Introduction

This research work attempts to undertake a contrastive analysis of Some Aspects of Bengali and Tamil Culture. A study of such nature is expected to provide various information about the two major languages namely Bengali and Tamil. The Thesis has been divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter is introducing the Research Theme.

The second chapter gives a detailed description of the Social Aspect of Tamil land and Bengal.

The third chapter gives a description of the Artistic Heritage of Tamil and Bengal.

The fourth chapter has focussed on Religious Aspects of Tamil land and Bengal.

The fifth chapter is discussing briefly the Indian Culture in East and South-East Asia.

The sixth chapter is discussing Special Features of Indian Culture.

The seventh chapter has presented the concluding observations.

Geographical position of India and place of Bengal and Tamil Nadu:

It will be observed from the physical features of Indian topography that her North is surrounded by the 'Himalaya range' and the 'Garwal range'; in South there are the 'Vindya ranges' and the Indian Ocean; in the East the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea in the
West. There is Thar Desert in Rajasthan on the Northern plains. While Bengal is located in the East of the Indian Map, Tamil Nadu is located in the South-East.

SHORT HISTORY OF INDIA:

India has a long history of more than five thousand years. The Aryans defeating the Dravidians took possession of the land. In ancient India there were innumerable Hindu Chiefs ruling the country from their own small kingdoms. India, then was predominantly bifurcated into small regions and states ruled by local Zamindars and kings.

After invasions by Muslim warriors the small states and regions were realigned under Muslim rulers to hold control over small states and regions. In some regions, the Muslim rulers allowed the local princes to rule the regions against payments of hefty sum as ‘Nazranaa’. With the defeats of Moghuls in the hands of Afghans the Muslim rule in India was on the verge of collapse. The political chaos that ensued at the time of defeat of Mughal empire had paved the way for permanent British rule in India.

East India Company landed in Indian coasts in seventeenth century with the objective of carrying trade activities. The weighing scale of the British Merchants ultimately transformed into ruling scale of the British Empire. The East India Company ensured that the British rule in India was firmly established before withdrawing from merchant activities. The British rule had its extension during the time of Lord Hastings. Bengal was the center of British rule following Regulation Act passed in British Parliament. In an attempt to extend its empire and establishing its supremacy the British rulers had to fight with the local rulers of Maharashtra, Hyderabad, Oudh, Mysore etc. The princely states had ultimately to surrender before the mighty British forces. Gradually, the entire India came under the British rule.

There is no doubt that by the year 1823 the greater part of India extending from Sutlej to Brahmaputra and from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin fell under the British rule.

Lord Dalhousie captured Punjab in 1849 after a prolonged fighting with the local army led by Ranjit Singh.
British rule and its oppressive measures against the poor people like farmers had roused anti-British sentiments among the general masses in different parts of the country. The Cole movement in 1831-1832 and Santhal insurgency of 1855-1856 were notable anti British movements.

The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-1859 the most lasting form of revolt that the British had to bear in mind. This revolt shook the very foundation of British Empire.

After Sepoy Mutiny, Indians experienced anti-British movements engineered by the cultivators of indigo in Bengal, Deccan riots of 1875 and Munda Tribal revolt.

The formation of Indian National Congress in 1885 and Muslim League in 1906 gave new dimension to the freedom struggle of India. Indian National Movement by non-violence method was spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. The movement called people to participate various non-violent movements like boycotting of foreign goods, Quit India Movement (1942) and rejection of paying taxes levied by British Government on essential items like salt. The formation of Azad Hind Fouz and Azad Hind Government by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in Singapore during the Second World war to fight against the British soldiers from outside Indian territory was a remarkable event in the annals of Indian history of the struggle for freedom.

On 15th August, 1947, India achieved freedom but not without pains. The united India had to be divided into two nations – India and Pakistan on religious lines. In 1950 India formally became the Republic under a new Constitution.

**CULTURE**

The societies in the world express their tradition of inter-personal relationship, ideas, religious beliefs, art, literature and education etc. through medium of their respective culture nurtured over a period of long years. The culture of any society is very important as it ensures unity of people even in adverse situation.
i) Social Life:

Social life of any community in India is comprised of its dresses, food habits, family set-up, marriage, music, caste, moral dealing etc. In strict conformity with Indian culture, both Tamils and Bengalees wear dresses which look sobre. The climatic conditions of Tamil Nadu and Bengal being humid in general, the dresses used in summer by both males and females in both the states are cotton fabrics to wither the heat. Kurtas and Dhotis are the main dresses for the male members of both Tamil and Bengali societies. Women of both the societies wear saris of different colors and hues. Nevertheless, the women maintain the dress code that is accepted in both Tamil and Bengali cultures.

