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**Print Culture amongst Tamils and
Tamil Muslims in Southeast Asia, c.1860-1960**

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Abstract of paper:

This paper is about the significance of print in the history of Tamil migration to Southeast Asia. During the age of Empire people migrated from India to colonial Malaya resulting in the creation of newer cultural and social groups in their destination (s). What this meant in a post-colonial context is that while they are citizens of a country they share languages of culture, religion and politics with 'ethnic kin' in other countries.

Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims from India were one such highly mobile group. They could truly be called 'Bay of Bengal transnational communities' dispersed in Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam. The construction of post-colonial national boundaries constricted but did not affect the transnationalism of Tamils across geographies and nation-states. A thriving and successful print culture is a pointer to the manner in which Tamils and Tamil Muslim expressed their transnational (Tamil) identities. Such a print culture this paper suggests is a rich and valuable source of social history.

Keywords

Print, Print Culture, transnational communities, migration, mobility, social history, Tamils, Tamil Muslims, India, Indian migrants, Indian Ocean region.

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Introduction

This paper examines the development of a Tamil Muslim press in Southeast Asia from the late 19th up to mid-20th century. It investigates the patterns and trends in the production of journals, newspapers and periodicals through the social and political biographies of print-leaders. It explores how migrants shape 'communities' through the 'mobility of print' or the movement of ideas, leaders and production centres related to their journals. And by the use of 'communities', I refer here to those from which they migrate, the ones that they move into and the sub-community of 'migrants' that they create in their destinations.

Further, this paper attempts to recast 'migrants' as 'transnationals' (Basch 1994: 5) [Note 1] through the story of print to show how they played a dynamic and leading part of more than one kind of political locale or social arena. In constructing a 'public sphere' centring around 'print', this paper aims to shed light on notions of culture, mobility and tradition. This would significantly shed light about the identities of migrants. It will focus on Tamil Muslim migrants in Southeast Asia mainly in Malaysia, Singapore and Burma.

By examining the phenomenon of 'print' or 'print-capitalism' or 'print-culture', I suggest that we would problematise the manner in ethnicity has been deployed in the historiography of Indians migrants in Southeast Asia. By analysing print as a form of cultural expression and the various patterns and trends that marked this activity, I foresee the possibility of historicising the concept of 'transnationalism.' By investigating the roles of the literary and journalistic elite who provided leadership to this 'print-culture', I argue that identities of Tamil Muslims were not a constant but in a state of flux.

Historiography

Much has been written about the migration story of South Asians in Southeast Asia. Historical research has described the flows and processes that were characteristic of

this migration and the subsequent location of migrants in the receiving economies (Sandhu 1969 and Arasaratnam 1980). Studies have focussed on the 'minority-status' or the place of South Asian migrants in the national colonial and post-colonial polities and societies of Southeast Asia (Mahajani 1960, Chakravarti 1971 and Ampalavanar 1981). Yet others have ventured into ethnographic accounts of the long-standing customs, rituals and religion of these immigrant societies (Jain 1970, Mearns 1995 and Collins 1997). Lastly, there has been the odd country-wise sociological compilation of South Asians in Southeast Asia (Sandhu and Mani 1993). This kind of study attempts to present a *longue duree* analysis of these immigrants overlapping as it does with the 'minority-status' or 'from the margin' perspectives [Note 2].

Despite the diversity of the literature available in terms of the issues, the countries and periods chosen for analysis, prevalent studies are marked by a fundamental similarity of approach to the story of South Asian migrants in Southeast Asia. For one, much of the history of migrants has been written mainly in relation to the colonial and postcolonial states. The flow and demand for labour or the grievances of the lineages of such labour-migration have received maximum attention. Theirs is a story privileging only the economic processes. In some ways the only construction of the lives of such migrants has been the form in which states and employers have cast them as factors of material production. Even research on mercantile activity focuses on their economic functions and the political influences that they wielded in late medieval or early modern courts. What needs to be studied further are the roles played by these merchants in the other kinds of cultural and political processes like the development of a print culture.

Secondly, migration stories are country-based or at the most take up two nation-states at the most. In this perspective, Southeast Asia is a *pot-pourri* of many societies put together. There is little or no attempt to examine connections and developments across the sending and receiving societies and the different ones among them. In the case of Tamils and Tamil Muslims, for instance, many migrated to Sri Lanka and Myanmar before moving onto Malaysia. These would qualify for what is popularly known as 'twice-migrants.' These migration stories remain frozen in national histories and the cross-cutting linkages between their various historical movements and current location is not a matter of serious concern. In other words, a 'transnational social field' is acutely missing in this historiography of migration. This is ironical given that the Empire (s)

provided such a backdrop to develop a transnational perspective. This does not mean reverting to the 'Statist' view of migrants but the ability to track processes and source-material for history-writing across geo-cultural entities is enabled in some ways by the history of the Empire (See Hong 1996:66)[Note 3].

