

SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THANJAVUR MARATHAS BRAHMINS*Tamilarasan Varadarajan****Abstract**

This essay intends to describe Thanjavur Marathi-speaking People (especially Maratha Brahmins) and tracing their lineage through ancestral rulers. and to elucidate the impact on the Marathi-speaking People after the post-colonial period & to understand the reasons for their gradual decline in concurrence to their present scenario. This essay aims to bring into limelight the various reasons for the decline of the Marathi-speaking people in Thanjavur, the gradual diminishing of their cultural tradition, status and other factors. It mainly focuses to address the origin and sociological status of the Marathi-speaking people in and around Thanjavur and to know the relation between Thanjavur Marathas and other community especially Kallars, Vaandaiyar, Etc.

All material evidence presented in this project is basically taken from primary sources by taking live interviews of several Marathi-speaking people in Thanjavur. The analysis has been done in lucid language so as to give a liberal construction to the entire project since the inception of the Marathi-speaking people in Thanjavur. This essay is only having primary sources and helps to understanding the concept of social diversity prevailing in the society. The essay affirms the existence of the Thanjavur Marathas, and helps to identify social status in the society.

INTRODUCTION

The History of the Thanjavur Maratha Brahmins originally dates back to 18th and first half of the 19th century. During this period, the mass exodus of people most specifically Brahmins migrated from different parts of the Maharashtra and Karnataka to the Tamil country, under the successors of Chattrapathi Shivaji. Thanjavur was one and only Maratha kingdom and founded by the Chattrapathi Shivaji's Brother, *Venkoji Raja Bhosale*. Marathas Empire last until the last Maratha ruler was dethroned by the East India Company in 19th century.

The Supremacy of Vijayanagar Empire was prevalent in first half of 16th century, which was challenged by the Nayaks of Madurai conquered Thanjavur in 1646. The

* Tamil Nadu National Law School, Tiruchirappalli.

Chokkanatha Nayak, ruler of Madurai captured Thanjavur and killed the ruler Vijayaraghava. The elder son of Vijayaraghava induced the Bijapur Sultan to get back his empire from Nayaks. The Maratha General *Venkoji alias Ekoji* captured Thanjavur, which began the rule of Marathas in Thanjavur.

Historical Background

There has been evidence of Marathi immigrants in the Tamil country ever since ancient times. During the Vijayanagar Empire and its aftermath, there was regular movement of people from central India to South India. The Thanjavur Marathi community originated in the 17th Century. Serfoji -I invited Brahmins to settle down in major parts of Thanjavur and offered vast quantities of land. He also established many mandapams, agrahaam and Sarabhojirajapuram, etc . Some aristocratic Marathi Brahmin families, continue the age old custom of concluding marriage alliances only with the other aristocratic Maratha families of Maharashtra and Central India. Venkoji offered many important post in their administration most specifically Ministers i.e. *Dalavoy or Mantri*. sometimes the Dalavoy was also the commander in chief of the Army. Marathi Brahmins was said to be next position to that of the King and the importance was given more to the *Dabir Pandits*. The country was divided into the Subahs and Seemais and Maganams in the decreasing order. The Subahs were pattukottai, Mayavaram, Mannargudi and Tiruvadi and small villages of Kumbakonam. Marathi Brahmins was only sole right to collect tax in and around all the villages and they named themselves as mirasdars or puttackdars.

Sociological Status Of Thanjavur Marathas In Pre-Colonial Period

Nearly around three around year's back, the first to conquer Thanjavur were the kith and kin of Marathas especially Venkoji, the brave Maratha and who is considered to be a half-brother to Chattrapathi Shivaji was the first person to declare himself King of the Thanjavur Maratha Kingdom. After his establishment of Kingdom, nearly 300 Maratha Brahmins (Maratha Iyengars & Maratha Iyers) arrived and settled in different parts of Thanjavur especially in:

- a) Thanjavur Palace
- b) MaelaVeedhi,
- c) Ayyankullam, Etc.

Religion - These Brahmins were the devotees of Rama, Vishnu and Amba Bhavani, Etc., who constructed many monasteries not only confining to Thanjavur but all over India mostly in places like Mayavaram, Kumbhakonam, Pudhukottai and many others.

Language & Literature - The Thanjavur Marathas mainly used the Sanskrit and Telugu and plays mostly in Sanskrit. The Venkoji himself composed a "Dvipada" Ramayana in Telugu. The Thanjavur Marathi's were only introduced "*Poli*" and "*Samabar*" & introduced *Poi-Kaalkudirai* and other musical instruments such as *gottuvdyam* and *tambura*. Shahuji's (Elder son of Venkoji) greatly gave importance to the art and literature and made Ramayana & Mahabharata in the Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil as well. In his era, these stories were converted into Tamil drama (koothu) and "*Advaita kirtana*". One of the important literary and learning pursuits were motivated by Raja *Seroji II* was the enormous literary collection of Saraswathi Mahal Library within their palace.

