowds surged towards the Soortee Bazaar in Rangoon, where they began to attack the Muslims who owned most of the shops there. The police were called to restore order, but when people saw the mainly Indian police beating Burmese Buddhist priests, passions became even more inflamed and rioting went on sporadically for six weeks, during which time 192 Indians were killed and 878 injured. 4,000 arrests were made but no compensation was ever paid to Indians who had suffered. The Riot Committee reported that in fact most Burmese sympathised with the rioters and not with their victims (Burma. Home Department 1939).

Political developments in Burma

When the British began to rule Burma they established a system of administration which followed the system used in India without taking account of different conditions in the two countries and this led to discontent. Following economic troubles related to World War I, Cady (1958) reports a dramatic increase in crime and lawlessness, especially in Lower Burma, where there was "unrelieved and ever-deepening economic distress".

Later writers (being wise after the event) realised the scale of Burmese opposition to British rule, but some contemporary accounts often have an ostrich-like quality. There was a feeling that politically Burma was a country under tutelage. Hall (1906) actually called one of his books, *A people at school*. In 1917 a delegation of Burmese leaders met British officials from London to appeal for Burma's separation from India for purposes of government, stressing Burma's distinctive racial makeup, individual languages, customs and religion. Instead of granting the same measure of autonomy to Burma as was granted

to India under the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1918,⁴⁹ the Craddock scheme (1918-1920) which was proposed for Burma, patronisingly declared Burma's political development to be a generation behind India's, and asserted that the country was not ready for full electoral control of the administration (Cady 1958). In fact, Montagu himself had been no less patronising. Taylor (1974:95) quotes Cady as reporting that Montagu referred to the Burmese leaders he met as "nice, simple-minded people with beautiful clothes. Complete loyalty; no sign of political unrest". Such attitudes understandably infuriated the Burmese.

The Burmese were suspicious of any attempt to grant them less autonomy than Indians and by 1920 Burmese nationalists, who had at first been content to take part in discussions with British representatives, began to fight more vigorously for independence, some of them maintaining that separation from India was inadvisable because it would result in Burma being marginalised. Others believed that it would be better for Burma to remain bound to India because Burma would then automatically be granted any additional rights that India gained. The attitude I found amongst several of the Indian salariat, that Burma gained independence only by hanging on to India's coattails, probably dated from this period when several prominent Burmese and elite Indians spoke out against separation.

By 1920 politically active *pongyis*, began to be a force to be reckoned with on the nationalist scene. Between 1920 and 1923 the Young Men's Buddhist Association, or YMBA, developed into the General Council of Burmese Associations, or GCBA, and was increasingly politicised. Its members sponsored local nationalist associations called Wunthanu Athins, which started agitation against rice control policy and certain taxes. Despite the careful choice of the GCBA's name, originally meant to include non-Burman associations – Indian, Karen, Chinese and so on – Indian associations in Burma never became fully integrated into the independence movement there. In the early days Burmese nationalists visited India and gained help and inspiration from the Swārāj, or Self Rule, movement in India and Indians of varying political views did play a significant part on the Burmese political scene, 50 but most Indians either kept clear of politics or – especially members of the business community – put their energies into the avoidance of any erosion of Indian powers and rights, which were threatened as Burmese nationalists

By these reforms Indians in India were granted more or less complete control of affairs at local government level and under the technique of dyarchy, specified provincial government departments were transferred to the control of elected representatives (Wolpert 1982:297)

They included M. M. Rafi, M. A. Raschid, J. M. Sen Gupta and E. P. Pillay.

gained more power. Indian industrialists, traders and bankers were, as Chakravarti (1971) admits, too tied up with foreign interests to act freely, while those in government service believed it was both their duty and to their advantage to remain loyal. By this time the British were beginning to realise that they would have to soft-pedal on Indian recruitment to government service and take on more Burmese. Indians seem to have accepted that this was inevitable. Moreover, the Indian community was fragmented; they looked first to the welfare of their own community, religion or class and this disunity made it easy to drive a wedge between different segments of the Indian population. In Guyot's (1978:194) words, "In the plural society each ethnic group had separate basic institutions – kinship, religion, property, recreation – but no sense of loyalty to an overarching community".

If the Indian community was divided, so was the Burmese. Taylor (1974) argues that in the twenties and thirties, the middle class in Burma began to decline, relative to the Indian middle class, as Indians began to be more influential as traders, landowners, moneylenders and mill-owners. (He describes Indians as "supplanting" the prosperous Burmese elite). The Burmese elite middle classes were tied economically to foreign – both British and Indian – interests. He maintains that as their wealth, power and independence declined, and Indian influence increased, political problems began to be seen in terms of ethnicity, not class or status. In addition, the struggle for autonomy brought out fissiparous tendencies among the Burmese and frequent party splits continued to cause instability long after the departure of most Indians during World War II.

Political movements arose whose leaders did not come from the economic elite and which were against the continuation of Indian interests. In 1930-31 the Saya San Rebellion took place. British authorities stressed the superstitious elements in the rebellion, emphasising that Saya San was a *pongyi* who had himself crowned king in a jungle "palace", that his followers wore amulets and were tattooed to protect themselves from bullets, but Htin Aung (1967) says it was "a rebellion born of sheer desperation" and Maung Maung (1980), who refers to it as "the Peasant Revolt", shows that it quite clearly had economic origins – explicitly denied by some British authors – and arose because of the increasing poverty of the farmers, who were fighting for the lifting of taxes which they could not pay and for the right to extract timber and bamboo from the forest for their own use. Some Indians fought in Saya San's army, but most rebels saw Indians as being party to the oppression of Burmese farmers.

In 1937 Burma was separated from India for administrative purposes. From this time, legislation began to be enacted that favoured Burmese over Indians. For example, the

Burmese language was given first place. But politically, the most significant single event of the thirties is now recognised as the founding of the Dobama Asiayone, or We Burmans Association, also known as the Thakin Party⁵¹ in 1935, yet as Taylor points out in his foreword to Khin Yi's (1988) book on the history of the Dobama movement, its importance was not understood at the time. Even in his own 1974 study, Taylor relies mainly on government reports. Chakravarti (1971) mentions Thakins in passing but Dobama Asiayone does not even figure in his index. Furnivall (1948) likewise mentions the Thakins only in a couple of sentences. Non-Burmese writers of the time saw the separation from India, which took place in 1937, as far more significant than Burmese nationalist movements. It is Burmese writers like Maung Maung (1980) and Khin Yi (1988) who show how fundamental the Thakins were to political developments in the 1930s. Its members were ardent nationalists, often from rural backgrounds and so knew at first hand how farmers suffered as the rice trade declined. They had no sympathy with the wealthy, whatever their ethnic allegiance. They were, for example, against the myooks (headmen), who were loyal to the British and in league with moneyed Indians, and collected debts owed to Chettiars after civil hearings. (Maung Maung 1980). They spoke out not only against the colonial government and foreign business interests, but also against those Burmese whom they condemned as capitalists - in other words, those who formed the economic elite and who were the first to negotiate with the British for increased autonomy and political power.

Thakins were often – but not invariably – Marxists, and recruited mainly, according to Cady, from the less academically successful students. Indeed, Cady states that the more successful tended to look for civil service posts (1958:376). The Thakins' main aim was their country's political independence and to this end they were willing to accept help from any quarter, including the Indian Congress party, Nationalist China, Communist China and Fascist Japan. According to Cady, their greatest success was in organising fellow students, the peasants initially "were distrustful" (1958:376). Cady condemns their ideology as "strongly nationalistic ...otherwise a hodge-podge, extremely fluid" (1958:377), but Taylor, drawing on Khin Yi's (1988) study, says that the movement derived intellectual energy from the broad spectrum of views which Thakins held. They were responsible for inciting students in the university and schools to go on strike in 1936 (including one of Venugopalan's sons, to the dismay of his parents, who pressurised him into giving up his support). The Dobama Asiayone symbolises the ambivalent attitude of Burmese towards Indians. Khin Yi (1988) reports that their first manifesto

Thakin, meaning master, was a title used for the British. Party members used this title to show that they did not feel inferior to anyone.

said, "Do not hate the Indians but love one another more", and she asserts "the DBA was not anti-Indian". Some Thakins toured India, both to learn from Congress leadership and to gain support for their cause and there were some Indians amongst the Thakin leaders, such as Narayan Singh. When there was a long strike in the oilfields in 1938 many Indians joined the striking marchers and at a mass meeting of strikers in Rangoon in February 1938, organised by the Dobama Asiayone, many Indians must have been present because Khin Yi reports that speeches were translated into Hindi and Urdu for the Indians in the audience. On the other hand "Do Bama", or "We Burmans" were defined as the indigenous races of Burma. One of their most popular slogans was "Master race we are, we Burmans", another was "Revenge for all sacrileges to religion", which, though not directly anti-Muslim, was hardly calculated to make Indian Muslims feel at ease, considering that the 1938 riots arose because of a reputed slur on Buddhism by a Muslim. Newspapers like The Sun and The New Light of Burma, which had close Dobama connections, wrote about "the Indian peril" (Khin Yi 1988). In Pegu a pongyi was arrested for reciting a Dobama song, urging the Burmese to drive all Indians out of Burma and a number of anti-British pamphlets were circulated (National Planning Commission 1960).

Yet Nagarajan's son, Venkatraman, tells me that when he and his siblings were at the Burmese National School, they included themselves as "Do Bama" – so far as they were concerned, they had been born and brought up in Burma and therefore felt they belonged to the country.

The setting-up of the Burmese National Schools in 1920 seems to have passed unnoticed by earlier Western writers, although Cady as well as Maung Maung (1980) both note their establishment. These schools were a patriotic response to mission and government schools, and so Nagarajan's decision to send his children to one of these schools was significant (See p. 88). In 1920 and again in 1936 there were agitations in schools and colleges. Like Htin Aung (1967), Maung Maung (1980) writes about the deteriorating relationship between teacher and student. In his view, teachers in the monastic schools cared about their students as individuals, but teachers in Western type schools and in the University were simply salaried employees whose relationship with their students ended once lessons were over. Many Burmese saw the 1936 University strike as a brave attempt by young people to stand against colonial and racist attitudes and the authoritarian way the University was run. Cady, who was a professor at Rangoon University at the time, had a different opinion. He considered the strike was a deliberate attempt to politicise what had started off as a purely educational matter and that it subsequently had an overall deleterious effect on higher education in Burma. Indian members of the university council also spoke out against the strike, but some Indian students joined it. Maung Maung is scornful of the students from some of the Christian mission schools who, he says, were "neither truly European, Indian, Chinese nor Burmese" (1980:127) and comments that although they got on well with the European teachers they were often ridiculed by other students. This comment may include a hint of resentment towards Indian students, because they formed a large percentage of University students, and because they were reckoned to be serious students who were favoured by their teachers, whereas many Burmese students were more involved in either social or political affairs. How accurate his memory was about the supposed ridicule, I do not know; certainly none of the men in The Families mentioned it.

"Communal tensions between Burmese and Indians", writes Taylor (1974:386), "never reached the severity of the period from July, 1938, to July, 1939, until the Japanese invasion in 1942". Taylor and Siegelman (1982) both agree that the anti-Indian agitation was inflamed by three main causes – what Taylor calls the "irresponsible Burmese press", which Taylor (1974) identifies as *The Sun*, *The New light of Burma* and *New Burma*, Burmese distrust of the police and the anti-Indian attitude of the Thakins of the Dobama Asiayone. During this period, as well as the serious riots starting in Soortee Bazaar (see p. 95) there were widespread attacks on Indian agriculturalists and Indian shops, which spread from Rangoon to other areas.

After the 1938 Riot Committee made its report, there were two results which directly affected Indians. One was to begin talks with Indian authorities about restricting Indian immigration and the other was to commission James Baxter, the government's Financial Adviser, to write a report on Indian immigration. Baxter's report (1941) remains the most detailed and important statistical document on Indian migrants in Burma, but as Cady points out, the decision to look into the restriction of Indian immigration was "unfortunately two decades overdue" (1958:398). Baxter's report is recognised as a thorough, careful document, but its recommendations were superseded by events, for within months of its appearance, the Japanese invaded Burma, British rule was halted and at least half the Indians living there returned abruptly to India.

Variations in accounts of Burmese - Indian relations

I have consulted accounts written by Indian, British, American and Burmese authors. Although each writer has an individual stance, there is a correspondence between the nationality of the each author and what he chooses to recall from the past.

Despite the size and influence of the pre-war Indian community in Burma, there are only three works by Indian writers about the Indian community. Of these only one, Chakravarti (1971), deals solely with Indians in Burma; both Kondapi (1951) and Mahajani (1960) include references to other overseas Indians. All three recognise that there was anti-Indian feeling on the part of the Burmese, but at the same time they stress the Indian contribution to Burma's economic development. Chakravarti was a Bengali employed as a civil servant in Burma and, as a member of the salariat, his views are, not surprisingly, close to those often expressed in The Families. Like them, he avoids overt criticism of the Burmese, asserting that he worked under "several distinguished Burmans" and does not believe that even the most nationalistic Burmese wanted to terminate Indian interests entirely, only that there should be tighter government control. He emphasises the contribution that Indians made to Burmese development and economy. He argues that Indians worked hard, helped the development of Burma for a hundred years and were then thrown out by the Japanese invasion and destruction of the Burmese economy. His chief criticism of the British administration is the way it encouraged the complete separation of the Indian and Burmese communities. He points out that even after a hundred years of unrestricted immigration, Indian settlers accounted for little more than 2% of the total population. He is sympathetic towards the Indian labour force who worked under dreadful conditions. He maintains that the capital of Chettiar bankers contributed greatly to the economy of "absolutely under-developed Burma", enabling the country to take economic advantage of the opening of the Suez Canal. He does not believe the Chettiars were rapacious as money-lenders, as they are often portrayed, but that the enormous acreage of agricultural land which accrued to them throughout the 1930s, was acquired reluctantly when they had to foreclose on their Burmese debtors, in order to maintain their own liquidity. Though the Chettiars were "much criticised", he believes they played an essential part in providing finances for much-needed development. He blames the depression of the 1930s for starting the decline of Indian interests and draws attention to the contribution Indians made in the development of Burma. His chief criticism of Indians is that they continued to "remain Indians first and Burmans last".

Kondapi (1951) and Mahajani (1960) are the other major Indian writers. Like many other writers, both of them argue that relations between the two communities deteriorated only after large-scale immigration began after 1852 and problems were exacerbated by the number of Indian sepoys who fought for the British in their three Burma wars and by the concentration of Indians in the Rangoon area. The Burmese writer, Maung Maung (1980), also asserts that originally Burmese and Indians worked together amicably, and that resentment built up only when Indians began to arrive in large numbers. Kondapi

tends to look at specific reasons for Burma's problems with Indians rather than at the general political and economic situation. He blames the subsidies given to steamship owners for the huge influx of Indians into Burma, although Adas (1971) declares these had been stopped by 1891. He also argues that problems arising from the "enormous transfer of lands into the hands of the Chettiars" (1951:294), were curbed by the Land Purchasing Bill of 1941, which provided for the state purchase of land and its redistribution to landless labourers. Moreover, he says, Chettiars stood to lose further by this bill because it included no provision for additional compensation in respect of compulsory purchase.

Indian writers and British writers nearly all had a good word to say for the Chettiars. Harvey (1946), for example, remarks that local, i.e. Burmese, money lenders charged "usurious" rates of interest. When the Chettiars began business they were "alien in appearance and habits...the butt of the Burmese cartoonist,...depicted as Public Enemy no.1...a convenient victim", but in fact, Harvey continues, "he was honesty itself"; his terms were easier and rates of interest lower than Burmese moneylenders and wherever the Chettiar went, interest rates fell (pp.53,56). The Report of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (1930) and Cooper (1959) supply statistical information to show that the Chettiar's rates averaged 24% and never reached 50%, which is a far cry from the claims of one Burmese writer, Htin Aung (1967), who alleges that rates of 120% were charged.⁵² As Siegelman (1962) points out, although the Chettiars were certainly not averse to making money, it was the laissez-faire policy of the British-Indian government that encouraged the alienation of land which, in pre-colonial times, had been held on usufruct. Had the government given more support to the extensive network of cooperative agricultural credit societies, Siegelman believes this system might not have collapsed and the Chettiars' scope for acquiring land from bankrupt farmers would have been limited. Yet however Western or Indian writers may justify the actions of the Chettiars, they are the most disliked section of the Indian community, so far as Burmese writers are concerned. Whatever evidence there is to show that Chettiar interest rates were lower than those of Burmese moneylenders, they are **remembered** by the Burmese as exorbitant.