Thirdly, ethnic categories are seen as the pre-givens of history. To make this point clear the use of terms such as 'Indian' or 'Malay' or 'Muslim' or '*Jawi Peranakan*' in the historiography as it stands are used as if they hold good for identities at all times and place. These identities are not seen as a process and in the making of them but as handed down through history. Further, a few categories such as these are spoken of as if they exhaust the migration story. Class as an analytical category is brought in now and then especially when referring to labour migration and matters regarding the relation of immigrant societies to post-colonial nation-states. But there are silences on other counts: the gendered character of migration and identity-formation is more conspicuous by its silence rather than anything else. Further, 'Indian Muslims' are seen as a monolithic community in the pursuance of their interests - often in Southeast Asia the 'Indian Muslim' is read synonymously with 'Tamil Muslim' or 'Chulia Muslim.' That there were complex processes underway that splintered these identities is hardly noticed. For instance, any account of the 1940s lays greater emphasis of their involvement with the Muslim League and the Pakistan movement. The engagement of Tamil Muslims with the Dravidian Movement and Tamil nationalism is mentioned only in passing. The 'Indian Muslim' in turn gets essentialised as Muslim. In this context, Judith Nagata makes a pertinent observation:

The transnational and universal character of Islam, ..does not invariably succeed in eradicating other social cleavages, any more than common ethnicity necessarily mutes differing religious loyalties in other parts of the world. (Nagata 1993: 513-540) [Note 4]

The fact that what passes off as Islamic or Muslim could also be expressing other cultural dimensions is hardly observed. Tamil Muslims it could be argued have had a long tradition of being Tamil. The institutions and rituals of Islam in Tamil Nadu were coloured and conditioned by local Tamil cultural practices (Bayly 1989: 104-150).

To understand the processes of identity formation we need to examine what combination of political, social and economic circumstances make a group of people express themselves as 'this' collectivity rather than 'another.' This seems to be a problem of defining history and historiography within the bounds of the colonial public sphere and leaving out processes and activities outside of it and in some ways denying agency to historical actors themselves. There are major silences in existing literature on caste, gender, locality, sect and religious doctrine that do not do justice to the dynamic social and cultural processes that occur in the public sphere.

The origin-myths of Tamil Muslims in India refer to Arab traders having brought Islam to south India in the seventh century A. D. Based in the coastal towns of Tamil Nadu, these Arab traders married local Tamil women whose offspring, a mixed Arab-Tamil race, were the first Tamil Muslims (Sheriff 1976:4-11; Kamal 1990: 14-26; Rifayee 1988: 31-33; Fakhri 1998: 15). The Arab trade it may be noted was a continuation of the pre-Islamic trade between West Asia and South Asia. A similar process of the spread of Islam through the Indian-ocean trading routes is said to have occurred in Sri Lanka both independent of and linked to the developments in Tamil Nadu (Shu' ayb 1993: 706). And it is from these two Tamil Muslim populations that migration occurred to the Straits Settlements, Indonesia, Indo-China, Thailand and Burma (Karim 1982: 251) [Note 5]. Arasaratnam documents the role of Chulia Muslims in the sea trade in South India and Southeast Asia in the 17th century (See Arasaratnam 1989) [Note 6]. The Tamil Muslim population that we are concerned about here is a highly diverse population in terms of class and occupational activity. The range of businesses that they were in involved were nearly all encompassing but the more frequently visible ones were textiles, jewellery, food and catering, shipping and travel and general provisions. Caste-like distinctions could be noticed in the popular life and vocabulary of Tamil Muslims (See Nagata 1993: 517-518) [Note 7]

Tracing the relation between Print and Tamil Muslims

Tamil Muslims migrants to Southeast Asia found several different ways such as mosques, associations, publishing houses, bookshops and periodicals through which they could express being and becoming a collective. The historical experience of Tamil Muslims validates Benedict Anderson's notion of the press or newspaper as a cultural

product where readers see themselves as brought together by an imagined linkage. For Anderson, modernity represents a search for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Further,

Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways (Anderson 1991: 36).

Tamil Muslims as a society appeared to embody this 'new way of linking fraternity, power and time.' Linked to all this are distances and geographies which are crucial variables in the case of migration. It has been documented how Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore have continuously served as urban centres that provided ferment to the development of literature in general and Indian, Tamil and Muslim literature in particular (Mani 1995:384). There are two historical facts that are very significant in leading one to believe that there was a special relationship between 'print' and Tamil Muslims.

For one, the earliest Tamil Muslim periodical in 1869 (*Alamat Ilankapuri* published in the Arabi-Tamil language) was brought out in Sri Lanka. In Tamil Nadu itself the first Tamil Muslim journals were founded in 1888, three of them in the same year (*Vidya Vicharini*, *Mohammed Samadaani*, *Shamsul Imaan*). Again interestingly the first of these *Vidya Vicharini* was begun in Penang in 1883. With the return, five years later, of the publisher and editor Ghulam Qadir Navalar to Nagore the periodical was resumed in Tamil Nadu (Sami 1994: 36) [Note 8].

