CHAPTER – 4

INDIAN DIASPORA IN MADAGASCAR AND SEYCHELLES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The present chapter will make a comparison between the status and identity of Indian diaspora in Madagascar and Seychelles. An attempt is made in the chapter to bring out both differences and similarities. The chapter is broadly divided into two parts. The first part, which will make a comparison of differences and similarities, is further divided into two sub-sections. The first section will deal with economic status while the second section will deal with socio-political status. The second part will take up the issue of Assimilation and Identity. It will analyze how far the two communities have assimilated with the host countries or have retained their identity.

Madagascar was ruled by a single colonial power that is France, while Seychelles was ruled by two – France as well as Britain. France occupied Madagascar in 1896 and got independence in 1960 and Seychelles was acceded to Britain by France in 1814 and it got independence in 1976. However, both these countries are known as ‘Francophone’. Unlike Britain, France has always followed the policy of assimilation in its colonies. The French Assimilation concept was based on the idea of expanding French culture to the colonies outside of France in the 19th and 20th century. Natives of these colonies were considered French citizens as long as the French culture and customs were adopted. This also meant that they would have the rights and duties of French citizen\(^1\). France ruled its colonies as an extension of its empire. Under this policy, the subject population was to be fully acculturated in the main stream culture in terms of language and culture. French influence is clearly seen in its ex-colonies and Seychelles and Madagascar are no exceptions.\(^2\) The French learned early that their colonies would last longer if they worked to become friends with the people of their colonies. France, therefore never left its colonies even after formal independence was granted to them. In Seychelles, even when it

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was handed to Britain, French laws, customs and culture were followed faithfully. No attempt was made by British colonial rulers to change this.

The twist in the tale is that despite being both Francophone, the impact on Indian community was different. On the one hand, Indian community in Madagascar has strictly retained its identity, in Seychelles, People of Indian Origin, at least until last decade were fully assimilated. Recently, there is a renewed interest of Indians, especially Tamils to retain their identity.

In Madagascar, there were evidences that Indians were present before the colonization period. Medieval Arab sources give evidence about South Asian Merchants along the Indian Ocean Littoral. From the 9th century onwards, traders from India frequented the coasts of Oman, Socotra and Aden. French accounts also reveal that small Indian trading community was already present on Madagascar by the late 18th century. For example, Dumain found a well established settlement of Indians in Majunga, when he visited it in 1792. Even during colonialism, Indians came as a result of free immigration. They came as artisans or skilled workers and then shifted to trade after reaching their destination. A significant number were migrants who had already spent time in the Mascareness or elsewhere in the region. This was the migration in search of opportunities rather than forced mobilization or an escape from desperate socio-economic conditions. 3

Where as in Seychelles, Indians came in small number first as slaves and then as indentured labour. A small number of traders came from present day Tamil Nadu and later from Gujarat. 4

4.2 Economic Status: Differences and Similarities

People of Indian Origin in Madagascar and Seychelles have done extremely well economically. They have risen up the economic ladder.

During the colonial rule, in Seychelles, most Indians worked on white-owned estates as slaves. After the abolition of slavery and when British took over they became agricultural

3 For details Refer to Chapter no. 2
4 For details Refer to Chapter 3
Wage labourers, sharecroppers, fishers or artisans. When French left Seychelles, the loyal Indians were given huge land area. Therefore, many Indians rose up economically. The first Tamil, Ramalingam from Reunion, came to Seychelles in 1789 as an advisor to the Governor and was endowed with large areas of land for his services. In 1864 the Naiken family established their business followed in 1874 by Kandasamy Chetty in business. Traders from Tamil Nadu came and flourished. The main trading commodity was Timber.

