"A LITTLE PIECE OF DENMARK IN INDIA"

The Space And Places Of A South Indian Town, And The Narratives Of Its Peoples

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Abstract:

The South Indian town of Tranquebar was a Danish colony between 1620 and 1845, and several historical buildings and structures from this period remain in the town today. A group of Danish volunteers called the Tranquebar Association are trying to restore the historical buildings, which they consider a legacy of the "golden age" of Denmark. I wanted to find out what relationship the local Indians had to the buildings, and the history of the place, comparing their views with those of the Danish.

In this text I will discuss the different meanings the historical buildings in the town of Tranquebar in South India has to different groups of people living in or active in the area. To do this I examine the connection between buildings as significant places, or ethnoscapes as parts of different boundariless "neighbourhoods" to the different groups, and the different historical narratives of the different groups. These narratives are as much products of the different identities of the different groups as they are tools to shape these identities, and proved central in establishing places of significance in the space of Tranquebar, and also in the surrounding area (foremost the village of Tarangambadi).

The town of Tranquebar and the village of Tarangambadi comprise a space where different groups have different ethnical "neighbourhoods" formed around different significant places. These places are of varying importance to the different groups, dependent on their relative places in the different narratives. Where two groups connect the same places with different narratives it is a source of conflict as to who can establish the significance of the places. The narratives themselves are not sources of conflict. In spite of different interpretations of the same general event history, the historical narratives are primarily for internal consumption inside the groups, not for establishing hegemony over the other narratives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The village of Tranquebar lies on the South East coast of India, in the state of Tamil Nadu. From 1620 to 1845 it was a Danish colony, but was then sold to the British East Indian Company and remained British until India's independence in 1947. Originally a fishing village called Tarangambadi, it was renamed Trankebar by the Danish who used it as their main trading post in India, upgrading it to a busy town and strengthening it with a fort and city walls. After becoming part of British India Tranquebar (renamed by the British) lost its special trade privileges and rapidly dwindled in importance. Today it is mainly a fishing village surrounding a small town with historical buildings and ruins from the Danish era. Villagers in the outlying village refer to it as Tarangambadi, while townspeople call their town Tranquebar. These different names officially denote the same area, as it is officially known by both names. But since old, the city walls marked the boundary of Tranquebar from the neighbouring fishing village that has eventually outgrown and surrounded it. The local inhabitants mostly acknowledge the boundary to this day, though the walls are mostly gone.

In the following chapters I will refer to the urban area inside the boundaries of the old city walls as Tranquebar, and the urban area surrounding them as Tarangambadi. In local written sources (newspaper articles, tourist brochures and the like) Tranquebar is consistently referred to as a town, while Tarangambadi mostly is referred to as a village or *Taluk*, a cluster of villages with one nominal head village. Tarangambadi does in fact dominate at least 15 smaller villages in the area, but my main focus will be on the village rather than the taluk.[1]

The historical buildings of this area have strong meanings for several groups of people. Notably one of them, a Danish volunteer organisation has attached special significance to the fort and to the buildings from the (Danish) colonial era. This significance is expressed through the Internet, newspaper articles and television reports with the Danish but also with the local Indians.

I want to determine what the buildings and structures of the Danish era mean to the local inhabitants. Are the buildings significant in any way for the locals? Do they have the same significance for the locals as for the Danish? If not, how do they vary? Which buildings are

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[1] A report published by PRAXIS in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami (*Village Level People's Plans: Tharangambadi, Tamil Nadu*) places this number at 24 villages. My local informants named 16 villages including Tarangambadi.

important for local Indians, and which ones are important for the Danish in contrast? And of course: Why would there be variations in the perception of or significance of these buildings for different groups of people?

In this thesis I will show that the different groups active in and around Tranquebar have very specific ideas of the significance of the area, stored in places often unique to the separate groups. With groups I mean organised bodies of people with some common attachment to the space in or around Tranquebar. I have divided the local inhabitants and dominant actors into four categories, Hindus, Christians, Moslems, and Danish. These I will refer to as groups, although there are different levels of organization and homogeneity within these.
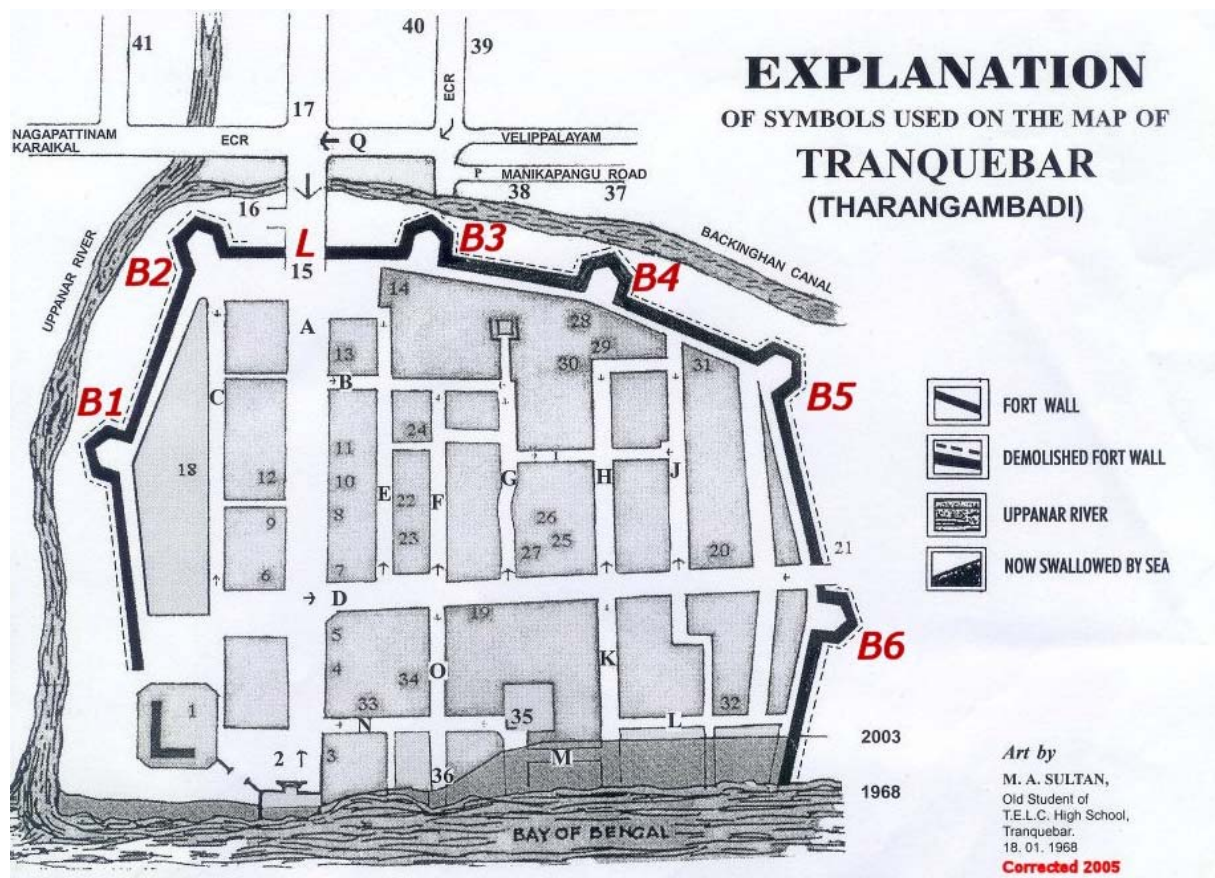
The largest group is comprised of the local Hindus, who are dominated by the fishermen's community (the word *caste* was never used by my informants). Most Hindus live outside the city walls, but there is a small part of them living inside, in Tranquebar. The city walls are important as a boundary marker, the fort as a connection to the historical kingdom of Tanjavur. All other structures of historical importance to the locals are situated outside the walls, as much as 38 km away. These structures and the history behind them are virtually unknown to the Danish, as they have no historical connection with the Danish era.

The next largest group, Christian Indian locals are not one but three separate congregation. This group has two of its churches in Tranquebar, all built by the Danish during the colonial era (before the British). A third church in Tarangambadi was built in 1854, after the Danish had left. This makes it not significant for the Danish. The Christian Indians own almost every Danish-built structure in Tranquebar, except for the fort, remnants of the city walls (in reality only the gate remains) and an old Governor bungalow (the latter all owned by the Tamil Nadu government). As Lutheran Christianity spread through South India from Tranquebar, the town has profound importance to all Lutheran Christian South Indians, and even some importance among Anglican and Catholic local Indians.

The Moslems living in Tranquebar constitute the smallest group permanently residing in the area. Their historically significant places are all situated into a walled compound in Tranquebar. As with the local Hindus the fort only serves as a connection with Tanjavur, but all Moslems in the area live inside the old city walls. The Moslems tend to stay aloof from the

conflicts around the historical colonial buildings, as they have no vested interest in them, controlling all places they associate with their history.

The only group comprised of non-residents, the Danish "Tranquebar Association" is dedicated to the preservation of the fort primarily, but secondary also of any historical structures from the Danish colonial era. This group is strictly speaking member based, but could also be said to cover most of a small number of Danish tourists visiting the area. During part of my stay the group also employed two architecture students paid by the Danish National Museum as interns aiding and supervising restoration work on one of the two Danish cemeteries. This includes several Indian-owned structures, belonging either to the Christian group or the state of Tamil Nadu.

Map courtesy of Mr. M. A. Sultan, *Reminiscences of Tranquebar*

Map Legend

KING'S STREET "A"
1. DANSBORG FORT.
2. ZIEGENBALG MONUMENT.
3. COLLECTOR'S BUNGALOW.
4. DANISH GOVERNOR'S BUNGALOW.
5. T.E.L.C. TEACHER'S TRAINING INSTITUTE
   (SITE OF THE COMMANDER'S HOUSE)

6. CHURCH OF SWEDISH MISSION
   (C.S.M. BUNGALOW)
7. ZION CHURCH
8. T.E.L.C ZIEGENBALG SPIRITUAL CENTRE
9. NEW JERUSALEM CHURCH
L 0. ST. THERESA'S TEACHER'S TRAINING INSTITUTE
11. ST. JOHN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

Nearly all places in South India where people gather, from the markets and streets of large metropolises to the tiniest village squares are marked by the drone of noise, ranging from the drone of traffic, human activity and roaming farm animals to music and news casts played on radios and cassette players, TV sets in the background playing musical dramas or sporting events, with the occasional religious ceremony thrown in. Where I lived during my fieldwork, in the part of Tarangambadi called the fishermen's colony, the noise level was sufficient to make sleep all but impossible after 7 or 8 A.M., maintaining a consistent high level into the night, dropping off first around 9 P.M. quieting down an hour or so afterwards. To be in Tarangambadi is to be exposed constantly to the background noise of human activity from dawn to dusk. One of the most marked traits of Tranquebar is the near absence of this noise. The only exception is Sundays, which is a holiday for Hindus and Christians both (these being the two largest religious communities in Tarangambadi).

In the fishermen's colony people were fairly crowded even before the tsunami that hit the village on Boxing Day 2004. After the tsunami, the loss of homes made it necessary for relief agencies to erect a large number of temporary shelters as a stopgap until new homes could be built. The shelters are invariably built in fireproof materials like corrugated sheet iron or asbestos-like synthetic materials. But to relieve the extreme heat generated inside by the metal roofs, many of them have a layer of palm leaf roofing on top of the metal or fireproof material. Some of the shelters are built like barns, with internal dividing walls giving each

family a separate space. Others are row houses with proper separation. The population density in these shelters approaches slums in the large cities, with a noise level that follows. The other houses are mostly a mix of thatched palm leaf roofed concrete base buildings and red tile peaked-roof plastered brick buildings. But most of these houses were catastrophically damaged by the tsunami, and no new buildings are constructed in this way in Tarangambadi anymore. As there are no public schools kids often play in the street or on the beach near the boats during the day, their mothers talking or quarrelling with each other while doing chores or drying fish (a widespread cottage industry in the fishermen's colony, obviously).

By the beach, north of the city walls the fishermen pull up their boats after fishing and sort the catch in the mornings with the whole family of the boat owner(s) before auctioning it off at the local fish market. This market, only used for selling and buying fish wholesale to traders ready to pack it in ice and transport the fish and seafood to the large cities by truck. These market mornings are chaotic with everybody shouting over each other in attempts to sell their produce first and at the highest prices. Without experience of the situation it is almost impossible to grasp the rapid dynamic of the professional buyers and auctioneers acting simultaneously in parallel deals. The activity level here is very variable, as the auctioning of fish and seafood takes place only when there is fish in the sea. The fish is not ever-present, but comes and goes, following yearly cycles. But exactly when the fish comes is never quite predictable, the ocean can be virtually empty one day and full of fish the next one. This does not give the fishermen a predictable daily routine, and occasionally the fishermen community rush to sea in the middle of the night to catch newly arrived schools of fish. When there is little or no fish to be had the fishermen's beach is less busy than during fishing surges. But there is always some activity, fishermen repairing their boats and nets, hired mechanics repairing outboard engines, and kids playing among the boats.

Between the fish market and the residential areas a large Hindu temple stands, with another smaller temple next to the beach just between the old city walls and the fishermen's colony. Both temples had stereo systems connected to large public address systems. These are also playing Tamil popular music, mostly in the afternoon and evening hours. As these sound systems are more powerful than ordinary radios, the temples are distinct in the general

soundscape of Tarangambadi.[2] Five times a day, the Mosque in Tranquebar sounds off the times of prayer with an old siren, followed by a muezzin chanting on a P.A. system, but not continuously like the temple. Sundays and holidays the bells from two of the churches chime in (the smallest of the three has no working bell tower). Though they occasionally overlap in celebrations there are no open antagonism between the religious communities, and of the four groups I focused on only the Danish had complaints about the noise from the muezzin.

Outside the centre of Tarangambadi there are no large shops, and the only industries are fish related, mainly an ice factory, and building projects to furnish fishermen and their families with new homes. The builders are mostly recruited from other states, notably Orissa and Andra Pradesh, as the massive reconstruction programs in Tamil Nadu in the wake of the tsunami has placed construction workers at a premium. As well as the Danish, these are temporary residents; they are also practically the only ethnically non-Tamil population among the Indian residents in Tarangambadi or Tranquebar. Work goes on from about 7 AM to sunset, although some groups often continue work into the night as construction deadline approaches. It is not unusual to have a radio playing at full volume at the work sites, and as construction work needs a fair share of verbal communication, shouted conversation in both Tamil and other languages like Oriya or Telugu mark the construction sites.

The new homes are built inland and well north of the village's current centre of gravity, and consist of largely identical designs. When these projects are finished there is a high likelihood that both the visual image and the geographical centre of the village will be altered to some extent. A trunk road runs through Tarangambadi, connecting it with smaller outlying fishing villages and hamlets, becoming Main Street when entering Tarangambadi proper. Along this road or close to it most new homebuilding projects are concentrated, but also the homes of the wealthier Hindus. These homes are without exception built in the modern all-concrete style, with flat terraced roofs. Those who can afford it have two story buildings, but most are single story buildings with an elaborately decorated façade.

All traffic from pedestrians and oxcarts to public bus lines and heavy lorries use the trunk road, making it extremely trafficked during day hours as everything from building materials

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[2] In this text I will use "Soundscape" as one of different strategies for establishing , based upon Appadurais theory of neighbourhoods shaped by different "landscapes" in *The Production of Locality*. The term is developed from Appadurais different "-scapes", although he does not explicitly use the term.

to farm produce was transported on it. On every building site a radio turns out Tamil popular music at its maximum level during work hours, which often coincide with the sunlight hours. Most lorries and some of the buses also had radios on an intense level, and the popular Indian music was as much a part of the background noise as the hum of engines or people yelling messages to each other on the workplaces.

Main Street is the "downtown" area of Tarangambadi (and in reality also for Tranquebar). Almost all shops and businesses of Tarangambadi lie in this area, concentrated around what used to be the old Pondicherry-Karaikal main road. Shops are open from 8 A.M. in the morning till around 10 P.M., and sell a variety of goods as well as services. Some of the latter include hairdressers, tailors and a cigar roller. This downtown area is packed with people from early morning to late night, buying foodstuffs and snacks, ordering dresses or shirts, having a haircut or a shave, or simply drinking coffee and chatting. All varieties of people meet or move through this area: men, women, Hindus, Moslems or Christians, residents of Tarangambadi and Tranquebar. As the Pondicherry-Karaikal highway runs next to Main Street the bus stop is a stone's throw away from it, and many of the shops are oriented towards the bus stop and the highway instead of the Tarangambadi Main Street. A side spur of Main Street crosses a bridge becomes King Street, which leads into Tranquebar through the old city gates.

Tranquebar is different from Tarangambadi in almost every detail: Architecturally it resembles a European colony more than an Indian fishing village, the population is demographically different (the majority inside the city walls are Christian, and no fishermen live here) and the soundscape is less Indian than museum-like: Compared to Main Street a couple of hundred meters away, King Street is nearly silent. And King Street is the most active street in Tranquebar. This is not to say there is no activity at all here! All traffic to and from Tranquebar moves through Main Street. There are other entryways, but these are not suited for vehicles. Also there are two schools in King Street, and a male teachers college. But these are walled compounds, witch dampens away much of the sound. The only shops apart from the restaurant at a hotel by the beach are sweets shops. Of the half-dozen or so shops in King Street, only one is actually inside the city walls. Walking the streets inside Tranquebar it was impossible for me to shake the feeling that history had moved on, that everything is happening somewhere else now.