Monasteries - The monasteries is the subjective evidence for us to make this project All the Maratha Kings supported the Maratha Brahmins for the construction of Monasteries especially in the period of Venkoji, one of the greatest devotees of Rama, Samartha Ramdas who was a religious priest for the Maratha's made certain reformations in the religion and helped in its upliftment. He constructed lot of Monasteries in many regions of Thanjavur and the most important were:

1. Baava Madam in Baava Madam Street,
2. Saganayagan Madam in Saganayagam street,
3. another monastery in EalliammanKoil Street,
4. TherkkuVeedhi,
5. SaamandhanKulam,
6. Nagamara madam, VadakkuAjaaram,
7. TherkkuVeedhi next to Indian Overseas Bank

These monastery was located in the city if the Thanjavur but which lost their cultural heritage. Samartha Ramdas had six important disciples: one of the famous of them was Ramachandra Moorkamgar who lived in eighteenth century and constructed monasteries in Madhya Pradesh especially in Gwalior to Tamil Nadu places like Mayavaram, Pudhukottai, Kanchipuram, etc. The preaching's which was originally in Sanskrit and Marathi was only preached by them and at the first time they gave the easy explanation to the people. Because of the intervention of the British East India Company, they wanted to preserve their cultural

heritage and made the "Modi Script" which contained important literature and sociological data. Nowadays, the pronunciation of exact Marathi language is not spoken by Thanjavur Marathas but only very few of them, they were known in numbers. During the period of Kinships, the Maratha Brahmins were the:

1. Diwans
2. Army generals,
3. Ministers, landlords and
4. Persons of high reputation.

But now they lost their cultural heritage that are now working as cooks and managing small foods in the hotel. Today, in Thanjavur Mealaraja Veedhi, in the areas of Ayyankullam, they left their place and migrated to Chennai, Coimbatore, Kanchipuram, etc for their survival. The existing Marathas are not even hundred according to the latest statistical data. In Ayyankullam Vadakarai, they started Maharashtra Marathi Sangam which is a common platform unifying the Thanjavur Marathi people. Aftermath, his successors couldn't withhold the throne for long due to internal conflicts reducing the strength and glory of the Thanjavur Maratha Kingdom. As a result, it went into a gradual decline. Its successors were weak and hence it indicated the diminishing signs of this great kingdom. The Kingdom in its crippled form by making treaties with the British who very soon became puppets in the hands of British until the British dethroned the last Maratha King Shivaji 2 and annexed Thanjavur to their territory as per the Doctrine of Lapse.

Sociological Status Of Thanjavur Marathas Post Colonization:

There was a drastic changes that happened in the post colonization period, the Thanjavur Marathi Brahmins totally lost their cultural entity due to the intervention of East India Company, separation of linguistic basis of states, class struggle. According to the recent census, Marathi is spoken as a mother tongue by about 1% of the total population of Tamil Nadu .In Thanjavur Marathi's is spoken by 0.75%. Exact district wise statistics are not available, but according to estimates, Marathi's are mostly concentrated in the city of Chennai, Thanjavur, Nagapattinam, Dharmapuri, Vellore, Salem, Thiruvannamalai, Thiruvarur, Kanchipuram and Tiruchirappalli districts of Tamil Nadu. Some of them even migrated back to Maharashtra and some of them to Bangalore, Kerala & concentrated in

Travancore from Kumbakonam and Thanjavur. Hieun Tuang, the Chinese traveler mention as

“To their benefactors, they are grateful; to their enemies relentless if they asked to help others in distress, they will forget themselves in rendering assistances”

Live Interviews Of Descendants Of Thanjavur Marathas: - Here is a live interview taken by the researcher to many Marathi people in the Thanjavur in the areas of Mealaraja Veedhi, Ayyankullam.

A Set of brief interviews with Thanjavur Marathas Brahmins

1. Researcher :Can you explain about you ancestor who lived in this place?

Ganesh Rao: First of all I am working in the Rtd. Collector office, my great grandfather was a land lord under Shivaji II of Thanjavur. After his dethroning, the lands of the great grandfather were annexed by the British and my grandfather again fell back to agriculture to continue his sustenance.

2. Researcher: What About your relatives?

Ganesh Rao: Most of my relatives especially my cousins migrated to Chennai in 1963 itself who live in Adayar and Mylapore.

