

Understanding Identity Among Third-Generation Palakkad Iyers in Mumbai

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Abstract

This paper outlines the construction of a new-age identity of the third generation of Palakkad Iyer community in Mumbai. It also examines how living in an urban and globalized world can affect the community and individual identity. Using semi-structured interviews and conversations with elder community members, the study found that acculturation, culture shedding, and access to a globalized world has created a dissonance with this community identity. This has changed the way the third generation view themselves in a globalized space. The paradoxical nature of globalization has created an awareness amongst this generation to learn more about their community culture and history. Using social media platforms, they are trying to collate their community history with personal anecdotes, experiences, testimonies and knowledge passed on from previous generations. Thus, this generation has artfully been able to pick aspects of their community and global culture to create a harmonious niche to exist within.

Introduction

Identity, from a social science perspective, is the process by which people draw on cultural attributes and build meaning in their lives (Castells, 2006). Globalization, however, is a process that is contradictory in nature. It pushes for homogenisation and universalisation, and

localization and differentiation at the same time (Agarwal, 2015). In the context of these two processes that work simultaneously, the understanding of the self, as an individual and a member of a community, becomes harder to comprehend and navigate.

Within this understanding of the self, also lie collective and individual identity which are shaped by their own factors, such as the process of induction into the community, the demarcation between in-groups and out-groups, the codes that facilitate that demarcation, and others (Eisenstadt and Gisen, 1995). They are also interlinked – especially when it comes to the Indian society (D’Souza, 2006). This is because in India, the collective has always been treated as a unit, not individually. The concept of the individual being a unit onto itself came later. Thus, the identities of the collective and the individual (especially in this case) remain interlinked (D’Souza, 2006).

This interlinking is applicable for the community under study – the Palakkad Iyers. Members of this community can trace their ancestry back to the town of Palakkad. They are members of the Hindu Brahmin community and spoke Tamil originally, but the Palakkad Iyers speak a dialect that is a combination between Tamil and Malayalam, colloquially referred to as Palakkad Tamil.

When it comes to this close-knit community – tradition, heritage, practices and history are mostly passed on orally. There is little by way of texts available in languages accessible to the community.

In this inaccessibility and dearth of literature, this community falls back on oral history as a bridge to learning about their community history, traditions and practices. Oral histories are important, if not as equally as important as written histories. Oral traditions include oral testimonies, which are transmitted through generations, as a method of preserving memories (Vansina, 1965). Community history, traditions, families and cultural idiosyncrasies have all been passed via word of mouth. The importance of oral history is that it provides an insider’s perspective (Mason, 2000). As such, they are windows into the past, and have the scope to contain detail that may not otherwise be found in written records (Schapera, 1962).

The focus of history in many cases, is the need for documentation – which holds true in the case of this community as well. With that being the focus, written history has been given more importance, when compared to oral tradition, history and narratives. (Finnegan, 2012) However, due to a lack of accessible codified history, and a continued practice of transmitting history orally through the generations, the Palakkad Iyer community has always relied on the oral narratives and histories to constitute as community history.

Thus, it becomes important, especially in this case, to provide information on the community and its perspective of its past and their identity, through cultural norms and practice. However, the

lack of a consolidated written history means that there is no fixed point of reference for the younger generation of a community.

When history and tradition are passed on via oral narratives, the foundation of a community remains fluid, and hence subject to change (Dutta, 2007). This fluidity becomes more pronounced in an urban space, where there are more factors that influence identity.

There is a need for a codified narrative, which can become the reference point from which individuals of a community can understand their roots and cultural traditions. Having a written narrative also means that there is a structured reference from which the community itself can develop itself with the times (Dutta, 2007).

When it comes to the Palakkad Iyers, there is a need for codification of oral narratives, so that the younger community members have a fixed foundation upon which they can build their identity. It is also important because for the younger generation of Palakkad Iyers in Mumbai, since there is a dissonance with their community identity. And this dissonance has led to a gap in their individual identity.

For this generation, written sources of information hold more importance, as there is certain level of assumed veracity with written information. In its absence, or dearth of accessible information that this generation can use as a foundation to understand their heritage and culture, their dissonance with the Palakkad Iyer aspect of their identity has become more pronounced. And as mentioned before, it has created a gap in their individual identity.

This research is also a personal endeavour. I am a third generation Palakkad Iyer from Mumbai, and my purpose, or objective is to explore the migratory history of my community, and acculturation of the community in Mumbai. This study aims to outline and chalk the trajectory of the Palakkad Iyer identity among the third generation in Mumbai.