Similarly, in Madagascar, as mentioned earlier, Indians came as traders, most of them coming from Gujarat-Bombay Belt of India. Trade and shopkeeping became the principle occupations of Indians. Indians in Madagascar, belong to bania castes A caste that is well known in India for its trading skills. Secondly, unlike French settlers and natives, Indians were precluded from early days of their settlement, from acquiring extensive land rights. Deprived of any opening in the agricultural sector, they turned more to the urban and commercial enterprises. Therefore, such commercial leanings, favoured and sustained by circumstances that did not allow the Indians to own and acquire cultivable land on extensive scale. However, nothing could prevent them from maintaining commercial transactions with the natives living in rural areas.

Similarly, the question for PIOs in Seychelles is: why even after having access to land, PIOs in Seychelles, rather than going for agriculture, opted for retail trade and construction business. The most plausible answer could be that there was not much scope in Agriculture. Seychelles is a hilly region. Agriculture is difficult. While trade in timber is more lucrative and later Indians made their mark in the construction sector.

In Madagascar, Indian merchants used to travel in Caravans, carrying goods for exchange. Indian textiles were exchanged for Gold. Gold was the most sought after commodity for exchange as the demand for gold was quite high in the Indian market. Indian merchants also played an important role in supplying goods to the remotest area of Madagascar. Even the goods from the French Ships were taken into interiors by the Indian merchants. Thus, Indians were seen as agents of distribution. This is how Indian merchants monopolised trade in Madagascar.

Similarly in Seychelles, one can find Tamilian Shop in even a remotest area. Tamils have captured entire retail trade of Seychelles. Likewise, Gujaratis in Seychelles are in the
control of the construction sector. Rising real-estate prices in 1980s enabled some of them to take over entire construction business. It also enabled them to use family holdings as collateral to secure loans for business ventures in small-scale manufacturing and artisan enterprises. The names of laxmanbhaiji and Vijay are quite famous. They are well established businessman in the construction sector.

Similarly, People of Indian origin are controlling almost entire Gold Trade. Almost 90% of the gold shops are owned by PIOs. Even in foreign trade and commerce Indians have made their presence felt. PIOs being clever merchants always made a good rapport with those in power. This quality made them successful during the Merina rule and also under the French colonial Empire. When French left Madagascar, The vacuum was filled by PIOs business houses. They got hold of Madagascar’s foreign trade. They made huge investment in the foreign trade. This gave a major boost to Madagascar’s export in vanilla, coffee, sugarcane, clove, cocoa, and livestock product.

Likewise, in the banking sector too Indians are dominating. They acted in almost similar way as moneylenders of India did during the colonial period – lending money to poor peasants and taking away their land in case of non-repayment. It was possible for the Indian merchants to lend money as they amassed huge capital from their commercial trade.

Thus, the economic importance of PIOs in Madagascar far outweighs their number. Indians in Madagascar control around 50-60% of the economy. However, this made the PIOs in Madagascar quite unpopular among the native Malagasies. PIOs are seen as exploiters and at time they become obvious targets of anger of peasants. They are victim to any political and civil unrest in the country.

Thus, as far as economic status is concerned PIOs in Seychelles as well as in Madagascar enjoy a very high status. However, in Madagascar PIOs constitute only two percent of the population but are controlling more than fifty percent of the economy.

4.3 Socio-Political Status: differences and similarities

In order to compare and contrast political status of People of Indian Origin in Madagascar
and Seychelles, we will first compare their status during the colonial rule. How colonial masters viewed Indians?

French viewed Indians with suspicion. Their links with British India led General Joseph Simon Gellieni to attribute the insurrection of 1898-99 in the north-west to the Indians, Comorians and other Muslims, perhaps acting with support from England.  

For French colonisers, Indians were the subjects of rival country England. Indians were suspected in many ways. Indian Muslims were often suspected of collaboration with the Arabs. They saw Indians sometimes as people of the country and sometimes as foreigners. Indians were tossed between their foreigner status, as British subjects, and their resident situation in Madagascar.