Besides the fact that the earliest Tamil Muslim periodical was begun in the migrant population what is also of great interest is that South Indian Muslims (Tamil / Malabari) as the *Jawi Peranakan* [Note 9] also promoted Malay print culture. As William Roff notes, "Malay journalism, like book publication in Malay, owes its origins very largely to locally born Indian Muslims in Singapore or, to be more exact, to the community known as 'Jawi Peranakan'" (Roff 1994: 48). In 1876 a group of '*Jawi Peranakan*' are known to have formed an association in Singapore to open a printing office and publish a weekly newspaper in Malay, under that name (Roff 1994: 49). The same group also published between 1878 and 1880 *Tankai Nesan* a fortnightly Tamil

newspaper. The editor of *Jawi Peranakan* Munshi Mohammed Syed bin Mohideen was also said to have been that of *Tankai Nesan* (Sami 1994: 212) [Note 10]

The founding of the Tamil Muslim press in Southeast Asia and the role of the *Jawi Peranakan* were two landmark developments. It is worthy of emphasis that the earliest impetus for a Tamil Muslim press did not occur in Tamil Nadu but in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Further, that the *Jawi Peranakan* provided an impetus to the Malay press points to a distinct relationship between 'print' and South Indian or 'Tamil Muslims.' The role of the *Jawi Peranakan* in the development of a print culture in Malaya questions the necessary and always location of migrants in the margins. Quite to the contrary, the activities of South Indian Muslims in Southeast Asia in relation to 'print' suggest that they have may well have written themselves into the 'core' of the national histories of these societies. As to how and why 'print' as a form of a cultural expression takes on greater significance among Tamil Muslims than other forms of association is something of a long-term concern for this research.

Print fulfilled the need to recreate a sense of belonging away from home. In other words, it recreated a way of feeling at home amongst Tamil migrants in Southeast Asia. It was a means by which migrant populations could produce and reproduce ways of thinking or cultures familiar to them from their points of origin. These journals provided identities to the migrants. As they were subscribed and circulated both among home and migrant populations they served as vital links to both migrants and their sending societies. These points raise more questions than they answer some of which would be addressed in the rest of this paper. Following immediately are broad patterns and trends in print activity and go on to elaborate the roles of three individuals between the 1920 and the 1950s who played a role in 'print-culture' or whom I address as 'print leaders.'

If the activities of the group of *Jawi Peranakan* blended Tamil and Malay cultural worlds, different forms of print by migrants blurred other boundaries and symbolised cultural unities. Tamil Muslims not only provided leadership to the Malay press but also to the Tamil press. C. K. Maqdoom Sahib was the editor of the *Singai Vartamani*, a weekly published in 1875. This was the first ever Tamil newspaper in Southeast Asia. The *Singai Nesan* published from Singapore in 1887 articulated the concerns of the Tamil community. One of its lead articles, for instance, carried an appeal to Queen Victoria in

the name of the Hindu and Muslim residents of Singapore (Sami 1994: 191). In the Tamil Diaspora this was another facet that print symbolised i.e the primacy of language as a cultural signifier and the consigning of religion to the margins in social relations. Tamil Muslim migration was a significant segment of a larger Tamil Diaspora. Muslims in that Diaspora frequently expressed a sense of Tamilness. (See Ampalavanar 1981: 42) [Note 11]

Where Hindu-Muslim differences became acute or noticeable it was a result of the spill over of politics from the Indian mainland rather than caused by any differences intrinsic to the Southeast Asian context. This was more so having to do with events from north India and was relevant only as episodic incidents that did not cause a dent in intra-group relations among Tamils in Southeast Asia. Further, whether a particular periodical was run by a Tamil Muslim but was really a more general Tamil newspaper rather than a religious sheet is not entirely clear from sources. In some examples like *Kalvi* (1934) and *Aranka Vartamani* (1936) published from Burma, it is clear that Tamil Muslims were the editors but these were not journals concerning only Islam or the Muslim community. Inversely, there were Hindu-sounding names of editors but the journals were clearly Muslim ones like the *Selangor Vidya Baskaran* published in 1907 from Selangor in Malaysia.

Among other trends and developments that can be noticed regarding Tamil Muslim publications in Southeast Asia (see Sami 1994), is the rather short or unknown span of many of these publications. Some are recorded as having survived for a few years, for yet others we have data of when they began but not when they ended. Some had intermittent lives. The *Thondan* a daily from Burma began in 1940, discontinued after a few years but revived in 1953 only to close down again. Yet others like the *Malaya Nanban* have a recorded life span as between 1943 and 1962 and the *Saiful Islam* between 1907 and 1947.

When the publisher-editor Ghulam Qadir Navalar of the *Vidya Vicharini* (f.1883) moved from Penang to Nagore (India) in 1888, the journal moved with him. Thus the very first Tamil Muslim periodical was an example of print and print leadership in circular migration. This was not a one off case as seen through the example of *Saiful Islam* which began in Burma in 1907 and later on moved to Vellore / Madras in 1910.

Similarly, *Sempirai* a fortnightly begun in 1950 moved with the editor between Madras, Nagore and Singapore.

Some of the initiatives in 'print' though separated by vast distances were contemporaneous. In 1883, the year in which *Vidya Vicharini* was founded in Penang, another significant initiative the *Muslim Nesan* was launched in Kandy in Sri Lanka. Edited by Siddi Levvai Marakkayar, *Muslim Nesan* had subscribers in Madras, Pondicherry, Penang and Singapore. Unlike some of the other early journals it was composed in Tamil itself and not Arabi-Tamil. Both *Vidya Vicharini* and *Muslim Nesan* debated with the writings and positions of the other. The editors Ghulam Qadir Pulavar and Siddi Levvai Marakkayar enjoyed a position of eminence if not reverence in the society of that time (Sami 1994: 343-356 and 380-384).