This study will draw on oral narratives as told by first and second generation Palakkad Iyers in Mumbai, to comprehend the perception of the identity they carry. These narratives will help identify the various influences and factors that aid in the formation of the collective Palakkad Iyer identity, which in turn, will aid in understanding how it influences the formation of the individual identities of the third generation in Mumbai.

Methodology

The methodology used in the course of this research includes semi-structured interviews and detailed conversations with six respondents, three male and three female, within the age bracket of 25-35. The criteria for selection was simple – all respondents are Palakkad Iyers who are born

and raised in Mumbai. One respondent has shuffled between Mumbai and Pune but has his family home in Mumbai. All respondents come from upper-middle class households. Additionally, six members of the first and second generation Palakkad Iyers in Mumbai, all aged 40 and above have also been spoken with.

One here defines the term ‘Palakkad Iyers’, in order to demarcate the difference between each generation, which is crucial to the purpose of this study :

The first generation of Palakkad Iyers, are those whose parents moved to Mumbai from Palakkad. Hence, they are either born in Palakkad and moved to Mumbai while they were young or were born in Mumbai itself.

This generation was raised on traditional community values that place importance on community affiliation, and hence the link between the community and individual identity of this generation is strong, and their participation and interaction within the community is high. Religion is important to them, and they adhere to the traditional practices and norms that are ascribed to the same. They speak Palakkad Tamil fluently, and most can read and write Malayalam and/or Tamil. They speak Hindi, and broken Marathi and English. Their interaction with society outside their community is limited, and their connect with Palakkad is strong, where they still view Palakkad their native place. Hence, they themselves see Mumbai as the other, when it comes to the concept of home and the native land.

The second generation of Palakkad Iyers, are those who were born and raised in Mumbai. Since they were educated in Mumbai, they write and speak fluent English, Hindi and Marathi, and are also fluent in Palakkad Tamil. However, when compared to the first generation, not many can read and write Malayalam and/or Tamil.

Like the first generation, they are active participants in the community and the link between the community and individual is strong. Their interaction isn’t limited to the community – they also interact with those outside the community by way of professional or personal relationships and others. Religion is important to them, and they do adhere to traditional practices – however, not all of them. This may be due to logistical and practical purposes, and sometimes personal opinions. Family is important as a social construct for them, and many share their homes with their parents. When it comes to the concept of home and the native land, this generation views Mumbai as home, but Palakkad is equally important for them as the native land.

Third generation Palakkad Iyers, by contrast are different. This generation was also born and raised in Mumbai; however, they speak English, Hindi, Palakkad Tamil and Marathi. Their proficiency in Hindi and English is more than that of Palakkad Tamil. This generation has mixed opinions about religion; many are agnostic, atheist, or spiritual. Those still practicing traditional rituals and practices in this generation are a minority. Family is important to this generation, but

they do not associate family as only those with whom they share blood ties – friends and other interpersonal relationships rank high for them, if not on the same level as family.

The level of participation and interaction with the community amongst this generation is markedly low. This could be attributed to wider interaction with society, and also a generational difference in approach to different facets of community (which will be explored later in the paper).

The questions that were asked in the interviews with the respondents were around the themes of identity, community, religion, perception (both by self and by others) and language. Some questions in particular, like ‘Have you had to explain (to anyone) who a Palakkad Iyer is? And in any scenario, why?’ were asked with the intent to understand if the respondents themselves had an idea as to what constructed the Palakkad Iyer identity. Another reason was to understand if there was awareness about this community amongst those who this cohort interacted with.

Other questions, such as ‘How do you introduce yourself to others? Does it differ when introducing yourself to a South Indian, versus other people?’, ‘How well do you speak Palakkad Tamil?’, were asked to understand the importance of the Palakkad Iyer identity within their personal identity – this in turn helped understand the level of dissonance.

Conversations with community members helped in providing information on community history, traditions and practices. They also helped chart the migratory history of the community from Palakkad to Mumbai, although most of these are personal experiences of their parents. It also includes their experiences growing up in Mumbai and being part of community activities.