Many French accounts recognized the trading zeal of Indian merchants. According to one such accounts, Indians were ‘sober, industrious, economical, clever traders....they monopolize trade. Their trading tactics include buying low price rice and reselling it at an expensive rate later. They are parasite and nothing more’  

This ambiguous attitude of French regarding Indian community must be understood in the context of social and political relations. They had just subdued an island whose political unity was far from being achieved. The Merinas of central kingdom had expanded their territory, but the coastal regions were areas of rebellion and resistance, which the French faced for many years. They had to promptly identify allies, to assess loyalties, to find auxiliaries to the colony project. Yet, the French mistrusted English and Muslims in general. The Indians, as British subjects and many of them Muslims, were considered as enemies, competitors, scapegoats and were often talked of by the colonizers to the Malagasy as Foreign body of exploiters.

Notwithstanding, the negative view about the Indians, the French colonial administration also recognized the special place that Indians had in the development of the country. Indians, due to their hard work and remarkable resistance to climate, were considered

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very helpful in continuous flow of goods into the remotest villages. They acted as agents of distribution. Indians were considered as race having varied skills.

Indians on their part were neutral and pragmatic. Their primary concern was their business. Therefore, they were always on the side of power. They could be blamed only for getting rounds with financial laws, otherwise Indian community maintained a low political profile and never engaged in any revolutionary activities against the government.

After independence, too PIOs were viewed with suspicion by not only those were in power but also by Malagasy people. Despite living for generations, there has been reluctance on the part of the governments in power to give them Malagasy nationality.

At the time of colonization, some communities, like Khoja ismailies (followers of Agha Khan) were encouraged to ask for the French nationality.

At the time of independence of Madagascar in 1960, one thousand Indians had French nationality. During the first fifteen years, the country gave 255 naturalizations, out of which hundred were Indians. Indians are discriminated while giving nationality as against other foreigners. Although living for many generations, many PIOs have been denied Malagasy citizenship. They need residence permit. They are considered as foreigners and laws on the foreigners regulates their community activities, prohibiting certain professions to them and the acquisition of immovable without prior approval of the public authorities.

There are around 1000 stateless in Madagascar.\(^7\) The US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor reported about the stateless Indians. In 2007, it reported that ‘An arcane system of citizenship laws and procedures has resulted in a pool of stateless persons in the minority Muslim community, many of whom have lived in country for generations. Citizenship is transmitted through blood; birth on Malagasy soil does not transmit citizenship. Children born to a Malagasy mother and non-Malagasy father must be declared by a certain age or risk losing eligibility for citizenship. Some members of

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\(^7\) www.indiandiaspora.nic.in
Indian origin who failed to register for Malagasy or Indian citizenship following India’s independence in 1947 were no longer eligible for either.\(^8\)

Lack of citizenship restricts PIOs to actively engage in political activities of Madagascar. Majority of them do not vote. Very few have managed to get political posts. In 2002, legislative elections, two persons of Indian origin were elected as deputies to the 160 member national Assembly.

Quite opposite to this trend in Madagascar, Indians in Seychelles enjoy an equal political status vis-a-vis other communities. PIOs in Seychelles are politically quite active. Indians contest elections. An example of this is the presidential candidate of Seychelles National Party - Wavel Ramkalawan. He is a person of Indian origin.

The Seychelles National Party (SNP) was formed by the merger of three separate opposition parties in 1994: the Seychelles National Movement, led by Gérard Hoarau; the National Alliance Party, led by Philippe Boullé (an independent presidential candidate in the 2001 presidential election); and Parti Seselwa, led by Wavel Ramkalawan.

Ramkalawan, an Anglican priest, is the SNP’s current leader. He won 44.9% of the vote in the 2001 presidential election, behind René (54.2%) and ahead of Boullé (0.9%). At parliamentary elections in December 2002, the SNP won 42.6% of the vote and 11 seats out of 34. Seven members were directly elected and four were chosen by proportional representation. In July 2006 elections Ramakhilavan’s popularity was such that he got only eight percent votes less than the winning candidate James Michel of Seychelles People’s Progressive Front.