Geographic location is instrumental in Tranquebar: certain streets mark the boundaries of religious groups and in a large extent where they live; its old city walls define the town's borders from Tarangambadi. These walls do not really exist anymore. All that remains of the city walls are the city gate (renovated by Indian archaeological authorities), a 30-meter stretch of wall incorporated into the compound walls of one of the schools, and the ruins of two bastions nearly washed away by the sea. Most adult inhabitants of Tranquebar and Tarangambadi know the location of the old city walls as well as they know the streets, although the walls disappeared more than a century ago. Though the walls are all but gone as physical structures, they remain intact as cognitive boundaries. The rules of jurisdiction in the *panchayat* or elder council treat the walls as if they are still standing, and they are referred to in daily speech ("inside the walls", I'm from inside the Fort").

The beach is an exception to the many places. It is free for anyone to use, and regardless of religion or ethnicity. Fridays after prayer Moslems habitually come to the beach, not only from Tranquebar but also from as far away as Karaikal an hours' journey away. The beach is known all over Tamil Nadu, and visited by foreign tourists as well. The two only hotels in Tranquebar are situated next to the beach, and backpackers as well as luxury tourists occasionally mingle with the Indian visitors at the beach.

The beach inside Tranquebar is one of the most popular and highly regarded beaches in Tamil Nadu – by Indians: Foreign tourists are still relatively rare in Tranquebar (Tarangambadi even more so, but there are often a small number of volunteers from Western relief agencies). These tourists mainly visit the beach, the old Danish fort Dansborg and a Hindu temple from around 1305. The tourists come by auto-rickshaw, car or coach, using the old marching ground as a parking lot. The activities here are sporadic, however, coinciding mostly with peoples free time. It is not as evenly hectic as the Main Street area, though it probably can rival it periodically. The fort and the temple are popular landmarks with the Indian tourists. Both have been used in several video and film productions, from commercials to feature films. Indian tourists, particularly wealthy city-dwellers from economic centres like Chennai are at least as fascinated with the fishermen, as a Western tourist would be. I saw several of the former videotaping fishermen mending nets or launching small boats, and in conversation several urban Indians were amazed that I would voluntarily live with a fisherman's family.

Two of my Indian informants (both university graduates) described to me how normally this is a given when living in India. One of them, Leela, is a professional woman from the Nagapattinam area now living in Chennai. She told me that Indians seldom were conscious of their noise level. "To the average Indian," she told me, "there is nothing unusual about drilling a hole in the wall at two in the morning. If you complain they will stop, but usually they don't see the problem." Another one of them, Anindo, comes from a relatively wealthy upper middle class family in Chennai. He told me that no matter how rich a neighbourhood in Chennai is it will be within hearing range of one of the slum neighbourhoods. Especially during celebrations as weddings, funerals and 50th anniversary birthdays, music from loudspeakers is a popular way of signalling to the rest of the community that some significant event is taking place in the family. This background noise is conspicuously absent in Tranquebar. Apart from the tourists on the beach and the two children's schools in King Street, there is virtually no activity in Tranquebar.

In his article "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy" Appadurai examines the methods used by people to create new local environments, or "neighbourhoods", and argues that there are not one but at least five different intermingling landscapes. Appadurai defines these landscapes, *imagined worlds*" or dimensions of global cultural flow as aids to understand the fluid states of relations in a modern globalised environment: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes.

He proposes the "ethnoscape" as a concept to describe "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live". The concept of "technoscape" is meant to denote "the global configuration…of technology and the fact that technology…now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries". "Financescapes" are what Appadurai finds useful to speak of as "…the disposition of global capital [which] is now a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before, as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move megamonies…with vast, absolute implications for small differences in percentage points and time units". "Mediascapes" and "ideoscapes" are closer related to each other than the three previous landscapes. "Mediascapes…tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements…out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives…" Ideoscapes are closely related, but "…they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and

the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it".[3]

Appadurai describes the forming of "neighbourhoods" as different from the traditionally viewed territorial description of localities. His "landscapes" are attempts to redefine the mechanics that create places in the space of human environments. I see ethnoscapes as the creation of significant places, in this context the establishment and reproduction of places of significance to specific groups within Tranquebar and Tarangambadi. A further development of these "landscapes" would be "soundscapes" (as used above), a function of ethnoscapes and mediascapes. As I will argue below the use of sound is instrumental to denote places of significance among the native Indian groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi. Sound as a marker is a central aspect of making places. It immediately informs those present as to what place they have entered. I will suggest a further development of this theory, based on another writer, Jonathan Friedman.

Friedman describes in his article "Myth, History and the Historical Imagination" how historical events are given different meanings to fit in with the identity and self-image of ethnical groups. In this sense history and myths are used similarly, and the different interpretations of historical events make them similar to myths, although the former have the advantage over the latter that it can be labelled "historical facts". Berkaak also discusses the creation of myths from history in "Oppgjøret ved OK Corral". Disagreement on the factual historical events did not prevent or hinder the establishment of the Gunfight at OK Corral as a central myth depicting the historical Wild West of 19th century USA. In "A place in the Sun" Berkaak follows the process of creating new places by constructing new significance through connecting them to different local histories. These two last articles give us an opportunity to combine the theory of places as constructed by different "landscapes" by Appadurai with Friedman's premise of history and myth as a tool for creating ethnical, religious (and sometimes political) identities.

While Appadurai describes the creation of meaningful places through different "landscapes", Marc Augé examines locations that are part of no landscapes, dubbing them non-places:

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[3] Appadurai, Arjun (2002): Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy pp 51-55

> "[N]on-places are spaces of transport and transit that are lacking any historical significance and strong symbolism. If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which can not be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place".[4]

This is a problematic term, as any place in an urban setting will have some meaning to someone. Everything from an empty parking house, which will in all likelihood be the workplace of some menial worker, to a village garbage dump, which is after all vital when the villagers need to throw away something will have some meaning to someone. To be blunt, if a geographic location is not a wilderness, it has at some point been improved, cleared or built it at some point. But as the different groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi focus on different specific locations as significant places, they also studiously ignore places that are problematic to them. No one place in Tranquebar or Tarangambadi is avoided or ignored by all four groups. But while one place may be significant to one group, to another group it may be a "non-place". In the following text I will use the term "non-place" or negative space exclusively to describe one specific group's association (or more accurately lack of) to it. What group I will refer to will be clear from the context.

Chapter 2: Methods employed during fieldwork

I conducted my fieldwork in the state of Tamil Nadu in South India, in the town of Tranquebar and the surrounding village of Tarangambadi in the district of Nagapattinam, six hours by car from the state capital Chennai. The first week I lived at a hotel in the neighbouring town Karaikal, while finding lodgings in Tranquebar or Tarangambadi. I eventually found a room with a Hindu family living in the Fishermen's Colony in Tarangambadi. During the final week I interviewed informants who had lived in Tranquebar but moved to Chennai, using the nearby town of Pondicherry as a base.

One unforeseen problem during my fieldwork was that it occurred during the warmest period of the year in Tamil Nadu, what the local inhabitants referred to as "the hot season". The Danish knew this from experience, and the Tranquebar Association limited their stay during the first half of the year to five or six weeks in January, February, and March. Because of this I had far less time with the Danish than I had counted on, and needed to concentrate more on the local inhabitants than I had originally planned. The Danish who were present there were

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[4] Augé, Marc: *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* 1995 London : Verso p. 96

also busy with restoration work and had little time or inclination to spend much time on interviews.

My most useful contacts were the local director of an Indian relief agency and the secretary of one of the three churches in Tranquebar. Through them I gained valuable information regarding how the fishermen's panchayat functions. I had contacts within all the three churches active in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi and with the Hindus. The Moslem society of Tranquebar was somewhat more difficult to contact and acquire informants within. They proved to be not only smaller than the Hindu and Christian societies locally, but also more introverted as a community and belonging to completely different professional and income wise groups than the vast majority in the area.

One unique opportunity I gained during my fieldwork was as a participatory observer of a film production in Tranquebar. A film crew sponsored by senior members of the non-Catholic Christian community in South India was making a feature film production portraying the life and work of the German-Danish missionary Bartolomeus Ziegenbalg (see chapter 3). I was offered a supporting role in the film, and by accepting had an excellent opportunity to observe close up the Indian perspective of one of the historical figures, as well as how this perspective was being reproduced.

The language I used in conversations was mainly English, as I only had an interpreter available the last month of my fieldwork. I had to be particularly aware of the fact that very few from the Hindu community in Tarangambadi or Tranquebar spoke English, and to compensate when choosing interviewees towards the end of my fieldwork. On the other side language was less of a hurdle in participatory observation of the Christian Indians, as many of them spoke passable English. Since my planned project was focused on the activities around the buildings within Tranquebar I spent much of my time there, but not only there. I also did interviews and active observations in Tarangambadi and outskirts, especially the fishermen's colony but also neighbouring villages and towns. Participatory observation of daily life in Tarangambadi and working habits among the fishermen was possible without interpreters or advanced Tamil language skills. Much of the communication during physical work is non-verbal, and different actors and roles (especially work distribution within fishermen's families) are easily recognisable without exact understanding of verbal language.

The town of Tranquebar and the village of Tarangambadi has five different religious societies, one Hindu, one Moslem and three different Christian ones (Evangelic, Catholic and Anglican). Even though many Moslems in the area spoke English, they were the most difficult society for me to gain access to. This could have several reasons. One is that the Moslems traditionally constitute the main part of the upper class in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi, but another reason may be that Moslems in general are an exposed minority in India and find it safest to keep a low profile in society, somewhat insulated from the rest of the general public. The Hindu society was relatively easy to enter, especially because I lived with a Hindu family that acted as a door opener for me. But even without such a "booster" this society was quite open towards outsiders, and its members were often eager to include me in religious ceremonies and work activities.

The three Christian societies were the easiest to contact and gain entry to. As I am from a country in the Christian cultural area, all three communities received me as "one of them". Christian religion, especially evangelical Protestantism is an important component of the Indian conception of the history of Tranquebar, so I concentrated on the Christian communities within Tranquebar when collecting life stories and interviews. The evangelical in particular but also the catholic and Anglican churches were important subjects for me, as they are clearly the largest owners of buildings from the colonial era in Tranquebar.

Even though I did not regard the Moslem and Hindu religious communities as central aspects of my fieldwork material, I chose to collect data from them too, as influences from the local environment on the main problem of my thesis. During the fieldwork my experiences with the Hindus proved significant enough for me to involve myself in the Hindu community more than originally planned, and to gather more data from them than I had originally anticipated. The open nature of my interviews also gave me new insights, and when studying the Hindus by participating in activities with them I received not only data and experiences form key events I had not anticipated, but the germs of new questions regarding the role and perspective of the Indians living outside the old city walls. The end result of my changed perspective was that the Hindus living in the area have a more central place in my final thesis than originally planned, as well as a substantial event history regarding pre-colonial Indian history in the following chapter. This is not only to give outsiders a glimpse of the complexity of Indian history; it is also an attempt to illustrate the Hindu, Tamil and general Indian perspective on it, as opposed to the Western one.

Another influence on the local community was the disastrous effects of the tsunami that had hit the area. The district of Nagapattinam which Tarangambadi and Tranquebar lies within, had been hit particularly hard by the natural disaster that hit the regions surrounding the Indian Ocean on 26/12 2004, so hard that the rebuilding process likely will change the makeup and composition of both the buildings in the area and the general population. After briefly considering changing the focus of my thesis I decided to follow the original project outline, and use data and experiences from the relief work as secondary factors affecting the physical space of Tarangambadi (as it turned out Tranquebar escaped with far less loss of life and property than Tarangambadi).

One practical problem I encountered occasionally was that I as a white European foreigner routinely became associated with relief aid, as some 20-30 organisations had been involved in the local relief work in the wake of the tsunami. Many tried to use me in a scheme to receive money to their projects, be it bibles to poor Christians, free shipments of fishing hooks to the fishermen's community or sheer begging. In a way this could be fortunate, as many actively invited me to visit them, and it made contacting potential informants easier. Mostly however this was unfortunate, as the would-be informants often tried to steer the conversations towards the tsunami and their own financial problems. In one particular case I visited a hamlet housing agricultural workers and their families with an interpreter. In spite of my insistence that I did not belong to a development agency the inhabitants automatically associated me with foreign aid, hopefully economic. The mood among them went from being open and eager to tell me about the hamlet to being overtly unfriendly when it sank in that I would only be asking questions, leading my interpreter to advise that we leave. Fortunately the last example was not the norm, and in general my informants were eager to tell me what they could about the area.

Methods for gathering data

During my fieldwork I concentrated on oral sources and participatory observation. The only data I gathered during my fieldwork were rare books or pamphlets published locally and difficult to acquire elsewhere. In Tamil Nadu the historical buildings of Tranquebar were often used in TV-commercials, music videos and featured in newspaper articles. As I wanted my primary sources to be human interaction I did not actively gather these forms of data, keeping them as secondary sources. One film production shot locally I used participatory data from, as I was one of the actors in it.

Interviews

Beforehand I had decided to keep formal interviews at a minimum, and I used the interview format mainly when I gathered life stories. This was because I would rather observe interactions directly during the restoration work in Tranquebar than to collect second hand accounts of the interactions later. I also feared that a formal interview setting would lead central informants to put on their official hats and give me careful, neutral answers rather than opening up and display personal attitudes or experiences. Since I beforehand suspected potential conflicts between several of the actors I was also concerned that sensitive information would be kept from me so that other involved parties would not know too much. This was to a certain degree confirmed. Still I made several interviews (in English or Danish) in the beginning to get a temporary overview. Later interviews with and without interpreter were to collect life stories.

My interview guide was intentionally open, and I encouraged my interview objects to tell me everything they knew of what they knew of local conditions and histories. The most important to me was to get an overview of the restoration process and ownership of the historical buildings, and to collect life stories. The life stories were intended to give me information about local circumstances I otherwise would not have expected and therefore would not have thought to ask about. By structuring these last interviews so openly, I could carefully goad them towards different subjects as they were talking, rather than to break the flow by changing the subject during the interview.

During the interview situations I was aware of possible fortunate and unfortunate roles given the objects and myself. As a researcher with university training I could seem somewhat intimidating to fishermen with five years education or less. To avoid this I consciously attempted through open questions to let the interview objects speak freely, whether or not they told me what I already knew or subjects irrelevant to my thesis. By doing this they took the storyteller role where I was the listener, rather than the role of obediently answering my questions. They then told me more and talked freer than if I had asked clearly delineated questions, and often gave me additional information it wouldn't have occurred to me to ask.

The interviews themselves lasted as a rule from half an hour to an hour, occasionally two hours. Not everybody had time to as much, and this could limit the length of the interviews.

During some of the interviews I took keynotes in a notebook later to write up the interviews in their totality. During others I chose not to take out my notebook, but dictating from memory later. It was usually dependent on the situation whether I took notes or not. Some of the interview objects, particularly women or men with little education became nervous and hesitated to open up when they saw me write their statements in a notebook, so I often tried to make them without one. However many educated men were very eager to be interviewed, and expected from the situation that I take notes. In all interviews where I used an interpreter I also took notes. The interpreter, who also acted as a contact to informants acted as a "bridge" between the informants, and created an atmosphere where I could take notes discreetly while the interpreter and I were the audience of the informants, making them more confident and open.

Of the 15 or so interviews I made 9 were life stories, the others were regarding the situation in Tranquebar. A little less than half the interviews were made with the aid of an interpreter, the rest were conducted in English. As I initially feared the amount of relevant information I gathered from the interviews varied strongly. But the life stories were useful for mapping changes in the life and urban face of Tranquebar with time, and to acquaint myself with the different life situations of the different inhabitants.

Informal conversations

My main tool for collecting oral data was informal conversations with different central informants among the different main actors. Those I consider the main actors are the Danish from the Tranquebar Association and the leading figures among the local Indians, notably officials in the three churches. As the Moslems were in a minority and not much affiliated with the reconstruction process, they and the Hindus were originally considered secondary. However the data I gathered from the Moslems and Hindus regarding space made me reconsider and incorporate these two groups further into my central problem, both regarding place/space perspectives and use of history as a tool for creating identities. Themes in the informal conversations included different individuals' relationship to the restoration projects, and eventual conflicts between parts (for instance conflicts between the Danish and some of the church societies) and conflicts within the parts (like internal power struggles within the church communities). In these conversations I never took notes.

As my stay in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi progressed I received far more information during informal conversations, or what Ellen (1984) considers informal interviews than I got from the interviews with the same people in the beginning of my fieldwork.[5] This was because with time I won more and more trust from the central actors, and because the setting became different, without me standing with a notebook and poised pen. Having said that, I never had as much time as I would have liked with the Danish, as six weeks in my experience was too brief a time to build up the same rapport.

Participatory observation

Since participatory observation of the Danish was only possible during the six weeks they stayed, I focused on them when they were active in the town of Tranquebar, joining up with them when they showed the area to visiting tourists. With the resident Moslems I never established sufficient contact to participate in activities. The Christian Indians and the Hindus were the easiest group in this respect. The Christian Indian communities freely involved me in prayers, services, and social activities. This was also true with the Hindus, and some of my most valuable formative experiences during my stay came from excursions with Hindu informers.