This oral narrative forms a part of the identity the community carries forth for the enculturation and socialization process of the younger members of the community, while also creating an individuality in a global melting pot like Mumbai. The length and details in answers from the respondents haven’t been the same, which has led to certain limitations in building on the information. While some, through the course of the interview have chosen to give anecdotes and detailed answers, others have kept it short and curt. Questions regarding religion and practice have been answered curtly, since practice and expression of religion is a personal choice; hence references to personal or community beliefs will be limited, while those of ideology and language are detailed. Some respondents have chosen not to substantiate their responses further, and hence it can be seen as a limitation in understanding their point of view.

The book *The Saga of Kalpathy* (Das, 2017) has been used as a reference point to get information about the migration of the Palakkad Iyers from Tamil Nadu to Kerala and then to metropolitan cities. This book helped provide confirmation of the oral history mentioned in conversations with members of the community. It also provided information on how the

community settled in Mumbai and the challenges they faced as they migrated to different parts of the country.

The Palakkad Iyers

The Palakkad Iyers are at a unique juncture in Kerala and Tamil Nadu's social setup. They crossed over to Kerala from what is now the state of Tamil Nadu. Iyers and Iyengars alike, both came from cities like Thanjavur (Tanjore) and Srirangam first to Coimbatore – and then, to what is now the town of Palakkad. This migration of Tamil Brahmins into Kerala occurred like passage belts – meaning this migration occurred in batches, where people from certain towns migrated to particular towns and cities.

Those who came from Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Chidambaram and Tiruchirappalli migrated to Palakkad and nearby areas. Those who came from towns like Madurai and Tirunelveli chose to migrate further south to places like Thiruvananthapuram and nearby areas like Ernakulam and Kozhikode.

While some migrated at the behest of local rulers (like those who moved to Thrissur on the invitation of Sakthan Tampuran), others migrated in search of better opportunities. (Das, 2017).

As these Tamil Brahmins settled in such cities, they assimilated themselves within the social fabric and picked up the language, way of life and cuisine that was characteristically Keralite. But this wasn't the case for all of them. There were those that stayed back in Palakkad – now the Palakkad Iyers. While they too, ingratiated themselves within their social surroundings, their proximity to Tamil Nadu ensured that the degree of influence was less. While other Iyers started using Malayalam as their main language, the Palakkad Iyers stuck to Tamil. However, it did include words and phrases common in Malayalam, and over time it became a mix of the two languages.

When it came to cuisine, there was a more pronounced use of coconut in everyday cooking, and native Keralite dishes and vegetables also became the mainstay of cuisine in Palakkad. With time, this cuisine showcased the harmonious amalgamation of both Tamil Brahmin and Keralite gastronomy that is now unique to Palakkad. This goes to show that Palakkad Iyers, as immigrants, chose to maintain aspects of their original culture, and take some aspects of the host (Keralite) culture on the basis of value – an acculturation strategy preferred by most immigrants. (Goregenli, et al. 2016; Berry 1997)

When internal migration occurs, the migrants enter a new social, political and cultural environment. And with this, they enter a new social setup that comes with its own stratification

(Duany, 1996). While this was true when they migrated to Palakkad as well, this phenomenon is more explicit in a multicultural urban space like Mumbai.

In the early 1900s, many Palakkad Iyers migrated up north in search of better lives and economic opportunities – and most, migrated to Bombay, now Mumbai. As is with most internal migration patterns, especially from a rural to urban space, the likelihood of people moving to a particular area increases when there is a set network of people established (Lucas, 2016).

And this is exactly what happened with the internal migration of Palakkad Iyers to Mumbai. Over time, there emerged pockets of areas where a large number of Palakkad Iyers settled – areas like Matunga, Dombivili, Mulund, Chembur, and Kurla had a large population of Palakkad Iyers, amongst other South Indian migrants.

Now, Matunga has more Palakkad Iyers than anywhere else in India, with the exception of the hometown itself. (Mukherji, 2016). This goes on to suggest, that the community's history of migration and networks in host cities has helped them ingratiate into urban spaces well.

Pockets of South Indian migrants around the city have helped the second generation of Palakkad Iyers in having a stronger sense of community, and hence personal identity. Another facet that has helped them retain this community identity is spatial arrangement and architecture. Places like Matunga, owing to the large influx of South Indians, were overrun by numerous temples, interspersed with housing complexes.

This spatial arrangement has the same basic structure of Palakkad's *agraharams*. *Agraharams* as a settlement pattern have a subtle presence, but play a significant role in the way the Palakkad Iyers function as a community.