In many respects the attitude of the three Indian writers is similar to that of British writers like Donnison (1953, 1970), Harvey (1946) and Baxter (1941), but there is one

It has to be said that unfortunately Htin Aung's books (1965, 1967) are not well documented - surprising for a man who was Rector of the University of Rangoon for a number of years - and this is not the only unsubstantiated statement he makes that is at variance with other authorities.

marked difference in the approach of British writers. From the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the British express unease about the dislike of many Burmese towards Indians and the problems that could develop; they realise only too well that the presence of Indians in large numbers is due to the British. Yet despite mounting evidence of Burmese resentment, the British continued actively to encourage migration for their own ends. As early as 1906, Fielding Hall quotes a Burman as saying, "We don't mind being beaten by the English because they are a great people, but we don't like you bringing in Indian troops to do it". Hall continues, "for the Burman hates and despises all the Indian races which he knows" (1906:139). Harvey writes, "Both the Indian and Chinese minorities are the result of our rule" (1946:12). He goes on to note that three-quarters of the troops in Burma were drawn from the Indian "martial races" and believes it was a mistake not to recruit Burmese into the army, because this encouraged them to see Indians as fighting against them (1946:40). He acknowledges that Indians were "an acute problem and it was our doing" (1946:69). He refers to Indians as "camp followers of the ruling race" – a less sympathetic expression than Tinker's (1990) phrase, "imperial auxiliaries".

Back in 1908, a Mr. G. F. Arnold, (1908) reporting to a Royal Commission on decentralization in Burma, spoke forcefully on the subject of Indians in Burma. He said that the Burmese were "a superior race" and resented the way they had "been supplanted in Rangoon by the indigent population of India". He asserted that they were recruited only to help the Indian government of the day get rid of its surplus population and to supply merchants with labour. He complained that British officials were being sent to Burma without knowing the Burmese language and said these officials were out of touch with the people and wanted English speaking Indians in the bureaucracy because they found them easier to work with. He went on, "Placing natives of India in appointments in Burma has, in my opinion, a disastrous effect on the country and the people". Like Kondapi, he deplores the government's subsidy of steamship passages. Regarding education, he suggests that it would have been better if the existing monastic education had been adapted instead of initiating "an entirely different system". Unfortunately, officialdom seems to have paid little attention to his report.

Donnison, Furnivall and Harvey all had firsthand experience as administrators in Burma during British days; their books also express doubts about aspects of British policy. Donnison (1970), who was often perceptive about Burmese views and the possible results of British policies, is honest enough to admit that after Burma's inclusion in the British Empire and the opening of the Suez Canal, "the door was thrown open to the entry of Indians, of British trading and industrial firms" and of laissez-faire economic principles which had a revolutionary and in some ways, "disastrous effect" on Burmese

society (1970:86). During the phenomenal trade expansion which continued up to the end of the 1920s, much more profit went to the British trading firms and the Chettiars than to the Burmese cultivator. Furnivall (1948:187) admits that "Burma gained little or nothing". Harvey, though accepting that the British caused tensions by encouraging Indian immigration, had a more imperialistic attitude and actually argued that removal of profits from the country – by British trading firms, British civil servants' salaries and Indian remittances – was not necessarily a drain (1946:59).

Some of the arguments for the recruitment of salariat Indians certainly seem a bit thin; Donnison (1953) refers to their "nimbler intellectual qualities" and appreciated their tradition of learning English and their ability to get on with the British. Such reasons may have made Indians useful to the British, but they were less readily accepted by the Burmese. The British maintained that they needed Indians who could carry out subordinate functions in government service, because Burmese were reluctant to learn English, but reasons for this reluctance never seem to have been fully investigated. The dramatic decrease in the number of monastic schools and the increase in attendance at schools where English was taught hardly bears this out. More likely the decision to employ Indians was based on administrative convenience.

Andrew (1933) gives a contemporary report of Burma in the early thirties, when violence between Indians and Burmese first began to flare up. He admits that Burma had "always been the milch cow of Indian politicians" and that Burma's needs were "repeatedly denied" (1933:xxviii). His ambivalent attitude is apparent, when he writes, "Indian labour is essential to Burma", then admits that "the flow of Indian labour to and from Burma is controlled more by the vicissitudes of agriculture and other conditions in India than in Burma" (1933:218). While Donnison and Harvey defend the immigration of English educated Indians, Andrew criticises the "political agitators, ne'er-do-wells and men seeking clerical and similar posts" who, in his opinion, "are not wanted" (Andrew 1933:xxviii).

Burmese writers put a political gloss on events which Indian and earlier Western writers regard as being based on economic factors or connected with the administrative problems faced by the government. Later writers pay rather more attention to the Burmese political aspirations that began to make themselves felt from about 1916, when members of the Young Men's Buddhist Association, the YMBA, originally set up to encourage Burmese cultural development – began to try to bring political questions on to the agenda. Maung Maung (1980), who is nationalistic but never gratuitously anti-Indian, says that the YMBA was set up to counteract the racist attitude of the British. I can find no evidence to support Htin Aung's assertion that the British made Burma into a

province of India in order to humiliate the Burmese (1967:283). Indeed, Taylor (1974:75) quotes a letter from R. A. Butler stating that this was done purely for administrative expedience. Htin Aung further believes that the British refused to limit Indian immigration because they would not accept that the Burmese were different from Indians, but it seems more likely that the pressure of commercial interests and the convenience of administrators were the factors at work here.

Harvey's picture of Burma in 1918 as "the most placid province in India" (1946:28), is not supported by the early chapters of Cady (1958) who, far from portraying the Burmese as a gentle, peaceful people, details many violent episodes of revenge and cruelty carried out by the Burmese against peoples, like the Karens, whom they considered inferior. He also mentions that, as far back as 1886, anti-British dacoit bands, some led by Buddhist priests, were on the loose (Cady 1958:139). Yet Harvey's view was shared by some other officials, as the following reference to the Saya San Rebellion in a government report indicates:

The Burma Rebellion was the event of the year, indeed of many years. Burma has hitherto enjoyed the reputation of being the most loyal and contented province in India, and the outbreak of a sudden and prolonged rebellion came as a surprise. (National Planning Commission 1960:4).

It should not have come as a surprise, yet despite a rising tide of violence over twenty years, which had begun with the stabbing of a party of "harmless tourists" in 1919 (Harvey 1946:28) and which included riots and uprisings causing hundreds of deaths, a view of the Burmese as a happy-go-lucky people persisted. During the twenties and thirties there were scores of examples of unrest in the docks, prisons, against the military and the police, against oil companies, against agriculturalists, against traders, against the university authorities, much of it directed at Indian, and to a lesser extent Chinese, immigrants. Yet it was, after all, British policies which were responsible for the state of affairs. Htin Aung (1965:273) suggests that the reason why Burmese were commonly viewed by foreigners as "lazy, violent and not amenable to discipline", was because Burmese workers refused to put up with the appalling conditions that Indian coolies were prepared to accept.

Remembering Burma: Tamil Migrants & Memories

In addition to the authorities already cited, see Adas 1971, Moscotti 1974, Steinberg 1982, White 1991.

Some contemporary British writers tried to explain away what was happening. Take, for example, the 1930 dock riots (see p. 94). Andrew (1933:284) was in Rangoon when they took place and he gives a full account of what happened, but was unable to see that they had any connection with the general state of the country. 54 In his view the strikers were simply responding to one particular economic situation, the strikes were not racial and not premeditated. The maistries "lost control over the coolies", but "if the shipping companies had handled the situation better, the strike might have ended peacefully" as a similar strike had done in 1924. But to compare the situation with what happened six years earlier is to ignore a changed situation. By 1930 the rice trade was beginning to founder, Burmese were competing more intensely with Indians for jobs, political awareness had increased and the desire for independence had grown. The riots may not have been premeditated in the sense of being pre-planned, but the fuse for them was lit in a potentially explosive situation which had not developed in 1924. Maurice Collis, who was a judge in Rangoon in 1930, and one of the most perceptive and pro-Burmese of British writers, gives an account which leaves little doubt about racial motives for the killings (Collis 1945). He recounts how he was instrumental in helping the authorities give temporary asylum to thousands of panic-stricken Indian labourers while frenzied Burmese mobs sought them out over two days of rioting. He describes the mood of the victorious Burmese rioters:

The Burmese proletariat walked with a lighter step. They had shown the Indians their place. This was Burma...Too many Indians had crowded into it from their starving villages across the bay. They could...undersell the Burmese, and there was a swarm of them too in the public services, particularly in the railways and the Prison Department. Well, they had been taught a lesson (Collis 1945:203).

The racial element became even more apparent less than a month later, when Burmese prisoners in Rangoon Central Jail tried to murder the newly appointed superintendent, who was Indian (Collis 1945). All the military police whom the British called in to put down the disturbance, were Indian – surely an insensitive act, to put it mildly, even if expedient, on the part of the British authorities.

There were at least 120 deaths and nearly 1,000 injured, most of whom were Indians.

The Families, work and the British

When recalling life in Burma, salariat Indians, including The Families, put forward a view of themselves which was at variance with the views of others, especially the Burmese. Members of The Families – even some younger people who had never been to Burma, but who remembered the memories others had passed on to them – invariably put a positive gloss on accounts of The Families' time there, portraying themselves and their relatives as educated, honest, hardworking people, conscious of their indebtedness to earlier migrants and to their families. Men realised that many of them owed their jobs to the British, but argued that an efficient administration by uncorrupt officials was important, no matter who was in power; they were merely assisting the British to provide this. Several men stressed the impartiality and honesty of the British and how much they had learned from a British superior in the work place. They gave me examples to show how fair the British were, and how impartially they dealt with their employees. I find it curious that the memory of the uncorrupt Britisher should stick in so many minds, when histories of India at the turn of the century mention the way high-powered British officials made money by dubious means and distributed jobs as favours (see, e.g. Washbrook 1976:216-217).

The rule of law, I was told, was important. If you were a doctor, a teacher, an accountant, helping to run a prison, or designing a bridge, you were performing a function useful to society, no matter who had political power. I suppose it could be said that they had civil servants' minds; or was it the collective memory of their forebears, helping to administer "little kingdoms" in the Tamil country in pre-British days, walking warily to keep a job through times of changing rulers? Nandy (1988) would no doubt point to the way that identification of the colonised with the coloniser binds the two together with firmer bonds than force can tie. Their view was that you should be loyal to the hand that feeds you. It was necessary to earn an honest living so that your family responsibilities could be carried out. Besides, what were the alternatives? they would ask me. When I asked one man who lived in Burma until he was nine of, if his parents had supported the independence movement, he answered, "You ask me if my family took part in the struggle for independence; for us it was a struggle just to live".

Sometimes I struggle not to think of the Vicar of Bray.

His wife is related to a branch of Nagarajan's family that still lives in Madras. His father died a few days after walking from Burma in 1942.

If asked, they would undoubtedly say they believed in freedom for their country, but while in Burma, to many of them it was an academic question. They came from a land which for centuries had been subject to different rulers; the British, in their view, were just the latest in a long line. Most men in The Families avoided direct political involvement, believing that the British would in time grant them independence, and when that time came, to inherit a sound administration would be a bonus well worth having. A relative of Ramakrishnan told me government servants should not get involved in politics; if they feel strongly about political issues, they should leave service, or wait until after retirement. He went on:

You should stick to the rules of service, no matter what government you work for. Officialdom is one. Bureaucracy follows whatever policy is laid down. If we meddled in politics, or tried to curry favour, that was bad. Government servants should be completely detached from political influence, though in real life that doesn't always happen.

Very few even wished for social contacts with the British. In one home I was shown a photograph of a relation attending an official garden party, but other relatives disapproved of any attempt to hobnob with the British; there was a general feeling that work in government service was one thing, but trying to socialise with the British was going too far. Two or three people who had a relative who had mixed with the British, felt a need to explain why that person had done so. I was told how one man used to invite British people to dine at his home (they were not government officials), but my informant excused his action, saying this was only because he lived in a place where there were very few middle class people and in any case he did not forget his principles so far as to join them in drinking alcohol or smoking. Arthur Sharma told me with pride that when his father was invited to a function at the Governor's residence, he refused to go as a way of showing his disapproval of British rule.

Interestingly, any frown of disapproval about behaviour seemed to be reserved for those who were at the two extremes; on the one hand, some disapproved of any social intercourse with the British and on the other there was criticism of working men with dependent families who played an **active** part in the movement for Indian independence because that put their families at risk. On the other hand, to become active in politics after retirement was acceptable, because by this time a man had passed the *grhastha* stage of life and therefore had fulfilled his duty to his family. Some (especially in Venugopalan's family) showed their support for the independence movement by heeding Gandhi's call to wear *khādi* (hand spun and hand-woven cotton), or took part in events when Indian independence leaders came to speak in Rangoon (as did Jawaharlal Nehru,

M. K. Gandhi and Annie Besant). A few found their own private way of keeping self respect, like Arthur Sharma's father, who refused to use the main entrance reserved for senior management staff at the firm where he worked, because other Indian staff had to use a side entrance and he wanted to show solidarity with them. One woman, a relative of Venugopalan who was imprisoned in India for her part in the Independence movement, is always mentioned proudly; the memory of her imprisonment is seen as a statement made on behalf of her family. She showed commitment to the fight for independence, but being a woman, she was not an important breadwinner, so her action could be upheld.

Those who did show some political awareness believed that India's freedom struggle had begun back in 1885 with the founding of the Indian National Congress; therefore Indians had served a long apprenticeship for $sw\bar{a}r\bar{a}j$ (self-rule) and had proved that they could administer the country competently; the Burmese on the other hand, had no independence movement worth the name. In 1989 and 1990 when I protested that the Burmese had their own independence movement going back to about 1920, salariat Indians were dismissive of these efforts.

The Families and the Burmese

Although most people stressed their happy memories of Burma, these memories were more often about the country than the Burmese people. Whenever I asked The Families' members or other people I met how they got on with the Burmese, the initial replies were fairly non-committal, either something to the effect that they got on well or that they had not known many (perhaps because they had left Burma when very young or because they lived in an Indian part of Rangoon). Few respondents, unprompted, said much more. Did you have any Burmese friends? I would continue. One or two women, like Anasuya, Anandhi's sister-in-law, responded by showing me a photograph of herself in Burmese dress with a Burmese school friend, but I became aware that for girls this was a popular way of being photographed and almost on a level with fancy dress. However, the respondent who used the expression, "rosy Burma" (she was not a member of The Families, but her father had negotiated the marriage between Arthur Sharma's parents), had photographs and even a letter, written to her by a Burmese friend after she went to India. Her recollections of schooldays convinced me that she had Burmese and Chinese, as well as Indian, friends. Others maintained that the disruption which the war brought prevented correspondence after they got to India; refugees had too many practical problems and too little money to keep on writing to old school friends.

I heard comments like "We had Burmese neighbours", or "We went to a Burmese wedding", "We fed our neighbours, whoever they were, at Pongal" (the Tamil harvest festival); there were a few school and college friendships, but I never heard of a close friendship between Burmese and adults of The Families; so far as I could discover no Burmese friends visited them at home, although a few Indians unconnected with The Families talked of a close Burmese friend of theirs, or of their family⁵⁷. People did not usually talk spontaneously about relations between the two groups, though they replied readily enough to my questioning; sometimes it seemed almost as if they had never thought about the matter until I mentioned it. Certainly, contacts with the Burmese don't figure very prominently in people's memories. Occasionally, in conversation, I would hear stereotypical comments like, "Burmese men are very lazy, but the women work hard", and variations on this theme such as "The Burmese didn't like us because we were prepared to work hard and they weren't", or "The Burmese were happy-go-lucky", or perhaps something to the effect that Burmese men were usually easy-going but quick tempered. These echo the stereotypes about the Burmese which frequently appear in books by British writers. There were, of course, just as many stereotypes of Indians, both from the Burmese and the British side (e.g. Burmese comments like, "Burma is being swamped by Indians", or the British, "Indians are better at passing examinations than Burmese"). Stereotypes can be a kind of shorthand social memory, imposing a particular identity on a group. In plural societies, as Burma was, with limited social contact and growing competition, stereotypes reinforced a sense of Otherness between racial groups.

On the other hand I never heard a comment from anyone in The Families that betrayed any resentment or bitterness towards the Burmese, even from those who witnessed riots, or suffered discrimination; it was more like a studied absence of awareness of them. Only when talking about the struggle for independence did some respondents become more vocal; the consensus was that Indians struggled long and hard for independence, but the Burmese "had it handed to them", partly through the efforts of Indians.

For the wives of Nagarajan, Venugopalan and Ramakrishnan, like many women of their generation (born between ca. 1885 and 1905), language was a barrier to communication. They had grown up in a Tamil/Telugu speaking region and in addition to their mother tongue, they spoke Hindustani and understood — in varying degrees — some English, but they learned very little Burmese, and in Rangoon, would have had little need to do so.

I know of two, unrelated, Panjabis, who lived in different parts of Upper Burma, who did have Burmese friends. One of these families, who stayed on in Burma until 1962, converted to Buddhism.