Changing my focus

I had to change my focus partially during the fieldwork from focusing on the relations between the Danish and local Indians because of the limited time I had with the former. This made me concentrate more on different groups within the local Indian milieu and their relationship to the place and its history. Another problem was the buildings themselves.

It turned out when I arrived that far fewer buildings from the Danish colonial era remained standing than I had anticipated, and that the Danish already the autumn before I arrived had finished the restoration of fort Dansborg, by far the most important building for the Danish. Also Tarangambadi and (to a lesser degree) Tranquebar had been hit by the tsunami December 2004, and a massive rebuilding effort was underway in the area.

The tsunami has become a central part of the local narrative, and as such I incorporated it as a peripheral part of my empirical data. However as it had no part of the original planned scope for my fieldwork, and as it is probably too soon to study the impact of the tsunami in the mind

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[5] Ellen, Roy (ed): *Ethnographic Research. A guide to general conduct* London: Academic Press 1984 p230

of the inhabitants of Tarangambadi and Tranquebar I decided against letting it take too big a part of my empirical data or analysis.

Ethical assessments

I decided beforehand to anonymise all interview objects, including the informants I had only open conversations with. This means referring to them by assumed names, in a few cases also the positions they had within different institutions. Although almost all informants were willing to be quoted under their own full names, I could not be sure they realised how I would use their information and will therefore keep to my principle of full anonymisation of all my informers. Institutions were more complicated. The Tranquebar Association is the only organisation of its kind in Tranquebar, which again has a unique history in relation to Southeast India. Changing key information of these would lead to loss of vital data regarding the perspectives of the agents in the area, as well as the meaning of the history of Tranquebar. As the Tranquebar Association is also completely candid about its position and intentions I decided against masking any of the details of the group.

The three church societies are also mentioned under their own names, with few details withheld. I considered anonymisation of these as one of them had an internal power struggle when I was interviewing members of it. The asked me to keep my knowledge to myself for the duration of the court case the power struggle had culminated into. But as the case was decided just before my departure and is now publicly available I have used my data on it in the thesis, as well as the church in question.

One difficult ethical dilemma I got in during the fieldwork was when I gathered information of an entity within the area I studied committed what I (and Indian law) considered infringements of the rights of several individuals, although the entity in question did not see it like this itself. I did not report this to the authorities, and any point I use these cases in my thesis I will change details in the cases so that they cannot be connected with any part of the societies of Tranquebar or Tarangambadi. If I had reported the cases the likelihood any actions by the authorities would have been taken was low, and the likelihood of me alienating a section of the local society would have been high.

The question of denied entry was present more within the sphere of people's homes than of any public places. Where I was barred from entry I chose to respect this, as I was unlikely to get more information than if I had talked to people who had been in these places.

Chapter 3: History and uses of it for shaping identity

There is a long-lived notion among many students of Indian culture, history and particularly religion that Hinduism lacks a sense of history. I will discuss this notion, as Western Indologists originally wrote most of the "official" history on India in the wake of the European colonisers, using Moslem sources that first iterated this idea. In the beginning of this chapter I will use Sharma to explain the origins of this view, before disproving the validity of such a notion. This is relevant because elements of the history of the region around Tranquebar are significant to *all* Indians living in the area, not just Christians or Moslems. On the other hand this notion explains the relative obscurity of large parts of the local history of Tarangambadi to outsiders, and why central elements of the Tamil historical identity are all but unknown to the Danish.

Proceeding from this debate I will recount an event history of the region of Southeast India, especially the "classical" period before encounters with Western colonial powers. This is to acquaint readers with cultural influences on Tamil-speaking Indians from historical events not usually accounted for in the regular histories of Tranquebar, or the perspectives of Indians on significance of historical events. In the second half I will discuss how the histories of the different groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi are products of their separate social positions and self-images. History is also reshaped in these processes, and used as a tool for creating a common group identity, thus reproducing the social positions they emanate from. As I will give examples of below, there has been a pervasive view that Hindu culture lacks a sense of history. Through explaining why this view is false I will demonstrate the differences between Western and Hindu perspectives on history.

The history of the colonial period is undoubtedly a painful part of history for Indians, and somewhat controversial to Danish as well. I will use Friedman's theory of mythopraxis to show how the historical events have been reinvented by different Indian groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi to either focus on positive elements in the history of the area, or remaking elements of it to fit with a strong assertive self-image among the Indian groups, and to a lesser

degree among the Danish. With his use (or re-use) of the term *mythopraxis* Friedman clarifies that his use of the term differ from Sahlins'. Where Sahlins uses the term to mean the enacting of myth in reality, creating "mythical realities", Friedman uses the term to denote the practice of constructing histories according to schemes transferred from other domains.[6] To call the possessing of histories among the groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi mythologisation may seem strong wording. But the practice of strongly accentuating some aspects of an event history and largely ignoring others, mean that the histories the different groups reproduce vary distinctly, as well as the roles given to the different parts in the histories.

I will also look at different historical narratives and interpretations of the event history, as the descriptions of the historical events vary with the perspective of the author. Different groups have different opinion of what are relevant aspects of the history of Tranquebar. In following chapters I will discuss the different perspectives and strategies of gaining hegemony of the history of Tranquebar. In this chapter however, I will mainly discuss different perspectives of the history to establish that no one dominant historical representation exists in literature or local sources, but that differing interpretations exist among different groups.

Do Hindus have a sense of history?

There has been a persistent notion that Hindus lack a "sense of history", as Hindu mythology is perceived to be circular. This view is discussed in Arvind Sharmas "Hinduism And Its Sense of History", where he catalogues an impressive list of authors that claim that Hindu culture suffer from lack of either a history, a sense of history, a lack of historiography or a lack of a theory of history.[7] He traces this back to the Moslem invasion of India and quotes the Moslem Indian Al-Biriuni:

> Unfortunately the Indians do not pay much attention to the historical order of things, they are very careless in relating the chronological succession of their kings, and when they are pressed for information and are at a loss, not knowing what to say, they invariably take to tale-telling. But for this, we should communicate to the reader the traditions, which we have received from some people among them.[8]

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[6] Friedman (1992) p. 196

[7] Sharma, Arvind (2003): *Hinduism and its sense of History* New Delhi: Oxford University Press pp 1-4

[8] Ainslee T. Embree, ed., *Alberiuni's India Translated by Edward C. Sachau* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971) Part II, pp. 10-11 (Quoted in *Hinduism and its sense of History*, pp 9-10)

This view seems to have been strengthened by the British, partly because "…Indian claims to antiquity caused some problems in Christian circles, in which the date of creation … in 4004 BC was still considered authoritative".[9] The European Indologist view of Hindu literature is typically similar to Al-Biriuni:

> The weakest point in the whole domain of Hindu writing, in both Vedic and post-Vedic periods, lies in the province of history. Quality students almost without exception have held this view. 'The whole course of Sanskrit literature', says MacDonell, 'is darkened by the shadow of this defect'.[10]

This notion, that Hindus have no concept of history, is probably attributable to the difference between the contrast from the cyclical view of history prevalent in oriental philosophy like Hinduism (notably also Buddhism) and the linear conception of time as a line moving exclusively forward (often with a clear beginning as well as an final end) dominant in Semitic religions (Judaism, Islam and Christianity) and prevalent in Western thought.

Hindu religion has the doctrine of the Yugas. This religious doctrine states that the universe goes through an eternal cycle of four *Yugas* or ages. The first age, *Krita Yuga,* is an age of perfection where *Dharma*, the moral order of the universe is observed completely. The second age, *Tretã Yuga*, marks a regression from the perfect form of the first age, while in the third age *Dvãrara Yuga* only half of the *Dharma* survives on Earth. The last and darkest age, *Kali Yuga*, is the age we live in today according to Hindu doctrine. These ages are parts of a larger cycle, the *mãhayuga*. Between these cycles there is a *pralaya* or period of dissolution before the cycle restarts. There is also a larger cycle represented by an *mãhapralaya* or great dissolution every thousand cycle. These cycles never end, and according to Hindu belief the universe goes forever through a rhythm of "creation-destruction-creation".[11]

This of course contrasts with the "Western" religious doctrines of time. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, time itself begins with the divine creation of the universe. From creation a brief period of trouble free life in Paradise ends with a fall from the grace of God, and mankind lives on Earth in a less than perfect existence gradually redeveloping its virtues through different prophets, saints or persons chosen by God until the end of history,

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[9] Sharma op. cit, p. 11
[10] Benjamin Walker, *The Hindu World,* Vol I, p. 453, quoted in Sharma op. cit pg 13
[11] Eliade, Mircea (1991): *Images and Symbols: studies in religious symbolism* Princeton: Princeton University Press

doomsday, when a final reckoning will separate the good from the bad and a return of Paradise on Earth.

The linear development of history echoes in several Western scientific theories. The theory of the origins of man when first formulated by the onetime theological student Charles Darwin resembles the genealogical lines of Patriarchs in the Old Testament, with successive races of proto-humans replacing each other until the final development of Modern Man. Marx in his thesis of historical materialism argued that human society went through historical phases ranging from early slave societies through a egalitarian classless society. The theory of the Big Bang was even endorsed by the Catholic Church before it was scientifically well established, as the Pope regarded the theory consistent with the Biblical myth of creation.

Sharma mentions the further arguments by Western Indologists like Basham, that as there was no regular system of recording the year as in the Roman A. U. C. system, Indians almost certainly imported the concept of fixed dates and eras from the invaders from the Northwest. However Sharma also points out that both Indian dates of the death of kings and the longest continuous era in Indian history is reliably fixed in 527 B. C., well before the invasions from the Northwest[12]. Another argument is the lack of Indian written records, although Hartmut Scharfe points out natural reasons for this:

> In view of the careful bookkeeping in the *Aksa-patala* the virtual absence of archives and chronicles in India is surprising; but the climate would destroy most documents. The frequent change of administrative centres as a result of the rise of new dynasties with a strictly regional power base further prevented the development of an archival tradition.[13]

But Hindus in the Tarangambadi area do have a strong sense of history, as I frequently witnessed. This was apparent to me when I lived in the village, and through conversations with the Hindu inhabitants. As I will mention in a following chapter many historical buildings outside Tranquebar carry strong connotations with the Hindus not for religious reasons but for historical ones. The traditional boundaries between the different villages or the division between Tranquebar and Tarangambadi (see following chapter) are attributable to the Danish era, and therefore clearly rooted in history.

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[12] Sharma, Arvind Op Cit., pp 100-101
[13] Hartmut Sharfe,*The State in Indian Tradition* , p.139, quoted in Sharma Op. Cit. pg. 103

Finally there are the inscriptions. Sharma quotes D. C. Sirkar that there are at least 90 000 inscriptions around India (35 000 alone from Tamil speaking areas), in effect historical records left by past rulers[14]. As a parallel to these old inscriptions left on columns or standing stones from old times I found a surprising number of modern inscriptions on memorials scattered around the villages in the area. In Tarangambadi and Tranquebar alone I counted more than 12 inscriptions made after the Danish era (the inscriptions were all dated, and in the Western calendar system). These were in Tamil and often marked with the symbols of a political parties active in Tamil Nadu. The political parties have a broad and diverse member base; which like the religious makeup of Tamil Nadu is predominantly Hindu. It is not difficult to deduce from this that the (Hindu) leaders who set up these inscriptions and memorial stones wish to be remembered by posterity. Memorial stones are in themselves so implicit of a wish to be remembered that I have little doubt Hindus have a strong perception of history, the past and the future.

There is at least ample evidence that the Indians of Tranquebar and Tarangambadi, Hindu or not will interpret history from their social positions and differing group identities, as well as using these histories, or their narratives of history to emphasise and reproduce their positions. The narrative is not split only between Danish and Indian, however. As I will attempt to illustrate in the following chapter, the narratives change among the different Indian groups as much as between the Danish and the Indians, in some cases more.

Sources
The Greek author Ptolemy mentions the neighbouring city of Nagapattinam in his texts around the 1st century, but most sources on the region before the Danish settled in Tranquebar are of course Indian. These include engravings and inscriptions dating from the Cola Empire around the 10th century, but also Sangam epics like the *Cilappatikaran* and *Manimelakai*[15]. The Danish colonial period is covered by an extensive (dominantly Danish) historical literature. The mission venture in Tranquebar is described in several religious histories and there are a number of biographies of the first missionaries in Tranquebar, Ziegenbalg and Plütschau, mainly by Indian or Christian missionary authors. Though there is a large body of work regarding Tamil Nadu post-independence, Tarangambadi and Tranquebar are too

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[14] D. C. Sirkar, *Early Indian Numismatic and Epigraphical Studies* (Calcutta: Indian Museum 1977) p. 91, quoted in Sharma (2003) pp 81-82

[15] Varadarajan, Mu (1988): *A History of Tamil Literature,* pp 80-95

peripheral to be mentioned particularly in any of these works. Generally, a strong growth in Dravidic identity rose in South India in the 1960s as reaction to the Hindification movement, an Indian nationalist movement pushing for Hindi as the sole language of India. As Tamil Nadu is an important Dravidic cultural region a, the Dravidic movement had strong following in Tamil Nadu.[16] This has given the ancient past of today's Tamil Nadu a prominent place in the makeup of modern Tamil-speaking Indian identity, regardless of personal religious views of individual Tamil Indians.

Early history of Tarangambadi

Though the region containing Tranquebar and Tarangambadi has a long and ancient history, neither the town of Tranquebar nor the surrounding village of Tarangambadi plays a significant role in historical accounts before (or after) the Danish period. From ca. 100 B.C. through 500 A.D. the area around current Tarangambadi was a part of a bustling trading environment ranging from Pondicherry to Nagapattinam. In classical Cola times, the area around Tarangambadi was an important Buddhist spiritual centre.[17] During the Sangam Cola period (1st century B.C. to 5th century A.D.) the neighbouring cities Nagapattinam and Poompuhar were important sites for visiting pilgrims and students from as far away as China. Though primarily Hindu the ruling kings allowed Buddhist structures to be erected. These included the Chudamani Vihara, a Buddhist monastary in Nagapattinam erected in the 6th century A.D. The ruins of the monastary stood until Jesuit monks demolished them in 1868.[18]

Buddhism was gradually displaced by hinduism as the dominant faith in the area, and a temple named Sri Masillamani was erected by a Hindu ruler in 1305 or 1306. Islam came to Tarangambadi with traders from the Arab Gulf states and north east Africa in the 14th century, and there remains a small Moslem community to this day in Tranquebar.[19]

An early Cola kingdom had its capital in Puhar (today the village of Poompuhar) until the 6th century, when the sea destroyed the city. From the 8th century to 1620 the area fell under the

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[16] Subramanian, Narendra (1999): Ethnicity and populist mobilization – Political Parties and Democracy in South India. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp 164-165

[17] Jagadisa Aiyar, P.V. (2000) *South Indian Shrines* p. 535
[18] Ibid, *p*. 535. There is no records regarding if or when Buddhist monks abandoned the monastery, though no sources from the Colonial era mention Buddhism.
[19] Sultan M. A., *Reminiscences of Ttranquebar, p. 9, 34*

power of several Cola dynasties based in Tanjavur. The Colas gave way to the Vijayanagaran Empire in the 14th century. Tarangambadi itself is mentioned first in an inscription from the 14th century, naming it Sadanganpadi[20].

The Colas were one of the earliest civilisations in Southern India. They had a kingdom based in the Chauvery river delta with Puhar (current day Poompuhar) as capital from the 1st century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D., mentioned in contemporary Sangam literature. The Colas disappear from the political map but reappear in the 9th century [21]. After a long interregnum the Colas then established an empire in the 9th century far larger than the original kingdom[22]. Eventually ranging from South India to Sri Lanka and parts of Indonesia this later empire was ruled from several capitols, eventually based in Tanjavur. After the defeat of the Colas the Vijaynagar Empire conquered the larger part of South India, and installed a viceroy (titled *Nayak*) in Tanjavur to rule the region. As the power of the Vijaynagars waned, the Nayak of Tanjavur ruled more and more as an independent king. It was the Nayak king Ragunatha that signed the treaty with the Danish in 1620, allowing them to establish a colony in Tarangambadi.[23]

The Danish period

The Danish first came to Tranquebar in 1620 after a failed attempt to establish a colony in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). After negotiations with the Nayak king of Tanjavur Denmark was allowed to rent the area around Tarangambadi for trade purposes. As the head of the expedition Admiral Ove Gjedde was a trained fortification architect construction of a fort to protect the colony began immediately. The fort, named Dansborg was advanced for its time, and both the Dutch and the Portuguese in India tried to acquire Denmark as a local ally against the other. [24] There were other Danish colonies in India, some more successful than others. There were repeated attempts to colonise the Nicobar Islands in the Indian Ocean, from 1756 to 1760. They all failed when the European colonists were wiped out by malaria, and the Danish claims to the islands were later sold to the British. Other, smaller trade posts

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[20] Nagaswamy, R (1987): *Tarangampadi.* As there is no information about antecedents of the 9th century Colas, there is some discussion if the later Cola Empire was just a chiefly family that claimed descent from the earlier dynasty (Subbarayalu 2001 pg 83).
[21] The Colas are described in Pandyan epics but precise dates are difficult to establish. Most literature concerns the later Cola Empire dating from the 9th century to the 13th.
[22] Y. Subbarayalu (2001): *Studies in Cola History* Chennai: Surabhi Pathippakam p 113.
[23] Vriddhagirisan, Chidamabaram S.Srinivasachari (1942): *The Nayaks of Tanjore* Annamalainagar: Asian Educational Services
[24] Olsen (1967): *Vore Gamle Tropekolonier* Copenhagen: Fremad, p. 79, pp 144-146

were established in Calicut and Frederiksnagore. But Tranquebar remained the principal Danish holding in India through Denmark's colonial venture in India.