While visitors in the 1920s from Tamil Nadu to Southeast Asia observed that Indians in general and Muslims in particular were unconcerned about political movements, over the 1930s and the 1940s the depression and the war had its effect in raising the political temperature. This was raised further when Indian nationalism either in the form of the Indian National Congress or the Indian National Army stoked anti-colonial sentiments. Tamil Muslims were not insulated from such developments. If journals such as *Sudandira Indiya* sprang up in Burma in 1947, the year of Indian independence, then others like *Malaya Nanban* and *Thondan* endorsed the politics of the Indian Muslim League and the Dravidian Movement simultaneously. The latter was a reflection of the political alliances and developments which I will consider in greater detail when I discuss the relation of Muslims with one 'non-Muslim' print leader E. V. Ramasami Naicker or 'Periyar' the leader of the Dravidian Movement.

Agency and Print Culture

This section shows how social and cultural expressions by collectives of people thus depend on the anticipatory rather than intrinsic primordial sentiments of religion or language or nationality. The relationship with larger political movements brings us to the role of the print elite or 'print leaders' as I have chosen to call them. In what follows, I discuss the role of three such personalities of the period: Daud Shah, Karim Ghani and E. V. Ramasamy. Each of them were highly controversial figures and crucial players in

the manner in which they influenced Muslim politics, society and culture of that period. While Karim Ghani was located in Southeast Asia itself both Shah and Ramasamy were visitors to the region. In their own ways their visits have been hailed as milestones in the developments of a political culture. While Shah and Ramasamy were concerned with reforming Muslim and Hindu society respectively, both their ideologies and personalities reflected a catholicity of outlook that was symbolic of their cultural and political biographies. Both Shah and Ramasamy have earned their places in this account by virtue of having blurred the boundaries between various socio-cultural categories. Their ideologies were similar as well. Karim Ghani on the other hand could be characterised more as a transnational personality choosing different political trajectories between his early days in Burma and final demise in Pakistan.

I begin with the story of P. Daud Shah (died 1969) who was the editor of the periodical *Darul Islam* (life span of journal between 1923 and 1955). The 'print culture' of Tamil Muslims had a 'circularity' about it: periodicals produced in Southeast Asia were read in Tamil Nadu and the other way around. *Darul Islam* is an example of a monthly that was produced in Madras and circulated in Tamil Nadu but also widely distributed and read in Malaysia, Singapore and Burma.

Through an analysis of the travel accounts of Daud Shah in Southeast Asia, I argue that the phenomenon of print was more than just a matter of reporting news of a community or expressing an opinion or reproducing religion through scriptural emphasis. I suggest that the story of print was also not just that of a Muslim press being indicative of a Muslim community consciousness. But that the production and consumption of print showed the presence of a truly transnational social field in which multiple identities were constantly being defined, redefined and contested. Print as a socio-political process of its time invented and redefined a transnational social field. It enabled people to recast older forms of relating into newer means and visions of connecting with one another, places and objects.

Before I proceed to discuss Shah's travels in Southeast Asia, it is appropriate to mention Shah's social reform efforts. Shah could in some ways be called the 'Muslim Ramasamy' for his efforts to reform Tamil Muslim society as were Ramasamy's efforts for the larger Tamil society. Shah spoke for the Muslim poor and women and offered

alternative theological readings on various Islamic issues. As editor of *Darul Islam*, Shah emerged as the 'father of Tamil Muslim journalism.' He opposed Arabi-Tamil and Arabic as languages for Muslims. His efforts were aimed at lessening the hold of the ulama and the mullas on Muslim society by denying them their main source of power which was the knowledge of Arabi-Tamil and Arabic. There were the ecclesiastical languages for the conduct of clerical functions and for interpreting religion. Shah's criticism of the *ulama* as the equivalent of Brahmin priests in Hindu society paralleled the emergence of the non-Brahmin movement which sought to do away with the caste system and sought equal rights for the lower castes with other sections of Hindu society. Muslims opposed to Shah called him a proponent of the *Ahmadiyyah* sect. *Saiful Islam* another leading Tamil Muslim journal published from Tamil Nadu was a regular critic of Shah's writings and politics. Print in the form of a periodical or books was the main form in which both Shah and his critics engaged with one another. Each of these attributes of Shah's biography recurred during his visit to Malaysia and Singapore. Shah's travels in Malaysia and Singapore were reported regularly in *Darul Islam* during the months of February to June 1925 when he was away. As a chronicle of travel it provides a fascinating account of community leaders in those localities that he visited as well as the contentious issues and concerns of that time. This data was enhanced when Shah himself wrote a first person account in later issues of the journal [Note 12].

Daud Shah landed at Penang on 20 February 1925 and returned to Madras on 12 June 1925. His tours took him to Swettenham Port, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Ipoh and Singapore. At each of these spots, he was received by Tamils both Muslim and non-Muslim. Likewise each destination provided him with an occasion to address Tamil audiences again Muslim and non-Muslim. Despite an emphasis on Islam and Islamic matters in general in the course of his speeches, Shah was concerned with wider Indian and Tamil issues. When Shah spoke on 23 February 1925 at the Penang Indian Association which met under the presidentship of A. K. M. Muthupalaniappan Chettiar, he said:

All faiths forbid speaking ill of other religions. Followers of all religions form one community. All Indians form one community. We must do away with untouchability, caste and religious differences in Penang. We have to learn from the English how to be united. By doing so we can promote the cause of the Tamil

language and the conditions of our poor brothers known as Indian coolies whose welfare we can safeguard [*Darul Islam* April 1925].