For these women their home and family largely constituted their world. It is not surprising that they found it difficult to establish social relations with Burmese people; their language, history, religion, food and culture were all different and with quickly growing families, they were fully occupied. Also, they had been brought up in families where girls, except for going to school, often spent much of their time in domestic duties, as preparation for early marriage. Moreover, they came from a highly stratified society in South India, where they were expected to learn and observe strict behaviour involving restrictions on their actions and who they moved with. They could hardly be expected to strike out and make friendships with Burmese women, who came from a very different ethnic, cultural and religious background. In Burma they did adapt to the extent of mixing with Indians of different communities and backgrounds and allowing their children more freedom than they had had. Taking their upbringing into consideration, even this meant considerable adjustment.

A few men mentioned friendships with Burmese young men at university and one of Venugopalan's sons developed a deep interest in Burmese music while he was at Rangoon University. Another man told me that his Burmese fellow-students "trusted him". When they went on student outings the Burmese left their belongings with him for safe keeping while they went for a drink, because they knew he was reliable and didn't drink. Venugopalan's son, who joined the 1936 students' strike, (p. 98) spoke of his happy years at Rangoon University.

I asked Venugopalan's granddaughter, Kamala, if she did not think it strange that they should have no Burmese friends. Looking back, she regrets this; now, she enjoys getting to know people from different backgrounds, but she left Burma at the age of nine and during her childhood it did not occur to her to question her isolation from the people whose country she lived in. She recalled only one hint of problems between Indians and Burmese.

I was only a child and we lived in a completely Indian area, so I didn't know anything about the riots, except once when the Muslim who used to bring bread to us daily, didn't turn up for about three days and we were told there had been some trouble.

The "trouble" must have been the 1938 riots, when Indian Muslims from Soortee Bazaar in Rangoon were attacked. (p. 95)

Members of Ramakrishnan's Family, on the other hand, had firsthand experience of violence between Burmese and Indians, which probably all related to the unrest in 1938. His daughter, Mangalam, told me that once there was rioting just outside their house in

the Rangoon suburb of Hanthawaddy. Her father was mistaken for a Zerbadi, and had to be rescued.

Mangalam's older sister, Lalitha, has somewhat different memories of that time. She referred to what she called the Telugu Muslim riots, which she thought were in 1937,⁵⁸ and the trouble outside their house. She said they had to hide their Telugu servant, otherwise he would have been attacked. She also declared that she remembered seeing the mob near their house get hold of a pregnant Indian woman, hang her upside down, rip open her stomach and pull the foetus out. None of the rest of her family remembers this dramatic incident, so I have no independent corroboration for her memory. Later Lalitha admitted, "We knew the Burmese didn't like us; I don't know why". Their brother, Ravi, remembers the riots, during which, he said, Indian municipal workers were attacked and their father had two guards posted outside the house for protection.

The different memories these three siblings have of the 1938 riots seem to suggest either, that like John Dean's memory of the Watergate affair (p. 38), the impression that one or other wanted to convey, took precedence over what actually occurred, or, like changes in the Anzac legend (p. 46), other people's retelling, or even the rumour of events, may have influenced one or other of the accounts. Yet neither the sisters, nor their brother, showed any animosity towards the Burmese in general. They distinguished between the violent actions of the mob and the Burmese who were their neighbours in Hanthawaddy.

Nagarajan's sons and daughters seem to have been unaware of Burmese-Indian rioting. This may have been because they were not living in Rangoon in 1938, and were too young to remember the 1930 riots. None of them has any recollection of their parents mentioning the riots to them.

Ravi remembers their Burmese and Anglo-Burmese neighbours, with whom he was very friendly, and how they played five-a-side soccer near their home with a mixed side of Anglo-Burmese, Indian, Burmese and Karen children. He was one of the few Family members who had several Burmese friends. He remembers going often to a *pwe* (theatrical performance at a festival) and to the Shwe Dagon pagoda in Rangoon with Burmese friends. He described how the *Yeganpwe* (the Burmese water festival), was celebrated. When out with his friends he enjoyed eating Burmese food – the only person who admitted this to me – and has happy memories of growing up in Burma. "My world

I think she must have been referring to the 1938 riots, as Kamala, in an earlier paragraph, was.

was full", he told me, – "friends, studies, sports. No-one bothered me as long as I got a good report, and I always did".

Ravi was one of the few people of his age group in The Families (he was born in 1923) who took an interest in the political situation and who supported the Burmese independence movement. He regularly read *The Sun*, a radical and nationalistic Burmese newspaper. Of all the people whom I talked with, he was the most critical of Indians. In his opinion, there were two kinds of Indians; one kind brought their ideas and ways with them; the other adapted to local ways. He did not think that the British looked down on the Burmese, but some Indians did and they tried to insulate themselves from local life.

On the other hand, his older sister made several stereotypical observations, like, "The Burmese are lazy, they're a happy people but they don't want to work regularly – only for what they need. Indians are hardworking". Another politically aware person in their family circle was the husband of one of Ravi's older sisters who married a man who joined the forces of the Karen rebels in their fight for a separate state in Burma.⁵⁹

One person who talked more freely than most about Burmese-Indian relations was Venugopalan's son-in-law, G. R. Ramamurthi, who was born in Burma in 1915. He was a lawyer who worked for the government. He said that originally he felt Burmese; it was only later, as Burmese agitation increased, that he "felt alienated". He saw clearly that it was "the British who fomented trouble between Burmese and Indians", and as a result the Burmese saw Indians as exploiters. But "Indians did not go to Burma of their own accord; the British took them and therefore their loyalties were more to the British than to the country". Although more politically aware than most, he repeated the assertion that many Indians made, that "Burma never fought for independence as India did". Speaking about "times when there were riots", he told me how he helped some other men to organise a street patrol of men in the Rangoon suburb of Bauktow where he lived, to forestall any attacks. A few women were afraid, he said, and took shelter in his family's house. But he regretted the rise in tension between Burmese and Indians and tried to take positive steps, giving as an example his part in setting up a hospital in Bauktow to be used by both Indians and Burmese.

Ramamurthi also told me the story of Soma, the Burmese dacoit, who was living in Bauktow when he and some relatives were allotted land⁶⁰ to build a house there. Many

And was never heard of again.

So far as I can discover, some government employees could apply for land in certain undeveloped areas outside Rangoon, Bauktow being one. Most Indians there were either Tamilians or

people would not go there because they said it was unsafe, but his father went to see the chief of the dacoits, promising him and his family plenty of work in helping to build houses and in other ways. Some people thought his father was mad to trust a dacoit, but he maintained that the man turned to dacoity only for economic reasons and became an outcast because respectable people shunned him. He predicted that the dacoit would turn out to be trustworthy and this proved to be the case. Ramamurthi's father helped to rehabilitate the dacoit and his family, who in turn proved helpful to them in difficult times.

For myself, it was a long time after I married into Nagarajan's family in 1960, before I became aware that there had ever been problems between Indians and Burmese. Relations between the two communities were so very rarely spoken about; it was only incidentally, in listening, over a long period, to tales of life in Burma that I slowly began to realise the gulf between them. At first, I naively supposed that because The Families had lived in Burma they must have had Burmese friends, but gradually I realised that this was not so. In Rangoon, where there was such a concentration of Indians, the absence of interracial contact was not so surprising. Even though Nagarajan's family spent years in the *mofussil* (provincial area), where the percentage of Indians was much lower, the gulf between Indians and Burmese remained.

The story of Dr. Kamakshi is one that I was first told several years ago. It was, at the time, an oft-repeated memory and gave me the first hint that, in a country that was customarily spoken of in glowing terms, there were tensions between Indians and Burmese. Dr. Kamakshi was the wife of Anandhi's uncle, Radhakrishnan⁶¹. She qualified as a doctor in 1931, when there were few women doctors in either India or Burma⁶² – and her family were all proud of her achievement. After her first year in medical college she got good marks, but, Anandhi wrote in her life story, even though she got better marks than many Burmese students, the authorities failed her. She adds that there was a lot of discrimination against Indians, so when this happened Radhakrishnan sent her to

Gujaratis. They were all vegetarians. Those granted land had to clear the area, build their own houses and organise services, e.g. postal services, themselves. Many houses had no electricity or running water (as Venugopalan's granddaughter, Kamala, remembered) but it was a way of getting a house cheaply. No doubt it suited the British because it was a way of developing land at minimum cost to them, and a further way of binding Indians to them. I have not been able to find out what Burmese people thought of the scheme.

He was her FB and also her MFZS.

There were only 19 women studying medicine in Rangoon in 1931 (Census of India 1931. Vol. XI Burma).

Madras to complete her medical training while he continued to stay on alone in Rangoon. At first I wondered whether sending her to Madras was a way of excusing her poor performance as a student, but when I began to read Burmese history I discovered that such discrimination against Indians did indeed take place.

Once having migrated to Burma in 1922, Nagarajan and his wife soon decided to settle there permanently and were prepared to adapt more and more as time went on. As I have already related (p. 88) in 1939, when they were living in Meiktila, the children were transferred from the Seventh Day Adventist School to the Burmese National School, ostensibly in case their father were at some time transferred (it is still common for government servants to be transferred every two years or so) to a town where there was no Anglo-Vernacular school. If they got used to a mainly Burmese system of education, their education would not suffer if such a transfer took place. The children accepted this explanation and Anandhi gives this reason in her autobiography. At the Burmese National school they also adopted Burmese forms of their names. No-one ever suggested to the children that the change might have anything to do with an increasing clamour for Burmanisation or calls to limit Indian influence, or even the rioting of 1938, yet though it is difficult to believe that Nagarajan at least, was unaware of what was, by then, referred to as "the Indian problem", all memory of it has been expunged from this family's memory, if indeed, it was ever there.

At the Burmese National School they could hardly, I thought, have avoided playing with Burmese children, for few Indian children and even fewer Tamil speakers attended it. When I questioned one son he agreed that they talked to Burmese children and played games with them in school, "but" he added, "they were difficult to get close to", and they did not visit one another's homes. His explanation was that in Meiktila, their school was about four miles away from their home. He and his brothers and sisters all went to school together in a victoria (horse drawn carriage) which his father hired for them by the month. All the brothers and sisters had to go home together when school was over, or walk all the way, so there was no opportunity to stay behind to play with individual friends. Moreover, in a large family, where there was an average of only 15-18 months' age difference between one child and the next, there were always playmates at home, so they did not feel the need.

Home, widening out to extended family, friends and the salariat Tamil community comprised the major part of the world they inhabited. Neither Indians nor Burmese saw the need to include each other; they inhabited a plural society, deliberately encouraged by the British, where there was virtually no social interaction between them, which encouraged each community to see others in a set of stereotypes.

Like migrants the world over, their chief concern was to earn a living; to do this they were prepared to work hard, to keep their heads down and avoid confrontation. When circumstances made it advisable to adapt, they did so without complaint, but they did not seek actively to integrate into Burmese life. This was hardly surprising considering the compartmentalisation of life in the caste-conscious India they had left, the coolness of the Burmese towards them and the deliberate creation of a plural society by the British. Yet they believed that Burma influenced them in several ways, making them more open, broadminded and willing to help others (were these also stereotypes?) and they spoke affirmatively of the greater independence and long-standing access to education which they noticed among Burmese women. Of all the people I met only one did not think he had been influenced by living in Burma. "Wherever you go you find both narrow-minded and broadminded people", he said; "it depends on the individuals you meet".

The migration to Burma took place at a time when it was ruled as a province of India and when the first members of The Families went to Burma at the end of the nineteenth century, they accepted British rule as a fact of life. Under the British, for the first time the subcontinent had come under a single rule. It was an area of many regions, which had a variety of languages, customs, history, religion, food and climate, and – until then – rulers. If the British could bring the whole of India under their sway, the inclusion of Burma as the Province of Further India would not seem remarkable to those who took up the offer of work there. Before the arrival of the British, the South had never been conquered by rulers from the North. As South Indians, they had already accepted British rule from Delhi, a place which in many ways was as foreign to them, and as far away, as Rangoon.

It was only as time went on, that events around them brought to some Indian adults at least, a growing realisation of the gulf between Burmese and Indian, combined with a growing sense of being Indian and not just Tamil; as one of Venugopalan's sons said to me, "It was Indianness, not Tamilness, that came to us in Burma". Tamilness was, one might say, the mark of a chosen identity; in Burma, others identified them as Indian so Indianness was an identity thrust upon them, partly because they belonged to a minority community there and partly by the way they were treated by the British and regarded by the Burmese. In the Tamil country they felt they were where their roots were. Away from that region, they were more conscious of their wider identity as Indians. Migration often forces a broader identity on individuals and groups. Differences that are significant in a local setting, count for less when we are surrounded by strangers. I understood what Venugopalan's son meant; it was not until I went to live in India that I was conscious of my European, as against my English, identity. People from other groups may not be aware of differences that we ourselves notice; in Burma there was a tendency on the part

of both the Burmese and the British, to lump Indians together; distinctions that Indians themselves made between different groups of Indians were often disregarded.⁶³

Ambivalence about their identity as Indians was perhaps one reason why they tried to exempt themselves from Burmese dislike. They still tended to see themselves as Tamilians first and Indians second. Moreover, their education, on which they prided themselves, removed them from identity with the South Indian labour force and from other groups of Indians towards whom antagonism was mainly directed. They were not Muslims, they were not Chettiars, they were not dock labourers nor coolies, nor tradespeople who could be said to oust Burmese shopkeepers and they did not intermarry with Burmese women. Burmese resentment towards Indians in government service seems to have been comparatively muted.⁶⁴ When British policy changed to incorporate more Burmese into government posts, thus limiting possibilities for Indians, they did not protest; after the separation of India from Burma in 1937 they seem to have taken it for granted that it was bound to happen. As Ramamurthi had said, Indians were taken to Burma by the British. When the British began to withdraw their support, either they had to make way for the Burmese or become more Burmese themselves. As it turned out, gestures towards Burmanisation, such as sending the children to a Burmese National School, were not enough.

Yet that was not all. We all have multiple identities, so it was not simply a question of Tamil and Indian identities. Other identities were invoked – Burmese, Brahman, salariat, for example, depending on context. Those who were born in Burma frequently spoke of feeling Burmese. These included G. R. Ramamurthi, Nagarajan's children at the Burmese National School and one of Venugopalan's granddaughters who said recently,

We were born in Burma and looked on it as our home; we never thought of leaving. We knew we were Indian, but [at school] we

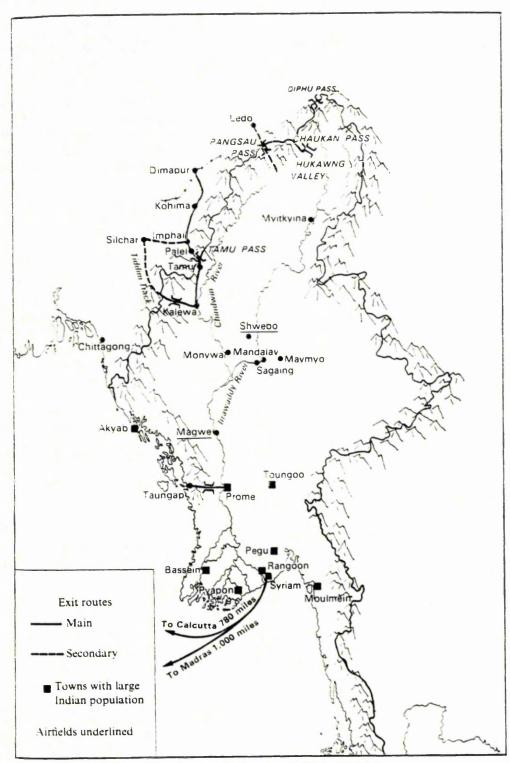
We find the same situation in England today. Newspaper and magazine articles, television and radio programmes, discuss the problems of "Indians" or "Asians" in this country, without mentioning, or perhaps even realising, that different Indian and Asian communities have very different traditions, problems and attitudes and that such generalising can only result in information which is at best misleading and may be quite incorrect. I read (early in 1994) a magazine article about "Niloufer Ali, a young [unmarried] woman with Hindu parents...", which betrays crass ignorance, for no Hindu would bear such a Muslim name and there are many differences between Hindu and Muslim customs, let alone regional differences. Many South Asians are tired of television programmes about the evils of arranged marriages, which seem to presume that all arranged marriages are bad and invariably involve forcing an unwilling girl into wedlock, which is certainly not the case.

Except for an incident involving the Indian superintendent of Rangoon gaol in 1930.

were taught that Burma was a part of India and we could travel freely to and fro, so we didn't think of ourselves as foreigners.

After the political separation of India and Burma in 1937 and the serious anti-Indian riots of 1938, adults at least must have became increasingly conscious of their Indian identity, as the Burmese more and more regarded Indians as a group whose interests opposed their own, and partly because of the increasing momentum of India's independence movement which, for the first time, caused Indians to unite (even if temporarily) in order to challenge British rule.