Up to this point the Danish and Indian informants I spoke with more or less agreed upon the turn of events. The Danish informants and written sources do not discuss the history of the region in detail before the 14th century, and the Indian sources are not all as impressed with the achievements or background knowledge of the Danish expedition. But both the Danish and the Indian groups agree that the treaty that gave birth to Tranquebar was on between equals. But with the missionaries the narrative changes subtly with the Christian Indians, and fades away with the Hindus, even those who live inside the old city walls.

Missionaries from Europe

In 1706 Frederick IV, the king of Denmark-Norway, sent the first Lutheran missionaries in India to Tranquebar. Heinrich Plütcshau and Bartholomeus Ziegenbalg were trained missionaries from a German seminary sent to the Danish colony expressively for the purpose of preaching Lutheran Christian faith to the local Indian population in the Danish colony. They arrived in Tranquebar in 1707, where they proceeded to establish a Protestant mission. There had been missions established by Jesuit priests in both the Portuguese and French settlements in India, the most important being the mission of St. Francis Xavier of Goa, giving catholic Indian parishioners the common name "Goa Christians".[25]

The catholic community of Indians already in Tranquebar had settled around 1597. Most of them descended from Keralan fishermen originally converted by Portuguese missionaries from Goa.[26] This congregation was already present in Tarangambadi when the Danish arrived, but seems to have died out later. There was also a sizable population of mixed race Indians from the Portuguese settlements since the Portuguese ruled neighbouring Nagapattinam until the Dutch conquered it in 1657. As the Portuguese settlements on the Indian east coast were conquered or destroyed by rival powers refugees from these settlements were often allowed to resettle in Tranquebar.[27] In the 19th century there was no catholic community in Tranquebar until a separate mission built a church in 1854. The three waves of Catholicism came independently of each other, and the Catholic Church in

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[25] Brijraj Singh (1999): *The First Protestant Missionary to India* Bombay: Oxford pg 43
[26] Ibid, pg 43
[27] *Intet skib til Trankebar,* s. 18**,** SKALK nr. 1 / 1991, cited in http://trankebar.net/dk.htm

Tarangambadi and Tranquebar today has no data or information about the first catholic communities in Tranquebar.

One secondary reason the Catholic community died out may be that the Madura mission, which was responsible for spreading Catholicism in Southeast India, was run by Jesuits. The Jesuits, or Brotherhood Of Jesus, a catholic order was the main force behind the spread of "Goa Christian" congregations and catholic mission work in India until 1759.[28] At this point they were banned in all Portuguese territories, and in 1773 the Pope officially suppressed the Jesuit order. This ended the Madura mission, and catholic mission activities did not recommence until the first half of the 19th century.[29]

Lutheran Christianity however had not been spread in India before. The European colonists had their own priests, but their job did not include mission work. The only Protestant colonial powers in India apart from Denmark-Norway were the Netherlands and Great Britain. As the colonies in India were primarily moneymaking ventures the mother nations had not bothered sending missionaries until the Danish king Frederick VI in 1705 decided that his Indian subjects also needed Christianity and declared that a mission should be established in Tranquebar.[30] Before this there had been priests and eventually a church in Tranquebar for the European subjects. This in no way meant that Christianity was to be spread to the native Indians in Tranquebar. Apart from the facts that the services were held mostly in Danish or German, two languages almost no Indians spoke (the lingua franca being Portuguese) and that Indians were denied entry to the European church, there was considerable tension between Indian commoners and European colonists when Ziegenbalg arrived.

 The different groups in Tranquebar met the missionaries with reactions ranging from indifference to open hostility. Local Indians of the Hindu faith were often bullied and harassed by European colonists, who treated them with open contempt. The Hindus assumed that this was because of the teachings from the sermons and many wanted nothing to do initially with a religion they interpreted as hateful and immoral. As drinking, fighting and debauchery were widespread among the Christian colonists, the Hindu Indians associated this

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[28] The Catholic Encyclopaedia (online), http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09519b.htm
[29] The Catholic Encyclopaedia (online), http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09519b.htm
[30] Olsen, Op Cit. Pg 225, Sing Op Cit., pg 41

with the Christian faith.[31] Eventually Ziegenbalg gained converts among Indian slaves in the colony. By royal decree baptized slaves had to be released from slavery. The king did this to encourage christianisation among the Indians, and many slaves followed suit to gain freedom. Other converts were mostly low-caste Indians attempting to be freed from caste restrictions. Later missionaries tried to do away with this custom and preached equality among the church members. But because of this they had problems converting Hindus, who often did not want to let go of this part of their identity. Caste was also indirectly a problem for the missionaries as mostly low-caste Indians converted to Christianity. Often higher-caste Indians viewed Christianity as a low-caste religion and wanted nothing to do with it.[32]

The European colonists on the other hand were sceptical to attempts to Christianise the local population. The kingdom of Tanjavur was far more powerful than the Danish colony militarily, and as Hindu priests dominated it there was concern that open mission activities outside Tranquebar would anger the Nayak king and bring retaliation on the colony.[33] The acting governor John Sigismund Hassius was concerned that the missionaries were directly under the Danish king and did not respond to him.[34] When Ziegenbalg started baptizing slaves directly undermining the slave trade in Tranquebar, Hassius had Ziegenbalg thrown in jail without trial. After 4 months' imprisonment Ziegenbalg relented and took a less strident stand against slave trade in Tranquebar, but he and governor Hassius had a tense relationship for the remainder of the latter's rule in the colony.[35]

Although primarily interested in teaching the Lutheran gospel to the Indians, Ziegenbalg actively attempted to learn as much as possible of the beliefs and language of the inhabitants of Tranquebar. He and Plütschau hired a teacher to learn first Portuguese, then Tamil. Ziegenbalg also collected writings on Hinduism and Jainism, often buying books from widows of Brahmin priests. He eventually wrote several texts on Hindu beliefs, Tamil culture, a Tamil-German dictionary and translations of some of the books he acquired. A Tamil glossary Ziegenbalg wrote is probably the first one on the Tamil language.

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[31] Olsen, Op Cit, pg 229
[32] Brimnes, Niels (1999): *Constructing the colonial encounter. Right and left hand castes in early colonial south India.* Richmond: Curzon press
[33] Olsen Op. Cit, pp 231-233
[34] Ibid, p. 225
[35] Olsen Op. Cit, pp 230-236

Ziegenbalg also translated parts of the Bible to Tamil. The period Ziegenbalg was imprisoned he started translating the New Testament, and some years later he completed the Old Testament. This was the first translation of the Bible to an Indian language as catholic liturgies were held in Latin and orthodox Syrian liturgies in Coptic. After receiving funds and equipment from Europe (particularly from missionary societies in Germany) Ziegenbalg could set up a press, printing Tamil bibles and books in Tamil on Christianity. The setting up of a printing press from Germany made Ziegenbalg the first book printer in India, and the development of a paper factory to furnish the printing press was also a first in India (previously Tamil texts had been made on palm leaves). He also established a seminary for Indian priests in Tranquebar before his death in Tranquebar 1719[36].

After initial setbacks the mission grew successful over the years and both Danish, Swedish and German evangelical missions spread out in South India. The kings of Tanjavur stopped the first attempts of the mission to spread outside the Danish colony in the 17th century. Later, as the British conquered increasingly larger parts of South India resistance faded and Tranquebar became a hub for mission activity in the region as well as a place for training native priests. At the end of the 19th century there were sufficient Indian priests and clergy that European mission societies gradually pulled out and left the mission work to them. Instead an umbrella organisation of Tamil evangelical churches supported partly by European organisations was established. This organisation is active to this day, as the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, or the TELC.[37]

The Christian Indian narrative of this puts emphasis on two elements of these events in particular. The subjugation of the Indians by the Danish, and Ziegenbalg's struggle on behalf of the Indians against unjust treatment by the colonial masters. Other elements are important too: The first printing press, the first Tamil dictionary, and so on. But without fighting on behalf of the Indians even the mission work of Ziegenbalg would have been a colonial narrative. As I will give examples of in the following chapter even Catholics in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi identify with the Lutheran Protestant for his stance in the narrative. The Danish narrative mentions Ziegenbalg as an interesting episode, but the Tranquebar Association had no special rapport with this historical figure. However the 300th anniversary

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[36] Olsen (1967) Op Cit, Singh (1999) Op Cit
[37] Diehl, Arvet från Trankebar, pp 13-18

of Ziegenbalg's arrival in India was celebrated in at least two major newspapers and a news magazine in Tamil Nadu.

The British

In 1845, after Tranquebar was sold to the British East India Company with all other Danish holdings in India, it lost all of its importance as a trade centre. Tranquebar remained a spiritual centre, as the seminary founded by Ziegenbalg was located there. At this point the mission activities had been Because of this the bishopric of Tranquebar, the highest office in TELC, was for a long time based in the old colony. But as the centre of Christianity moved further inland the seminary and bishop's office was relocated to the city of Trichy some time before 1935 and the bishop of Tranquebar only visits the town once a year for ceremonial purposes.[38] As the bishop is still called the bishop of Tranquebar however, and the ceremonial inauguration of new bishops is to take place there Tranquebar is key to the identity of the TELC.

After becoming a British town administrative duty was transferred to Nagapattinam and apart from a railroad connection set up in 1924 (services stopped 1986) and a trunk road connecting the French territories Pondicherry and Karaikal little development took place in Tranquebar. There are no known descendants of the Danish colonists residing in or around Tranquebar today.

Perspectives on history and the perception of the Danish colony

The view of the history of Tranquebar varies in what you put in it. Several sources on the history of the Indian east coast mention Tranquebar only in passing, often mistakenly referring to it as Dutch. The Danish, especially the Tranquebar Association concentrate on the colonial history of Tranquebar. In this context Ziegenbalg is mentioned, but not emphasised. When he is mentioned, Danish (and Norwegian) sources concentrate on the conflict between him and the governor. It is virtually impossible to find reliable information on Tranquebar after 1845, when the British acquired the colony from the Danish. From a European point of view Tranquebar loses all historical importance at this point, degenerating from a Danish

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[38] Diehl (1974), p. 105.

trade hub to a backwater of British India. The Danish narrative of Tranquebar's history begins in 1620 and ends in 1845, when it loses the interest of Danish scholars.

From most of the Indian's points of view, the history is more continuous, as there has always been an Indian community in the area around Tarangambadi and Tranquebar. The majority of the Danish moved from Tranquebar when the trade privileges were revoked, presumably the Indian merchants did so too. Sadly there are few sources depicting their point of view, and apart from the remaining Moslems there are no one left to tell their story.

The Hindu narrative however, has no mention of the Danish. When asked about the Danish or colonial era, they refer to it as "the British period". The Hindu narrative does not differentiate between colonial masters, be it Danish or British. When asked directly about the fort, both the Hindus living inside and outside the old city walls had strong negative connotations with it. The fort was seen as a garrison for British troops and a place of executions. The Hindu narrative, which fades out around when the colony of Tranquebar is established in 1620, seems to return to Tranquebar towards the end of the British era. In fact the Tamil identity that first emerges in opposition to the British Raj towards independence and then in opposition to an all-Indian Hindi movement is a close parallel to the Greek freedom movement of the 18th century mentioned earlier.[39]

Danish and Indian histories and narratives

Indian perspectives on Tranquebar vary from a Christian one relatively close to the European ones, via the Moslem view that sees it in their own contextual timeline (13th century till today), to the Hindus, who are almost purposefully ignorant of the colonial history but very conscious of their (South Indian Tamil) history. But these are clearly narratives from the Indian point of view, just as the Danish (and occasional Norwegian) sources are from a Scandinavian one.

The Danish colonization of Tranquebar is described in the Danish work *Vore Gamle Tropekolonier* (Our old Tropical Colonies) as a bold and risky venture spurred by the arrival of a Dutchman named Bouhshower to the Danish court with a letter from the "Emperor of Ceylon" offering trade privileges. It dwells on the risky passage to India and troubles with the king of Kandi who did not acknowledge Boushouwer's letter and declared it fraudulent. Later

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39 Friedman (1992). P 195; Harrison, S. 1999a. Cultural boundaries. Anthropology Today 15:10–13

a Dutch member of the expedition was to reach an agreement with the Nayak king of Tanjore, giving them control over the village of Tarangambadi, renamed Tranquebar.[40]

In this work as in other (Danish) historical works on the Danish colony in Tranquebar the Indian voices are absent. The narratives belong to the Scandinavian (and Icelandic) sources, and the perspective firmly placed with the Danish colonial masters. One of the few common traits the Indian and Scandinavian sources share is the coverage of the missionary activities, as they are neither Danish nor Indian (but therefore can be considered both).

In his book *The First Protestant Missionary to India* (Oxford 1999) Brijraj Singh describes the Danish expedition less impressively:

> "The Danish East India Company, founded in 1616, had embarked on a harebrained scheme in 1618 to support an 'emperor' of Ceylon, who did not exist, against the Portuguese in return for a Trading monopoly. The mission ended in disaster and the survivors found themselves in the court of Tanjore (modern day Thanjavur), where Ovi Gjedde, later to be famous as a Danish admiral, signed a treaty with the Raja on 19 November 1620 by which Tranquebar and fifteen other villages that comprised the district were given to the Danish. They were allowed to build a fort, establish a trading station, have an army, administer justice, and follow their own religious customs without hindrance; in return they had to pay an annual tribute to Tanjore"[41]

The First Protestant… proceeds to describe Ziegenbalg's work in Tranquebar. Singh emphasises not only the mission work of Ziegenbalg but also his chronicling of Tamil languages and Hindu customs, as well as the establishment of the first printing press in India. This perspective was mirrored in the Indian press in 2006, the tercentennial of Ziegenbalg's arrival in India. He is repeatedly lauded as a pioneer in several fields in India, ranging from book printing to girl's education. One Internet page run by the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College lists 9 "firsts" in India achieved by Ziegenbalg[42]. A poster in Tranquebar set up by one of the Christian congregations listed as many as 23 "firsts".

A common feature of Indian portrayals of Ziegenbalg is that he is considered an Indian himself. A feature movie shot in Tranquebar with funding from a South Indian religious

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[40] Olsen (1967): *Vore Gamle Tropekolonier* Copenhagen: Fremad, Vol. V, pp.33-79.

[41] *The First Protestant Missionary to India* (New Delhi: Oxford 1999), p. 40
[42] http://www.gltc.edu/tercentenary/ziegenbalg.htm

organisation has Ziegenbalg speaking mostly in Tamil. This was not because of language problems. The principal actor was American and parts of the dialogue were in German. But in the film Ziegenbalg speaks in Tamil both to locals and to Europeans, something the historical figure probably would not have done (especially since only a few of the missionaries among the Europeans spoke Tamil at the time). The only character that speaks exclusively German is Hassius, Ziegenbalg's bitter rival in the colony.

Why this revision? The Indians are generally very proud of their history, and as I will show below there is a strong link between the Indian present and its past. But the colonial era, if we think of the period from the first Portuguese conquests in the 16th century to Indian independence in 1947 it is a painful subject for Indians. One sees examples of this even between the lines of the history of the Danish colony. When the Danish arrive, they deal with the local ruler as an equal, and the balance of power is even between the colonists and the Indian rulers. When the Danish abandon the colony it is not to the Indian ruler, but to the British who had conquered most of the region in the mean time.

Friedman describes histories as "products of particular social positions".[43] As social positions are central to maintain distinct identities and standing in a polyglot society like Tranquebar and Tarangambadi, it is natural to produce histories that reproduce or strengthen these positions. The decline from an equal part to a subject of the colonisers is not unlike the position Greek identity had around the 18th century or the Polynesians today, as Friedman describes them in "Myth…"[44] The identity as a downtrodden people can initially be fruitful, if one as a minority seeks recognition. One recent example in South Indian history was the Dravidisation movement, a countermovement to the spread of Hindi throughout South India that portrayed Dravidic languages like Tamil as being wiped out by movements that wanted Hindu to be the sole official language.[45] But this is not usually the starting point of historical narratives of identity. The Greeks reinvented their classical history by taking classic Greek names like Socrates and Pericles. By connecting to the ancient Greece the freedom fighters of what was then a province of the ottoman empire accentuated themselves not only from the Ottomans as a European people, but also reclaimed "their" heritage from Western Europe,

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[43] Friedman 1992 p. 194
[44] Ibid, pp 196-197
[45] Subramanian, Narendra (1999), pp. 315-318

who used it as a basis for Western civilisation.[46] The Polynesians (at least the Christian ones) trace their descent to the lost tribes of Israel, giving them a narrative that puts them into a Christian (and in a sense Western) context, rationalising the religious conversion.[47] This reinvention of history, dubbed *mythopraxis* by Friedman is repeated in different forms within most groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi. The Hindus (as I shall describe further in the following chapter) reinvent it largely by ignoring the colonial past, dwelling more on the classical history of the Colas and the great Sangam epics. The Christian and Moslem Indians incorporate different aspects of the colonial history into a narrative where these aspects become part of narratives that ultimately strengthens their bonds with an Indian identity.

