

FORMATION OF A NEW IDENTITY: TRANSFORMATION OF PARAVARS IN TO BHARATHAS IN SRI LANKA

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This study focuses on transformation of an Indian migrant caste group known as Paravar into Bharatha community in Sri Lanka. This community was drawn from a caste group concentrated in the area of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in South India. People of this caste group migrated to Sri Lanka for various reasons during the period of 16th to 20th century. In the 19th century they were able to emerge as a new community having a new identity in the Sri Lankan colonial society.

There are a few studies on Indian diasporic communities in Sri Lanka, however, none of these studies have paid attention to the impact of colonialism and identity transformation of these communities. The available studies on Paravar or Bharatha community cover primarily genealogical details and generally descriptive accounts in a chronological order. As other Indian communities did this community also underwent socio-economic and later political transformation in the Sri Lankan colonial society. Political as well as socio-economic policies practiced under different colonial hegemonies impacted on their complex transformation in this period. Under the changing socio-economic and political conditions they were able to achieve an upward mobility in the social ladder. At the same time favourable socio-economic environment as well as the administrative structures created under the colonialism were utilized to change their economic role more favourably, collaborating with the colonialism. Thereby, they were able to transform their traditional identity both qualitatively as well as quantitatively in Sri Lanka. But at the same time they were bent on maintaining an identity as a separate Indian diasporic community.

The principle problem address in this research will be the impact of colonialism in the formation of new identity of the selected diasporic community. This process involved complex relations with both the colonial and indigenous societies and cultures. The research will focus on the dynamism of the strategies of survival and advancement adopted by this community in this process.

The proposed research will be based on information and data obtained from primary archival materials in Sri Lanka and statistical records of colonial governments. The research will also involve a search for private collections of documents of Bharatha and other Indian business families in Sri Lanka as well as personal interviews. Analysis of the information collected will be used to support the arguments relating to the transformation of this community.