What I find striking is the relative blandness of nearly all The Families' accounts of their contacts with the Burmese, which seem to be at odds with the eventfulness of the years during which they lived in Burma, for the 1920s and 1930s were years of great political and economic instability. In part this may be attributed to the fact that many of those who have personal memories of Burma, left when they were children. Exposure to the mass media, as known today, did not exist, so there would have been less awareness of what was going on away from one's immediate surroundings. Certainly when they talk about Burma, they have little to say about the Burmese, and with the exception of a few, now elderly, men who went out to work in Burma, what they do say is confined to generalisations. Even so, there seems to have been what almost amounts to a conspiracy of silence regarding what parents told their children. If rumours ever circulated about unrest, they were quickly overlooked - an example, not so much of The Families' memory as The Families' forgetting. On this point, another memory of another's memory (or is it myth?) is also worth relating. One woman, whose father was related to Venugopalan, has often told me tales of his life in Burma which are drawn from the memories of her immediate family members. (She was born after her father left Burma). Her father had a good job at the oilfields in Yenangyaung, but left for India in 1938 because, she says, he was ill, and he never went back again. What she has never told me - she may not even know herself - is that in 1938 there were strikes, protests and marches, involving hundreds of workers at the Yenangyaung oilfields, which went on for several months. It is tempting, at the very least, to draw a conclusion about his leaving, different from her oft-told tale about his illness.



Map showing Indian evacuation routes (from Tinker 1975)

Chapter 6

The evacuation from Burma

This chapter begins with a summary of the reasons why The Families left Burma and is followed by accounts of the evacuation told from two principal angles – from written records and then as described by members of The Families who took part in it. The latter stress the personal more than the political or military side, but there is a consistency of purpose in personal accounts that contrasts with the contradictions of records written by people both in and outside the government.

Although The Families see the decision to leave being forced on them by external circumstances, they do not see themselves as helpless beings, buffeted by fate. Just as they selected memories of the migration to Burma which could act as a model as they settled there, so their memories of leaving and going to India have a present-day significance which derives from their cultural attitudes and values and has affected the way they look at the future.

Why they left Burma

The way The Families remember it, they left Burma because of the Japanese bombing of Burma in 1941 and subsequent invasion; but the situation was really more complex than that and was connected with their Indian identity (in part adopted willingly and in part thrust upon them), and their relationship with the colonial power.

Although some Burmese tried to move away from the cities where there was bombing, most of them went only as far as their own family villages. In the main it was the Indians, Indo-Burmese and Europeans who left the country. Some Indians and Indo-Burmese thought at first that it would be enough if they moved north, away from the fighting, hoping to be able to go back to their homes when the fighting subsided, but by the time they reached northern towns, the theatre of war had spread; by then they had little choice but to struggle on to try to reach the Indian border.

Indians who stayed behind fell into four main categories – those with insufficient financial resources to leave; secondly, those who had lost touch with family and friends in India or had a Burmese women and been accepted into her family; thirdly, some of the self-employed, including self-employed business people and doctors in private practice, whose source of income did not disappear with the retreat of the British – as was the case with those who were in government service or worked for British companies – and fourthly, some who wanted to leave but were trapped by the speedy advance of the Japanese. Amongst those – like The Families – whose social contacts were mainly within an Indian urban community, few were likely to be able to find a place to live in a Burmese village (although I met one South Indian family who did), where they could shelter from the bombing and fighting and hope that the Japanese would pass them by.

The underlying reasons for Indians leaving were rooted in their position as migrants and their relations with the British. They were part of a middleman minority, whose interests increasingly conflicted with the Burmese and because they lived in a plural society, Indians and Burmese always remained aloof from one another. A few salariat Indians left Burma even before the outbreak of war⁶⁵.

In Chapter 5 I show that long before the start of World War II the British, especially those connected with the government in Burma, were conscious of growing Burmese nationalist sentiments and anti-Indian feelings, and wanted the entry of Indian restricted. Even in The Families, who were inclined to put a favourable gloss on life in Burma, some (especially older) men in The Families admitted that after the separation of India and Burma in 1937, there was growing Burmese resentment towards Indians, although most of them insisted that the resentment was towards other Indian groups and they saw no reason why the Burmese should dislike them, personally. Some regarded the Burmese as friendly to the end; for example, V. S. Sarma (1979) relates how helpful Burmese people were when the overcrowded car in which he and his wife started their journey to India broke down; other refugees commented that in the north there was no antagonism towards Indians. I never heard anyone in The Families speak of any actual ill-treatment by the Burmese after the war started, although there were some tales of refugees being asked exorbitant amounts of money for services or goods. No-one in The Families put forward the view that Burmese were actually ready to attack Indians; in fact, I only ever heard of two people who did. One was an Anglo-Indian woman and the other was a

In Chapter 5, *The Families and the Burmese* section (p. 118), I mention how one man's return to India coincided with an eight month long strike of workers, Indian as well as Burmese, at the oilfields where he was in charge of the Indian labourers, but illhealth is given as the reason for his return.

Panjabi man. Yet though The Families' cultural attitude of not criticising openly may have led them to repress such memories, when they talked about the final years in Burma, there was increasing awareness that by being Indians, they were not wanted. "I don't know why", one of Ramakrishnan's daughters had said, when telling me about the 1938 riots and an acknowledgement that the Burmese disliked them was usually accompanied by a sense of incomprehension as to why that should be. There seems to have been a conspiracy of silence so far as children were concerned and after separation in 1937 I think their elders deliberately shielded them from a growing awareness that their position was changing. In retrospect I can see a certain guardedness in the comments of those who were adult in Burma, yet no-one ever told me they disliked the Burmese – rather the reverse. Was this due to the discipline of avoiding overt criticism, or was it an understanding of their ambivalent middleman position, between British and Burmese? Their unease showed in their unanimous decision to leave when the Japanese extended the theatre of war to Burma in late 1941.

Given the way that many members of The Families, in common with other Indians, suffered during the evacuation and after reaching India, I wondered, when they first told me what they remembered of that time, if they might have been better off had they stayed behind. When I mentioned this, some who were children at the time spoke of their unquestioning obedience towards their parents or guardians, who had made the decision for them ("We weren't like children nowadays; we didn't argue with our parents"). Or, as one Burma-born member of Venugopalan's family said to me, "we had somewhere to go and the Burmese didn't". Moreover, all the people they knew well were leaving. They had relatives in India whom they had visited from time to time, so it seemed natural to them to go to people whom they knew and who had some social obligation towards them.

Yet although they speak of the evacuation as inevitable, the decision to leave was not taken without hesitation and certainly not without regret, for they were settled in Burma and had much to lose by leaving the country. Though they saw themselves as compelled to leave, when they recount what happened they do not appear simply as helpless pawns, but as retaining some power of choice.

Just as they regard the migration to Burma as an option which they all took up of their own free will, (though from another point of view it could be ascribed to such circumstances as the economic situation in Madras Presidency, to the Tamil anti-Brahman movement and to their English-educated status which led to a particular kind of relationship with the colonial power), so they remember and relate some of the ways in which they made their own decisions at the time of the evacuation. Every account I have

heard of the leaving of Burma (and I have collected about 30 accounts, most of them from The Families), has included a description of the way the evacuees made their own arrangements for the journey. However chaotic the journey became, however obstructive government authorities or the army were, every account shows how the people involved took responsibility themselves for making their way to India. I shall draw attention to some examples as I draw on personal accounts in a later section in this chapter.

I think this attitude was in part a way of maintaining self-dignity in the worst of situations, a determination to show that they still had the power to take decisions, combined with a stoical acceptance of what could not be changed. To leave Burma as they did was their *karma* (the effect of past action on the present and future) — "if it is written in your head, it will happen", as a Tamil saying puts it. But *karma* is not blind fate, I was told. It leads you towards a certain situation, which you should to try to control, but when you realise that you can't control it, you have to accept the inevitable.

As the war progressed, Nagarajan and Anandhi, for example, discussed the situation and jointly resolved that she should leave with the children. In Anandhi's account of the evacuation it is clear that the group of thirty or so other Indians with whom she and her family travelled, took many decisions themselves, including how far to travel each day, how food was to be cooked and shared, and when not to stay in a camp because of insanitary conditions. They might not always think they made the right decisions – Anandhi blamed herself when her twelve and fourteen year old sons were missing for a day, only to be found later with another party – but she believed that it was her job and within her power to keep them all together.

Nagarajan, as a government employee, was defined as having an "essential occupation" and could not leave without jeopardising his permanent employment and possibly, his pension. He had too many dependents to be able to afford to take the risk. On the other hand, Anandhi's brother, Raghuram, was a doctor with his own practice. Although the government was trying to keep back all doctors to make them join the army, Raghuram wanted to rejoin his wife and children, who had already gone to India by ship. Dressed as a Muslim to avoid identification, he travelled with Anandhi and her party from Meiktila to Tamu. She was grateful to have at least one adult male of her family with her, but by the time they reached Tamu, near the Indian border, so many people had recognised him, he told Anandhi that he wanted to go on alone, because if he was taken away to join the army it would help neither her nor his wife and children. She writes in her autobiography that she agreed to let him leave.

This incident is interesting because apart from showing that people were still capable of making choices, it shows that they continued to put duty to the family first and placed limits on their duty towards the British. The Families' members had seen their salvation in dedicated service either to the British administration or to the foreign company for which they worked, convinced that their loyalty would be rewarded. The moral precepts they imbibed through their British education encouraged them to believe that duty extended beyond the family to obedience and hard work for their employers (Viswanathan 1990). Even so, loyalty to the British was not purely a moral obligation, it was not a part of one's *dharma*, like duty to family, but was a part of a reciprocal relationship between employer and employed, between governing and governed, that only functioned so long as both sides of the equation were intact.

What comes through in many of the accounts I obtained about wartime experiences, is the subdued nature of any expression of resentment at discriminatory behaviour by the British on the journey to India. Reasons for this were given to me by those who took part, but there was, perhaps, a reason that was never articulated, which I come to shortly. Stated reasons were, firstly, that it was a difficult time for everyone; some Indians behaved selfishly and some British people did all they could to help. Secondly, there was a general sense that in wartime it is inevitable that an army is given preference and that everyone looks after their own. Some men actually said as much to me, adding that the situation was worse for the British because they would probably be killed if they fell into Japanese hands, while the Japanese were more likely to try to persuade Indians to fight with them – although I personally never met any Tamilians who joined the Indian National Army, which fought for a time on the Japanese side. (The case may have been different for Bengalis, who were usually more enthusiastic about Subhas Chandra Bose, the Bengali who founded the Indian National Army). The consensus was always that if you were going to be ruled by another power, it was best to stick with the British. Thirdly, there was an understanding, at least among men, that the British were unprepared and in such a state of confusion themselves that little help could be expected from them. This leads me to suggest that all these reasons rest on a sense of being in the situation as equals (at the least) of the British. They had never felt themselves to be inferior, however the imperial cards were stacked against them. Now, when the British were in trouble, they could afford to treat them with sympathy. One can see a parallel between their own situation and that of the British - the problems of a small and threatened elite. The difference was that the British still had their power, though it was apparent that they would not have it much longer; as a group, urban Brahmans had already lost theirs. But they had not lost the sense of self worth which they still kept in their cultural memory.

Nevertheless, neither an understanding, albeit partial, of the British position, nor a belief in *karma*, completely prevented people from feeling bitter at the absence of help from government agencies, at the time of the Japanese invasion and during the evacuation. For instance, when Rangoon was bombed, people had not been told what to do in an air raid and they were left to dig their own trenches. The incident that caused most bitterness in The Families was when, during the evacuation, the army not only commandeered the refugees' buses but forced them to travel by a longer route. Yet if The Families were subdued in their criticisms, other Indians were more openly resentful. Bhattacharya (1993) shows that there were protests in many parts of India, against the discriminatory treatment which Indians suffered during and immediately after the evacuation, protests which the British did their best to suppress.

The evacuation from Burma – the story from records

Although the situation in South-East Asia began to worsen before the end of 1940, the British were incredibly ill prepared for the Japanese attack on Burma. In February 1941 a group of Rangoon Indians got together to work out an evacuation scheme, but government ministers said it would cost too much and refused to support it. In late 1941, an Englishman named Marsh, who was a civil servant in Burma, drew up careful contingency plans for Rangoon in the event of a Japanese attack, but they were completely ignored (Hutchings papers). In the autumn of that year official government policy was to "stay put". McLeod, the British General Officer commanding Burma, was reported in *The Hindu* (13 December 1941:4) as saying, "In the air, on sea and on land, Burma is ready to repel any foe", yet only a few days later the Japanese entered Tenasserim - the southern "tail" of Burma. No proper preparations had been made against attack; the Commissioner of Civil Defence did not begin to urge the public to dig trenches until 17 December, just a few days before the first air attack on Rangoon which came on 23 December. Air-raid shelter provision was totally inadequate as not more than one-third of the population had shelter of any kind. The public received no prior instructions that in the event of bombing they should take cover, so when the first raid took place, many people crowded onto their balconies, went into the streets or congregated on the race course or on other open spaces to watch the air battle, with the result that casualties were far higher than they need have been. Estimates vary; there were probably between 600 and 1,000 casualties from the first raid, although Collis (1956) puts the number as high as 2,000. More raids swiftly followed, but these produced fewer casualties because people soon learned "the vital importance of taking cover", as an article in *The Hindu* (3 January 1942:7) put it.

Months before the bombing of Rangoon started, many Indian men, worried by the expansion of the war in Asia, had begun to send their families to India by steamer, if they could afford to do so. Many men were unable to leave with their families, partly because restrictions were placed on able-bodied men who wanted to travel by steamer, and partly because those who were in what the government defined as essential occupations, which could mean anything from doctors and civil servants to dock labourers and drivers, were not allowed to leave. By early January, as the situation worsened and bombing became an almost daily occurrence, more and more left. Crowds thronged the steamship companies' ticket offices, desperately trying to buy tickets. At that time, two steamship companies operated between India and Rangoon. One served mainly the Europeans who wanted to leave; the other, an Indian-run company catering mainly for Indians, soon closed down its Rangoon branch. R. C. Hutchings, the British Agent, managed to persuade the military authorities to allow civilians to return to India on the transport ships which brought in army personnel and the government took over the issue of tickets. There was a serious crowd problem around the steamship company offices because of the number of people wanting tickets, so the issuing of tickets was transferred to the racecourse, where hundreds gathered and waited, desperately anxious, sometimes for days,66 in the hope that they would be lucky enough to be get tickets. During January 1942 about 70,000 Indians, or about 7% of the Indian population in Burma, got tickets and left in this way. Efforts were made to select women, children and the sick, but whether this was out of sympathy for the weak or simply an effort to keep back healthy men to help in defence, in the running of the city and its services or in the administration of the central government, it is difficult to say. At this stage "the use of land routes was not even contemplated" (Hutchings papers:20).

Even before Rangoon fell in late February, for the vast majority of Indians who wanted to leave but who were unable to buy steamship tickets for one reason or another (lack of availability, lack of money or distance from Rangoon), the only option was to go overland. The trouble was, there was no all-weather road across the mountains that run down the west of Burma, only rough roads across the passes. Yet within a few months three completely different land routes were to be used.

The British were quick to speak up in defence of their own efforts. Despite more or less daily reports in newspapers, such as *The Hindu*, that Rangoon was being bombed, not to mention other towns such as Moulmein and Martaban, and accounts of hundreds of air

One woman, a friend of Nagarajan's family, told me she waited there for four days. Her husband went to the office as usual, then in the evening he took food to her.

raid casualties, official sources praised "British and American airmen" who "saved Rangoon from being systematically bombed" (*The Hindu* 11 January 1942:5). On 20th February it was announced that Rangoon was to be evacuated, except for those engaged in essential work. By this time the sea route was closed and many thousands of Indians were on the move. Although the government version of events mentioned a three stage evacuation plan for civilians, there was in reality no plan and ordinary civilians had to make their own plans as best they could. Government servants were instructed to leave their offices, taking their files with them (!), and to go north, to establish their offices, at first in Mandalay and Shwebo, and after Mandalay was burned, in Myitkina, in Upper Burma.