This includes the "Tamilisation" of Ziegenbalg. By turning Ziegenbalg into a major *positive* figure, and one who eventually became one with the Indian people, he becomes part of a narrative that overshadows the negative aspects of colonisation. In the process, he is turned Tamil, making his achievements Indian. The Christian community, who owe much to Ziegenbalg, thus become an Indian version of a "Western" religion instead of a foreign element in Indian society.

Moslems had a concrete physical legacy from the Danish period, as a walled compound inside Tranquebar encompassing a mosque, Moslem graveyard and dargah (Sufi shrine/grave) was given the Moslem community by one of the Danish governors. The Moslems have a story of how the compound and why the Danish governor gave the land to the Moslems, mentioned earlier. This story incorporates the Danish colonial masters into the Moslem worldview as above the Moslems in worldly power, but subordinate to God (represented by the Moslem saint) spiritually. The graveyard in other words becomes a physical legacy of a mythical-historical hierarchical narrative, where the Danish governor is acknowledged as above the (Moslem) Indians in Tranquebar, but underneath the Moslem god (represented by the Sufi saint).

The Moslem and Hindu views, at least the ones from the locals differ from the European/Danish or the Christian/Indian views. The local informants I spoke with told me several stories and myths connected with the fort. In stories there is a strong connection between the fort and Tanjavur, and a recurring story told of a secret tunnel from below the

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[46] Friedman 1992, p 195
[47] Ibid, p 196

fort to Tanjavur large enough for a horseman to ride through. Another story told of a special place for hangings, from where the bodies of the executed convicts would be slid into the ocean. The informants who told me of the executions occurring on the fort had a fearful association with it. Only Christian and Moslem informants differentiated the British and the Danish colonial periods, and several referred to Dansborg as a British fort. When asked about the history of colonial Tranquebar Hindus consistently referred to the colonial period as "the British period", and appeared ignorant of the Danish. This is interesting when contrasted with the nearby former French colonies of Pondicherry and Karaikal have strong ties to their former master, and have strong cultural ties to France to this day. The simplest explanation for this is the brute size of France compared to Denmark-Norway, and the more recent breakaway of these cities (1956 as compared to 1845). In a popular history regarding Pondicherry the Indian author in colourful language both reveres and blasts the French historical period, but it is undeniably a part of the current Union territory's cultural identity today. In Pondicherry there are still traces of a French-speaking cultural elite, with an ambivalent but overall positive relationship to the French legacy. In Tranquebar there are no such traces, as no Danish remained, and were wholly replaced by a British elite as in the rest of the Raj and most surrounding areas in 1845. From a local perspective at least, it would seem that the colony of Tranquebar has had a greater impact on Denmark than vice versa.

This can of course mean that the informants, particularly the Hindus were ignorant of the fort and its history. But all local Hindu informants claimed ignorance of any Danish period, in spite of the fact that most villagers and townspeople knew of Ziegenbalg. It could also be interpreted to indicate a simplification of the colonial history to create a smoother historical narrative: All Indians honour the Indian "freedom fighters", people who fought for independence from British rule. By "streamlining" the historical players into the Indians and the British the conflict is easier to identify with. This would also explain the (Christian) Indian narratives' focus on Ziegenbalg's conflict with the governor. By associating Ziegenbalg with the Indians and the governor with the European (British?) colonisers, a narrative of early resistance is scripted. Like Berkaak's case of the gunfight at O.K. Corral, a myth is created, the sides clear, and the actual historical facts vague enough to construct an identity myth.

Having looked at the different Indian practises for constructing histories, I will proceed to the Danish history. Although the facts given in the academic Danish historical literature presumably are correct they are subject to interpretation by all. A good example of this is the Danish version of the colonisation venture in 1620 juxtaposed with an Indian rendition of the same events, based on the same sources. These interpretations are no less dependent on social positioning than the Indian ones.

The Danish narratives both implicitly and openly suggest that the colony was a little piece of Denmark, as it was ruled by the Danish king and administered by Danish officials. Of course, it was: The Danish colours flew over every official building, and the administration consisted of Danish citizens, as did most of the merchant estate in Tranquebar. In reality the colony was in all probability never dominated by Danish culture, and would feel more like a Danish piece of India. The lingua franca among the natives was always Portuguese, the established tongue for dealing with foreign traders. The Kingdom of Denmark-Norway in the historic period 1620-1845 was not based on ethnicity, as most nation states are today. Considerable parts of the kingdom were ethnically non-Danish, today forming the states of Norway, Iceland, and parts of Sweden and Northern Germany. Hassius, the archenemy of Ziegenbalg in Tranquebar was born in Norway. The founder of the colony, admiral Ove Gjedde came from a Danish barony in Skåne (today a part of Sweden) and the king, Christian IV was the first ruler of Denmark that was raised in the Danish language rather than in German (which was still his second language)[48]. In short the kingdom of Denmark-Norway was ethnically a far more polyglot society than the later nation state of Denmark.

I must stress here that I do not wish to give the impression that Danish historians are unprofessional, far from it: My main sources on the history of the colony are indeed Danish! But if we compare the newspaper clippings, books, radio and TV features on Tranquebar with Friedman's Hawaiians tracing their ancestry from the lost tribes of Israel and Brigham Young University searching for the same lost tribes among South American Indians, it is clearly a case of identity building through mythopraxis[49]. In the same manner as Modern Greek national identity was built on the myth of a direct descent from classical Greek civilisation the Danish modern identity (at least among the Tranquebar Association) seem to rest on a Danish globalised culture reaching as far out as the Indian Ocean.

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[48] Svend Ellehøj, *Danmarks Historie,* pp. 24-25
[49] Friedman (1992), pp 194-196

Neither is it too far fetched to read a positive spin on the Danish narrative of the colonial period. Denmark today is a far smaller nation geographically than the historical kingdom of Denmark-Norway. The descriptions of the Danish colonial empire ring parallel to the narrative of the British Empire, on a smaller scale. The relative stature Denmark-Norway had in Europe when it included large German cities like Kiel and Hamburg, and the colonies ranging from Southeast India to St. Thomas in the Caribbean are recounted with some nostalgia in the articles. At the same time the less appealing aspects of the colonial venture, the slave trade in particular, are glossed over. Much weight is given to the fact that Tranquebar was bought (or more accurately rented) from the local Indian ruler. The relative kindness of the Danish is also underlined, with free religious practice and welfare towards the poor among the Indian subjects as proud examples (although both were necessitated by local circumstances). These elements, hinting of the rudiments of a Social Democratic colony in Southeast India would suggest that the Danish history of Tranquebar is as much a product of modern Danish identity as it is a means to reproduce that identity, in the process creating a bond between Tranquebar and Denmark.

Who makes history?

Although there is a wealth of history regarding Tranquebar under the Danish there is no single dominating perspective or source. Much past literature on Indian history has been written by European scholars, often repeating the claim that Hinduism lacks a sense of history. The claim is countered not only by Indian historical literature written by Hindu scholars but the identification of local Hindus with the historical artefacts in the region.

Several if not all sources on the region during the Sangam period are Indian. The colonial history is covered by mainly Danish historians, who concentrate on the colony of Tranquebar as a Danish venture, with details like the missionaries as minor details. The website of the Tranquebar Association features detailed biographies of 16 different historical figures, ranging from governors to ordinary sailors. The three missionaries Ziegenbalg, Gründler and Plütschau are mentioned, but not chronicled.[50] The two volumes dedicated to Tranquebar in the Danish historical work *Vore Gamle Tropekolonier* ("Our Old Tropical Colonies") mentions Ziegenbalg in a single chapter, expanding on the mission in another.

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[50] http://www.trankebar.net/dk.htm -the official website of the Tranquebar Association

But the histories of Ziegenbalg are written mainly by Missionaries or Indian historians and journalists, who describe the Danish colony only as a backdrop to the man increasingly portrayed as an Indian pioneer rather than a European. In Indian newspapers Ziegenbalg was mentioned in several press articles during the 300-year anniversary in July of 2006, including a feature article in the national news magazine Frontline.[51] It remains to be seen who will dominate the interpretations of the history of Tranquebar.

The newspaper articles I have mentioned all contribute to the image of Ziegenbalg as "A Great Indian". The production of history creates an image of Ziegenbalg as a great Indian intellectual. Given that he spent most of his life in Tranquebar, wrote pioneer works on Tamil language and people, translated portions of the New and Old testament into Tamil, this is not necessarily a warped view of Ziegenbalg. The histories told him, especially by Christian Indians like the film crew emphasise his struggle on the part of the local Indians versus the governor of Tranquebar and his superiors in Denmark.

I found an unexpected parallel to this mythopraxis "…according to categorical schemes that are transferred from domains" in a conversation with two American tourists, Ted and Maria. As we talked the conversation turned to Ziegenbalg and the strong feeling of identity many of my Indian informants had with him. When I tried the parallel that it would have been like Einstein being honoured as a "Great American" for his work on the Manhattan Project, the Americans told me he was. This surprised me a bit, as I personally never saw the great scientist who had been born in Switzerland and did much of his major work in Germany before fleeing the country as an American. As I confessed to this, and told them of his background, Ted smilingly shook his head and replied, "Doesn't help. He's still a great American".

Chapter 4: the agents of Tranquebar and Tarangambadi

As I argued in the previous chapter, the different groups have different histories or narratives based on their social positions. But what are their different positions in Tranquebar and in Tarangambadi? To give the reader an insight in how the Danish, Moslem, Christian and Hindu groups perceive and interpret their different versions of history, it is necessary to demonstrate the integral part history plays in constructing the groups' identities. To do this, I

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[51] Frontline magazine, July 28 pp 84-86, The Hindu, July 05th 2006, pg 2, The Hindu July 28th 2006 The Hindu September 28th 2006

want to present the different groups and their identities to the reader in detail, from the perspectives of the different groups themselves.

The division of the people into four groups follows the differences of the groups' different self-perceptions, not necessarily any common criteria like religion or nationality. But as I will argue for each of these groups, the best way to understand these groups are as different ethnicities. The traditional way of understanding two of these groups the, Christian and Moslem Indians as followers of mission based world religions is difficult in today's Tranquebar, where there is very little movement between the religions. There are two Christian private elementary schools that conduct overt attempts to convert the mostly Hindu schoolchildren to Christianity, but as one of the teachers confessed with very little success. As I will illustrate in this chapter the religious affinities of the Indian groups, not to mention the common Lutheran background of the Danish, can be seen as ethnic identities.

In her book "Blended Boundaries" Kathinka Frøystad describe the attitudes of her upper class high-caste Hindu informants in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh towards Moslem Indians. Her experience over several visits over the years to the same people was that they did not perceive Moslems heretics as much as another ethnic group, one different from themselves.[52] Historically they were not always as distinct, as Frøystad points out in her introduction.[53] At one point the groups solidified to a point where changing ones religious view means severe sanctions from the local community. Interestingly caste in this local community does not play a large part in everyday life. The Hindu fishermen's society is caste-based, but it is even more based on local ties, as resident status one of the chief criteria for membership in the panchayat. The PRAXIS report mentions a Dalit hamlet comprised of refugees from caste related conflicts in another village. One of my informants, a Christian official originally from a poor low-caste family in the inland mountain areas of Tamil Nadu claimed that 'castism' was far stronger in other rural parts of Tamil Nadu than in Tarangambadi or Tranquebar. Nevertheless, the separate Dalit panchayats in the Tarangambadi area are inferior in status to the fishermen's, and there is increasing tension between the fishermen's societies and the low- and scheduled-caste agricultural communities locally[54].

[52] Frøystad (2005): pp 1-31
[53] Ahmed (1981) quoted in Frøystad (2005) p. 9
[54] PRAXIS report pp 23-25

The Danish

The Danish I refer to below are members and supporters of a society called The Tranquebar Association. This society is concerned with preserving the historical (Danish era) buildings in Tranquebar, mainly the fort Dansborg. Although other Danish people undoubtedly come by independently (as backpackers, for instance) the Tranquebar Association has been visiting Tranquebar regularly since the late 90s and act like semi-official representatives of Denmark locally.[55] The Tranquebar Association is not directly engaged with any projects in Tarangambadi or other villages in the area, although they contribute financially to many relief projects outside the city walls as well as restoration inside. The focus of their work as well as of the Danish narrative geographically is Tranquebar.

Although the colony of Tranquebar was under Danish dominion for two centuries there are no ethnic Danes living there today. A single informant claimed that a Danish retired person had lived in Tranquebar until his death some years ago, but I was not able to confirm this. The nearby city Pondicherry was a French colony until 1956, and has a considerable population of French citizens. However as Tranquebar is far smaller and lost all significance as a trade centre over a century and a half ago, there are no remaining ethnic Danish Indians in the town or village. It is not impossible that descendants of Danish-Indian marriages survive in India, but there is no Danish parallel to the Anglo-Indians. Historically mixed race Indians in Tranquebar were called "Portuguese Indians" as many came from former Portuguese holdings in East India. There was never an association between the identities of mixed-race Indians and the white Danes in Tranquebar.

There have been several independent excursions of Danish to Tranquebar since they relinquished control of the colony to the British, ranging from individual tourists to official visits by the prime minister and later by the queen of Denmark in the 20th and 21st centuries. Attention was sporadic until a group of four Danish teachers familiar with the history of the Danish colony in Tranquebar, a history they were obviously proud of, founded The Tranquebar Initiative Group, which later became the core of The Tranquebar Association.

One of the senior members of the organisation, Randers, told me of the founding and original organisation of the group:

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[55] On their web page http://trankebar.net/dk.htm they list the Danish Royal Court and Ministry of Culture as supporters.

"Since the end of the '80s my husband and I were visiting South India quite often in connection with the establishment of a secondary school (following a Danish pattern) less than 200 km from Tranquebar, which we liked to visit when we were [in the area]. We became interested in restoring the old fort and other buildings from the Colonial era, and in conjunction with that I, my spouse and two other colleagues formed the Tranquebar Association.[56] There has been a lot more members joining since, mainly from Denmark, but the core of the organisation consists of us four. Salle is the foreman, I come up with ideas on the direction of further work, and Seim writes most of our "official" letters, while my spouse has an "observational" role at the moment. Our different roles [in the core group] are not fixed, my spouse also writes occasional letters for example. I am currently in charge of the two other volunteers here, but we have a relatively flat structure. The reason we organised ourselves into an association is, we couldn't receive monetary support as private individuals. Standing together as an association made us able to function in bureaucracies, that is the Danish and Indian ones. "

The initiative, and later the association originally worked solely for the restoration of the fort, as this was a famous Danish building and a structure they could be allowed to restore. All archaeological work and restoration of historical buildings must be sanctioned by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). One of the first tasks of the Danish organisation was to learn their way in the bureaucracy. Randers emphasised the importance of learning how to deal with the Indian officials, who differ from the Danish in outlook, as well as in tone.

"With Indian bureaucrats you must always start right at the top, not with one of the lower functionaries. And be clear about what you are planning to do. To fool around with vague or half-baked plans will get you no-where, they want solid thought-out concepts from you."

Still, the Danish feel they have problems communicating with the local Indians. The official entities the Danish communicate with in India are the Mayor of Tranquebar (or the "official" panchayat mentioned in chapter three), the Collector of Nagapattinam District, and the Tamil Nadu Commissioner of Archaeology and Museums. The Mayor and the Collector generally have a good relationship with the Danish, while the state level Commissioner was considered slightly unpredictable by Randers.

"The Commissioner of Archaeology and Museums…insists on being addressed as 'Dr'. when we first came to him with our proposal he just had us running around the entire bureaucracy so he wouldn't

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[56] It was not clear if Randers meant the Danish era, or the Danish and British periods as a whole. The Tranquebar association focuses on buildings from the Danish era, but have shown interest in restoring British-built structures as well.

have to make a decision about us. He sent us from his office to another one, who sent us to a third, and so on…and smiled innocently when we finally, after a whole roundabout were sent back to his office. Why hadn't we com to him first, he asked us? It's him we had to ask about these things!"

Today, the fort is fully restored by Indian archaeologists from the Archaeological Survey of India and Danish volunteer workers in collaboration. When I arrived the main project was the renovation of one of the old Danish churchyards. The Tranquebar Association has also expanded their goals to include the preservation of old buildings in King Street, Queen Street and Goldsmith Street, the three areas with the highest concentration of Danish colonial and "classical" Indian style buildings.

The Danish group is comprised of people who live in Denmark and only periodically live in Tranquebar (or Tarangambadi as the case may be), but nationality is not a requisite for this group. Only dedication to the preservation of the Danish colonial buildings, ruins and structures is required, and although Danish people found it all nationalities are welcome. The Tranquebar Association are the most numerous among the Danish, but I also include Danish tourists and to a degree Danish development officials as well as local allies, strictly speaking local Indians.

Although the Tranquebar Association is rather large in Denmark, only around half a dozen members were actually in Tranquebar during my stay. Fortunately two of the founders of the organisation were there and could give me valuable background information. These two and one architect student were the most valuable informants among the Danish in Tranquebar, but not the only ones. Other members and tourists affiliated with the group also contributed.

As mentioned earlier, time constraints limited my participatory observation with the Danish in Tranquebar. Fortunately there were Danish groups or individuals who occasionally visited Tranquebar, organized by the Tranquebar association, as inspectors from relief agencies or package tourist groups. These were easy to engage in conversation. But as they all stayed briefly and many of them were new to India, conversations with especially the latter could only give me a mood report of the moment, and follow up questions were impossible.