Agraharams are a characteristic feature of Palakkad – where the temple formed the core of an area, and houses and other structures were built with the temple as the center/ head of the spatial distribution – forming a concentric ring or garland pattern (Venkitaraman, 2015) This not only meant easy access to the temple, but also brought the community together spatially and socially, and this proximity is what inculcated a strong sense of community within the Palakkad Iyers.

Security is also another reason why migrants band together when they migrate to newer places. Having a living pattern where homes were close-knit, ensured a certain level of security to the community (Venkitaraman, 2015).

As the Palakkad Iyers belonged to the Brahmin *varna* of the Vedic caste system, it meant that they held certain power, according to the societal structure back then. However, when compared

to the rest of the population, they still were the minority, and hence the security of the community had to be factored in.

When migrants move to a particular place, they settle down closer together and stay close-knit as a community (Venkitaraman, 2015) – something that is seen with the Palakkad Iyers as they moved to Mumbai as well. Palakkad Iyers live in concentrated areas in Mumbai, with Matunga, Chembur, Mulund and Dombivili having the largest concentrations.

The way the community interacts and behaves, affects the individual and the way they behave (Masolo, 2012). For the majority of second-generation Palakkad Iyers who grew up in places like Matunga, Chembur, and Dombivili, the creation of spaces that loosely resembled the *agraharam* pattern of settlement, helped bring about a community identity.

And since most social interactions were those with other community members or South Indians, the community identity became an intrinsic part of the individual identity. A prime example is in Matunga, where the famous Shanmukhananda Hall acts as the crux of the area, with housing built around the hall premises.

This *agraharam*-like layout meant that during festivals and on days of religious importance, the whole community came together under one roof – further enabling the community spirit – especially among the elders, to whom these occasions merited great importance.

Architecture has a great role in transferring community ideas of culture and setting a historical precedent for communities. (Ugljen-Ademovic, et al., 2014) And this can be seen in the way Palakkad Iyers have re-created their traditional spatial arrangements of *agraharams* in Mumbai, to retain their sense of community.

It also helped inculcate a sense of community amongst the younger generation as well. The impact of the community spirit that stemmed from the *agraharam* settlement type is observed in these areas and can be seen in this excerpt from an interview by Narayan (2015),

Actually, you should say that I grew up in Matunga, which in many ways is like growing up in an *agraharam*. Matunga's citizens would congregate on the streets. Women with dripping wet hair would wait outside housing societies to watch bare-bodied men walking down the street, singing *bhajans*, clinking *kartals* (called *kinnaram* in the south), beating *dholaks* and tambourines in time to their shaking bellies.

Another facet that is vital to the Palakkad Iyer community as whole, is religion and the corresponding rituals and practices. The Palakkad Iyers also give great importance to the Keralite deity Ayyappa or Ayyappan. This is of note, since it provides an example of how Palakkad Iyers

as a community, have also inculcated religious aspects, (in this case, a Keralite deity) into their culture.

Initially, pujas were limited to small spaces like homes with a few people participating; however, over the years, they have evolved into big festival-like get together where the whole community comes together. As the number of migrants increased, pujas became more of an organized event, with a large number of participants (Gaikwad, 2015). There are now *samajams*, or community centers that now organize such religious activities, with places like the Murugan Temple in Chembur and Hariharaputra Samaj being some of the most popular, with almost 400 members that take part in various activities (Gaikwad, 2015).

The number of participants in religious festivities in urban spaces, goes to exhibit the level of importance of community amongst individual members. These spaces were established as a way to bring together the community and keep them in touch with their roots – and to a great extent, it has worked successfully. Organized *bhajans* and pujas on religious occasions bring the community together.

The demand among the elder crowd is such that some of the big pujas and *bhajan* sessions are even televised on local devotional channels like Sankara TV, where older members feel like a part of the occasion at home. (Subramaniam, R., personal communication, October 28, 2018)

When the Palakkad Iyers came to Mumbai in waves from the early 1900s, they were just one group of migrants, amongst the scores of communities and migrants who had come to Mumbai in search of better economic opportunities. Migration affects the migrated, as well as those in host cities, and this was the case in Mumbai as well. During the British Raj, Brahmins occupied plum posts in British offices, much to the chagrin of locals. This lack of economic opportunity led to anti-Brahmin sentiments and in the Bombay Presidency, an anti-Brahmin movement was led by Jyotirao Phule

This precursor to the “sons of the soil” political movement in Maharashtra was a setback to the Brahmins in Mumbai – the Palakkad Iyers included. Soon they moved down the ranks from official posts to blue collar jobs – a trend that continued even after Independence into the late 80s.