The southernmost pass, and the first route to be used, was from Prome to Taungup. Soon after the bombing of Rangoon started, an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Indians, including many employed in the docks, on the railways or doing humble but essential jobs like refuse collection, left Rangoon by road, many of them on foot, and travelled north towards Prome, where they hoped to cross the mountains by the first route, via Taungup, and eventually reach India. The authorities were worried, the official reason being that people were leaving in such large numbers, insufficient food and water would be available on this route. A greater fear, not voiced publicly, was that if too many workers left, Rangoon's essential services would break down, for many of those fleeing were dock workers, road repairers, bus drivers, street cleaners – people doing the kind of low status, badly paid jobs that were necessary to save the city's infrastructure from collapse. The response of the authorities, therefore, was to send men – both British and Indian – up the Prome road and, using loudspeakers, to tell the refugees that conditions on that route were too bad for them to continue and that they should turn back for Rangoon, where the government would house them in secure camps near the city and would evacuate them if this became necessary (Tinker 1975:4). Eighty per cent did return; they were housed in makeshift camps and little or nothing was done to help them when Rangoon was evacuated. Those who did not return got through safely, although no arrangements had been made for them (Hutchings:20). When it became obvious that the fall of Rangoon was imminent, many Indians tried once more to use the Taungup route, which officially remained closed, although the Burmese police could usually be bribed to let them cross the River Irrawaddy. 100,000 to 200,000 tried to reach Chittagong this way, but many died in the attempt. Despite attempts to restrict numbers, 1,000 were crossing the river every day by the second week of February, and 8,000 were waiting to cross. And "in all the 110 nightmare miles between Prome and Taungup there was just one British officer to help the refugees" (Tinker 1975:6).

Others left Rangoon for the north of Burma, some hoping at first that they would be safe there and able to return to their homes when peace returned. As the situation worsened, it became apparent that their only hope was to get to India. They used the second route, which involved travelling up river to Kalewa, from where the refugees (or "evacuees" as official documents preferred to call them, as though they were leaving in an organised, orderly manner) had to find their own way as best they could to Tamu, where there was a pass across into Manipur. The government belatedly began to try to construct a motorable road in this area, up to the Indian border; officials talked of organising Indians into convoys and despatching one convoy of 250 every three or four days up to Tamu on the Indian border but launches on the Chindwin were stranded or in short supply, cholera broke out at Sagein and on the road past Tamu, road construction was halted because of the constant stream of refugees passing along the route, and the arrangements simply broke down. Soon these refugee ranks were swollen by Indians from several other towns, who were attempting to travel by the Manipur route (Kalewa-Tamu-Palel-Imphal-Dimapur). At first the government had not even considered this route as a possibility, especially for women and children. In December, only 175 crossed this way; by the end of January officials began to look into it and by February the number on the Manipur route had risen to 6,795. It was possible to travel by boat or steamer up to Kalewa from where there was a dry season road up to Tamu. From Tamu to Palel the road degenerated into a little used – until now – mule track across the mountains, a track which the authorities now wanted to make into a motorable road to bring in army supplies. This was the route by which Anandhi, Nagarajan's wife, travelled with her eleven children and two grandchildren. (See following section).

Hutchings described in an unpublished report how he went up to investigate what was happening beyond Tamu, fearing there might be a bottleneck. On 28 February he "received the most peremptory orders from the Government of India to limit the flow at Tamu to 500 a day", which he called a drastic and distressing limitation, which the refugees – not surprisingly – could not understand. He describes his frustration at the way correspondence went back and forth about the evacuation while he tried to do his best to keep the flow of refugees going. British propaganda, he reported, was "absurdly optimistic" (Bhattacharya 1993). With only a few weeks to go before the start of the monsoon rains, the position was desperate, especially as military demands for road construction took precedence over the needs of refugees. The camp where many were detained at Tamu in an effort to limit numbers on the road, was overcrowded, insanitary and subject to outbreaks of cholera. On 16 March the British authorities in India opened an alternative route from Tamu to Palel, which was rapidly dubbed the "black" route; the "white", or European, route being shorter and having better camps and access to more

food than the "black" route which was compulsory for all but a very few highly placed Indians. The official explanation was that this route could only take a limited number of people and since private organisations had supplied Western food, like tins of corned beef, the route was limited to those who would eat it. On hearing this, members of the Indian Chamber of Commerce Committee wanted to know how European voluntary organisations had been able to get access to the route, while relief organisations in Calcutta had been refused permission to arrange essential supplies for Indians who had been diverted to the longer route with less food and water and the added danger of wild beasts (The Hindu 1 April 1942:3). After Palel there was an all season road, but for part of the way the road was so narrow it had to be restricted alternately to up or down traffic. From Dimapur, transport was available to the railhead at Dibrugarh, in Assam. Hutchings estimates that between 125,000 and 150,000 Indians left Burma via Tamu up to the end of April, when the "premature" withdrawal of support to the refugees occurred. There were some British officials also on the route but "most thought only of hurrying on to safety". Even at the end of May, when the monsoon rains were perilously near, 25,000 Indians were still travelling between Kalewa and Palel (Tinker 1975:11).

There were complaints by prominent Indians of the hostility of Burmese and British officials, stationed at some camps. State propaganda insisted that there were only isolated instances of discrimination, but there was quite a lot of resentment against the British on this count. Beyond Tamu, wrote Pandit Kunzru, evacuees are "unanimous in complaining bitterly of the callous and insulting attitude of the evacuation officers and their principal subordinates" and he asked why the camp commandants and their assistants were all Europeans on big salaries, and why so few Indians were allowed to leave by air (*The Hindu* 28 April 1942:4). Others complained of discrimination in the use of routes and transport facilities and the lack of consideration shown to Indians.

There was a third and even more dangerous route, much further north, over the Naga Hills by way of the Pangsau Pass, which could only be reached by a long and difficult trek through the Hukawng Valley, which some called the Valley of Despair (Proctor 1976). At first it was not even considered possible to leave Burma by this route but as the war advanced, those who were too late to use the Kalewa-Tamu-Palel route and were trapped in the north, including government servants who had been ordered to Myitkina, had access to no other route and therefore attempted to leave by this way. The route was much longer than the others and many did not survive the arduous journey.

This was the route by which Nagarajan and his son-in-law⁶⁷ travelled, and, with other groups, some of Anandhi's relatives. Gribble (1944) gives a graphic firsthand account of the perils of the way; of the four rivers without bridges that had to be crossed, the mountain ranges, the well-nigh impenetrable jungle which had to be traversed, the desolation, lack of food and shelter, incessant rain and the appalling mud through which they crawled and slipped as they went up and down the hills. As a British army officer he carried authority with the local people, he had access to supplies and the hospitality of the chiefs of the few villages through which they passed; he is acutely aware that the ordinary refugee had a far harder time of it.

On all the land routes there were deaths from cholera, dysentery, accident and malnutrition. Matters were undoubtedly made worse by what a leader in *The Hindu* on 2 May 1942 – the day it was decided that northern Burma could not be held – called the "grave miscalculation" of the Allies, who had not foreseen that Japanese forces could penetrate the Burma Road so quickly. No accurate statistics are available, but of the estimated 450,000 Indians who tried to leave Burma between the end of 1941 and July 1942, between 10,000 and 50,000 died (Tinker 1975:4). It was not only Indians who criticised the government's handling of the whole affair; I have already quoted from the Government Agent, R. C. Hutchings, and Hugh Tinker, who took part in the Burma campaign, while J. S. Vorley, who organised the Mandalay camps, wrote a report which criticised the government so severely that Tinker believes attempts were made to suppress it (Tinker 1975:7). Frank Eldridge (1946), an American journalist, is scathing about the British fighting efforts.

Thoughout the war in Burma, the propaganda campaign run by the British and the kind of publicity which war news generated, was deliberately intended to hide from the public the reverses suffered by the Allies. When the British retreated, this was described as part of their military strategy, even though there were plenty of rumours that the British were running away. News of Japanese advances and of British difficulties, was played down or even suppressed, whether it was intended for the population in Burma or in India. Rumours were rife and often nearer to what was actually happening than the official news (Eldridge 1946). At one point, a police officer called Robinson, is recorded as saying, "Don't listen to the news, listen to the rumours" (Bhattacharya 1993). Efforts were made to prevent refugees returning to India from publishing their accounts of the

The husband of his eldest daughter. He was a veterinarian in the army and had been told by his commanding officer to make has own way out of Burma.

However Bhattacharya (1993) reports a copy in the South Asian Archives in Cambridge).

evacuation (Bhattacharya 1993). B. R. Pearn, a well-known figure and writer (1939, 1946) in pre-war Rangoon, wrote a highly critical report which was never published and accounts written by war widows were also withheld. Eldridge (1946:64) writes that the systematic suppression of facts and the giving out of false statements about British reverses, far from calming the population, led to increased rumours and panic. He also asserts (1946:83) that a censorship rule was established, "prohibiting the use of the word 'withdrawal' in newspaper copy, and arbitrarily substituting the word 'battle' wherever it appeared", which led to some very confusing accounts.

Despite the variations in the way the evacuation from Burma is told, what is apparent, in reading published and unpublished accounts, by officials, army personnel or private individuals whether British, American or Burmese, is the utter confusion and unpreparedness of the British against the Japanese assault. At this point I turn to some personal accounts.

Evacuation from Burma - personal accounts

Collecting personal accounts of the evacuation was a fascinating experience. It is not an event that people often mention spontaneously, and even in 1990 one woman refused to talk about it, saying that the memory was still too painful for her to recall. Everyone else I asked told me what they could remember, whether it was a memory of consecutive events on a long journey to India, or only certain isolated incidents. Whether talked about often or not, it was apparent that some incidents were burned into the memory, never to be forgotten. Few refugees wrote down their account, the most vivid being one which Anandhi, Nagarajan's wife, included in her life story, written in the 1970s. I realised that a memory can be intense, without necessarily being communicated to others. A memory may not be suppressed, just held in the rememberer's mind for a long time before being disclosed. At the same time, a clear memory must entail some forgetting or the weight of unselected recollections would prove unbearable (Lowenthal 1985). The clarity of some memories suggested to me that what was remembered was a distillation of the past, filtered through what had happened since. Apart from the actual incidents, some very moving, what is interesting is the extent to which the selection from the past can be read off as reinforcing cultural or familial attitudes; that is, individual memory can be transmuted into social memory, to reinforce culturally approved behaviour, in the same way as passed on tales of life in Burma can do. For example, as I select from Anandhi's account, we shall see how the scope of her individual memories reinforced the cultural values which contributed to the social memory of her group - behaviour

inculcated through habit memory. She selects incidents which show the importance of fitting in with the group, managing on limited means, not complaining or demanding anything for herself, caring for her children – in short, the range of obligations imposed on her by the *habitus* in which she lived. I include here selections from personal accounts of individuals from all three of The Families, which give some indication of the difficulties they had to deal with and their memories of the way they faced them. They were, so far as I can discover, fairly typical of many thousands of others.

Well before the bombing of Rangoon started, many Indian men who could afford to do so had sent their families to India by steamer. As the situation worsened and bombing became an almost daily occurrence, more and more tried to leave by sea. I listened to people's tales of how some relative had managed to get tickets for them with great difficulty; or how they had joined the crowd on the Rangoon racecourse, where the authorities had told people to go for tickets, but where they might have to wait of several days; or how they were successful in getting tickets for the last steamer (and an extraordinary number seem convinced that they left on the last steamer). Many working men had to stay on unless their employer arranged for them to leave; those who were in what were defined as "essential occupations" (which meant pretty well any job which was even remotely useful to the government or the day-to-day running of Rangoon) were not allowed to leave. Most men in The Families fell into this category.

Since Venugopalan was retired he was able to leave by ship with his wife and their grandchildren in December 1941. On the boat each person was allowed only a small piece of hand luggage, which even the children had to carry themselves. They were crowded on to the deck, where at night there was hardly room to lie down. They ate the dry food they had prepared for the voyage and after being at sea for six days they arrived at Vizagapatnam. In normal circumstances the steamer would have taken them to Madras in three days. From Vizagapatnam they went Coimbatore to stay with relatives.

Venugopalan's sons were employed and therefore did not set out for India until March 1942. One, a newly qualified mining engineer in government service at the time, was told by his superiors to put machinery "on an emergency basis" before Rangoon was evacuated. This, he told me, meant removing small but essential parts and hiding them so that the Japanese would not be able to use the machines. He described how the British later sent him and other staff from Rangoon to Mandalay, then from Mandalay to Maymyo and finally told him to find his own way back to Mandalay. After Rangoon fell, the British wanted all skilled and trained employees to leave, believing that without them the Japanese would not be able to run the country. The scorched earth policy which the British adopted, he said, "extended to depletion of talent". On his return to Mandalay he

found the city in ruins and the stench of death everywhere. The Japanese were advancing and so, without waiting for permission from his superior officer, he decided to stay no longer. He managed to meet up with one of his brothers⁶⁹ and they made their way together to Kalemyo then on to Tamu, where they started to walk. Eventually, in April 1942, he arrived in Calcutta, then travelled by train to Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, where his parents were staying. By the time he got there he had no shoes and his only clothes were a vest and a pair of torn trousers. His brother, who had been granted official permission to leave Burma, was able to join the government in exile which had been set up in Shimla (Simla) but he found himself without a job. He was informed that he had forfeited his government post because he had run away. Yet he had been sent from one place to another, then left to find his own way through the war-ravaged countryside, where transport was chaotic. I talked to another man who was sacked in similar circumstances. When I asked them how they felt about being dismissed, they shrugged it off – they were young, educated and could work hard – what was the use of complaining?

By 1941 some of Ramakrishnan's family had left home and were living in different parts of Burma, where they were working or – in the case of some of his daughters – had gone to join their husbands. They got out in different ways, some by ship, some by land and a lucky one or two managed to fly back to India, because some foreign companies evacuated their employees and families in this way.

Nagarajan's family were living in Meiktila, south of Mandalay, when war broke out. At first they did not want to go away, but after Rangoon was evacuated and Yemathin, a town 35 miles away, was bombed in late February, they decided, reluctantly, that they must leave. They did not know how to raise enough money for travel expenses for their large family. Nagarajan considered sending his wife and children to stay with friends further north, where he hoped they would be safe. Then his British superior officer asked him if he had sent his family away. On hearing that Nagarajan did not have the money to send them all and did not want to split up his family, the man gave him money from his own travel allowance (or, according to another story, from the government expenses' money in the safe, saying that it would soon be no use anyway). While giving due acknowledgement to the unnamed Englishman⁷⁰ it is clear from the way members of his

Many government departments were evacuated to Mandalay during this period, so meeting up with a relative in another department was not as improbable as it might seem.

Although Nagarajan lived until 1971, he never seems to have mentioned the man's name and none of his family ever asked him. This absence of naming seems like a reversal of the imperial

family recount the episode, that the final decision is seen as one taken by husband and wife, although facilitated by the Englishman's offer. The family locked up the goods they had acquired during 22 years in Burma, hoping that one day they might be able to recover them⁷¹ and went to friends in Pakokku, where they stayed while arranging for a boat to carry them all on the river. Nagarajan, who had been granted three days' leave from his office, saw the family onto the steamer and advised his wife to "act intelligently" on the journey. He told her to press on, even if any of the children died, warning her that he would not be able to get in touch with her again unless and until they both reached India. Judging from his talk with her before they parted — or at least the way it is remembered — he believed she was capable of making wise choices.

Having seen them all on the ship, Nagarajan returned to his office.

Anandhi had with her eleven children of her own, including two married daughters who each had a small son with her. Thus, there were fourteen of them and they travelled north up the River Chindwin in a group of forty or fifty refugees. During the day they usually managed to travel about ten miles; at sunset they disembarked, lit fires on which to cook a simple meal and to scare off wild beasts and set off again on the river the next morning. After ten days they reached Kalewa and from there went by another boat to Kalemyo. Steamers could ply no further. As it was, the Chindwin was a treacherous river which could be navigated only by specially designed craft; great skill was needed to steer a vessel between the shoals and sandbanks.

Anandhi was told that buses, each carrying twenty people, would be available to take them on to Tamu, which marked the beginning of the pass over the mountains to Dimapur. She was the only member of the party who had several children with her, so their group decided that she should travel on the first available bus which, they understood, would return the following day for the rest of the party. Only when she and her party got off the bus in Dimapur did they hear that "the authorities said the buses were all needed for the white men" (Iyer unpub.ms) so in the end the rest of their group had to hire bullock carts and make their way as best they could, finally reaching Tamu seven days later.

habit of referring to ruled-over peoples as types, not individuals, *vide* ethnologies like Thurston's (1909), which picture examples of 'A Tamil Brahmin' or 'A Korumba', and so on.

This was not to be. Although their valuables were locked up and hidden in a specially made strong box, when a relative went back after the war, he found everything had been stolen.

The camp at Tamu, as Hutchings and other government officials knew, was dirty, overcrowded and many of the refugees were sick, some with cholera. Anandhi described it like this:

When we reached the foothills near Tamu we found a vast crowd already gathered. It was a terrible sight. There was a lot of illness and the place was very unhygienic...The next day the crowd grew even larger; there was increasing illness and death all round. The men who had travelled with us told us to stay no longer. 'You must leave,' they said; 'we will help you in any way we can' (Iyer, unpub. ms).

From Tamu the only way to travel over the hills was to walk along the rough track, which was often steep, muddy and slippery, or to pay to be carried by two Nagas in a *doli* (litter) or, in the case of a child, on the back of a Naga tribesman. Anandhi and her two married daughters, who each had a small child, were carried in *dolis*, five young ones, who were weak or sick by this time, were carried piggyback, while the four eldest children, who were aged between ten and fifteen, said they would walk, to save money. A Naga charged Rs.50 to carry one child on his back, so in this way Rs.200 was saved⁷². They found the money only by the three married women selling their jewellery⁷³.