Shah's universalism and humanism was combined with a dual anxiety for Islam and Indians. In a travel account titled 'My Malaya Country Experience' in the August 1925 issue of *Darul Islam*, Shah recalled with distress:

Indians in the East do not seem to be interested in the politics there or national issues or the Indian community organisations or activities. ... There is not to be seen a united Indian association of traders here. ... People from Ceylon are more visible than Indians themselves. Like Brahmins have done well for themselves in this country (India), Ceylon migrants have got appointments as officers and clerks. There is greater unity to be found among them. The Ceylonese do not associate Indians with them. And the Indians seem to dislike the Ceylonese. ... It is difficult to find piety among Indian Muslims and Hindus in Malaya. Devotion is lacking though there is no shortage of mosques and temples... Christianity is growing here. The only Indian paper that is functioning is *Tamil Nesan*. Many Indian journals have begun and lapsed in that country [*Darul Islam* August 1925].

Like Daud Shah, several Tamil and Tamil Muslim literati were deeply concerned about the birth and demise of community journals or newspapers and periodicals. If Shah praised the work of *Tamil Nesan*, his efforts in publishing *Darul Islam* were in turn complimented by Muslims like Haji N. N. Pichai Rowther. The latter was the chairperson of the local committee at Malacca, formed there to welcome and receive Shah. Rowther hailed Shah for filling the void for a Muslim journal in south India through the publication of *Darul Islam*. The fear of a 'void in print' or whenever a print medium was absent there was cause for anxiety and hence the constant exhortation to publish and sustain a community press. Print in its material and cultural manifestations was an extension of the social, economic and political (if not physical and communal) body of Indian and Tamil or Muslim groups. Hence its absence was seen as a loss or stifling of expression of the self. In this manner, print provided a sense of cultural identity to communities, their associations and their elites in a political arena dominated by colonialism with numerous competing social groups.

All Muslims, however, did not uniformly welcome Shah. *Saiful Islam* published from Madras initiated a campaign whereby it accused Shah of being an *Ahmadiyya* Muslim or a follower of Khwaja Ghulam Mirza Ahmed of Qadian. The term *Ahmadiyya* till this day continues to strike a raw nerve in Sunni Muslim belief as the founder Ghulam Mirza Ahmad claimed to be a Prophet himself, thereby, violating a fundamental tenet in Islamic belief of the Prophet Mohammed being the 'seal of the Prophets.' And Daud Shah was accused of being an *Ahmadiyya* himself. Vellore Sharfudeen and Tenkasi Abdur Rehman of the *Saiful Islam* arranged for their readers and supporters in Malaysia and Singapore to distribute pamphlets accusing Shah of being an Ahmadiyyah and by extension the impression that he was an heretic or apostate. This caused schisms within the Tamil Muslim community and generated heated debate about whether Shah should be accorded the importance that he was being given in his tour of Malaysia and Singapore. Shah's followers took the battle to the Supreme Court in Singapore and won a defamation suit of 5000 dollars in his favour against the proponents of the position of *Saiful Islam* (*Al-Kalam* March, April and May 1925) [Note 13]

As Shah's travelogue demonstrates print became a form of politics in the sense of the "process by which plays of power and knowledge constituted identity and experience." (Joan Scott as cited in Suny 1993: 9). The story of Shah and *Darul Islam* points to the existence of a transnational social field that traversed geographically and culturally Indian/Tamil, Islamic /Malay and European/Chinese worlds. There were varied notions of 'Indianness', 'Tamilness' and 'Muslimness' that came to the fore depending on the historical conjuncture. Faced with European business and governance, it was important for Shah to call upon a sense of Indianness, in promoting print it was Tamilness and finally in matters of faith and piety a Muslimness was important. And this was not to be a smooth process for Shah as his own 'Muslimness' was under question as a result of his struggle to democratise Muslim society by diluting the hold of the *ulama* and speaking up for women and poor. The price that he paid for challenging the structure of power in Muslim society was a lifetime of ostracisation. Though he won the defamation case doubts about his commitment to Sunni belief among the general Muslim population struck root. This was ensured by Shah's opponents who sustained a campaign throughout his lifetime both in Tamil Nadu and abroad about his *Ahmadiyya* affiliations. This in fact limited the impact of Shah's attempts at social reform [Note 14].