The reason why Indians in Seychelles enjoy a different political status from that of PIOs in Madagascar is that when Indians came to Seychelles there was no indigenous population. So there was never a question of competition between so called natives and people of Indian origins. So every individual on the island was a settler.

Socially, Indian community in Madagascar has maintained exclusiveness and a cultural superiority. This has made them a hated community. Thus whenever, there is civil or political unrest in the country, Indian community is attacked. Their shops are looted.

The riots of 1987, which made many PIOs to leave the country, started in Antisirabe. PIOs reside in large numbers in Antisirabe, and controlled most of the economic activity. They run most of the larger enterprises and Industry and are therefore the most important employers. However, the Malagasy employees felt that they were being ill-treated by their owners. Therefore, an anti Indian feeling started burning. An incident triggered the riot. A Malagasy bought an ice cream from an Indian shop. There was some argument between them and the owner of the shop spat at him. The news went throughout the city. One political party was interested in intensifying a dispute between the Malagasy and PIOs. Then, a well organized riot exploded. Indian business men were attacked. Their stores and houses were burnt. The riots also spread to other cities. In Toliara, on the west Coast, several stores were burnt and damaged. The houses of all the PIOs were attacked. Several Indians were made to flee the country.

There was another riot in Antisirabe in 1994. The riots of January 27th, 1994 burst in Antsirabé, following a procession of high-school pupils. The Indian families flee towards Tananarive where they take refuge. Many of their properties were freely taken by unruly mobs. Even the lives of Indians were also indiscriminately attempted.

Similarly, during Political crisis of 2002, Indians were attacked. In 2002 during national election there was discord between the Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana. Ravalomanana declared himself president. In response Ratsiraka declared martial law in Antananarivo. Pro-Ratsiraka forces began a systematic campaign targeting the infrastructure of Antananarivo by destroying a bridge at Fatihita. Roadblocks were erected, severely reducing the flow of goods and persons both in and out of the capital with severe economic and serious humanitarian consequences for the entire country. The Ravalomanana Government decided to use force to dismantle the blockade and seize control of the whole country and Ratsiraka left for France. This led to ethnic strife in many parts of Madagascar. Indians were also targeted. The US Bureau of Democracy,

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9 Mondediplo.com/1997/03/01madagascar
Human Rights, and labor, had reported that there were several high profile killings of ‘karana’ during this time; however, these killings appeared to have been more of criminal pursuits rather than political motives.10

In a recent political crisis on January 26th, 2009, tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, to protest against the rule of President Marc Ravalomanana by supporters of his rival Andre Rajoelina, opposition leader and mayor of the capital, Antananarivo. Unrest was sparked at a Rajoelina political rally on 24 January, after calls for a general strike and an end to Ravalomanana's growing "authoritarianism". Rajoelina had also been accusing the government of mis-spending public funds and suppressing press freedom. Demonstrations turned violent on 26 January, when anti-government protesters took to the streets, setting fire to state-owned television and radio stations in an apparent response to the government's previous closure of the mayor's private television station. According to figures released by the Malagasy Ministry of health, 82 people lost their lives and 321 were injured. Mob also looted and burnt many Indian shops in the capital. Police remained the silent spectator11

Kidnapping is also one of the major problems that Indians are facing. The younger ones are most vulnerable. Most of the victims are freed after payment of heavy ransom, around thousands of dollars. However, there are incidents, though few in number where victims are also killed. The social exclusiveness of Indians and refusal to adopt Malagasy culture has been looked with suspicion. Isolated incidents of violence and abuse occur on regular basis.