This was the most difficult part of the journey, for they were already weary and some of them were sick; food and clean water were scarce and they were confronted by the sight of dead and dying refugees at the side of the track. All except the youngest of Anandhi's children remember at one point having to step across a bloated body, lying across the narrow path on a steep hillside. During the walk from Tamu they were not comforted by the knowledge that they, and many other Indians, had to go by the longer and rougher "black" route while the easier "white" route was kept for British civilians and the army. V. S. Sarma, Venugopalan's brother, who travelled with another group, describes how puzzled he had been when he heard talk of "black" and "white" routes; he thought at first the names must refer to the colour of the rocks or the road on the way (Sarma 1979).

Finally they covered the 150 or so miles across the hills into Manipur. From there, buses were provided to take them to Dimapur where they were able to go by various trains until finally, on 31 March, five weeks after leaving their home in Meiktila, they reached

At this time Nagarajan earned Rs.235 per month, so Rs.200 was a tidy sum.

Indian women are always given jewellery when they marry. It is a woman's personal property and usually is sold only in dire circumstances.

Madras. By this time they were all malnourished and exhausted and several of the younger ones were sick. Within a week Anandhi's youngest child and her eldest daughter's small son both died.

Nagarajan reached Madras months later, having travelled by the notorious Hukawng valley route (see p. 129-130), then by train from Calcutta. He was so sick and emaciated he could not get off the train without help and the family members who went to the station to meet him failed to recognise him.

British records mention only British agencies and individuals who helped refugees, giving special praise to the Assam Tea Planters' Association. However, Venugopalan's brother, V. S. Sarma, mentioned earlier, condemned the teaplanters, writing that "They treated their coolies like cattle. They showed respect only to those who spoke English and wore European clothes, and who praised them. They rarely smiled and treated all refugees like uncivilised people. They had no manners" (Sarma 1979).

The only organisation Anandhi mentions as giving them help, was the Congress Party, which, as the leading Indian political party was quick to become involved in relief work. She cites three occasions when they received help from Congress Party members and makes no mention of any other agency. The first occasion was on the third day of their trek from Tamu, when she reported that Congress Party members distributed potatoes, tomatoes and rice, which seemed like a feast to the refugees after the hunger they had suffered. In her account it was also Congress Party workers who arranged for them to travel by bus from Manipur to Dimapur, from where there were trains to Calcutta, and who distributed food at points where the train stopped on the way. Another Indian refugee's account praises the help given by two Indian charitable organisations – the Ramakrishna Math and the Marwari Sangam – yet British accounts praise, indeed, mention, only the work done on behalf of refugees by British officials and a few individuals, and by the Assam Tea Planters' Association. Here we have an example of how memories are selected to interpret the past according to a particular view.

When I visited E. C. Murugan, the younger brother of Nagarajan's great friend, K. V. Reddy, at his home near Madras he recalled his unsuccessful attempt to leave Burma during the war. He is now in his late seventies, but has clear memories of that time. His account illustrates the way loyal government employees were treated; at the same time, it shows a different salariat attitude to the British. With The Families I was always aware that although they recognised that British officials usually treated employees fairly and were, on the whole, good to work for, they looked forward to a time when their country would be free. This was especially so with all branches of Venugopalan's family who

were always keen to tell me of the Independence fighters they had heard speak in Burma, or of small subversions they practised or ways of showing their resentment at India's subjection, such as wearing $kh\bar{a}di$ (hand spun and hand-woven cloth), or about the relative who was imprisoned during the independence struggle. Murugan, on the other hand, made no bones about his support for the British, still maintaining that their government in India and Burma was "the best in the world". Even his wartime experiences did not change his mind. I do not know what his brother's views were, when he was alive. Murugan talked to me about his wartime experiences and later wrote me a letter which shows the lack of British preparedness and the preference given to Europeans. He worked for the Reserve Bank — the Indian equivalent of the Bank of England — and had moved, as instructed, with other faithful bank personnel, further and further north in Burma, as the Japanese advanced, carrying important files with them. Finally, they reached Myitkina, where the Bank's British officers "assured us that they would pack us off to India by air". There they were divided into three groups — essential staff, including the British officers, married persons and bachelors. His letter continues:

I was in the last part! By the end of April 1942 one chartered plane arrived at the air-strip and the first batch of essential staff including the two British officers flew by it to Calcutta [where] the Bank's chartered plane was commandeered by the R.A.F. and was asked to fly back to Myitkina to airlift the British Civilians! By May 1, 1942, the whites became jittery...Any plane that landed at Myitkina was commandeered by the British Military Authorities to airlift the British Military and Civil to Calcutta, leaving the coloured - the aged, womanfolk (sic) and Children - in the lurch! When we, the Bank staff, approached the British Evacuation Officer, one Mr Landsdown, and pleaded our case for evacuation by the Bank's chartered plane, he expressed his inability to accede to our request. On 2nd May 1942, there was one plane on the airstrip. Mr Landsdown announced from a rostrum that the British Administration was ending by then. It was near about 4.00 p.m. He added that the Administration did their best, but could not help the stranded Indians at the airfield and advised us to take our own course by the land route. The British Brass Band played the National Anthem, God save our gracious King... The buglers sounded to signify their calls to the outpost. The Union Jack was slowly hauled down and handed over to the British Commandant. Thereafter, the last British contingent along with [a] few British Civilians boarded the plane already kept waiting for the purpose at the airstrip and the plane with the British Ensign took off, zooming high up in the sky and faded out of sight in [a] few minutes! Alas, we Indians in numbers were left behind in no man's land!

By then it was too late to try to get out of Burma. He and his fellow workers were captured by the Japanese and taken back to Rangoon where they were made to work for the Japanese. In reply to my questions, he declared that it was natural in wartime for the British to behave as they did, because they knew the Japanese wanted to kill them, adding laconically that the British were much better to work for than the Japanese. When I asked why, he told me the Japanese made Indians wear a badge (as the Nazis made Jews wear the Star of David); also, any Japanese soldier – even a private – could give orders to any Indian at any time, and they had to be obeyed. Murugan remembers being stopped in the street and made to cart away dead bodies after an air raid. The British, he believed, would never have asked him to do a job like that.

Like other Indian accounts of the time, Murugan's demonstrates that people had to help themselves and those near them – official help was either meagre or absent.

Chapter 7

The return to India and after

In this final chapter I look first at some changes that have taken place since The Families left Burma.

On arrival in India they were scattered – Madras and Kanchipuram in the south, and further north, Delhi, Nagpur and Shimla, depending chiefly on where the menfolk had work, where there were supportive relatives and where they could find a place to live. Some men, certainly those who had left without waiting for official permission or who had been self-employed, had to find work. In addition to the death or sickness of relatives, they had to cope with all the problems inherent in trying to set up a home, get children into school and so on. Over the next ten to fifteen years they struggled to settle in India on limited resources that sometimes were barely enough for daily living. As the younger ones completed their education they looked for work to supplement family income; the older generation tried to find them suitable marriage partners. I make no attempt here to give a detailed description of their lives; my chief purpose is to show how different ways of remembering have enabled them to restructure the past in the present to help in constructing their future.

Little more than ten years after they returned to India in 1941/2, a diaspora began which continues to the present day, so migration remains a significant element in their lives, as I indicate in *The Families' later moves* section. Within two generations of their return to India there was a remarkable alteration in *Marriage patterns*, with fewer marriage partners selected from within a small group of Tamil Brahman families and an increasing number of exogamous marriages.

Compared with related *Non-movers* (a term I use for those who have not migrated either internally or externally) in The Families, migrants very often have a more pragmatic and more positive approach to life. A significant proportion are more prosperous. Movers and non-movers may have had a common origin, but later distinct experiences have given each group their own sense of the past which has helped to define their future aspirations, as I shall demonstrate.

Turning to the *Question of gender*, Burma migrants maintain that young people of both sexes are treated equally (although this is not always so in practice) and express a belief in the importance of women's role, which, I maintain, has been affected by the memory of the significant part women played in Burma.

In *Their capital for the future*, I show that memory has been vital in helping them to overcome problems arising from the adverse effects of historical events. They have been influenced by remembering individual lives. Through their social memory, drawn from pre-Burma as well as Burma days, certain values and patterns of behaviour have been inculcated into the group, and these have then been used as cultural capital.

In conclusion, it may be seen that remembering is not just looking back. The past is never recalled simply as an abstract exercise; by means of formal histories, myths, individual memories and social memory we select memories according to our own agenda, in order to give significance to the here and now.

The Families' later moves

The first moves abroad began in the early 1950s, at first in connection with studies abroad for young men. India gained independence in 1947 but this does not seem to have influenced their decision either to leave or to stay. For those who were living in the south, regional affairs turned out to be of more immediate concern than national ones; the rise to political power of the Dravida Munnettra Kazhagam (DMK), with its anti-Brahman rhetoric, became an added incentive for leaving. Always quick to train for jobs which were likely to offer opportunities – or, as they would say – to come up in the world; that is, to find better paid, responsible jobs – they took up a variety of jobs in radio, airlines, merchant navy, and engineering – in other words, they were drawn to work in newer professions, which were seen as able to provide advancement for the enterprising and educated. Venugopalan's family turned more to the arts than the other two families; two of his sons become fairly well-known in the Tamil music and arts world, and the family of one of his brothers became involved in Kalakshetra, a Madrasbased centre for Tamil arts and culture, started by Rukmani Devi. Professions in engineering and the merchant navy provided more opportunities for work abroad than in fields like Carnatic music and may account for the larger number of Generation B in the Nagarajan-Ramakrishnan group who migrated outside India. Opportunities in the Indian arts world, particularly until recently, were greater at home.

By the late 1950s one young couple was living, albeit on a limited work assignment, in Hong Kong. Over the past forty years, the numbers away from India have risen steadily. In counting adults who are direct descendants (not including spouses or those under 18) of the three founding couples of The Families, I find there are six in England, twelve in Canada, sixteen in the United States and three in Australia. This is the present position, but over the past 20-25 years, some members of The Families have also lived in other countries - Kenya, Uganda, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Saudi Arabia. People move from one place to another, then on again. A stream of movement may be caused by young people moving elsewhere to study, then on again in the search for work, and perhaps yet again when they marry and settle down. In addition, there has been a great deal of movement within India, including Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and to towns in Gujarat. The young are not the only ones to be caught in this flow. After retirement, or after children are settled, an older married couple, or surviving spouse, may spend long periods with married children, either staying on a more or less permanent basis with one, or moving around, spending months, or even years with one, then moving on to another. In earlier generations men sometimes migrated alone and sometimes with other members of their family; in the generation born from the mid-fifties onwards women have begun to initiate a move abroad alone, initially for higher studies, but occasionally staying on and settling away from India. In the 1970s a chain migration to Canada began and about the same time, others began to settle in the United States. The move to the United States came after the liberalisation of immigration laws in 1965, when immigration quotas were allotted to certain categories of qualified and professional people from countries which previously had no quota. ⁷⁴ A few are settled in England, others have made a temporary home in this country. Others have moved to Australia.

There is another change, which is not migration, but which involves a temporary move. There is a longstanding tradition in India that women return to their parents' home for confinement, especially for the birth of the first child, and they would expect to stay there for several months. Once the migration to Burma began, such a practice was not often possible, and most women had to cope with the help of friends or relatives. Nowadays, in the case of young married couples who live outside India it is quite common for the mother to go and stay with her daughter for an extended period covering the birth of the child.

India-born immigrants to the U.S. rose from 31,200 during 1961-1970, to 176,800 between 1971-1980 and 261,900 between 1981-91 (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1993). There was a similar increase in Canada.

Past experience affects present attitudes. This may be one reason why migrants often seem to have more in common with one another, even if they live in different countries, than they have with branches of The Families who have always stayed in Tamil Nadu. Contributory factors may be the more relaxed attitude of migrants towards the observance of caste restrictions and taboos, their greater ease in cosmopolitan surroundings, a wider circle of interests which they share with other, non-related movers and a greater awareness of other lifestyles and extra-local events.

Marriage patterns

Adherence to the Dravidian kinship pattern was largely maintained until marriages (mainly of Generation B) in the 1960s. Since then, a dramatic change has taken place, as Tables 1 and 2 show. Table 1 lists the number of cognatic marriages in The Families, which I have been able to trace. My information for Generation A is incomplete; there may well have been other marriages between relatives.

	Generation A (b. upto ca. 1910)	Generation B (b. ca. 1911-1939)	Generation C (b. ca. 1940-1968)	Generation D (b. ca 1969-)
MBD	1	4	1	1
eZD	1	3		
FZSD	2			
MFBSD	1			
MFZDD	1			
MMZSD	1			
MFBD		1		
FMBDD		1		
FZD			1	
Total	7	9	2	1 (to date)

Table 1: Marriages between cognates as seen from a male ego

The change between Generations B and C is immediately noticeable. Moreover, the marriages listed for Generation C occurred between older members of this generation. Both husband and wife of the MBD couple told me that would not recommend such a marriage for their own children, because they believe that their close relationship is a cause of congenital health problems for their two daughters.

Admittedly, many of Generation D are still too young to get married, but from my personal knowledge I believe it is highly unlikely that the pattern of Generations A and B will be repeated. It is worth indicating that the one MBD marriage that has taken place

was not arranged, in accordance with tradition, by the parents, but because the two young people wanted to get married. In fact, the young man's father strongly opposed the marriage at first, saying that the girl, who had a BA, was not sufficiently well educated. When the young man pointed out that there was no reason why his wife should not continue her education after marriage, as both his mother and grandmother had done, his father gave in.

If we look at exogamous marriages among Burma migrant branches of The Families we see how the number increased after Generation A, and how the number of exogamous marriages is now fairly evenly divided between men and women.

Spouse's Ethnic Group	Male	Female			
Generation A	(total)	1			
English		1			
Generation B	(total)	6	2		
Anglo-Burmese		1			
Finnish		1			
Australian		1	1		
English		1			
White American (U.S.)		1			
Canadian		1			
Ugandan Panjabi n.B.*			1		
Telugu n.B.		1			
Generation C	(total)	8	9		
White American (U.S.)		2			
Black American (U.S.)		-	1		
Australian			1		
Maharashtrian n.B.*		1			
Maharashtrian/German			1		
Panjabi		1	1		
Rajasthani		1			
Canarese		1			
Generation Ca †					
English			2		
Canadian		1	1		
Pakistani			1		
White American (U.S.)		1	1		
Generation D [‡]	(total)	1	.5		
Bengali		1			
Notes					
* n.B. = non-Brahman					
† Ca gives the children of those in Gen. B who formed					
exogamous marriages					
‡ Few of Generation D are of marriageable age					

Table 2: Exogamous marriages seen from male ego and female ego

Opposition to exogamous marriages was initially strong (the father of the man in Generation A refused to have anything to do with his son after marriage, although some of his cousins kept in touch with him for years), but the situation gradually changed to

the extent that now a mixed marriage is sometimes encouraged by the parents, if they like the proposed spouse. As one American wife pointed out, the pressure is to draw foreigners into The Families, not push away those who have married out. The result is that such marriages have not weakened family ties.

Non-movers

First I want to comment on some non-movers, particularly some relatives of The Families that are still clustered in and around Madras. Among them, a girl's education is likely – though not invariably – to be given less attention than a boy's, there is a strong disapproval of exogamous marriage and they are likely to have a sparser lifestyle with fewer creature comforts – which could be due to poverty or lack of awareness of some items that could make life more comfortable, plus a continuation of the idea that their wants should be few. The women are less likely to work, or have interests, outside the home. If they do go out to work, the purpose will be strictly to help the family budget, rather than for the work satisfaction a career can bring. Whether a woman works outside the home or not, domestic work will be her sole responsibility. (As it is for some women, but a smaller percentage, among movers). Her working hours may be just a slice out of the day, leaving fewer hours for domestic chores and a diminution in already scanty periods of leisure.

Non-movers often appear as more conventional; not only is it more common for women to be pushed into the traditional role of obedient daughter-wife-mother, women in particular are more likely to keep up long-established rules of behaviour, such as keeping menstrual taboos, or not eating before their husbands. But it is not only the customs of particular families that dictate behaviour, it also depends on the ethos of a place; life in Madras is much more conservative than in the more cosmopolitan Delhi or Bombay, for example. For example, men and women are segregated on buses, fewer Hindu women cut their hair short, women tend to dress more conservatively and for a woman to go out alone after dark frequently meets with – albeit unspoken – disapproval (as I found when returning alone from a meeting or a concert of music or dance).