Principal food of both Tamils and Bengalis is rice and pulse. This apart, the Tamils and Bengalis have their own special foods. Idli, Dosha, Uthapam etc. are few examples of special foods prepared in Tamil Society. Basically, Tamils are vegetarians. Bengalis on the other hand, are non-vegetarians. The prepare food items accompanied by fish or meat. The Bengalis are also fond of sweet-meats.

Joint-family set-up was common in both Tamil and Bengali societies. In this family set-up, the elders (males) were engaged in earning incomes for the family, while female members looked after household works. Over the passage of time the joint-family set-up has lost its utility for various reasons. Small nucleus family structure has come into existence. This new family set-up is noticed in both Tamil and Bengali societies.

Both Tamil and Bengali societies had common customs in organizing marriages in the family. In earlier days ‘arranged marriage’ was the custom for both Tamil and Bengali societies. Under this system the parents of both the girl and the boy used to arrange the marriage. This concept led to dowry system, where the parents of the girls had to cough up
moneys to settle marriage of their daughters. Although ‘arranged marriage’ system is still in vogue in both Tamil and Bengali societies the claim of dowry has substantially declined.

The social life of both Tamil and Bengali communities remains incomplete without mentioning their respective cultural practice. Music was one of the important cultural activities followed in both Tamil and Bengali societies since ancient times. Tamil music was based on classical tunes of Karnataka Gharana; whereas, Bengal had adapted Hindustani music to foster its own music. Bengal, however, was famous for its own folk-music. Folk music of Bengal has earned a special position in the world. Rabindra Nath Tagore, the Nobel laureate has given a teeth to Bengali music by creating new formats for notations to suit the lyrics composed by him. Thus Rabindra Sangeet has carved a special place in Indian music.

Both Tamil and Bengali societies have noticed the practice of caste system since early ages. In Tamilnadu caste system has been very intense and rooted in every sphere of life. Early Tamil civilization has noticed caste wars. In fact, existence of various groups of tribals in different parts of Tamilnadu created divisions even among upper caste and lower caste among tribals. In this connection, however, although, Bengal was never free from casteism the feuds between different groups on lines of castes were few and far between.

So far as moral dealing is concerned, both Tamil and Bengali culture maintain their respective tradition of high moral values. Both the societies are relatively free from moral degenerations.

**ii) Religious Life:**

Tamil and Bengali people are highly religious minded. Religious bend of mind of the people of Tamilnadu and Bengal could be visualized from the arrival of great sages like Sankaracharya and Swami Vivekananda. The establishment of Mutts and temples in both Tamilnadu and Bengal reflect their peoples’ cravings for spiritual fulfillment. The Hindu community in both the societies (Tamil and Bengali) worship deities in expression of their
religious faiths. Similarly, Muslims and other communities in both Tamil and Bengali societies follow their respective religious beliefs by going to Mosques, Churches and so on.

**iii) Economic Life :**

The economic life of both Tamil and Bengal was very common. Tamils and Bengalis lived on agricultural activities. Graduation from agrarian activities to industrial activities took place at a much later date when the continuous pressure on lands squeezed the incomes from agricultural activity. With the rise in population in both the societies people from rural belt started migrating to urban areas and cities in search of jobs. Narrow employment opportunities in rural areas in both Tamilnadu and Bengal have increased the number of poor people. The rich people in both the societies in rural areas exploited the poor for their economic advantage. In fact, at one point of time the rich Zamindars and moneylenders in rural Bengal and Tamilnadu have sucked the blood of poor farmers. However, with the Government’s policy of land acquisition for redistribution among landless peasants and initiation of land reforms, particularly in Bengal during late 1960s, the economic life of rural people has vastly improved. Along with development of Agriculture the respective Governments in both Tamilnadu and Bengal have initiated several measures to develop cottage and small scale industries in rural areas to provide scope for employment opportunities to rural population. The opportunities for urban population to get employment in industrial ventures were very narrow both in Tamilnadu and Bengal. Both the states carried with them huge burden of urban unemployed persons. Even now with the limited scope for employment in industrial sectors due to few numbers of industries i.e. manufacturing units in both the states unemployment is rising and consequently the economic life of people of both Tamil and Bengal societies have been adversely affecting. However, with the emergence and proliferation of service sector, especially, in Information and Technology, the job opportunities in both Tamilnadu and Bengal have got a boost. Consequently the economic life of the people of both Tamil and Bengali societies has risen vertically.