The existence of a transnational social field was further demonstrated through the case of Mohammed Karim Ghani (1907-1978). Ghani was another 'print leader' whose biography was more closely associated with migration than others considered here so far. Ghani operated more closely in those domains of the public sphere which were under colonial authority. Born in Ramnathapuram in Tamil Nadu, he migrated to Burma where at the age of 18 he discontinued his studies so as to become a reporter at the *Rangoon Daily News*. In 1925, he became its sub-editor. In 1927, he became joint editor of a Tamil journal, *Desaupakari*. It is around this time that he learned and developed sympathies for the activities of Subash Chandra Bose. He became a Parliamentary Secretary in the U Saw cabinet formed in Burma in September 1940 (Chakravarti 1971: 1965) [Note 15]. He moved to Singapore to become a Minister in the Provisional Government of Free India proclaimed by Subhash Chandra Bose in 1943. It is said that he was also the head of a section of the Indian National Army. In April 1945 Ghani went to Bangkok. He was arrested in September 1945 for his role in the Indian National Army (Raheem (II): 555-557) [Note 16]. He was brought to Singapore in March 1946 and was released there. Implicated in the controversial Nadira Hertogh case [Note 17], Ghani was imprisoned in the St. Johns island for a while but later was released (1952) to be deported to Pakistan where he died in 1978. Ghani published the weekly *Udaya Suriyan* from 1936 in Burma and took over the *Malaya Nanban* in Singapore in 1946. Ghani was a polyglot fluent in Tamil, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English, Burmese and Malay. He became the leader of the Singapore Muslim League on his return there.

After from his involvement in the Nadira Hertogh case Ghani's claim to fame is his stewardship of the *Malaya Nanban* [Note 18]. This Tamil paper was a daily which began in 1943 and was published by 'South Indian Printers' a publishing house owned by a Tamil Muslim textile merchant in Singapore. When Ghani took over as editor he changed its name to 'Muslim Publishers.' A testimonial from among Tamil Muslim communities has it that after Ghani took over *Malaya Nanban* had a new ring to it so much so that it had become a tool of renaissance for the 'Indians' living in Malaya, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and such places. The Singapore *Tamil Murasu* it is argued had stopped emphasising in its coverage the activities of the anti-caste anti-Brahminical Dravidian movement after World War II. *Malaya Nanban* was said to have taken to reporting the developments regarding the Dravidian movement.

Further, Ghani is known to have celebrated Ramasamy's birthday celebrations and other events in the Dravidian calendar by wearing its 'black shirt.' While neither the Nadira Hertogh case nor the role of print in that controversy is relevant here, what is significant is Ghani's politics there as the champion of Islam. He is known to have aspired to see the creation of a 'Greater Islamic Nation around Southeast Asia' or the 'recreation of the *Medina* society' which is a reference to the time of the Prophet representing a 'Golden age of Islam.' These cultural and political imaginings centring on religion derived impetus from contemporary events such as the creation of Pakistan and the establishment of Indonesia [Maideen 1989: 109-110].

Possibly the most dynamic print leader to emerge among Tamil Muslims in Southeast Asia, Karim Ghani and his biography at first glance defies categorisation and politics defies explanation. The terms associated with his politics 'Islamic struggle', 'Indian independence' and 'Dravidian renaissance' do not sit comfortably with each other. The Islam that Ghani sought to promote was a pan-Islam that did not sit comfortably with nationalisms whether Indian or Dravidian. Islam was an integral part of the cultural and political resources of the Dravidian movement but this was by no means a blanket endorsement or a programme to reorganise post-colonial Dravidian society around Islam (Fakhri 1998: 27-73). Neither does Indian nationalism go well with Ghani's role as a Muslim League leader or pan-Islamist since Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army were not well-disposed to the Muslim League or the creation of Pakistan. Further, Ramasamy and the Dravidian movement were hardly allies with the Indian National movement having declared Indian independence day 15 August 1947 as a 'day of mourning.' If he was hailed as a 'hero' [Note 19] by some Tamil Muslims he was seen as a 'rabble-rouser' and villain of the Nadira Hertogh riots by the British Administration who made haste to have him deported to his native village. The Indian government would not accept him and hence Ghani's pan-Islamic connections were useful in finding abode in Pakistan [Note 20].

How does all this sit together in one personality? The trajectories of Ghani's politics are indeed baffling and read as inconsistent. There are three inter-related and overlapping trends that are visible: anti-colonialism (Indian National Affair and Nadira Hertogh affair), pan-Islam (Muslim League and Nadira Hertogh affair) and Dravidian/Tamil nationalism (*Malaya Nanban* and affiliation with Ramasamy). Each of these

related to different dimensions of his individual biography as a diasporic Tamil Muslim but there seems to have been a conjunctural and context based engagement in when and how a Tamil or a Muslim or an Indian identity was foregrounded. It must be noted that to characterise Ghani's engagements as changing and conjunctural do not foreclose the existence of personal ambition and expedience that were ingredients in the complex politics of the times. This was visible in the manner in which Ghani deployed highly charged rhetoric through 'print' and public speeches and was seem to have adopted methods that could not exactly be called constitutional or legitimate. The 'politician' in the 'hero' and the 'villain' cannot and must not be ignored [Note 21].

If Shah's attempts with print constituted a political experience that highlighted the conjunctural character of identity-formation, similar was the story of Karim Ghani. If for Shah, Muslim society itself was a political domain to be redefined through the use of print, so was it with Karim Ghani who is accorded a rival place to Shah as also having fathered Tamil Muslim journalism. It would be appropriate to say that Ghani accorded 'print' the significance in Southeast Asia that Shah gave it in Tamil Nadu. There are significant ways in which the political biographies of Shah and Ghani converge and diverge in yet other places. Besides managing newspapers Ghani and Shah both authored various Islamic texts and books in Tamil. Between them however, Shah was the scholar and philosopher while Ghani represented a more activist and militant kind of intervention. Such personality orientations did influence the tone and tenor of the content and management of the journals. For Ghani, political society or more specifically state power was a significant drive: both as a participant (Ministerial positions in Burma/Indian National Army) and in opposition (Nadira Hertogh case) whereas for Shah civil society was a primary concern. Shah led a missionary campaign against the Hindu revivalist Arya Samaj in *Darul Islam*.