Of three examples given here of non-moving branches of The Families, I turn first to a branch of Nagarajan's family which had – and has – a very different outlook compared to his own. Nagarajan was the only member of his family to migrate. He had only one sister and after their mother died, the father married again, his second wife having one daughter. Relations between stepmother and stepchildren were never close, but

Nagarajan fulfilled his filial obligations, regularly remitting money to her and providing for her daughter's marriage. After the stepmother's death in the 1980s, contact between her only daughter's family (she had three daughters, all now married and with children) and Nagarajan's family has been limited, although I did meet all three couples and most of their children while I was in Madras in 1990. Of the three daughters, one is married to a very orthodox husband, how will not allow his daughter or daughter-in-law to go out to work. (His daughter-in-law lives with her in-laws, a traditional practice that is now uncommon in the households of movers). A second daughter has a son who married a non-Brahman girl and this has caused tensions in the family. Her parents-in-law say they are relieved that she looks like a Brahman, because this has enabled them to hide the fact that she is a Reddy from their neighbours in the largely Brahman area where they live. Interestingly, the third daughter, whose family has the most relaxed lifestyle of the three, (for example, the college-going daughters wear Western clothes, there is no objection to women going out to work), is married to a man who was born in Burma and who lived there until he was about eight years old.

My second example is of the family of Nagarajan's sister, who is usually referred to by Nagarajan's descendants by the appropriate term of relationship, Attai (FeZ). She has five surviving daughters and two sons; one has an Austrian wife and lives in Austria. The others all live in Madras. Attai is now in her eighties, widowed and living in a tiny flat, probably measuring about 12ft, x 10ft., with her unmarried daughter. She has spent all her life in and around Madras. Her husband did not have the drive that characterised the Burma migrants. For example, he had at one time a low-ranking post in government service, but when the office moved away from Madras, he refused to go, saying it would be bad for his asthma; as a result, he was unemployed for five years. Looking at the way Nagarajan, like other migrants, moved around whatever the personal inconvenience, I cannot imagine that he would have taken such a decision. Attai's husband never earned well, and his own family never helped them. A business venture of his was unsuccessful. I met four of Attai's five surviving daughters, none of whom seems well off. She herself and her unmarried daughter survive mainly with the help of remittances from her older son and by living thriftily. Attai recalled the help her brother, Nagarajan, and his wife, Anandhi, had given throughout their lifetime. "My sister-in-law was more like a sister to

So orthodox that when my husband and I visited them, we ate our meal from banana leaves. As a non-Brahman I would have polluted the plates they normally eat from. Of course we weren't told this was the reason, but I suspected it, and a conversation with the daughter-in-law of another of the three sisters, confirmed it. I knew about this custom, but I don't remember any other occasion when it was actually putting it into practice where I was concerned.

me", she commented. Older members of the Nagarajan family still keep in touch; younger ones scarcely know her.

It is not just that *Attai*'s family in Madras live under more severe financial constraints than their migrant relatives, her immediate family members in Madras follow orthodox Hindu practices much more closely than any who moved to Burma (or her son in Austria). Her younger son, who lives nearby, has a rigidly conservative attitude towards women. Against her family's wishes, (in particular, this Madras-based brother and at least one brother-in-law) the youngest sister, Seetha, married a Mudaliar; the marriage has not been a success and she now lives in appalling conditions on the edge of a slum. She visits her mother, but her nearby brother refuses to have anything to do with her and tries to keep the rest of the family away from her, maintaining that her marriage has brought disgrace on the family. He even refused to have her at a family wedding (an extreme measure in Hindu terms). She herself worries that it will be difficult to get her two daughters married because of their mixed caste and that they will need large dowries to overcome the stigma which, she believes, this brings.

The older son, in Austria, is a great support to his mother and unmarried sister, and they both praise him and his foreign wife. The brother in Madras has "forgiven" him for marrying outside the community and has accepted his wife into the family. At least two factors are at play here. First, to refuse the financial help the brother abroad provides would place a greater strain on his own purse if he is to fulfil his duty to his mother and sister, so economic factors affect deviations from the norm; second, it is the woman on whom the burden of maintaining purity falls. Indian literature through the ages is replete with references to the "good" woman, controlled by her father, her husband or her son, as opposed to the uncontrolled, i.e. dangerous, reprehensible woman. Only an uncontrolled woman would marry outside the prescribed bounds. It has always been the Hindu woman, not man, who has been seen as the specific embodiment of purity, as defined by the laws of the śāstras (Hindu scriptures) and custom.

Attai's family's believe that education is important for both sexes but they have neither sought nor achieved the degree of educational success of many of their moving relatives. Most young people at present obtain a Bachelor's degree. None is, nor is even thinking of studying for a Ph.D., whereas there are several young people with a doctorate in moving sections of The Families. There is also a difference in marriage age for young women. Twenty is the best age for a girl to marry, Attai's eldest daughter told me. If a girl gets any older it is difficult for parents to watch her and regulate her behaviour; once she is married it is the husband's responsibility. In migrating families it is not uncommon for a young woman to marry in her late twenties or early thirties.

The aspirations of Attai's family are lower. The "erring" daughter told me about the commercial company she works for. "I'm P. A. to the managing director", she said, and saw this as a significant achievement. I couldn't help thinking that if she were in a migrating branch of the family, she'd want to be the managing director. Most of Attai's family are traditionalists; they seek to uphold their Brahman identity by clinging to prescribed patterns of behaviour; they still remember the old exclusiveness of Brahmans and feel threatened by social change, having no experience of ways of life other than their own.

In Chapter 4, ("Rosy Burma" section), I mentioned how Radhakrishnan's brother, Varadarajan, went to Burma, but instead of taking a steady job and settling down, as Radhakrishnan wanted him to do, he began writing articles that the British disapproved of and after a few months he returned to India. Since his stay in Burma was so short, and unsuccessful, I count him among non-movers. In Madras I met his three sons and their families. Although they all live simply, the women in these families are more highly educated and include a lawyer and a university lecturer. There was one exogamous marriage in the 25-35 age group, where a daughter married a Mudaliar. Although the marriage had not caused a rift as deep as Attai's daughter's, it was only at our second meeting that the parents confessed that their daughter had married a Mudaliar. The father kept saying that he personally was broadminded and didn't mind, but... then recounted the problems which he believed arose from the marriage, including the mental illness of his elder son. Despite protestations of tolerance it was obvious that he was upset by his daughter's marriage, although he admitted that their son-in-law was "a good man". Yet the father claimed to be a follower of Swami Vivekananda, who founded the Hindu reformist sect, the Arya Samaj, and who preached against the evils of the caste system.

In contrast, marriage outside the community has become increasingly common amongst Burma migrants in The Families, as the previous section, on marriage patterns, shows.

Questions of gender

I have already mentioned the importance of education in Burma, where boys and girls were regarded as equally deserving of education, at least in their early years. It was in Rangoon that, for the first time in The Families, some women took up paid employment. Although the kind of work they took up was affected by gender – they all entered the nurturing professions – it was unusual at that time for Indian women to work at all outside the home. Yet by the early 1930s The Families included at least two women with

university degrees who were teachers, as well as a medical doctor and a hospital matron. Neither the medical doctor (Dr. Kamakshi, mentioned on p. 114) nor the hospital matron (one of Radhakrishnan's daughters), came from well-to-do families, so their achievements were noteworthy, considering that in 1931 female literacy was only 1.3% in the Madras Presidency and about 6.38% in Burma. At that time in Burma, a total of only 178 females were receiving university or collegiate education of any kind and another 19 were at medical school (Census of India, XI: Burma 1931).

The approach to female education and work in Burma marked a sharp change from the general attitude they had left behind in India, where in 1913 or 1914 the aunt of twelveyear-old Anandhi had refused to allow the girl to continue her schooling on the grounds that she would soon get married so more education was unnecessary - an attitude that lingered longer with non-migrants. In Burma education was recognised as something that should be widely available. Women whose education in Burma was cut short by marriage in their mid-teens, remember with regret that they had to give up studying. Each one took pains to explain to me that her parents did not scorn education for a girl, but rationalised her family's decision, giving such reasons as joining a husband in the army, or the imminent onset of war. Certainly it was in Burma that the idea first began to develop that it was important for girls to be able to earn a living "whatever happens", as some people put it. Everyone, regardless of gender, is important when you are in another country, away from the traditional props of the wider family and when there are fewer members of your "community" to turn to in time of need. There is nervousness at such periods about what might happen – you remember former difficulties, so you enjoy good things while you can, but are always aware that they might disappear from under you (cf. Davis 1993). In one generation the attitude towards the education of women and girls changed dramatically, enabling them to maximise their resources. It may have been that, in the context of another, more literate, country, the social memory of their "community's" achievement in the educational field was easily extended from one sex to both, and recollections in the older generation of the increasing difficulties facing Indians in Burma, combined to make them ready to look on education for girls as a kind of insurance for the future.

In the memory of The Families, from Burma days to the present, there is a widespread assumption⁷⁶ that "Boys and girls are/were treated equally in our family"; many people seem to forget, or be unaware of the inequalities that did, and do, mark people's lives.

I have commented earlier (Chapter 3) that the effects of any memory are not determined by its veridicality.

Although some women, like Anasuya, studied and worked after marriage, others, like Anandhi's eldest daughter or Venugopalan's eldest granddaughter, had their education cut short. There are other differences, for example, girls' movement outside the home is, even today, more circumscribed than boys', and despite the comparative freedom of Burma, once girls reached puberty they were expected to turn more to the home and domestic matters. I could give many current examples of how life is gendered, but limit myself here to three.

In one home I visited, the young woman told me that she and her brother were treated equally, but I noticed that when a guest came, it was she who vacated her chair for the guest, it was she who went to the kitchen to prepare refreshments for the visitor. In the evening her brother could come and go as he wished, while her freedom to go out alone extended only up to 7.30 p.m. Of course it is very easy to justify all this – she liked to welcome guests, or she wanted to help her mother, and in the evening she had to come home early for reasons of safety or respectability. Similarly, Dr. Kamakshi, one of her nieces told me, always behaved deferentially towards her husband, despite her superior education. Whatever work a woman engages in, for those who live in India, it is still seen as secondary to ensuring that her home is well run. Women very rarely disagree with this; most of them don't see domestic responsibility as being rooted in a "bargaining with patriarchy", but as providing an opportunity to fulfil an important function with pride. One friend and member of The Families, who has taught for many years, confided one day, "Of course I've never let my home and family suffer because I go out to work".

Those who have remigrated have a more egalitarian approach to men's and women's roles, but despite rhetoric about the importance of women, some of the women living in India, who have married into non-migrating families, suffer from the effects of male domination to an extent I should find insupportable. One woman repeatedly consults her husband for his permission to continue to do the teaching she loves; in cases where a wife is working and her husband is not, he may be free all day to do as he will, but she is still expected to see to all his needs as soon as she returns from work. In the end, it is often what the husband conceives as appropriate behaviour for a woman, that counts.

Yet women do believe they possess a special kind of power. Mythological stories which are prominent in Tamil Brahman women's memory lead them to understand a woman's role as one possessing śakti⁷⁷, (regenerative power). The theme of the powerful, chaste

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Sakti is not an easy word to translate. It can mean the goddess, the power or energy of the universe, the female generative force that is fundamental to all action, the motivating force. "In Indian culture,...action and idea are not separated from each other, but are treated as aspects of a

(or virtuously married) woman has always been a common one in Tamil literature, going back at least to Kannagi, the heroine of the 6th century epic poem, *Cilappatikāram*, who, through her power as a virtuous woman, avenged the King of Madurai's wrongful killing of her husband by causing the king's death and the destruction of the city. Women also perform annual rituals, or *nōṇpus*, which have been called power events (Wadley 1980:50). Married women believe that their performance of *nōṇpus* is important to ensure their husband's long life and well-being, a responsibility which many take seriously. It has to be said that a man does not perform equivalent rituals for his wife's longevity.⁷⁸

As an example of the importance of woman's *śakti*, I relate briefly the story behind what is called either Savitri, or *kārataya*, *nōṇpu* (*kāraṭai* is a special kind of pancake), which is celebrated annually by Iyer women. On this occasion, women remember the princess Savitri, her father's only child, who insisted on marrying Satyavan, although it was foretold that if she did, he would die a few months after their wedding. On the fateful day, he fell dead in the forest as predicted and the horrifying figure of Yama, the god of death, appeared to bear away his soul. Savitri was not afraid and followed Yama, saying that it was her duty as a good wife to follow her husband. Pleased with her devotion, Yama granted her four boons, so long as she did not ask for her husband to be restored to life. She agreed, but when Yama said he would grant a fifth boon, she pointed out that he must restore Satyavan to life, because he had already agreed to her request that she should bear a hundred sons. Without her husband, this would be impossible, for he knew her to be a virtuous wife. Thereupon, Yama revived Satyavan, and they returned home where Savitri is praised for her courage and devotion.

There are several meanings that can be unravelled from this story and the ritual performed on this day. It is possible to remember Savitri as a woman who was so blindly devoted to her husband, she was willing to face death for him and no doubt there are women who select only this meaning. For others – including several women in The Families – Savitri is remembered as a positive role model. She chooses her own husband and is prepared to leave the luxury of life in her father's palace for a simple life in the forest if she can marry the man she loves; she is a strong, fearless woman, who achieves her goal against great odds. She is a woman whom others admire. She is also

single reality. Indeed the paired terms Siva and Sakti in Indian thought express precisely this oneness". (Egnor *in* Wadley 1980:2) Although Tamil women may seem powerless and subservient in certain situations, they are recognised as possessing śakti.

I have heard some women argue that it would do no good because men do not possess such power, but I don't know how many really believe this.

resourceful, for the *kāraṭai* that is prepared on that day is made from the limited ingredients Savitri had available in the forest. Men are excluded from the celebration of the *nōṇpu*; the prayers said and the ritual enacted, are performed only by women. Married women tie a yellow thread, a *tāli*, which is the sign of a married woman, around each other's necks and pray that they will be able to ensure long life for their husbands. On this day, women eat first, in contrast to the common custom of men eating first. So although on many occasions men are given more importance than women, there are other times when women have a strong sense of their own power and influence which they celebrate together. There is, then, an ambivalence in the Hindu attitude to women. Some women accept that their prime duty is to serve their husbands, and this often leads to the dominance of men. At the same time, there is general acceptance in both sexes, that women are to be esteemed and that they have a special power – they possess *śakti. Nonpus* are examples of how stories of the past, sustained by ritual and performative memory, are given a contemporary meaning (Connerton 1989).

Women have power in the domestic sphere – a domain not to be dismissed lightly. Indeed, during the Burma period, it could be said that in some respects women had more power than men – they had real responsibility and influence in the running of their homes and bringing up the children, while the men's power was restricted to their pay packet, earned under an alien government.

Women adapted when they went to live in Burma and continued to adapt after they returned to India. Migration is a process that invariably involves adjusting and in some ways Indian women are brought up to acquire qualities that serve migrants well. Social memory teaches a girl from childhood to expect to leave her parents' house one day and that she will have to fit in with her in-laws; "you have to adjust", is a comment women constantly make to one another in India. So the idea of adjusting is ever present, even when it might seem to an outsider to be a backward step. More than one woman, brought up in Burma in a fairly liberal way, then marrying later in India, told me proudly how she eventually won the approval of her more orthodox mother-in-law. One woman who went out to work in Burma and whose mother was noted for being broadminded and progressive, in later life as a widow in India went to live in her son's house, adapting without complaint to the stricter regime of her more conservative daughter-in-law. So they defend the idea of adjusting, adapting in either of two directions – towards being freer or towards returning to a more strict adherence to religious rules and customs. Far from being depressed by such situations, these women take pride in responding to challenges before them.

Living with non-movers may lead a few women from Burma to turn to a stricter observance of orthodox Hindu practice, but in general, migration brought increased appreciation of their abilities and resourcefulness. In The Families women – especially mothers - are highly regarded. Even after they were married, Anandhi's children were always inclined to "ask Ammā" (mother), rather than consult their father over any problem (so much so that at times he felt disregarded!). Anasuya, Raghuram's wife, once said to me, "When we came out of Burma my father could do nothing; it was my mother that kept us all up". More recently, at a Families' wedding reception, the Black American husband of a granddaughter of Nagarajan commented in his speech that the first thing he noticed about his wife's family was that it "had a lot of feisty women".