3. Researcher: Didn't you take any steps to unify the Thanjavur Marathas?

Ganesh Rao: I was a member of the Maharashtra Marathi Sangam it is only an institution which organizes the Thanjavur Marathi people in a uniform order.

An exclusive interview of Mr. Muralitharan, who was the controller of the Maharashtra Marathi Sangam in Thanjavur.

1. Researcher: Do you know sociology status of the ancient Marathi people in language, art and literature?

Reply: On language basis, we used to speak Marathi. Even in my own home, we used to speak in Marathi but nowadays people in the region are accustomed to speaking Tamil and English and hence we even got used to it. In order to preserve our mother tongue, my children have taken first language as Marathi in school.

2. Researcher: What was the occupation of the ancient Marathas?

Reply: Most of them were treasurers. Some were landlords; others were revenue officers in various departments. Majority of them were mainly involved in administration of the army, finance and revenue. Hence they were safe and sound with their occupation though with difference in their job arena, they could sustain themselves to a large extent.

3. Researcher: How did your sociological status vary from your ancestors to this present?

Reply: During our ancestors, we were reputed in the society who held us in high regard. But as time marched, this respect gradually eroded and it looked as though we were reduced to the status of an ordinary mediocre man.

Here is another live interview of Mr. Krishna Rao, a graduate and currently doing his business.

1. Researcher: What's the occupation of the Marathi's in the present scenario?

Krishna Rao: They are currently engaged as art painters, textiles and caterings, architectural frame workers.

2. Researcher: Don't you find your position in the society as degrading when compared to your ancestors?

Krishna Rao: It has nothing to do with my status now. In the past, we had a rich glory of our heritage but now it got completely faded away.

The given above are just few interviews by the researcher which have been compiled to provide the status of the descendants of this royal lineage. There may be other interviews being taken which haven't been taken into consideration due to time and word constraint. There was an article recently in the Hindu (March 8,2010) on the various Maratha families, who gathered in Thanjavur in search of their family origin and to uplift their ancestry,

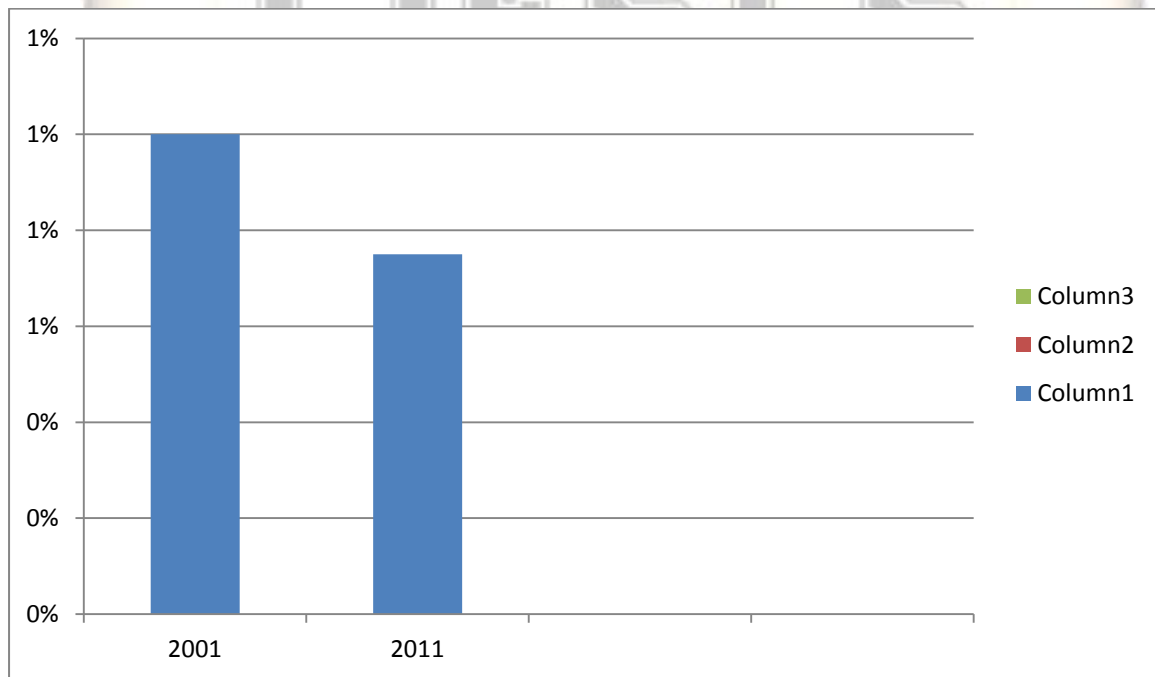
“Nearly 180 Marathi-speaking people living in various countries gathered in Thanjavur“ in search of their roots and offer help to Marathi people living in Thanjavur” on Saturday. An initiative taken by Deshastha Marathi Mandal (DMM), which is a creation of Thanjavur Marathi Group (TMG), the congregation saw lectures by experts on Thanjavur's Marathi connection, advent and influence of Marathas on Thanjavur and its culture. Cultural programs to highlight the richness of Marathi language and customs were held. Some of the programs include Marathi