Both Shah and Ghani shared however a commitment to the politics of Dravidianism and anti-casteism. Both addressed Muslim and non-Muslim Tamils from the platform of the Self-Respect Movement. This commonality between Ghani and Shah brings us to a third print leader Ramasamy the leader of the Dravidian movement. As mentioned before the term 'Dravidian movement' is a catch-all phrase to reflect different strands of non-Brahminism or anti-casteism that developed in Tamil Nadu over the twentieth century. In this paper I am concerned with the tours of Ramasamy to Burma and

Malaya. Ramasamy's newspaper *Kudiarasu* also had a following and readership over South-East Asia [Note 22].

If Daud Shah was received by Muslims, Hindus and Christians alike so was Ramasamy welcomed by Muslims in Burma and Malaya as the social reformer of his time. This was a complex engagement between Muslims and Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement as the latter propagated atheism as part of anti-caste politics.

Ramasamy toured Malaysia and Singapore twice in 1929 and 1954 and Burma once in 1954 [Note 23]. Like Shah, Ramasamy's travel itinerary began at Penang continued onto Ipoh, Singapore and various other places such as Johor Bahru and Malacca. It can be deduced from the account available of Ramasamy's travels that the reception accorded to him by Muslims in 1954 was different from what the one in 1929. The narrative of his tour around Malaysia in 1929 is littered with several incidents of being received by and felicitated by Tamil Muslims. However, they are conspicuous by their absence in the narrative of Ramasamy's tour of Malaysia in 1954. The drawing of national boundaries after World War II, the independence of India and the impending independence of Malaysia and Singapore had changed the manner in which Tamil Muslims related to Indian political figures and social reformers. Tamil Muslims were now more closely drawn to domicile (Malaysia / Singapore) rather than Indian events. However, in Burma in 1954 Ramasamy enjoyed the same reception that he received in Malaysia in 1929. Possibly, in Malaysia and Singapore the presence of wider Islamic Malay and *Jawi Peranakan* communities offered a different way of negotiating the politics of the times than the more isolated Indian and Indian Muslim communities in Burma. The need to look homewards for Tamil Muslims in Burma thus was higher than for those in Malaysia. Another possible explanation for the near-absence of Muslims in the news of Ramasamy's visit in 1954 was the shifts and breaks occurring within the wider Indian community in Malaysia and Singapore. Had prosperity of the non-Muslim Tamil mercantile elite dispensed with the need for Tamil Muslim patronage as these were among the more prosperous public personalities of the 1920s? This then indicated changing social relations among Indians caused by larger political and economic processes. And a reminder that different groups of migrants articulate Indian or Tamil or Muslim identities depending on the historical conjuncture, the promise of particular opportunities and the loss of hope in yet others.

Concluding Observations

Print was a site where power and knowledge were severely contested by different groups. Print showed how Tamil Muslims were as much concerned with questions of difference among themselves (*Vidya Vicharini-Muslim Nesan; Saiful Islam - Darul Islam*) as much those with 'external' concerns like colonialism (*Malaya Nanban*). If ethnicity, language and social reform provided an opportunity for Muslim and non-Muslim Tamils to come together changing political and economic processes altered social relations for them to drift in different directions. Activities surrounding print demonstrated those identities and concerns that were given primacy at any point rather than others.

The 'print culture' of Tamil Muslims points to a transnational social field reflecting creative and dynamic ways of identity formation. The histories of 'a sending-mainland', 'migrants' and 'a receiving land' if written as separate stories do not do justice to the sheer vitality, diversity and complexity of the processes that are underway between these seemingly disparate socio-economic and political units. Leaders and personalities through their involvement in various political issues and controversies showed that the instrumentality of print as much as how their own biographies were determined by it.

This paper sought to show the significance of print in the (un) making of migrant identities in Southeast Asia. The study of the production and consumption of print could be a useful exercise not just for the study of Tamil Muslim migrants but more broadly for the writing of Southeast Asian history. This paper concludes with the following cues to further understand the relation between print, national and transnational histories: First, we need greater detail of the production of print. Historical actors in this paper had been concerned with a 'void' if there was no print and in that sense 'print' was a material and physical manifestation of themselves. We could learn more about cultural processes if we treated 'print' as a cultural artefact in itself. Anthropologists have studied art forms as 'ethnic markers' and 'identity-negotiators' [Note 24] and there is food for thought for historians to consider print in similar light. Second, we also need to examine the consumption of print. Readers of print that is produced make the other half of the picture

and we need that as well. This is to uncover historical source-material that would tell us about a 'reading public.' To the extent we know little about the reading public, we are faced with a poorer and incomplete picture of the public sphere. Third, the story of print as it reads is a totally male domain. Uncovering the relationship of women to the production and consumption of print and the reading public might lead us to new and creative ways of thinking about the processes involved in community-formation. Clearly what needs to be documented before that is the extent to which literacy and skills were available to different segments of any community that would be a necessary pre-requisite for any form of involvement with print. These segments could be classified along lines of gender (male and female) and occupation (professional, mercantile, artisanal, petty-traders or daily-wage earning groups). By doing so we might just make possible the hitherto unheard voices of history to write themselves into it. Before 'moving migrants' from the 'margins', we need to move the study of print to a more important place in the writing of history than it has hitherto occupied.