Some people in The Families have an image of themselves as the guardians of Indian – and especially, Tamil - culture. Indeed, as political developments in the South have caused Brahmans to lose much of their former status in the traditional hierarchy, they have "colonised" the arts and created for themselves images of the past through performative memory. They see themselves as responsible for handing on a "great tradition", a body of knowledge about music, dance and literature. No doubt this stemmed from the old Brahman monopoly, now long gone, of the unique right to learn Sanskrit, the supreme example, they might say, of the "great tradition".⁷⁹

In the early years of this century – even today in some families – the ability to sing or play an instrument was a bonus in seeking a marriage alliance, especially for a girl. Nagarajan wanted to marry Anandhi because he heard her play the violin and sing. At the present day, some members of The Families have reached performance standard in singing or musical instrument playing. Their attitude to Bharata Natyam, the traditional classical South Indian dance form, is interesting because throughout the nineteenth century it was a form of dance associated with devadāsis, (temple dancer-prostitutes). In part due to the efforts of Rukmini Devi, a remarkable Smartha Brahman woman who, in the early 20th century, risked ostracism by marrying an Englishman and insisting on studying Bharata Natyam (to the horror of traditionalists), this dance form was rehabilitated from the low repute into which it had fallen and had been in danger of being lost. Although Bharata Natyam is now learned across the caste divide, it is interesting that it is Brahman girls in particular who have taken it up, so that what was looked on once as the dance of prostitutes is now studied and remembered by young Brahmans as a part of "our glorious heritage".

The word, Sanskrit, means a cultivated, a perfectly constructed and therefore superior, language.

Conclusion – their capital for the future

Very few descendants of those who lived in Burma have an in-depth knowledge of the political or economic history of that country during the time their forebears were there, but they are all very much aware of The Families' links with Burma and know stories about the older generations' lives there. However, the influence of individual memories of Burma is, I maintain, less potent than that of The Families' social memory, structured by collectively held ideas and shared experience, and by the *habitus*⁸⁰ in which each person lives. Social memory of the years in Burma (which itself includes a distillation of an earlier past), is a means through which the past is recreated and reinterpreted to transmit a paradigm for behaviour that is constantly readjusted to render it valid in the present.

In the same way that, two and three generations earlier, members of The Families formed part of a flow of migrants into Burma, young people who are now migrating are aware of the cultural capital they possess, in the form of educational and professional training, the support of The Families' network and a strong motivation to accomplish what they set out to do.

Looking back at the Burma years and the way they ended, it could be argued that the whole episode was a disaster, because Indians were disliked by the Burmese more and more as time went on, they became an embarrassment to the British who encouraged them to go there in the first place and most important for The Families personally, the evacuation brought sickness and death and they all lost their homes and possessions. Yet despite hardship and loss at the end, Burma is seen in retrospect as a success. What they choose to remember has to do with Burma as a land of plenty; a country with a good educational system; a place where people helped one another; of the strength of Family unity; a country of comparative freedom (especially for women); and for several older men, pride in what they see as their contribution to Burma's economic development; in short, a sense of pride in being from Burma and the notions of broadmindedness which that conveys to many (at least, older) Indians. Even stories of the evacuation

What Bourdieu calls *habitus* is essentially social memory, including as it does a constantly recreated habit memory and what Connerton (1989) calls bodily memory - rituals, clothes, and so on. In one of his several explanations of *habitus*, Bourdieu writes of it as "the product of history, [which] produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. The system of dispositions [is] a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles..." (Bourdieu 1977:82).

I am here stating the way they see it; I am well aware that not everyone would agree that supporting an imperialist regime did contribute to the country's development.

demonstrate the courage of those – like women – whom some might be tempted to regard as weak.

Their memories always point to some kind of direction in their actions. People do not say, "I didn't know what to do", or "I was helpless", although they might say something like, "I had to do it", but in retrospect at least, they were never purposeless nor drifting. Thus, even when the present is a disordered experience, as it must have been during the evacuation, the past is restructured through memory so that in looking back a pattern is discerned. Only when the present becomes the past can we see it clearly in context. In Mary Douglas's words, "No one arrives at the dawn of a great historical period exclaiming, Today we begin the Hundred Years' War!" (Halbwachs 1980:18). The ability to see the past from the point of view of what it teaches in the present, has encouraged them to adopt a positive, adaptable approach to life, instead of groaning under the blows of history.

Individuals have their own autobiographical memories which may, or may not, be communicated to others, but for social memory to continue it must be shared and passed on. This being the case, events and relationships which are not useful in strengthening their idea of themselves, The Families, or "the community", or simply occasions which do not convey the way they would like to be understood, tend to be overlaid or even apparently forgotten. The Burmese dislike of Indians is mentioned so frequently by government officials and historians, it can hardly be gainsaid, yet people put forward a whole range of reasons why they had no Burmese friends.

On a personal level, anyone who did not fit the approved pattern of behaviour is rarely talked about. "Why talk about these things? They are best forgotten", was one person's response when I tried once to probe. Forgetting, as I pointed out in Chapter 3 (p. 37-39), is the flip side of memory and social institutions forget just as individuals do. I think this is more than just reluctance to admit that there were individuals who, in The Families' eyes, were not a success; if we accept that memory is not a **text in** the mind, but an **activity of** the mind, (Fentress and Wickham 1992:6), there is simply no reason for activating memories of such a person. It is not so much that positive memories are consciously selected, nor that all memories are of times when things went well, but if people and events are to be recalled, there must be some purpose for so doing, such as reinforcing approved patterns of behaviour, or a sense of identity, or an example to be followed. On the other hand, there is always a willingness to restart a relationship. I

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From Mary Douglas's introduction in which she paraphrases a comment of Halbwachs.

know of only two cases of a person deliberately cutting of contacts with The Families. In one of these instances, when the person's daughter later showed a desire to get to know her relatives, she was welcomed with open arms.

The Families arrived in India bereft of material assets but carried with them valuable cultural assets. The manner of their interpretation of the past generates an attitude which is important to the way they negotiate their present position in society and helps them to achieve what they set their minds on in the future. This interpretation includes stories of hard work, the importance of family loyalty, respect for those who were generous, hospitable or helpful, and the need to study. Memories of this kind become cultural markers which are communicated to succeeding generations, for instance, through a child's observation of discussion, ritual and ways of behaviour in daily life, whereby such markers implant themselves in the memory. This systematic inculcation ensures the perpetuation of cultural resources that would otherwise disappear (Bourdieu 1977). Through participatory experience and embodied knowledge, as well as through tales told, they have acquired memories which teach appropriate codes of behaviour for people in their particular group and adherence to these codes provides them with the special prerogative that enables them to feel at home in their own cultural environment.

Their social memory teaches that family loyalty is an asset to be highly prized. Stories of Burma days and recollections of the difficulties faced during and after the evacuation, now combine with memories of later migrations, all stressing the contribution which strong family ties make towards the success of an enterprise. The value they continue to place on such ties is demonstrated in several ways – by the array of modern technological methods (including fax, video and telephone) used for worldwide communication between members of The Families, by an emphasis on hospitality (which is unlikely to be refused, whether convenient to the host family or not) and intervisitation, including attendance at ceremonies such as weddings and $p\bar{u}p\bar{a}ls$ (thread ceremonies), which are recorded to ensure that they are not forgotten, and by the inculcation of spouses and younger generations into a pattern of behaviour that supports the idea of family loyalty.

For The Families a part of their cultural assets derive from the position they, as Smartha Brahmans, have held for hundreds of years. They are members of a community which traditionally was seen as heading the social hierarchy and although they now subscribe to the view that "all men are created equal", they have a concept of self-worth and an expectation of attaining whatever they set their mind to, that arises from their social memory and which determines their actions. As Bourdieu puts it:

[P]ractical evaluation of the likelihood of the success of a given situation brings into play a whole body of wisdom, sayings, commonplaces, ethical precepts ("that's not for the likes of us") and, at a deeper level, the unconscious principles of the ethos which, being the product of a learning process dominated by a determinate type of objective regularities, determines 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' conduct for every agent subjected to those regularities (1977:77).

Furthermore, the centuries-old power and ability of Brahmans to acquire and transmit knowledge has nowadays been translated by The Families into a strong desire for, and a determination to win, high secular educational achievement, so that education has really turned into cultural capital – an investment that can become a major economic resource. The idea of cultural capital is clearly implied in the oft-repeated comment among the older generation which I mentioned earlier, (e.g. p. 70), that Brahmans have nothing but their brains.

Although I have never heard younger people make a comment about Brahmans and their brains, the "whole body of wisdom" this saying generates in the social memory still has far-reaching effects. Not so long ago, when a young man in The Families repeatedly failed a professional examination, I wondered why he did not give up that particular career for which it seemed to me he could not be suited. It was some time before I understood that have set out on a particular course of action, there was no turning back. So far as The Family was concerned, to fail in what one set out to achieve through learning was simply not an option, although it might take some people longer than others.

The use of education as cultural capital is clearly seen in Nagarajan's family. When his wife arrived in India from Burma, with her children, she had very little money and did not know whether her husband, who had not been granted permission to leave with her, was alive or dead. She coped with the death of her youngest daughter and her first grandson, she had the problem of finding a place to live, knowing that however accommodating relatives might be they could nor be expected (and indeed did not have the resources) to house and feed a woman accompanied by a pack of children for very long. Despite these difficulties, she believed finding schools for the children was a priority. Later, the whole family moved from Kanchipuram to Madras in order to take advantage of educational opportunities in the bigger city. (It was cheaper for all the family to keep together). In the 1950s there was a further conscious investment in education when the second daughter's husband, who was also Ramakrishnan's son, offered to pay for Nagarajan's first son to get some professional training in London, if the second and third sons would

be responsible for paying his contribution to the family budget. This investment paid off. It also reinforced, once again, the significance of solidarity in The Families.

Other cultural assets include the myths and stories that are repeated from one generation to another. These may vary from tales involving actual, known people, or they may be well-known mythological stories through which religious and cultural values are transmitted. Written and oral genealogies of different branches of The Families are another cultural asset, because they strengthen a sense of identity. As I pointed out in the previous section, *Questions of gender*, women are regarded in a way that has turned their abilities into a cultural asset.

In looking back to the Burma years through the memories of individuals, it is possible to have a view of that period and the actors in it, which differs from the way it is seen in written documents. Individuals' memories refer directly only to the most dramatic of historical events, yet often we can see historical, political and economic reasons behind their actions.

The Families' world has been changed more than once by historical events. They have been shaped by many memories of the past, by their various identities as Brahmans, as Tamilians, as Indians and last but not least, as migrants, for the phenomenon of migration, of life in a minority group, gives them access to a special, additional identity. Like Hall (1993), I would make a plea for the cultural hybridity which migrants, like The Families, possess. They have the capacity to live with difference, they are willing and able to learn new skills. They retain strong links with their past and identify with their place of origin but have no illusions about wishing they could go back, for they know that this impossible because change constantly takes place. They "know that identity is always an open, complex, unfinished, game, which moves into the future through a symbolic detour of the past" (p.362).

Glossary

advaita (S) non-dualism; doctrine developed by Sankara (ca.788-820 A.D.)

 $\bar{a}l\bar{a}k(T)$ a measure equal to one cup

 $amm\bar{a}(T)$ mother $app\bar{a}(T\dot{a})$ father

āśrama (S) stage of life

attai (T) father's elder sister

āyurveda (H) Hindu science of health
 bhadralok (Ben) Bengali educated gentry
 bhakti (S) devotion to a personal god

bhakti yoga (S) path of devotion brahmacārin (S) celibate student

campantam, alliance of marriage

cammantam(T)

campanti, cammanti affines

(T)

 $c\bar{a}mpir\bar{a}ni(T)$ gum burned to give fragrant fumes; a kind of incense

cittappā (T) father's younger brother; citti's husband citti (T) mother's younger sister; cittappā's wife

 $devad\bar{a}s\bar{i}(S)$ temple dancer-prostitute

dharma (S) religion, law, duty, responsibility

dhoti (H) cloth covering the lower half of a man's body, loin cloth

doli (Hä a litter

grhastha (S) householder

 $j\bar{a}ti(T, S)$ caste (in the sense of endogamous unit)

jñāna yoga(S) path of knowledge

 $k\bar{a}ratai(T)$ a kind of thick pancake

karma (S) the effect of past action on the present and future

karma yoga (S) path of action

khādi (H) handspun, handwoven cloth

 $k\bar{o}tiram(T)$ gotra; clan

kutampam(T) family

maistri(H) contractor; overseer $m\bar{a}mi(T)$ mother's brother's wife

mofussil (H) provinces (as opposed to a capital, or important, city)

Mudaliar high caste non-Brahman, belonging to the Vellala caste-group

mukti (S) salvation or liberation of the soul

myook (B) headman

Naidu high caste non-Brahman, belonging to the Vellala caste-group

 $n\bar{o}npu(T)$ annual ritual performed by certain Tamil women

 $periyamm\bar{a}(T)$ mother's elder sister; wife of $periyapp\bar{a}$

 $periyapp\bar{a}(T)$ father's elder brother; husband of $periyamm\bar{a}$

 $periy\bar{a}r(T)$ great man.

Pongal (T) Tamil festival of the rice harvest

pongyi (B) Burmese Buddhist monk

prasād (S) sacramental food; food offered to a deity, then returned to the

worshipper to be consumed

 $p\bar{u}j\bar{a}(S)$ Hindu worship

 $p\bar{u}n\bar{a}l(T)$ upanayanam; a boy's initiation, or thread, ceremony

pwe (B) type of theatrical performance enacted to celebrate a festival.

rajasik (S) "passion-producing"

rsi(S) legendary sage

Reddy high caste non-Brahman, part of the Vellala caste group

sakti(S) the power or regenerative force in the universe; the energy or

active power of a deity, personified as his wife.

 $sanny\bar{a}sin\ (m)\ (S)$ homeless wanderer. A stage in life which demands the $sanny\bar{a}sini\ (f)\ (S)$ renunciation of all household affairs and possessions

śāstras (S) Hindu post-Vedic scriptures which include rules for living

sat (S) pure

sattvik (S) "virtue-producing"

sastiapdapūrti (S) special ceremony to celebrate reaching the age of sixty

smrti(S) "remembered" late-Vedic literature which gives instruction in the

sacred law. The *sūtras* and *śāstras*

śruti (S) "heard", or directly revealed Hindu scripture

 $s\bar{u}tras(S)$ Hindu manuals of instruction in the form of aphorisms.

swārāj (H) self rule

tāli (T) symbol of marriage which a Tamil woman wears around her neck;

mangalsutra (H)

Thakin (B) Master. A term originally used for white men, but later adopted

by the Burmese nationalist party, Dobama Asiayone, to describe

its members

 $t\bar{u}ya(T)$ pure.

 $\bar{u}r(T)$ "native place", village or town of origin of paternal family

uravinar (T) relatives

urimai pen(T) the girl a man has a right to marry; often used for a man's

mother's brother's daughter

vānaprastha (S) hermit

varna one of the four main divisions of Hindu society; sometimes

loosely translated as 'caste'

Vellala high caste non-Brahman

victoria horsedrawn carriage

 $v\bar{s}s(T)$ a weight, equal to about 3lb

Yeganpwe (B) Burmese water festival

Zerbadi member of a community from the Akyab region of Burma,

descended from Indian Muslim men and Burmese Buddhist

women

The language of the word or phrase is indicated as follows:

B Burmese

Ben Bengali

H Hindi

S Sanskrit

T Tamil

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in discussing kinship:-

B brother

e elder

F father

H husband

M mother

W wife

Z sister.

Note on names of places

In most cases the current name is used, and an earlier spelling is indicated in brackets, e.g. Pune (Poona), but Burma is used instead of Myanmar, because that is the way the country is remembered.

Transliteration

ALA-Library of Congress Romanization tables (1993) have been followed, except occasionally where a word is very well known in another form, e.g. Pongal has been used, not Ponkal.

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- p.9, footnote 3, lines 2 and 4 for Vaisnavasa read Vaisnavas
- p.19 diagram 3, see corrected diagram at foot of page (changes underlined in red)
- p.22, footnote 9, line 4 for p.22 read p.23
- p.25, footnote 15, line 1 for jadis read jatis
- p.25, footnote 16, line 3 omit 0 after or MyZ)
- p.37, para 3, line 2 insert as between is and though
- p.57, line 10 omit 2 in 2-3%.
- p.73, line 1 omit do
- p.121, line 3 insert married after had
- p.121, para 3, line 3 add s to Indian
- p.134, final para, line 6 read at Tamu for in Dimapur
- p.151, line 13 for Nonpus read Nonpus
- p.156, para 3, line 6 for have read having

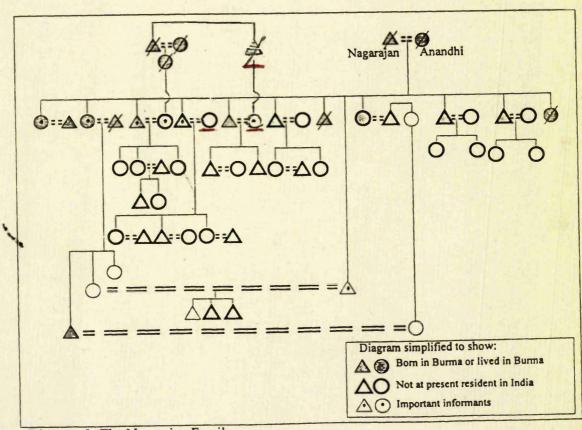


Diagram 3: The Nagarajan Family