The Tranquebar Association's members were engaged mainly in two activities when I met with them. Their primary task at the time was restoration and preservation. This included the

construction of a coastal protection barrier and the purchase and restoration of Indian houses built in the "classical" style inside the city walls. These works were preformed exclusively by local Indians however, at most with Danish plans for the construction of the coastal barrier.[57] The restoration of the houses was planned and executed by a group of three Indian architects from an Indian organisation hired by the Tranquebar association. Directly the Danish only oversaw the restoration of the churchyard in New Street, one of the old "European" districts in the original colony.

Secondarily they acted as tour guides for Danish visitors associated with the Tranquebar Group. One of the senior members of the original group told me they had had visitors whose ancestors had been buried in Tranquebar, and others with ancestors who had lived and worked in the Danish colony. This was both in Tranquebar and in Tarangambadi, but not farther than the beginnings of the fishermen's colony on the other side of the "downtown" area by Main Street. The focus for the Danish visitors (apart from the odd development official) was on the area within the city walls.

For a period of six weeks trough the end of January, February and the beginning of March of 2006, the Tranquebar Association was assisted with two architect students working as interns for the Danish National Museum. Their work days were split between planning/evaluation and overseeing the work of skilled and trainee masons led by an Indian engineer. Mornings at around 9 am they would come to the site and spend one hour making sure the workers had tasks. Through the engineer, who speaks English, they would give instructions to the workers as to what needs to be done, and how to do it. Since the workers preformed well independently when explained the tasks, the Danish would return to the main residence and local headquarters of the Tranquebar Association, Flora Cottage.

This restored Indian home lies in Queen Street, and is built in the classical style. For security reasons there is a chicken wire fence covering the opening in the small internal courtyard (3 by 3 meters), and modern bathroom facilities were installed when they renovated the building for their use. A telephone- and Internet connection allows for electronic communication with Denmark, and updates of the website of the Tranquebar Association with fresh pictures and

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[57] According to the Tranquebar Association's website (http://www.trankebar.net/uk.htm) an unnamed Danish-Sri-Lankese expert on coastal protection contributed to a report on the project, but no architect or engineer is named.

blogs. Usually lunch would be had here, Indian food ordered from and made by a local woman.

They would then return to the work site around 1 PM, checking up on the workers and giving further directions as necessary. Only one of them would go at a time to inspect, both of them taking turns. They were clearly more comfortable with this than with standing at the site all day long. Otto, one of the architect students told me "We don't need to stand here all day, they work fine without us just standing here gawking at them".

All in all apart from the two Danes and the engineer there were around 17 workers on the site. Two skilled temple masons with one assistant each, three male and ten female masons. These last thirteen masons are recruited by the Tranquebar Association via a charity run bricklayer school directed towards women. The purpose of this Danish-backed school was to teach low-caste women a trade. Randers, one of the senior members of the Tranquebar Association told me this was a conscious attempt to shift the gender roles locally.

> "Traditionally women are masons' assistants, *not* masons themselves. All the women at this site are doing this of their own free will, and in some cases against the will of their husbands. Ironically, the most widespread women's work is agricultural, which is even harder physically than masonry. To get away from this and to better job opportunities a small number of women locally are trained as masons. This is not without risk! Several of the women are beaten senseless by their husbands at home for going against the stream in this manner."

The Danish are naturally very active in using their influence to arrest what they see as a deterioration of historical structures. On a few tours of the city I made with members of the Tranquebar Association and visiting support members, the Danish were in unison about the modern Indian concrete structures, and this view was repeated in interviews and conversations with the Danish. Internet was here a tool the Danish used actively, in conjunction with newspapers, TV and radio. However it must be said that neither the Danish nor any of the Indian groups are in open conflict. The website http://www.trankebar.net has a Danish, Tamil and English language version. These versions are not faithful translations of each other. I must confess to no being able to translate sufficient of the Tamil version to compare, but there are clear differences in the language form, tone, and choice of translated articles. In short there are examples of aggressive language in the Danish version that are not translated in the English language version. In the Danish version, an angry blog article on how the TELC

disregarded the safety of old Danish gravestones when building a new clock tower was not translated or published in the English version.[58]

In disputes or disagreements over historical narratives, Internet has recently become an electronic arena for arguments. The cost of posting one's opinions is often as low as the computer time one spends in posting it, and the tone often alters radically from that of the printed article, becoming more aggressive as a rule. Berkaak (1999) describes the role of the Internet, and acknowledges its effect on the discourse and tone of debates. He points out three distinct features electronic message boards introduced to the general debate over who's version was the correct one. Firstly, the Internet has democratised the discourse, as references to primary sources and copies of historical data are spread to a large number of participators. Secondly, the position of the storyteller is widened out, as access to the net is equal to Internet access and more people have the possibility to forward their individual presentations. Thirdly, the discursive patterns are changed to more hostile rhetoric as the lack of a face-to-face discussion or human interface weakens normal rules for civil discussion.[59]

In the case of the Internet discourse around the Tranquebar Association, some of the characteristics of electronic debate have been repeated, but not all. The fact that anyone with relevant information on European historical figures active in Tranquebar are asked and encouraged to send in what they have has given a wealth of information, in the form of pictures and biographies. These are available to all who access the website. Posts from a variety of sources (including the author) are available, from several nationalities, Indian as well as Danish. There is a division, however. The more nationalistic elements of the Danish version are not repeated on the English version. Although there is the occasional harsh comment on the local variants of building maintenance on the Danish version, these remarks are not translated. Thereby they are not available to readers who do not speak Danish, effectively excluding Indian readers. So although the tone here can be sharp it never leads to quarrel with Indian elements.

Especially the modern buildings inside the city walls were criticised, but several of the visiting support members voiced open disdain for the customs of Indians in general. On a tour

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[58] http://www.trankebar.net/dk.htm (the Danish language version), http://www.trankebar.net/uk.htm (the English language version)
[59] Berkaak (1999) pp. 26-29

to the shop district in Main Street, the tourists commented to each other in Danish what they thought. "Look at al the garbage lying everywhere!" "Do you see that building? They tore down a girl school building from the 1700s to build that concrete block seven years ago. It's already collapsing! What great handcraft, huh?" The group had very little positive to say about the Indian way of life. This contrasted with their pride in the old Danish structures like Dansborg fort, the Danish built churches, and the fascination when "new" graves were discovered at the graveyard under restoration.

At this point however, I think the Danish point of view can and should be explained in context. As a Norwegian by birth I have rich personal experience with a Scandinavian culture closely related to the Danish. As I have stated in the second chapter I was careful not to take sides in any of the conflicts between groups or organisations in Tranquebar or Tarangambadi, and to treat every one of my informants with the respect they deserved. Still it is relatively easy for an observer with a Scandinavian cultural background to empathise with the Danish in Tranquebar, let alone because several Norwegian nationals lived and died there during the Danish era. When studying grave markers that are identical with contemporary gravestones in Norway in a quiet graveyard one can forget for a moment that the graveyard in question lies in India and not Denmark, or for that matter Norway.[60] For whatever reason the soundscape differs inside the old town of Tranquebar (as mentioned in the introduction), the effect is to make it more like a Scandinavian town in mood than like an Indian village. Add to the fact that the colonial structures are either Danish or generally Western European in style, and it is easy to watch the low skyline and focus on the red tiled roofs rather than the grey palm leaf ones, and imagine Tranquebar a little piece of Denmark.

But outside the city gates South India begins again. It is difficult to imagine to cultures more different than the Danish and South Indian. The Scandinavian production of locality emphasises controlled sound levels, a clean environment and for urban dwellers a clear divide between animals and people. The village of Tarangambadi uses its old boat canals as sewers, cows wander freely, and waste disposal in general is poorly organised. When confronted with this unique contrast between the Danish and the South Indian way of life, it is easy to become overwhelmed, and have strong emotional reactions. As I shall discuss in the next chapter, the fact that the Danish structures are slowly giving away to the modern Indian buildings

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[60] As Danish was the written administrative language in Norway during the entire Danish era in Tranquebar, the texts on Danish and Norwegian gravestones would be identical (authors note).

spreading into Tranquebar is also an important factor in understanding the Danish reactions and attitudes to the local Indians.

The Christian Indians

The Christian Indians have a common historical identity in Tranquebar, but they are not a homogenized group: There are three separate congregations in Tranquebar, a catholic, an evangelical protestant and an Indian Anglican community. Although missionaries from European countries like Germany, Sweden, Denmark and the U. K founded them and the communities still maintain contact with them, all congregations in Tranquebar are firmly Indian, with Indian priests and clergy.

There is today a sizable catholic community in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi, but they have no known links to the original catholic society in the Danish colony. My informants of the Catholic faith were generally fairly well educated and all spoke English fluently. The obvious reason for this (and for the same with my Evangelical informants) was that my informants mostly were clergy (nuns) and/or teachers. I was surprised therefore that no local Catholic Indians had any information on the former Jesuit church, many being oblivious to it. One of them, Albin told me that Ziegenbalg was the first Christian in Tranquebar.

> "The catholic community is about 200 years old. The oldest churches in Tranquebar are Zion church and New Jerusalem church. These were built by the missionary Ziegenbalg, who came to Tranquebar in 1707. The Rosary church [Tarangambadis catholic church] was built around 1850."

Sister Rosa, the headmistress at the elementary school knew of the former Catholic mission: Or more precise, she knew of it. The exact details of the previous congregation were unknown to the Catholics today, or so they told me. This is of course possible, but after the completion of my fieldwork it was not especially difficult to obtain historical data regarding the Jesuit past or the role of the Madura mission (mentioned in chapter 2). It is plausible that the Jesuits for a variety of possible reasons are shunned by Indian Catholics in Southeast India (or by the Catholic order that started the new congregation in Tarangambadi and Tranquebar). I will not enter such a discussion, as I gathered no positive data suggesting that my informants were even aware of any past Jesuit mission, making it impossible to strengthen or falsify such a theory. In any case I believe the Catholics downplayed or ignored this past for another reason.

The Catholic version of the local history of Tranquebar is for all practical purposes identical to the main Christian Indian narrative I discussed in chapter 2, giving Ziegenbalg the same prominence as a Christian pioneer in India. Why does a Catholic community allow a Protestant missionary such a key position in their narrative? The Christian Indian narrative gives all the Christian Indians social positions as Indians first, Christians second. Frøystad (2003) not only discusses the case for studying Indian religious groups as ethnicities, she also

Of the two Protestant communities in Tranquebar today the smallest one, Church of South India is the smallest and most recent. This small church society is the result of a union between churches of varying Protestant traditions, Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian and reformed Christianity being the major ones. CSI was founded in 1947 after discussions between different societies in South India, the first conference being held in Tranquebar in 1919.[61] This church has a Tamil liturgy, as have the two others in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi. When I spoke with the priest after one of the sermons, he told me the local congregation was around 87 people, none of them wealthy even by local standards. The church they held services in was sold to the CSI by the Danish state for a nominal sum earlier, but the congregation lacks funding to perform more than essential maintenance on the building. Seemingly all members of this congregation came from families that had moved to Tranquebar or Tarangambadi after the Danish period.

The Church of South India or CSI has a strongly asymmetric relationship with the Danish, as they are dependent on funds to restore their church. This, and the fact that CSI only controls the Zion Church and an adjacent graveyard means there is little conflict between the Danish and the CSI. The Danish restored the Zion Church graveyard two years ago. This graveyard is no longer in use, and with very few exceptions all grave markers are from the Danish colonial era. Some of the Danish who were practicing Christians attended services in the Zion church, even though they were held in Tamil. All in all the CSI in Tranquebar is small, its congregation poor and with little education, and their voice in local matters like the shape of the church is not very strong compared with the other congregations.

The TELC is bigger than both the Catholic Church and CSI put together locally, and the most important partner to the Danish in Tranquebar, as they own the largest number of historical

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[61] Church of India International Resource Center http://www.csichurch.com/

buildings from the Danish era in the town. The TELC are Christian Indians, but also Indians. Just as the Danish are influenced by their background the different congregations share a clear Indian identity. The different congregations communicate with the Danish separately, and with different levels of involvement. The TELC has a good dialogue with the Danish, but occasionally my Christian Indian informants raised complaints of the Danish, citing lack of information and suspicions of neo-colonialism as part of the motives of the Danish.

The TELC had an internal legal conflict that lasted much of the first half of 2006. One of the top elected officials in the TELC church had been accused of election fraud. After being suspended from his post he protested the accusations, and the matter was taken to court. At the time of suspension he had been negotiating the sale of one of the TELC's Danish era buildings to the Danish. The building, called "The old commander's residence" was built in the early 18th century and acted as the military headquarters for the Danish, hence the name. It had later been used by the TELC as a teacher's training institute, but had been abandoned after the tsunami damaged it. The negotiations to sell this building were stopped without explanation to the Danish, to their frustration and bewilderment. The Danish told me of this strange behaviour and used it as an example of how unpredictable and inscrutable the Indians could be. The reality was that the TELC was without a legal leadership according to their chartered rules. The interim ruling committee's own the accused official was questioning legality, and pending the results from court they were not empowered to sell any property. One of the local clerks in the TELC, James, told me why the sale had been stopped.

> "The Danish proposed to buy the old commandants residence. The bishop tried to sell, but he cannot without the approval of the church council, and we have no church council at the moment. He would sell everything if he could! As of now the TELC is powerless to do any such decision, as we are without one until court decision. You see, the bishop and the council have to jointly oversee the election of the new council. The bishop arranged the election by himself on the 20th [of February], five days before the old council's period ended! He should have arranged it in collaboration with the old council on the day their period ended. It is now in court. However until the court's decision we have no church council. Why he did it? To have full control! He wants to be the only one with any power in the church."

This was privileged information, and I agreed to keep quiet until the court's decision was made. This situation was a crisis for the TELC apart from the loss of face for the organisation, so the Danish were kept out of the loop. For the Danish the TELC was a faceless and

somewhat inscrutable organisation, and to an extent the TELC worked to uphold this impression.

This lack of communication went both ways. The Danish did not consult or necessarily inform other groups in Tranquebar of upcoming plans or projects, creating a shroud of mystery that particularly members of the TELC found ominous. One of the TELC informants, a senior school official, was curious about the Danish and asked me about them. He told me the Danish were buying up buildings in old Tranquebar, and was concerned, not knowing their purpose. When I told him the Danish planned to restore the classical Indian buildings he reacted. "First they must protect the coastline! The coastline is being eaten by the ocean, so in 50 or 100 years there may be nothing left to preserve, if they don't do something!"

All Christian congregations in Tranquebar are rooted in historically casteless or lower-caste societies, as conversion was one way to gradually escape caste limitations and discrimination. The Hindu majority does not actively prosecute the Christians of Tranquebar, but no practicing Christian is allowed to join the Hindu-run fisherman community, and any fisherman family that converts to Christianity will be severely sanctioned by the fishermen's panchayat.

I witnessed the effects of this hostility only one time, when one of my informants was flirting with Christianity. Perumal is a young man from a Hindu fisherman's family. One evening his brother and cousin playfully teased Perumal for the cross around his neck. "Perumal is worshipping demons!" they said laughingly. When I jokingly came to his defence, pointing out that I also was a "demon worshipper", Perumal smiled and we explained roughly the concept of Christianity to his brethren.[62] This seemed mild, and I knew from experience that friendship across religious faith was the rule rather than the exception. Some weeks later, I talked with him about religion, and registered he had returned to the Hindu faith. We sat on his porch making small talk, and when I asked Perumal if he was a Christian, he denied it. "No. I am Hindu." I the saw his cross was gone from his neck. When I asked him if he hadn't had a cross earlier, Perumal denied it. "I have always been Hindu."

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[62] Personally I should add that I am not a practicing Christian, or in any way attempted mission work. But my cultural background as a North-European and my given name Kristian meant I was naturally associated with Christianity. In Tarangambadi or in Tranquebar, atheism would have been a difficult hurdle for communication with the Indian population.

When I discussed the mission work with sister Rosa, she told me with some resignation that mission activity was fruitless in or around Tranquebar.

> "Since we came in 1901 we have had exactly zero conversions. We [the mission] are popular as a school. People use us. But since 1901, no conversions! We do not understand why. We perform religious ceremonies openly, with the children participating. The children learn psalms and religious songs, and pray with us. But as soon as they return home they become Hindus again."

To return to the example of Perumal, I never knew what or who turned him towards Christianity or what made him return to the Hindu fold. But as the Tarangambadi/Tranquebar area is to small in population to rate a Government run school, the only alternatives were the children's schools run by the TELC and the Catholic mission respectively. Both these schools deliberately expose their pupils to the Christian faith in hope of converting them.

Seemingly, Hindu Indians were to a certain degree open for the possibility of a Christian God and Jesus figure without necessarily counting themselves as believers. Many auto-rickshaws, taxis and buses in South India had both Hindu and non-Hindu symbols and good luck charms. In shops as well as in people's homes I occasionally saw effigies of Christ or the Virgin Mary side by side with Ram or Lakshmi. One popular motif in religious images I saw sold on the streets and mounted above the driver's compartment in buses showed the Moslem Qaba, the Virgin Mary and the Hindu god Ganesh side by side.

But mainly, the local Indians I met in Tarangambadi considered the different faiths more as ethnic identities than as personal views. Kathinka Frøystad (2005) describes the Hindu-Moslem relations in a North Indian city as more ethnic or class vs. class-based than actually religious.[63] By looking at the four groups as ethnically based I understood the differing identities better than by viewing them simply as spiritual movements.