Notes

- 1 By 'transnational' I mean here a single field of social relations or an interconnected social experience. It refers to the simultaneous involvement of migrants, for the colonial period, in the politics of more than one community or geo-cultural entity; and in the politics of more than one nation-state. Basch 1994: 5.
- 2 See individual contributions to the volume edited by Sandhu and Mani 1993.
- 3 Also of relevance here is the call for the study of history in Southeast Asia to engage with a supranational entity or audience. See Hong 1996.
- 4 Nagata's account of ethnicity and religion among the Malaysian Indian Muslims is distinct in problematising Muslim and migrant identities in the context of Southeast Asia. She points to the internal differentiation among Indian Muslims but her account relies heavily on intermarriage and religious revivalism as sources to point to the identities of these migrants. Nagata 1993: 513-540.
- 5 Over almost 1200 years of Tamil Muslim history what may be noted about them is that as followers of Islam and speakers of Tamil, they have worn more than one hat in terms of their cultural identity. They have traversed the Islamic worlds of India, West Asia and Southeast Asia with as much ease as they have the wider Tamil world in South and Southeast Asia. In self-recognition of this multi-cultural history, a very popular slogan that is adopted by these transnational Tamil Muslim communities as a manner of identity and cultural pride is *Islam enkal vazhi, inba-Tamil enkal mozhi* that translates as 'Islam is our path and sweet Tamil is our language.' See Karim 1982: 251.
- 6 See Arasaratnam 1989. The term 'Chulia' and even 'Kling' refer to people originating from pre-modern Indian polities such as the Chola and Kalinga kingdoms.
- 7 Chulias, Kakas and Tenkasi / Kadayanallur Muslims appeared to be *quasi-caste* or caste like subdivisions among Tamil Muslims. See Nagata 1993: 517-518.
- 8 For A. M. Sami, the early start of a Muslim press overseas or away from Tamil Nadu indicated that community-formation had begun among Tamil Muslims 'away' or 'abroad' rather than amongst those at 'home.' Sami 1994: 36. This argument might be partly valid in terms of community formation in modern politics but might end up ignoring all other forms of community expression that occurred among Tamil Muslims even prior to the 19th century. See, for example, Bayly 1989.
- 9 *Jawi Peranakan* is a Malay term used to refer to the offspring and the descendants of Malay women who married foreigners mainly Muslims from India.

10 A. M. Sami's *Islamia Tamizh Ithazkal* 1994: 212.

11 Some Muslims expressed their Tamilness so intensely that they earned the label of being 'Tamil chauvinists.' For instance, N. P. Shaik Abdul Khader, Ghani's predecessor as editor at *Malaya Nanban* has been termed as a 'Tamil chauvinist.' See Ampalavanar 1981: 42.

12 This travelogue was serialised in *Darul Islam* during 1925.

13 Shahs supporters saw this as a strategy to undermine his popularity and refuted that he belonged to the Ahmadi sect. See *Darul Islam* May 1925.

14 *Darul Islam* April 1926; May 1926. Earlier on Siddi Levvai Marakkayar in Sri Lanka was known to have met with the same hostility for his social reform efforts as Shah did later in Tamil Nadu.

15 N. R. Chakravarti writes that Karim Ghani's ministerial position in Burma was a consolation prize [for Indians?] with little responsibility attached to it. See Chakravarti 1971: 1965. Words in paranthesis mine.

16 More generally for Tamil Muslim participation in the Indian National Army see Divan 1994: 138-151.

17 Nadira Hertogh case - a custodial battle, controversy and agitation between 1950 and 1952 in Singapore involving a girl child born to Dutch parents but brought up by an Indonesian Muslim woman.

18 Besides the *Malaya Nanban*, Ghani simultaneously published weeklies in English (*Dawn* and *Comrade*) and Malay (*Sinaran*). *Malaya Nanban* was discontinued in 1962.

19 'Scholar' (*arignar*) and 'venerated scholar' (*allama*) are terms used to describe Ghani in later day hagiography.

20 For reports by colonial officials on Karim Ghani's release and deportation, see extracts from PMR 2/1952, 3/1952, 4/1952 and 5/1952 in CO 1022/434, National Archives of Singapore.

21 For a sceptical view of Ghani's intentionality by his contemporaries see Maideen 1989: 222-223; also see Hughes 1980:50. Senior functionaries of the Indian National Army had a harsher assessment of Ghani, the politician as 'slimy' and 'untrustworthy.' [Interviews India 2000].

22 There were other Muslims besides Shah and Ghani who were influenced by Dravidian politics. Abhiramam Muhammad Ibrahim, for instance, who published the *Thondan* (1953).

23 All details of Ramasamys tours are drawn from Veeramani 1989 and Nachiappan 1993. I thank N. Sampat for his comments on some of the primary sources used in this paper.

24 See, for instance, Adams 1998: 327-351.

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