This situation is quite similar to PIOs in East African countries – Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania. In Uganda, the president Idi Amin in 1972, gave Uganda's 70,000 Asians (mostly Gujaratis of Indian origin) 90 days to leave the country, following an alleged dream in which, he claimed, God told him to expel them. The order for expulsion was also based on the anti-Indian social climate of Uganda. The Ugandan government claimed that the Indians were hoarding wealth and goods to the detriment of indigenous Africans, "sabotaging" the Ugandan economy. Almost similar public anger was faced by Indians living in Kenya and Tanzania. Now, if we take the argument further and try to look at the

10 For details refer to chapter no. 2.
11 http://search.us.reuters.com/query/?q=madagascar&st=70&s=US
power structure of East African countries, we will find that during the colonial times the power structure was such that British were on the top followed by Indians and then Black Africans. When these countries got independence, the power structure turned upside down. British left the country and now Black Africans came on the top in the power structure and then Indians. However, economically Indians remained strong. Thus, from time to time when governments, in order to redistribute wealth, start nationalization process, People of Indian Origins are victimized.

Similarly, PIOs in Madagascar have to bear the brunt of public anger from time to time.

The situation in Seychelles is quite a contrast, PIOs in Seychelles are not a hated community. They are on the Island since its origin. PIOs have almost been completely assimilated itself with the society and culture of Seychelles. Therefore, a riot like situation against Indians never arose in Seychelles.

4.4 Assimilation and the Identity

Let us first discuss what does assimilation means in the context of diasporas relations with the host country. According to Gabriel sheffer,¹² today assimilation as a strategy is adopted by relatively few international migrants and members of emerging diasporas. It is adopted mainly by members of established diasporas who firmly intend to settle and do not intend to cultivate their connections with their homelands. Full assimilation, however, means more than just total identification with a host society and indifference to connections with one’s homeland. It means eradicating one’s own ethnic identity and adopting that of the predominant sector in the host society. As the events of the twentieth century have shown, however, that is not an easy transition, for it is extremely difficult, often impossible, to shed one’s primordial and psychological symbolical identity and adopt a new one. That is the case particularly because individuals and groups within host countries have long memories that relish the enduring subtle distinction between “us” and ‘them’ between ‘us’ and all ‘others’. 

It is, however, important to note that the forgoing observation is hotly debated among academic observers and diaspora members. It is debated on the both theoretical level and

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the practical level. Some diasporans and academics believe that assimilation not only is possible but also is highly desirable. Consequently, such diasporans try hard to assimilate. The view here is that although individual assimilation definitely occurs, it does not include entire diaspora communities, which means that despite demographic losses, relatively large core groups maintain their ethno-national identities and connections with their homelands. Also assimilation is becoming less appealing to members of emerging diasporas. Moreover, as noted, many “assimilated” diasporans are ‘rediscovering’ their old identities, rejoining their diaspora communities, and identifying as such.

In the light of above discussion let us analyze Indians in Madagascar and Seychelles. In order to do this let us take certain aspects of social life and see whether the Indian communities in Madagascar and Seychelles have fully assimilated with host society, or are strictly retaining their identity or are in the process of rediscovering their old identities. These are: Marriage, Language food and tastes, Religion Rituals and Festivals, Education. Let us discuss them one by one

4.4.1 Marriage

Among the Indian community in Madagascar, marriage is strictly endogamous in nature. Indians marry within their community. Hindus, with the march of time, tended to grow less particular about the observance of the traditional Indian caste system. The intermarriages among the Guajarati Hindu community is quite common. The Indian community of Madagascar, particularly the more advanced sections of it, appears to have developed a modern outlook on caste by overcoming the prejudices usually associated with it. Caste seems to have less hold on the Hindus in Madagascar than on other countries like South Africa. The reasons are not far to seek. According to Hariprasad Chattopadhaya, the Brahmins are usually ascribed a conservative social outlook and are looked upon as mighty props supporting the structure of orthodox caste system. The grip of caste tends to be feeble where the Brahmins are scarce. There are very few Brahmins in Madagascar.\textsuperscript{13} Again, the Indian traders cannot avoid social contact with the customers of different religious faiths in connection with their trade. Such a social contacts arising out of trade relations and commercial transactions necessitated

\textsuperscript{13} Refer to Chapter 2
participation in social entertainments and dinner parties. Rigid caste system has thus tended to breakdown among the Indians in Madagascar.