The Moslem Indians

The first Moslems landed at Tranquebar at the beginning of the 14th century, and are still a sizable minority in the town of Tranquebar, although their numbers are dwindling.[64] Traditionally they are traders, and though they work as bureaucrats and artisans also today no local Moslem will take work as a menial labourer. Poor Moslems negate this practice by

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[63] Frøystad, Kathinka: *Blended Boundaries* New Dehli: Oxford 2005, pp 4-15
[64] PRAXIS report (*Village Level People's Plans: Tharangambadi, Tamil Nadu)* pg. 41

taking work in the Arab Gulf states, where members of the local community do not know them and there will be no stigma in doing physical or low-status work. They are demographically a part of the upper and middle classes, and have their own panchayat.

There is a local tradition among Moslems that the spirit of the Moslem saint that brought Islam to Tranquebar visited one of the Danish governors in his dreams. A Moslem informant, Sahlawdin, told me this was the reason the Moslems have a graveyard inside the city walls.

> "Sheik Ishmael was a prophet that is buried in the tomb inside the mosque compound. His body was found in the sea, and he was buried near the fort (outside the city walls). It wasn't a good place; pigs went around freely in this area. The Sheik came in a dream to the governor, requesting that his grave be moved. And the grave was moved to a new location, a lot given to the Moslems by him."

Whatever the reason extra lands inside the city walls were granted the Moslem community in the 18th century and today a walled compound contains the two mosques, the tomb of the saint, housing for Mosque employees and a Moslem cemetery. There is also an old water tank that Moslems previously used for cleaning. However I was told that the amount of available river water today is insufficient to change the water regularly and that keeping it with standing water would be unhygienic, therefore it is not used today.

The Moslem community are not involved with the Danish or Christian Indians as a group, although Moslem individuals collaborate with the Tranquebar Association. They, as the other communities based inside the city walls are concerned with the coastal erosion and aware of the changes in the area, as Sahlawdin told me.

> "It used to be 2000 meters from the bungalow to the beach. There were two more streets, gone now. The coastline was 2 miles out in the old days, you had to pack a Tiffin box go to the sea. (…) How things have changed? The population inside the walls has decreased while the population outside has increased. Changes have been buildings that are renovated and roads that are reconstructed, things look different now."

The Hindus

The Hindus who relate to the structures in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi can be divided into three separate groups: Hindus in Tranquebar, Hindus in Tarangambadi and Hindus from

outside the area. These groups are divided not primarily by caste (though that may be a secondary factor) but by where they reside. The Hindus living in Tarangambadi and the surrounding taluk (group of villages) are predominantly fishermen or in fishery related work. The Hindus inside the city walls of Tranquebar do not work as fishermen at all, but have as many as 19 different occupations from teaching to sign painting[65]. Visiting Hindus are mainly tourists, but several filmmakers have used the scenery inside the city walls as backdrops for music videos, commercials, and at least one feature film.

The Hindus I interviewed were almost entirely from the fishermen's community. Problems relating to caste were outside the scope of my study, and I chose not to study the relations between the different communities. One of my informants, Peter, belonged to a poor family in inland Tamil Nadu, and had later received an education at university level, ensuring him a fairly high status. Although I never asked he hinted at coming from a low caste, and had some bitterness with the caste system in India. However he told me that compared to some of the communities only 200 kilometres inland, caste-ism was practically absent in the Tarangambadi area.

There is one small Hindu community in Tranquebar, and one large in Tarangambadi. The fishermen dominate the Hindu community, as Tarangambadi historically has been a fishing village. The Hindus inside the city walls do not fish for a living, and are generally less wealthy than the fishermen. When I was in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi, there was no tension between the Indian groups, and friendship across religious communities was common (but not marriages). There had been episodes in the wake of the tsunami, when Hindu missionaries came to Tarangambadi and abused the Catholic missionaries verbally, chasing them away from the disaster areas when they came to help. This incident was with outsiders and it seemed there was no backlash afterwards. But one iron rule in the fishermen's panchayat is that all fishermen must be of the Hindu faith. According to one of my Christian informants sister Rosa, told me that the panchayat had been less strict earlier, but that they had hardened through the 1990s.

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[65] Village Level People Plans (PRAXIS India), pp 18 – 19.

Chapter 5: Place, Space and Physical History

In chapter 3 I gave a brief outline of the history of Tranquebar and Tarangambadi, and the different interpretations given by the different groups in the area. Friedman's *Mythopraxis* is repeated among the groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi, as I described in chapter 4. The retelling and reinterpretation of historical accounts is important for the identity building of groups. But the forming of what Appadurai calls "neighbourhoods" [66] is just as important in Tranquebar for collective memory. I have described soundscapes and mediascapes among other "landscapes" earlier. The ethnoscapes of the groups in Tranquebar are at least partially dependent on its historical buildings, and hegemony over the identities of these. The Hindu Indians living in Tarangambadi and the Moslems in Tranquebar control their own structures, and have a monopoly on defining these. As Sharma notes there is a tradition for carving history in stone in Hindu society, with inscriptions becoming physical history.[67] These inscriptions have their descendants today, with memorial plaques and commemorative stones still being laid in today's India, as in Tranquebar. But physical history is more than carvings in stone. The Danish era buildings in Tranquebar have become cultural markers, and the city walls have become so strong boundary markers that even when mostly gone they form the limits of two separate societies.

I have described the role of histories, or narratives based on historical events as both products of the various social positions in the society of Tranquebar and Tarangambadi, and as tools for reproducing these positions. In this chapter I will discuss the roles the structures have in producing and reproducing both identities and narratives. I will also illustrate how the historical narratives of the groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi intertwine with different places of significance for each group, creating different "neighbourhoods". These "neighbourhoods" are anchored to physical structures; some of witch (but far from all) are significant for more than one group, creating conflict over who has hegemony over the shape and meaning of the structures.

Tranquebar and Tarangambadi today

Some time after being transferred to the British, the local centre of administration was relocated from Tranquebar to the town of Nagapattinam, which the district is now named after. The Nagapattinam district numbers about 1.5 million residents. An Indian district equals

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[66] Appadurai (1996), *The Production of Locality,* pp 182-188
[67] Sharma (2003), pp 81-93

a Scandinavian county (Norwegian *Fylke* or Swedish Län). There is an "official" panchayat, ruling the township of Tranquebar (which technically includes Tarangambadi), but it decides very little of importance, and the informal power of the panchayat of Tarangambadi is in fact greater than that of the Tranquebar panchayat.

The *panchayat*, or village council is one of the pillars of Indian rural societies. A central council of seven members headed by the senior member rules the panchayat of Tarangambadi. A larger council of twenty-four members, voted in by residents of Tarangambadi, elects this council. There are strict rules for resident status that decides who are eligible to vote; one's grandfather must have lived in the village or the candidate must have lived five years continuously in Tarangambadi. Also, only Hindus have the vote (conversely the Tarangambadi panchayat only has authority over Hindus) and the fishermen's society completely dominates it. Puuvar, a former fish seller belonging to the fishermen's community, told me "…the panchayat *is* the village".

The panchayat is powerful locally, and informally acknowledged by official authorities. The police have an agreement with the panchayat that they will come only when called upon by the panchayat. There are no police patrols in Tarangambadi (apart from escort of politicians at local rallies) and in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami relief agencies recognized the need to include the panchayat in planning and coordinating relief efforts to maximise the effect of aid donations.

The Tarangambadi panchayat is in addition a "head council" for other panchayats in the taluk of Tarangambadi. This panchayat also functions as a final appeal instance for as many as 16 others, as far away as Poompuhar, 38 km away.[68] These borders are old, and one panchayat bordering Karaikal is still referred to as a "half panchayat". This dates from the days when the French conquered Karaikal in 1815 together with the other part of the panchayat. Today Karaikal is Indian, but as it belongs to a different state than Tarangambadi, it has never been reunited.

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[68] The PRAXIS report on Tarangambadi lists 24 other panchayats, but local sources told me there were 16 and gave me an account of their names. There is also some confusion as the city council in Tranquebar also is referred to as a "panchayat". The role of this panchayat is different from a traditional panchayat.

The historical borders have also lead to a limitation of the panchayat's jurisdiction that I will argue is a major influence of their relationship to Tranquebar, or more accurately a lack of almost any such relationship. One of the boundaries of the fishermen's panchayat end precisely where the old city walls stood. In other words the entire town of Tranquebar is outside the influence of the fishermen's community, which otherwise dominate Tarangambadi and the neighbouring villages. As I shall illustrate below this is probably the chief reason for the local Hindus' lack of overt interest in any structures within the old city walls, Christian Moslem or Hindu.

The City Walls and the Tarangambadi panchayat

The city walls were built at the same time as the fort, which they are really a continuation of. They are now mostly gone, scavenged by locals for building materials after the fort was abandoned as a military strongpoint by the British. A short segment comprising the main gate and one remaining battlement still stands, and was restored by the Archaeological Survey of India in 2003 (incidentally just prior to the Tranquebar Initiative's restoration of the fort). Although it is very difficult to see with the bare eye where the city walls had been, all local informants knew very well the course of the walls, as I will discuss below. The walls were boundary markers as well as protection of the colony, and this boundary is active even today.

The Danish describe the town inside the city walls as "almost like a Danish village". Street signs are occasionally in English and Danish as well as in Tamil, and they still bear the names the Danish colonists gave them. The village outside the walls however is uniformly considered solely Indian both by the Danish and various Indian groups. In spite of obvious Indian features like cows in the middle of the street and palm leaf roofs in the poorer quarters, to a Scandinavian it seems almost like home – when contrasted with the bustling Indian village right outside the city gates.

The city walls are not consciously important to many of the inhabitants of either Tranquebar or Tarangambadi, for the simple reason that most of it no longer exists. Informants agreed that most of the walls were broken down some hundred years ago, the bricks used to build houses in and around Tranquebar. The only remains today are the old city gates, restored at the turn of the century, and a single bastion that is now a part of the perimeter wall St. Theresa secondary girl school. But for Hindus at least it is still important as a boundary marker, and when questioned closer most inhabitants have a good idea where the walls stood.

The area contained by the old city walls is mostly regarded as a "non-place", or as a negative space by the Hindus living outside. The Tarangambadi panchayat has no authority whatsoever inside the walls. Where Tranquebar begins, the Tarangambadi panchayat ends. The explanation for this by the Hindus outside the walls is that there are no fishermen in Tranquebar. There is a small Hindu community in Tranquebar, none of which are fishermen. In spite of the "official" panchayat of Tranquebar members of this society told me they belonged to no panchayat.

This does not mean the area is off limits to Hindus, and there are exceptions: The well giving the finest drinking water in the area lies inside the city walls, but is historically the domain of the fishermen. Also, most educated villagers have gone to school in one of the primary schools inside the city walls, and send their children there. But looking at the old town inside the city walls as a "non-space" beginning at the city gates with islands (the schools, the well) within it is the best explanation of the difference in levels of activity between Tranquebar and Tarangambadi. Besides the large number of Moslem merchants, Hindus dominate the area. Virtually all commerce is done in an area just outside the boundaries, where the Hindu panchayat has authority. The children of the fishermen enter the schools, areas dominated by the Christian Indians. In class they are singing Christian songs and participating in prayer. They return home and become Hindus again. What happens inside the walls is not the concern of the Hindus outside, as long as it stays there.

Stone carvings and ethnoscapes

Where the Indians mark history by carving in stone, the Danish marked history in Tranquebar by building edifices. Physical history is probably one of the most important aspects of identity building in Tranquebar. It is in any case a central aspect of the Danish activities, and a vital one among the Christian Indians. The walled compound containing the mosque, Sufi shrine/mausoleum and graveyard is a physical legacy of the Moslems' strong historical position in Tranquebar. The Hindu temple inside the old city walls is curiously absent from the mentality of the local Hindus, in spite of being without comparison the oldest structure in Tranquebar. However as I will discuss below, the Hindus in the area have other places outside both Tranquebar and Tarangambadi that through their presence anchor the Hindu community as the oldest group in the area as well as in Tamil Nadu in general.

Obelisk commemorating the completion of the Tranquebar railway spur, early 20th century

The Indian tradition of carving their history in stone did not end with the colonial period. The railroad spur built by the British was shut down in 1986, the train station is torn down and the rails removed. But the three meter high obelisk commemorating the completion of the railway in 1869 still stands today, at the corner of Main Street and King Street outside the Tranquebar city gate. As I crossed from Tarangambadi into Tranquebar and back the stone was impossible not to miss, as were many of the newer stones. In modern Tarangambadi and its surrounding villages I counted roughly a dozen memorial stones with commemorative inscriptions in Tamil, often made by local political parties or municipal leaders. The dates were recent, all of them being from the second half of the 20th century to present time, commemorating Tamil local events and local political leaders.

Indian memorial stone, dated May 21st, 2001

But when it comes to it, the Danish also carved their history in stone. There are two cemeteries from the Danish era in Tranquebar. When I was there the Tranquebar Association were in the process of restoring one of these; the other had already been restored. The gravestones in these cemeteries and inscriptions in the two churches are after all stone carvings as well. The main difference of the Danish and Indian inscriptions, if we dismiss the exoticism and Orientalist view, is that the Indians still make inscriptions and commemorative stones today. The Danish however are restricted to restoring the finite (and, because of the shrinking coastline decreasing) number of historical sites from the Danish period. The Danish are not legally restricted to these areas, and Danish relief agencies that have financed projects in the area are properly named on commemorative plaques nearby.

Danish grave marker in the Old Danish Cemetery in New Street, Tranquebar (photo: Karin Knudsen)

But if the Indians in Tarangambadi are concerned with making their marks on posterity by carving in stone, the Danish in Tranquebar are concerned with the preservation of what their predecessors carved in stone centuries ago. The Danish historical artefacts are just that, historical. To construct new monuments would be meaningless in this context, as they would have no historical context. Even if the Tranquebar Association were to be given permission to make a monument today celebrating the Danish era in Tranquebar it would not approach Fort Dansborg or New Jerusalem church in importance. To the Tranquebar Association Tranquebar is important as a historical artefact, frozen in time. Any new development will threaten to weaken the image of Tranquebar as a Danish colonial outpost.

This is a good example of how the historical narrative controls the ethnoscape of the Danish in Tranquebar. As the Danish narrative concentrates on the colonial period, all Danish physical history, whether buildings or grave markers must have been present at least before 1845. The only memorial stone in Tranquebar that openly commemorate a European figure is a monument celebrating the arrival of Ziegenbalg to Tranquebar. This marker, erected by the

mission that predated the TELC is not restored by the Danish but by Christian Indians. But given the Christian Indian narrative of Ziegenbalg as an Indian historical figure this marker is more a part of the Christian Indian ethnoscape than it is a part of the Danish one.

There is also a common feature in the different groups' awareness of the space of Tranquebar. The coastline is undeniably eroding, and large parts of Tranquebar have already disappeared into the ocean. Indian local informants all told me how far inland the coastline has come, with estimates ranging from one to four kilometres. These are almost certainly exaggerated, as was a story the Indian informants, Moslem, Christian and Hindu would repeat: "If you were to go to the coast from here before, you would have to bring a tiffin box (lunchbox), the distance was that great. Now its just outside." This is an acknowledged threat by all groups, but the importance of it varies. For the Christian Indians and the Danish it is critical, as the historical buildings they invest their identities in are directly threatened. The Moslems are also aware of the issue, as are the Hindus. But as the Moslems and the Hindus have a limited number of historical buildings all well inland or outside Tranquebar where the coastline is receding far less, they are not very concerned as groups.

In Tarangambadi the buildings are mostly built in either a traditional style with a peaked roof (and often walls) constructed from palm leaves or concrete buildings with flat roof terraces. Inside the old city walls shingled roofs dominate, and buildings with a small porch central courtyard are far more common here than outside. The classical colonial buildings that Danish enthusiasts associate with Tranquebar are concentrated along King Street, especially Zion Church and New Jerusalem Church, and fort Dansborg at the end of the street, by the beach. Some buildings are newly renovated and in good shape, others are visibly neglected. At least one historical building, a Catholic church from 1669 (before Ziegenbalg), has been torn down by its owners recently and was replaced by a new one. This upset the Danish volunteers I spoke with, and shocked them by the lack of sensitivity tearing down a historical building demonstrated. The religious community that had owned the structure however explained to me how they had needed the lot for a new school building. Also they were a different community form the one that had used the Church originally, and felt more affinity with Ziegenbalg than with the old Catholic community.

In the fishermen's colony beyond the northern boundary of the old city walls the fishermen use the beach as the main landing ground for small boats, hauling them ashore after fishing. This area of the beach is littered with various kinds of waste from the boats and fishermen, and one of the mothers who visited the beach strictly forbade her daughter to dig in the sand around the fishing boats (though boys from the fishing community frequently play around in it). The shoreline near Tarangambadi is unsuitable for harbour installations, and the larger trawler boats must either anchor off Tranquebar or dock in nearby Nagapattinam. Inside the city walls there are virtually no fishing vessels landing. The beach here is cleaner, and kids often wade or take short swims in the surf.

The beach has recently been changed by a measure initiated by the Tranquebar Association. A basic coastal protection barrier is being constructed at the time of writing. Essentially this is a barrier of large boulders dumped along the beach to prevent erosion of the coastline. The heavy-duty trucks carrying the boulders drive incessantly through King Street and Queen Street on their way to the construction project. These trucks are the only regular traffic in Tranquebar, apart from the eclectic mix of tourist buses, maxi cabs and family cars driving to the beach and the fort.