This shift led to two things – one was the realization amongst the community that the ‘Brahmin’ tag no longer was a commodity in the modern era, especially in a multicultural city like Mumbai. The second was, that education, now, was everything (Das, 2017 p.173).

It is important to note that as Iyers, this community comes under the *brahmin varna* of the caste system in Hinduism. *Brahmins* were the class that specialized in the dissemination of education

and sacred learning, and as such, were priests and teachers. In this context, the community has always understood the importance of a disciplined life and knowledge.

However, now the shift to modern education had to be undertaken to ensure that future generations could aim higher. Besides sending their children to private schools and investing in their education, the South Indian community, as a whole, set up educational institutions that were meant to look after the education of their own as well, with the South Indian Education Society being the prime example (Das, 2017 p.174).

Education can also be seen as a marker social position, and in the absence of family background as social status, education became the new indicator (Piplai et al., 1969). For a community that migrated for economic opportunities, having an advantage was important – and being well-educated to get skilled jobs was that advantage.

Parallel to this, the trend of Palakkad Iyers in middle-level jobs continued, so much so that the former chief election commissioner T.N.Seshan, in an article in Live Mint, remarked that Palakkad Iyers make good “cooks, crooks and civil servants”. It speaks to the number of Palakkad Iyers who were worked in middle-level jobs. Now, when it comes to the third generation of Palakkad Iyers, a lot has changed.

As a bi-product of globalization, when it comes to culture, identity concerns arise. Arnett in his paper *The Psychology of Globalization* (2002), discusses how in a globalized world, people now develop a bi-identity. One part of this is rooted in their own culture, and the other arises from their exposure to global culture. This phenomenon can be seen with the third generation of Palakkad Iyers, who were born and raised in Mumbai.

Members of this generation were sent to private schools and learnt English, while speaking the Tamil-Malayalam mix at home (colloquially called Palakkad Tamil). While their parents could write in Malayalam or Tamil (in addition to English and Hindi), this generation learnt English first, then Hindi, and only spoke Palakkad Tamil. (Iyer, K. personal communication, November 18, 2018) The shift in upbringing, combined with liberalization that occurred in the 1990s, meant that this generation had greater access to the global world – via television and the internet. Hence, this generation identified themselves with Western pop-culture that was awash in the 90s, along with Carnatic music. Increased interaction with non-South Indians and others in an urban space, meant that they had a different set of social and cultural influences. It is important to take note of these changes, as they have formed the base for the re-shaping of identity for the younger generation of Palakkad Iyers. Visits to the hometown were annual and short, which meant that there was not much scope for learning more about Palakkad culture and heritage (Subramaniam, S., personal communication, November 21, 2018). This generation, raised in a contemporary urban space, in a way, became so different from the previous generations, that visits to the

hometown became akin to diaspora tourism. The initial lack of participation on one hand, and the lack of cultural knowledge and inquisitiveness on the other, meant that they did not know much about who they were as Palakkad Iyers. In the age of globalization, where changes happen rapidly, the base which people use as the foundation of their identity gets lost. (Bornman, 2003) For this generation, putting into context, the distance from their roots and presence in an urban space, an erosion of the foundation upon which they base their identity is occurring. Another facet to take into consideration is the nativist movement that has plagued Mumbai, since the later stages of the British Raj. Mumbai, which constitutes of a good share of migrants, underwent waves of this nativist movement that always brought about the issue of the “outsiders versus the insiders”.

The proponents of this nativist movement always argued that the apparent “outsiders” have been the ones who have benefitted from the rise of Mumbai, while leaving the “true natives” behind. This, later in the 90s gave rise to the “sons of the soil” ideology adopted by many hard-line political parties in Mumbai (Singh, 2005) This did affect the generation of Palakkad Iyers that were born and raised in Mumbai. Hence, it can be said that three major factors have brought the third generation of Palakkad Iyers in Mumbai to this juncture. The first is having a different set of cultural influences, a wider scope of peer interaction, increased exposure to the global world, and exposure to different content via media. The second is in part, the lack of cultural knowledge, and lack of any sort of written history. The third is the nativist movement that brought out a public and sectarian discussion about the in and out groups in Mumbai.

The Third Generation Palakkad Iyers

Before one tries to explain the issues faced by the third generation of Palakkad Iyers, it is important to define who they are. This generation was born between the late 80s to early 90s, hence they are all currently between the ages of 25-35. This means that during their formative years through the 90s, they were exposed to global (mostly Western) media by way of television shows, music, movies and literature.