Notwithstanding the above statement, marriage with Muslim or a Malagasy is not allowed. The Gujarati Hindu community is liberal to the extent of marriage within the Gujarati Hindu community.

However, among Muslims, Bohras can marry only to Bohras not to Khojas or Ismaili and vice versa. They have followed this rule religiously. Though there are incidents of inter-caste marriage and also marriage between a Hindu and a Muslim, yet such marriages are not encouraged. This limitation on marriage has led poorer section to remain either unmarried or to take a Malagasy wife. Children born from such union are not given same status and are considered as half caste. The distant attitude toward the half caste children reveal how exclusive is their identity, grounded on a set of norms based on race, religion and culture. Half castes are not recognised as Indians. They suffer a lot because of this situation.

Marriageable age is very low. It is between eighteen and twenty one. Among Muslims, girls are sometimes married between the ages of fourteen- sixteen. This is because parents want to arrange marriage of their children themselves. This is one of the ways how Indian community maintains its social exclusiveness.

Due to this social exclusiveness, matrimonial choice is restricted for all Indian families, and call upon international community networks. One of them is formed by East-African countries and United Kingdom, especially for Sias communities {Bohras, Khojas ithna Asheri and khoja Ismailli} but they are sometimes cautious because they experience the cultural differences with English – speaking families living in East- African countries. So they use another network formed by Reunion and Mauritius islands and France.

For PIOs in Seychelles, Unlike the Indian community in Madagascar, Marriage is not endogamous. It is not compulsory to marry within the Indian community. Caste identity has remained insignificant for many generations of PIOs. Varna system has had little direct relevance to the meaning to the meaning of caste to Indians in Seychelles. Identification is more with as more defined caste or sub-caste jati – these centre very
much on kinship and village, and are affirmed through marriage negotiations. Individuals would try to secure the best possible marriage for their children, not usually into higher or different jati but into family of high status or 'good standing'.

However, during the last decade, there is a renewed trend among the Indian community in Seychelles (especially Tamils) to marry in India. They are coming to their state of origin for marriage. Indian wives are preferred as against earlier preference for Seychellois wife. The reason for this is that Marriage as an institution has become very weak in Seychelles. Divorce is quite common and easily available. Women have more rights in marriage. After divorce the burden of children do not fall on the mother. Women are preffered in government jobs. So it is easier for women to walk out of marriage. The preference for Indian wife also shows that Indian community in Seychelles is rediscovering its roots in India.

4.4.2 Rituals, Religious Festivals

In Madagascar, it has been seen that the attitude of Indian immigrants towards their religion are favourable since immigration. One of the possible explanations may be that religion acts as a psychological connection with the home country in an alien society. Another change one observes is that the Indian immigrants tend to look at the religion more as ideology than as a set of strict dogmas and prescriptions. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily result in a decrease in religious observation and practice. Most Indian families have a place of worship at their homes. They also visit temples, churches, mosques and gurudwaras and participate in all forms of religious activity. One can support the hypothesis that religious activity among Indian emigrants has not declined as a result of immigration. On the contrary, there is a greater religious consciousness and a need to practice religious rituals individually as well as communally.14

The social life of Indians in Madagascar revolves largely around Mosques and Temples. Majority of Indians in Madagascar are Muslims. They are extremely religious. Despite French Policy of ‘Assimilation’, Indian community in Madagascar has been able to maintain strong religious identity. Conversion to Christianity is not practiced and is also

looked down upon. Unlike, Indians in other French colonies (for example: Reunion—where Indians have converted into Christianity, have taken French ways of life, have even changed their names), Indians in Madagascar strongly uphold their religious identity. Maintaining this identity has remained and today also is a challenge among the Indian Community.