Abhang by DeepaBalaji, Harikatha in Marathi by Maanasadhotrekar, a talk on Deshasthas History in Thanjavur by AnanthaRaoKilledar, MarathiBalaGeeth by Sashikala. US-based Ravi Shelvankar, who started the TMG in 2009, said the group has been active online. This is an attempt to bring them together and also to meet people living in Thanjavur.

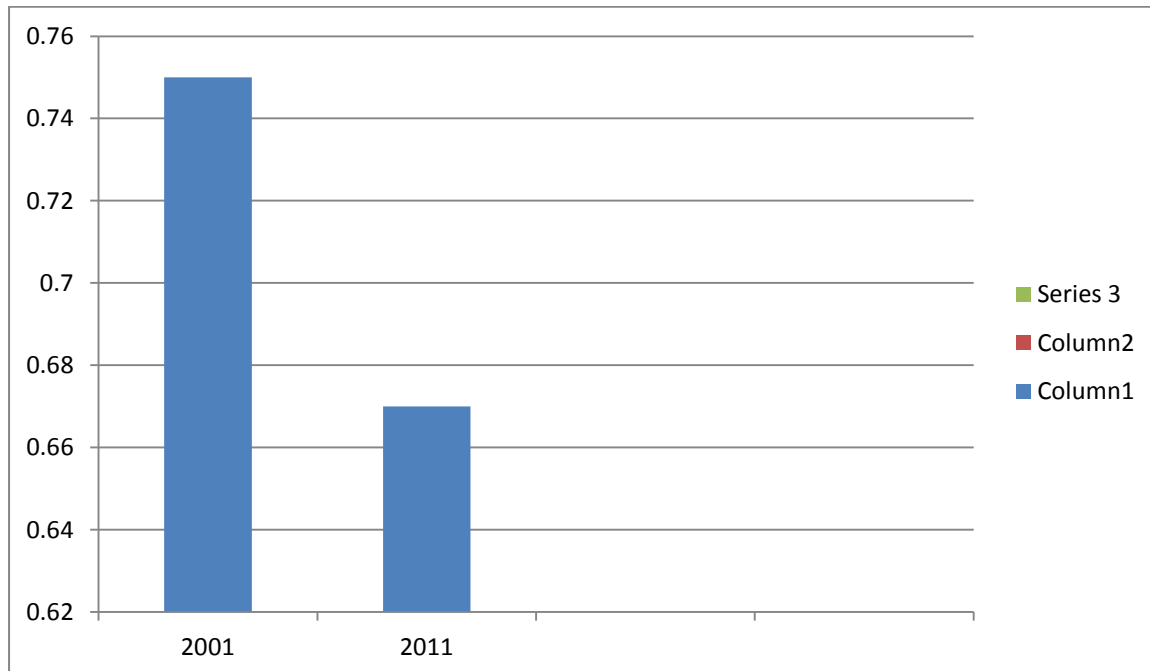
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GRADUAL DISAPPEARANCE OF THANJAVUR MARATHAS (Statistical Data):

According to 2011 census, the male population of Thanjavur in rural areas was 765,177. In urban areas, the figure was 417,239. The woman population of Thanjavur in rural areas was 789,354 whereas in urban areas it was 434,120. But the Marathi speaking population was only a few thousands of the total population.

Statistics revealing the number of Marathi-speaking people in Thanjavur.



Statistics revealing the number of Marathi-speaking people in Tamil Nadu.



In the light of the above discussions, it can be inferred and concluded that the Thanjavur Marathas had a very rich glory and heritage which in the later decades is gradually losing its prime importance due to technological advancements and other factors. This essay also brought into lime light the various issues of the Thanjavur Marathas in the past, from their ancestors till the present status in the society. It is more concerned about the various reasons that led to the drastic decrease of their position and status of the later descendants. This on the other hand also reflects the fading traditions and cultures of our ancestors which we forget to follow and completely neglect it as we think these stereotype traditions are no longer useful. Whatever be the scenario, it has to be borne in mind that the traditional values and heritage are very significant to us and is unparalleled when compared to anything else. Hence we needn't follow these daily lest we can at least make an attempt to preserve them by paying a tribute to our ancestors for being born in that lineage.