Media plays an important role in shaping the beliefs and ideas, a notion discussed by Arnett in *The Psychology of Globalization* (2002). Teenagers are more exposed to different types of media, which introduces global ideas, and provides a wider spectrum of information that has the ability to influence beliefs and behaviours. This has occurred with the focus group in question as well. Based on interviews conducted with this focus group, respondents answered that they did watch a fair amount of Western TV shows and movies, and read books that exposed them to a wider set of ideas that were different from the ones they grew up learning. This has led to acculturative stress, (Berry, 1997) where the difference between one’s own culture and a new culture can lead to identity confusion. The respondents also admitted that it has affected the way they look at situations and their beliefs and ideas, especially when it comes to religion.

Religion and tradition play an important role in the Palakkad Iyer community, as mentioned before. Religious functions and activities bring the community together and play a big role in introducing younger members to the community's traditions and culture. (Srinath, A., personal communication, November 21, 2018) Hence, from an early age, the younger members of the community, (including myself) were made to participate, and attend community functions, like pujas, prayer meets and cultural functions, as a way to enlighten us about our culture and practices. As children, many followed along, but this changed as we came into adolescence, with exposure to global ideas making us question our cultural beliefs and practices.

What has happened now, is that living in an urban space and globalized world, this age group has combined aspects of their native culture, and aspects of global culture that they prefer to form a sort of mix, which Arnett calls a complex hybrid identity (Arnett, 2002). Based on their responses, it can be said that the respondents are more open to listening to perspectives of others and do not necessarily believe in conforming to a set of norms only because they have been upheld for so long. When it comes to acculturation, there is a big difference in ideology and beliefs between the second generation and third generation of Palakkad Iyers. None of the respondents of the group call themselves religious. For them, the practices associated with religion are not as important. This generation believes more in spirituality, and some of the respondents are even agnostic. Spirituality in this case, according to the respondents, does not negate the existence of a supreme being, but it also does not mean that the only way to connect with this power is via rituals and practices. They believe that if man is made in god's image, they themselves are the connection to this cosmic power. It is where one looks at introspection and personal practices that connect them with this cosmic power.

For them, god does not seem to be the paragon of absolute truth, where all his sayings need to be followed. They believe and practice those aspects of religion that they see some logic or rational sense in. To this generation, logic and reasoning in beliefs and practices are as important as traditions and while they are different, to this generation they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

For example, a respondent mentioned that while she does visit temples regularly, she wouldn't call herself religious. To her, the way everyone expresses their spirituality is different, and the same goes for herself. Hence while she does visit temples, she does not follow all rituals and practices that go with the process. The respondent chooses to ascribe to those practices that make sense to her, and those that she cannot see the logic in, she prefers to keep aside. This can be seen as an example of culture shedding, where one dissociates from aspects of culture that one does not agree with (Berry, 1997). Culture shedding is one way of dealing with acculturation, and as such, is not exclusive to this community only. It is present in many third and fourth generations worldwide (Duncan and Trejo, 2016; Levitt and Waters, 2002; [Serrata](#) and Fischer 2013).

Family is the next important aspect for the community. From spatial living arrangements in Palakkad by way of *agraharams* to following a similar pattern by recreating it in cities, families have always stayed together. While in Palakkad it was a norm, due to security and ease of logistics, in Mumbai it was to stay connected to their roots. When it came to migration to cities, residential groups were established based on language (Piplai et.al, 1969), probably as it provided comfort to live amongst those who speak the same language.

However, later on the joint-family system disintegrated, as family members moved out to close-by places within the city. It can be seen as an effect of migration, where the family sociologically exists, but has economically fragmented (Piplai et.al, 1969). The reasons for this are varied – for some it was due to ease of transport, marriage, or even economic reasons¹. The affect that this has had on the third generation is mixed.

Based upon the respondent group's responses pertaining to family, it can be said that they find family important as a form of moral and social support. Like mentioned above, all of them come from families that have extended family members living close-by. Hence, while the joint-family system is no longer in practice, a new family system has come about. In this, families live in small offshoots close to each other, enough for individual families to have their own way of living, but also close enough to have support from other family members.

What this has successfully achieved, is that this generation has had the space to form their own ideas and beliefs but have also had family members as a guiding hand, especially when it comes to navigating culture and community. For them, family is a network of support that can be relied upon, but with enough space to have differing lifestyles and opinions. Therefore, there has been a balance between nuclear and joint family systems that has worked harmoniously for this generation.