Rituals followed by Indian settlers are same as followed in India. The marriage, birth of a child, death rituals etc. are exactly same as followed in India. Malagasy are not allowed to participate in the rituals. Marriage is an expensive business. Dowry system prevails, though it is condemned by the younger generation. Death ritual is unchanged, though simplified.

All religious festivals are celebrated especially ID, Navaratri and Diwali. Malagasy are never invited. Indians maintain exclusiveness while celebrating these festivals. Festivals are celebrated with much pomp and fair. Indian community gathers at one place and then all the ceremonies are performed together.

In Seychelles, Indian culture gradually gave way to a mixed Seychellois culture, which retains more of French customs, habit and common law, than of any other outside influence, even of the British who ruled for over more than 150 Years.

This is however, not true of Indians alone but also of all other communities that came to settle on the island from time to time. The Seychellois culture is essentially Seychellois, with an inevitable French accent. The Separate identities have been diluted, in course of time, in the totality of Seychellois society.

For well over 200 years the Indian Diaspora in Seychelles became integrated with the local population. In the course of this development their traditional values including language, religion and culture took a back seat in the land of their settlement.

In the 1980's, however, there was renewed interest of Indians, especially Tamils in establishing religious and cultural centres. Even though fellow Tamils in other settlements

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in this region established centres of cultural and religious significance for themselves, Seychellois Tamils did not establish any such centre. Their cultural thirst and religious needs were satisfied through periodical visits to their native Tamilnadu. Attempts were made to hold cultural festivals when Tamils assembled and celebrated their days of cultural importance. However, the absence of an established centre made these efforts intermittent.\textsuperscript{16}

It was only in 1984 that \textit{Seychelles Hindu Kovil Sangam} existence.

The main purpose of the S.H.K.S was to build a temple to cater to the spiritual and cultural needs of the Hindu population. The Arulmigu Navasakti Vinayagar temple was constructed in 1992. The organization of the Seychelles Hindu Kovil Sangam in 1984 and the consecration of the Navasakti Vinayagar Temple in May 1992 were landmarks for the resurgence of Tamil cultural activities apart from the religious awakening. The Kovil Sangam became the rallying base for all the Tamils and Hindus for the promotion of Tamil culture in this country. Active participation in Tamil classes, debates, dramas and other cultural events including Tamil publications has increased over the years. This temple combines a cultural institution with a holy home for religious needs.

The Arulmigu Navasakti Vinayagar Temple, the first and the only Hindu temple in Seychelles, has Lord Ganesha as the presiding deity. All the Festivals like Taippoosam Kavadi Festival, which started in 1993 in Seychelles are celebrated with much pomp and show.

The Seychelles Hindu Kovil Sangam over this short span of seventeen years has successfully established and entrenched some strong foundations for the preservation, consolidation and further flowering of Hindu-Tamil culture in this paradise island of Seychelles. The ever-popular kavadi festival and special Hindu festivals are covered in Tamil and English in the national media and wide coverage of such events over national radio and television are worthy of appreciation. The Sangam may be proud of having published six souvenir booklets on the temple, two compilations of devotional hymns and four annual religious calendars, all for free distribution. For the annual consecration the

\textsuperscript{16} Refer to Chapter 3.
national daily "The Seychelles Nation" in Tamil and English publishes a special
commemorative supplement.

Since June 1999 the Sangam utilizes a fortnightly radio time of fifteen minutes every
Friday evening to broadcast talks and devotional songs on Hindu faith courtesy of the
Government of Seychelles.

Finally, for one of the national day celebrations in June the Sangam had a traditional
illuminated "Car Ratham" in the float procession of thirty, which not only won great
applause and appreciation but also was placed first with a handsome award. Considered
together, these activities suggest that there is Tamil-Hindu cultural flowering in the multi-
lingual, multi-religious paradise island of Seychelles.