One factor that has seen almost uniform responses from the group, is based around language. Palakkad Iyers, as mentioned before, speak a mix of Tamil and Malayalam, colloquially called Talayalam by some, and Palakkad Tamil in general. The first- and second-generation Palakkad Iyers can read, write and speak either Tamil, or Malayalam, or both, along with Palakkad Tamil. Hence these generations spoke Palakkad Tamil, either Tamil or Malayalam, English and Hindi, and were literate in English, Tamil or Malayalam and Hindi (mostly the second generation onwards).

The third generation however, having studied in English-medium schools, are literate in English, Hindi and/or Marathi, only speak broken Palakkad Tamil and only a rare few speak either Tamil or Malayalam. It has to be noted here, that low-proficiency in Palakkad Tamil was not out of

¹ Based upon communication with members of the community.

choice here, but rather due to focusing on increasing proficiency in English and Hindi. In simpler words, in the course of learning these two languages, Palakkad Tamil got left behind.

This is not due to any personal preference, but rather it can be attributed as an after-effect of migration and a globalised employment industry. Being proficient in a language ensures a favourable outcome in terms of education, livelihood and social interaction (Bleakley and Chin, 2010). Second generation Palakkad Iyers in Mumbai had to shift to speaking English and Hindi for social and logistical reasons. In order to ensure ease of interaction, the third generation made Hindi and English their first language, with Palakkad Tamil being restricted to the confines of their homes.

Language is a bridge to culture, and with loss of language, there is dissonance with culture. There is a dissonance between generations, and with native culture. Based upon the respondents' answers, interaction within homes are now in Hindi and English, with Palakkad Tamil being used in cases where the sentiment can be conveyed in a particular form only. A respondent mentioned that most times, he gives replies in Hindi or English, even if the question was asked in Palakkad Tamil. What has happened is that in the course of ensuring a smooth transition in an urban space, the dialect has been put on the back-burner, and through the process of acculturation, there has been language attrition (Brown, 1980).

It is important to note here that Hindi has been given preference in terms of learning as opposed to Marathi, which is the state's vernacular. This probably could be attributed to the metropolitan culture of Mumbai, where Hindi is spoken more than Marathi due to the number of immigrants present in the city. Hindi is also prioritized as a language as it is widely spoken in most urban and metropolitan areas across the country – which makes it a more logistical choice. Hence, the prioritization of Hindi over Marathi by this community could be due to these reasons. However, at the same time, this does not mean that Marathi is not spoken or read at all – most second and third generations are fluent in the language; however, Hindi is the preferred choice.

The dissonance that language attrition has brought about does not apply only to interaction or conveying sentiments. For this generation, based on responses by the interviewees, written history holds a certain importance, as they associate codification with veracity. However, it is also important to note here that community histories are written in the vernacular – which in this case, is Malayalam, and probably in Tamil as well. This generation, being fluent in English, and not Palakkad Tamil, assumes codification to be in English as well. Thus, the lack of accessible literature in English, and lack of access to codified history in the vernacular due to language attrition, means that this generation does not have access to codified history, if available. In the lack of access to written history, the ties to expressions of community, like rituals, traditions, practices and the meaning behind the same are not available to this generation. Most of these are

passed on by word of mouth, through oral narratives, which, while focusing on the human aspect of the community, shift in focus and perspective and are hence highly subjective.

Thus, for this generation, the lack of accessible written history, due to a language barrier, and the subjectivity that arises with oral history has created a gap between the individual and the community. This gap, which is due to a lack of understanding community history and what constitutes the construction of the Palakkad Iyer identity itself, has created a dissonance. This ties in with my point of culture shedding, where the third generation, in the absence of proficiency in the language, no longer find certain aspects of our culture necessary.

Community is another aspect which has had interesting responses. As has been mentioned numerous times, the Palakkad Iyer community is close-knit and community functions are attended by many who keep close contact with other members. Festivities and occasions are celebrated with family, but also in community centers, where large number of members converge to keep the community spirit alive. The same cannot be said of the third generation of Palakkad Iyers. Most respondents mentioned that their only link to the community was via their parents, and that the level of interaction they had with other Palakkad Iyers was largely dependent on how active their parents were in the community. They participate in functions only if their parents are present. Parents are the main link to the community for them. For the elder generations, community gatherings are restricted to functions that have a religious and cultural connotation. Most respondents mentioned that they would not go to community centers of their own volition, unless there was a personal reason for them to do so. For the respondents, the meaning of community itself is different. Besides sharing a similar culture, for them, similar beliefs and lifestyle also matter. This does not mean that the community is not important to them – it is just that their participation manifests in a different way.

Another bi-product of globalization is that with access to knowledge about other cultures, comes forth the curiosity to know more about one's own culture (Piplai et al. 1969). Third generation Palakkad Iyers today are hence interested in finding out more about their own cultural roots and history. However, the absence of a narrative accessible to this generation means the only knowledge they can gain is the personal oral narratives that are shared. There are Facebook groups and blogs online that are dedicated to Palakkad Iyers and some in general are for Tamil Brahmins.

Members of these groups share personal stories, quips and anecdotes that range from family history to almost mythic stories. Memes and videos are shared on coconuts and South Indian food recipes; insights on culture are discussed and online sources that may be relevant to the conversation are shared. Groups on Facebook like *We Are TamBrahm*, *TAM-BRAHM THINNAI*, *Palakkad Iyer Community Kudumbam* have more than 10,000 community members, have high

member participation and community discussions, ranging on a variety of topics, from politics, religion to the differences in culture between generations.

While the younger members of the community actively engage in these groups, the trend has caught on with the elders as well.

After understanding the importance of disseminating culture to the younger generations, elders have sought to Facebook groups to share cultural information and engage in discussions ranging from theology to rationalizing religious practices. Now there are Facebook groups with members across all age groups, who all share cultural information, as a means to preserve a record of sorts about our cultural history.

One factor that seemed to come across in the process of the interview with the respondents was the role that Palakkad and Mumbai played in their lives. The Palakkad Iyers (especially the first and second-generations) have a strong connection to the town, in the sense that even though they may live anywhere else, the concept of home is always attached with Palakkad.

The third generation has also been raised on this concept that Palakkad is home. However, most of the respondents have visited Palakkad only a few times, and only to visit their family deity. Hence their connect with Palakkad isn't as emotive as it is with the elder generations.

Home can be seen in this case as “an actual place of lived experience and a metaphorical space of personal attachment and identification” (Armbruster 2002). For the third generation, the former is Mumbai, but the latter has been ingrained to be Palakkad. But for them, both spatially and emotionally, home is Mumbai.

This is part of the mentioned dissonance, where Palakkad as a space is not important – for most it only carries an emotional significance. For this generation, Mumbai is now home, in all aspects.

Conclusion

In summation, it can be said that globalization has had a profound impact in the way one generation of a community sees itself. This small community has migrated twice in its history – and both times, it has adapted itself to its social landscape.

Judit Bosker-Liwerant in her paper *Globalization and Collective Identities* mentions how globalization has a paradoxical nature – it has given rise to new global identities and has given a renewed significance to ethnic identities at the same time. This paradoxical process can be seen through the Palakkad Iyer community. While the elder generation has firmly rooted themselves

in their culture, ideas and religious beliefs, the third generation of Palakkad Iyers are redefining themselves and what it means to be a new-age Palakkad Iyer, being a globally-conscious generation.

Research on this community can be taken further by possibly studying how social media has helped share personal and community narratives across generations. The impact of social media is such in this case, that it has become a medium through which members are sharing oral and family history, and cultural information as a means to preserve and record our traditions and narratives.

While this paper has to an extent studied Palakkad Iyers in Mumbai, a limitation that could be delved into further research is how Palakkad Iyers of different socio-economic classes (SECs) have acculturated to urban spaces. The availability of resources, level of education and ideologies could impact the rate at which members of different SECs adapt themselves to new spaces.

The respondents of this study come from upper-middle class households and hence their viewpoint and acculturation process could vary from those, who perhaps come from higher or lower socio-economic classes.

Another aspect that could be looked at, is how the third generation of Palakkad Iyers transmit their culture to their children in the age of social media, and globalization, where youth and their sense of identity is more prone to change.

Globalization, in a way has helped this generation connect with their roots. While getting exposed to different cultures and ideologies globally, they have over time, understood the importance of staying connected to their roots. Instead of taking the route of following traditions for traditions' sake, this generation has navigated their social and cultural landscape deftly, picking parts of each facet of their native and global culture that suits them, while leaving behind notions and traditions that are past their prime. One can see that this generation has created a balance for themselves, retaining aspects of their native culture, yet assimilating themselves within a global culture that they know is here to stay.

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