4.4.3 Language, Food and Taste

Gujarati is the first language of Indian community of Madagascar. It is strictly spoken at
home. Children are educated in the French medium but they are not allowed to speak in
French or Malagasy at home. Indians, in general, speak three languages: Gujarati, Malagasy and French. Children pick up Malagasy from their Malagasy servants. Women
too learn Malagasy while working with Malagasy servants. Growing up in French
culture, Gujarati is still the first language of the Indian community. In fact, some old
Gujarati words that may have disappeared from the language in India are still in their
vocabulary. This strict adherence to Guajarati language shows Indian community’s strong
desire to maintain ethnic identity. Similarly with food, Gujarati food is served. Almost all
Hindu families are pure vegetarian and children are also forced to follow it.

Indian community in Seychelles, in course of their assimilation process has lost its
Language. Creole is spoken at home and is also language of work. They also speak
English. But Indian languages are not spoken. Even in Food and Tastes, Indian
community in Seychelles has adapted French cuisine and ways and manners. The reason
could be a) low numerical strength of Indian community and b) considering French
culture and language as superior and also as a way to rise higher in the social ladder.
4.4.4 Education

Education was up till now sadly absent among the Indian community in Madagascar. They are many reasons for this lack of education among the Indian Community. One of the most important reasons is the strong desire of maintaining ethnic identity and resisting any kind of intermingling with the native population. Most girls are married by the time they are 16 or 17 and hardly even finish their schooling so that parents can control their choice of grooms and will ensure their marriage within the Indian community. After marriage girls are expected to take up household chores and help their husbands in business. As for boys, after completing their schools they look after family shops or business. They are not expected to take up government jobs. Therefore, higher education is not considered essential.

The present generation, however, is concerned about the education of their children. The problem is that they would like their children to study in a French medium school. Good schools are in the capital, Tananarive. Those living in coastal areas are deprived of good education. Very few parents, who could afford used to send their children to France for higher education but now many parents are sending them to India, especially to Bangalore. Families also try to control peer group of the younger ones. Earlier, children were not encouraged to make friends with Malagasies. Now in many families children are allowed to make friends with Malagasies, however, they are not allowed to bring them home.

This is quite opposite to situation in Seychelles. PIOs in Seychelles acquire high education. Greater tertiary education among the Indians in Seychelles, accounted for the shift to management, professional and technical positions. The rising educational achievements among Indians (most of them go for higher education in France) saw growing number of Indians graduates entering the teaching profession and also in bureaucracy.

4.5 Conclusion

Madagascar was ruled by a single colonial power, that is, France, while Seychelles was ruled by France as well as Britain. Despite being both 'Francophone' the above discussion has shown considerable differences in identity formation and Socio-political
and economic status of Indians in Madagascar and Seychelles. On the one hand Indian community in Madagascar has strictly retained its identity; on the other hand Indians in Seychelles have assimilated almost fully with the Seychellois society and have accepted French ways and lives. Indians in Madagascar were able to retain their identity as, unlike Seychelles, they went as free merchants and not as indentured labourers. They were in no pressure to increase their social and economic status by adopting the culture and religion of their colonial masters. This has resulted in resistance, by PIOs in Madagascar, to any kind of intermingling with the native population. This exclusiveness has developed hatred in the minds of Malagasies against the Indian community. As against this, there was no indigenous population when Indians first arrived in Seychelles. So, there was no competition from the native population. Also, the Indians came as indentured labourers and conversion to Christianity and assimilation into French culture was considered important in order to rise socially and economically. Indian Diaspora in Seychelles became integrated with the local population. The separate identities have been diluted, in course of time, in the totality of Seychellois society. In the 1980’s, however, there was renewed interest of Indians, especially Tamils in establishing religious and cultural centres. This reassertion of identity is not identity reassertion as ‘Indians’ but as ‘Tamils’ and cannot be looked as conflicting with their Identity as ‘Seychellois’.