Queen Street runs north to south perpendicular to King Street, and apart from an old building called the Commandants house and a church there are only Indian style buildings there. The houses are a mix of old style bungalows with internal courtyards and modern two-story concrete buildings with roof terraces. Queen Street is also one of several boundaries between local Indians. In Tranquebar Moslems live west of Queen street and Hindus east of it. Christians live all over Tranquebar without any clear boundaries, though it seems most of them live south of King Street. Crossing Queen Street and running parallel to King Street, Goldsmith Street runs from the old and new town mosques in the west to the beach in the east. The classical style the old Indian homes are built in follows a tradition so constant that they often are difficult to date, and many of the houses may in fact be from before 1845, making them as historical as the fort and the churches.

At the western end of Goldsmith Street lies the compound with nearly all the significant Moslem buildings. These buildings are simultaneously isolated from and dominant in the skyline of Tranquebar. Only Moslems use these structures and some of them are banned for non-Moslems. But the Mosque's twin minaret towers are not only visually dominant; as well

as amplifying the Muezzin calls at prayer calls (and sometimes religious singing) the loudspeakers mark prayer five times daily on the mark with vintage air raid sirens, audible in the entire town and most of the surrounding village. This makes the Moslem community in Tranquebar conspicuous to outsiders, especially the Danish, but among local Christians and Hindus the Moslem customs are a normal part of life. Several Danish I spoke with in Tranquebar had problems with the daily sirens, especially the older ones who remembered the war and had very negative associations with the sound. Local Indians had no problem with the sirens or with prayer calls, and tended not to notice until I took it up as a subject.

The 2004 tsunami should also be mentioned as a factor in shaping the place and space of Tarangambadi/Tranquebar. Briefly told the tsunami swept through the village as well as most of the surrounding area as much as two kilometres inland. As well as causing 304 deaths it wrecked 904 houses and damaged another 266.[69] Old Tranquebar is situated on a slight elevation, about 1.5 meters taller than the rest of the village. This meant that Tranquebar was spared the brunt of the flood wave and suffered only slight damage to buildings (apart from the old Hindu temple which was severely damaged). The fishermen's colony was heavily hit and suffered most of the lost houses. Fortunately relief aid was quick in coming, and temporary shelters were erected quickly. The South Indian Federation of Fishermen's Societies, SIFFS, is one of the wealthiest NGOs in South India. Though they only protect the interests of fishermen SIFFS is a big contributor to the relief of coastal settlements in the tsunami affected areas. The biggest relief project in Tarangambadi (and in the entire district) is the construction of small concrete homes for homeless fisherman families. These homes are designed especially for the needs and wishes of the fishermen's communities. They do not resemble anything built previously in Tranquebar or in Tarangambadi, and will drastically change the look and layout of the village. The Danish are openly sceptical to the design, and in one conversation I heard one of them claim that homes like these had been planned for old Tranquebar, but that opposition from the Tranquebar Association had prevented it.

More important than the look may be the new layout of Tarangambadi as a whole, and of Tranquebar's role within it. During the Danish period the heart of Tranquebar was in the fort of Dansborg itself, where the town market was held. Later the centre moved outside the city walls, leaving the broad streets of the old town nearly empty. With the building of homes in

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[69] Village Level People's Plans: Tharangambadi, Tamil Nadu. *Report made by PRAXIS, Institute for Participatory Practises.*

the available lots northwest of the main street it is not unthinkable that the centre of Tarangambadi will move even further out, leaving old Tranquebar in the periphery of the village of Tarangambadi rather than as its centre.

The tsunami

Apart from the human tragedy the tsunami in loss of life and property, the physical features of the coastline were altered noticeably. The beach partly disappeared, uncovering unknown remnants of buildings outside the fort. The fishermen's colony was hit hardest, as it lies some 1 ½ meters lower than Tranquebar. This caused the tsunami waves to be concentrated toward this area, and it was mainly on its way back out into the ocean that the flood waves hit Tranquebar. As a result of this it was decided to raise the land level of the new building areas at least 1-½ meters before construction. The majority of the victims of the tsunami in Tarangambadi were fishermen affiliated with a strong interest organisation, the South Indian Federation of Fishermen's Societies (SIFFS). This organisation began an ambitious reconstruction program in the aftermath of the tsunami (though only for members). As a result relatively large parts of Tarangambadi are being raised to reach the level of Tranquebar.

Reconstruction and restoration

The reconstruction of ruined parts of Tarangambadi and Tranquebar has changed the visual makeup of the area. The new buildings erected by SIFFS are standardised and modern in style. The modern design is criticised by the Danish volunteers, who feel they break with the classical style of the older Indian buildings in Tranquebar. Worse, the buildings are made mainly in concrete, a building material several Danish architects in the Tranquebar Association had strong opinions on. Apart from recent concerns of possible toxic materials in concrete, it is prone to cracking up if moisture reaches the steel reinforcement bars, causing corrosion and expansion of the metal. As the architects stressed, this is not ideal for the humid climate of Tranquebar. When the SIFFS offered to build some of the houses inside Tranquebar the Tranquebar Society protested, and instead initiated their own project to restore classical Indian homes inside the city walls.

Corrosion may be one reason, but another reason seemed to me to be aesthetics. The houses gave me personally a feel of cheap holiday bungalows, painted in a garish shade of blue. These homes were described by the Danish as not at all authentic, but also mediocre in form and shape. In retrospect I must admit I agreed with them at the time, and this begs the

question: Why? The Indians did not seem to be bothered by the aesthetics, but seemed to take pride in concrete buildings. Also, the classical Indian homes cannot be said to be completely different from European buildings in that peaked red-tiled roofs are a dominant feature of any city's "Old Town" area. I cannot help but conclude that the parts of Tranquebar that please the eyes of Europeans most, are the ones that most resemble the old homes of European towns and villages.

Fort Dansborg

Fort Dansborg is the main symbol of the Danish colony of Tranquebar, in the eyes of the Danish. It was built in 1620 by local labourers after a design by the Danish admiral Ove Gjedde, and was the main strongpoint of the colony's defences until the colony was sold off to the British in 1845. After the British takeover Tranquebar lost its significance as a trading post and there was no need for a fort. After independence the fort was used as an inspection bungalow by the state government until 1978, when the Archaeological Survey of India took responsibility for it as a historical building.

Interior of Fort Dansborg, Tranquebar

In the mid-90's the fort was "discovered" by a group of Danish schoolteachers establishing an Indian junior high school after a Danish "Grundtvig" model (named after a Danish pedagogue and Christian theologian from the 19th century) in the state of Tamil Nadu.

After organizing the Tranquebar Association back in Denmark the Danish recruited several official Danish institutions (including the Royal Court) as supporters of a plan for restoring the fort. In collaboration with the ASI and the Tamil Nadu State Department of Tourism Danish and Indian experts, local artisans and Danish volunteers restored the fort in 2005. The Tranquebar Association has its own web page with information about Tranquebar and their restoration of the fort. There are other projects also, but the main focus is on the fort, witch they consider the main legacy of Danish power in India.

The fort is now a museum, visited by schoolchildren and families. The main attraction for Indian tourists is the beach, but many are curious about the fort as well. But one of the Danish architect students Didrik lamented the fact that Dansborg had been frozen as it had. In Denmark museums are attempted to be made as interactive learning centres, areas of living history. Dansborg, which used to be the heart of the colony of Tranquebar, is dead after hours.

> "You know what would be nice? If there could be a market inside the courtyard of the fort! That is where all trade in the town was done when it was a colony. It was the centre of activities her! Now it is just a dead thing. The ASI would never let us do something like that."

The streets of Tranquebar

There are not many buildings from the Danish era left standing in Tranquebar. Most of the ones known to be of Danish origins are in King Street or Queen Street. A Danish cemetery remains in New Street, but no houses. Goldsmith Street has several classical Indian style buildings, which the Danish are attempting to restore. The classical building fashion of these houses changed so little over the centuries that it is almost impossible to date them by studying the building style alone. These buildings are considered by the Danish to be like the Indian buildings during the Danish period, and projects to preserve and restore them are under way to give an urban setting reminiscent of the days of the Danish colony.

Admiral Street has a hostel and school (which will be discussed in detail further below) but these are of little or no interest to the Danish. The main focus for the Tranquebar Association, apart from Fort Dansborg is King Street.

King Street is the main street in Tranquebar. It is also the only street where buildings from the Danish period other than the fort are preserved. There are around 9 buildings of Danish colonial origin (as well as one built by the British) in King Street. Indian individuals or organizations now own them all. The Danish version of these streets is that they virtually are a little piece of Denmark: on the web page of the Tranquebar Association an article refers to Tranquebar as "a Danish town in India".[70] Queen Street and Goldsmith Street is also of importance for the Danish, although there are no buildings there that can be said to be from the Danish era with any certainty.

As I toured the cemetery in New Street with Randers, she told me of the colonial origins of the street. "After some time, the best lots in King Street, Admiral Street and others were all taken. The colonists didn't want to live at the top of the street [from the coastline], so they built a new one. And this is it!"

The most likely reason so few Danish houses are left is simple economics. All private Danish homes and offices would be at least as extravagant as the two-storied bungalows and office buildings that remain. This was a society so status conscious, elements of it laid out an entire new street inside the perimeter of the city walls rather than to build their homes up street. They would obviously be heavily involved in conspicuous consumption, with houses to match. So why are almost none of them remaining today? The wealth of all European residents, apart from soldiers and officials (and sometimes even these) rested on trade. When Tranquebar became British and lost it's status as a trading post, this source of income gradually disappeared, and with it the European colonists, leaving only missionaries and administrators.[71] The Indians left would be fishermen and artisans, with neither the means nor inclination to maintain large European style townhouses. The Indian houses that have succeeded them are mostly in a classical style, but more and more concrete buildings are being built.

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[70] Fyens Stiftstidende 16.okt.1999, cited in http://trankebar.net/dk.htm

[71] Dr. R. Nagaswamy, "Tranquebar Sale Deed", *Tranquebar*, pp 39-44. Although private persons with trade privileges from the Danish king no new privileges would be given, and the (Danish) Asian Company withdrew from Tranquebar.

Paul is a Christian Indian in his middle years. He was born and raised in Tranquebar, but lives today with his family in Chennai, where he works as a materials manager. He became joyful as he recounted his childhood memories from the town to me.

> "I really enjoyed living in Tranquebar. I loved the nature, the sea breeze, and the morning sun. As a kid I loved sitting on one of the big boulders by the seaside and read poetry or English literature, Wordsworth or some of the others. At morning the there would be a silver sunrise on the sea as it reflected the sun. Then, the sun itself would rise like a red ball; until it rose so high it was painful to watch it.
>
> (…)
>
> My parents were both teachers at the TELC schools in Tranquebar. (…) We owned two houses, both in Goldsmith Street down by the sea. The sea washed them away. This was before the tsunami. The coastline has been shrinking inwards since the old days.
>
> (…)
>
> Tranquebar has changed a lot since I was a kid. You have seen for yourself, most buildings like the salt office are completely collapsed today."

The Danish were not the only ones I met who were worried by the coastal erosion. Christian informants echoed this experience of Tranquebar as a slowly disappearing place (see also pg 49).

Indian houses

The Danish disdain for concrete is countered by the Indians enthusiasm for the material. In Scandinavia, concrete has been used for building materials longer than in India. According to three Indian architects the Danish hired for reconstruction of the classical Indian houses, concrete has only been used for the last 50 years or so. There are no concrete structures from the British period; all are built after Independence in 1947. In fact, several of my informants form the fishermen's colony emphasised how the village of Tarangambadi has developed from palm leaf huts to concrete buildings, a sure sign of modernity and (relative) wealth in India. One of the Hindu residents in Tarangambadi, Saani, was a fish seller aged 80. She told me "…except that there were almost no stone buildings in Tarangambadi before, little has changed". Puuvar told me "Before, maybe 80% [of the population] lived in palm leaf houses, with some 20% living in masonry houses. Now, with the rebuilding it will probably be the other way around!" Samson, a Christian Indian who had grown up in old Tranquebar – "inside the fort" – could see many changes in only the last 20 years.

Samson here relates a narrative connected to the buildings that shows an Indian perspective, one the Indians in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi has in common. As a Christian he was also concerned with the erosion of the coastline. But as an Indian he was also very proud of the progress his hometown has made, developing from palm leaf houses into a modern concrete environment.

The Indian perspectives on the physical history of Tranquebar and Tarangambadi differ from the Danish ones, as do their view of building techniques. For a family belonging to the fishermen's community, drying fish is an important activity. There is only one ice factory in Tarangambadi, and most Indian families in the area have no refrigerator, making dried fish a sought after commodity. The drying process is fairly simple, consisting of gutting the fish and letting it dry in the sun. Families living in a classical style building must dry fish in the street outside their homes, as the inner courtyard is partially sheltered from direct sunlight by the roof overhangs. Letting the fish dry in the street exposes it to roadside dust, not to mention theft and vermin (rats were endemic in the village due to poor waste removal routines). A house with a roof terrace is ideal for drying fish well away from these hazards. The terraces were also used for sleeping in the hot season April-May, as the height gives the roof terraces a cooling breeze, keeping flies and mosquitoes away.

The classical Indian houses' peaked roofs (both the classical tiled ones and the simpler palm leaf roofs) make the air circulate better inside, cooling the interior on hot days. Unfortunately this means no attic, and less storage room than in a modern building. A Hindu fisherman of some means had a modern concrete home built with his savings, with two stories and a flat terraced roof. The second story was rented out to a development agency self-help group, while women from the fishermen's community used the terrace for temporary storage from time to time. This earned the owner both a steady income and favours among the fishermen's community. Neither should one ignore that concrete buildings, being obviously expensive and

modern structures, are clear status markers and a means of conspicuous consumption among the wealthier local residents.

New homes for tsunami affected fishermen's families, built by SIFFS

But we should not overlook the Indian improvement narrative when discussing the move towards concrete, especially the new ones built by SIFFS. The painful disastrous event of the tsunami is turned from a deeply tragic narrative to one with a "happy ending" when the destroyed homes are replaced by new, modern concrete homes. The Danish complain that the style of the new houses breaks completely with the classical Indian houses, but that may be at least part of the intention. The new houses become physical evidence of progress.

There is talk about a "Danish-Indian" style over the classical Indian houses, a style that is absent in the modern concrete houses. The Tranquebar Association hired three Indian architects as part of a combined development/restoration project. This project involved buying up classical style Indian houses in Tranquebar and restoring them to look "historically correct". What they would do with them afterwards was unclear. At least one of the houses was to be used as offices, the others presumably to be rented out to locals for a nominal fee.

The three Indian architects were women from North India, trained both in India and the UK. According to them the Indian building tradition is not to use architectural drawings but to use existing buildings as models. This meant that houses would be copies of former constructions in the area, making for regional variations in style and tradition. This changed with concrete, which only trained engineers knew how to build with. This has given modern buildings in South India a very uniform view, similar to building styles from farther north.

As mentioned earlier this building style may be more suited to the needs of local residents today than the classical Indian houses. But with bricklaying skills almost vanished locally and concrete buildings being in high demand, the general style of both the town of Tranquebar and the village of Tarangambadi is changing.

The Ziegenbalg Centre, School and Hostel

Ziegenbalg founded the Ziegenbalg School and School in 1716, first to care for local orphans and later also to educate them. The Ziegenbalg centre used to be the seminary where Indian priests would study and be ordained by European missionary priests. Just as Ziegenbalg is a minor detail in the Danish histories, he was portrayed in the film production as a Tamil speaker (even in conversations with other European missionaries) he is lauded as the first translator of the Bible to an Indian language, the owner of the first printing press, and many other achievements. The Ziegenbalg hostel was the first educational institution directed towards girls, and is a source of pride with several local Indians, especially the congregation that runs the school and hostel. This school is active even today, and is used roughly for the same purposes as when it was built by Ziegenbalg.

In the period April-May an Indian film crew shot a film financed by a parent organisation of TELC. As one of few Europeans available locally, I was recruited as an actor. This lucky break enabled me to see the film shooting close up. All filming was done on location, and in front of or inside buildings central to the missionary effort. A boys' hostel run by TELC in Admiral Street has been improved and new classrooms and dormitories have been added. Still there was enough left of the original buildings for shooting "authentic" 18th century backdrops to the action. Only a few scenes were shot elsewhere, in another TELC run hostel in the neighbouring town of Mylaradurai and only one non-TELC building was used. One scene

where Ziegenbalg vainly tries to gain entry to Dansborg and the Governor is filmed outside the closed gates of the fort.

The hostel in Admiral Street, central to the Christian Indian narrative of Tranquebar are in themselves as much a physical part of the town's colonial history as the buildings in King Street. The Ziegenbalg centre, which lies in King Street, is of concern to the Danish. The Danish I spoke with in Tranquebar were concerned with the way the Christian Indians were managing the building in King Street, but they never mentioned the centre in Admiral Street. It may be that I missed Danish discussing Admiral Street and its buildings, but one parallel with the Hindus struck me as equally probable: The school and hostel in Admiral Street has always been a part of Ziegenbalg's legacy. The fact that the Danish of the Tranquebar Association displays so marginal interest in a figure central to the Christian Indian narrative indicate that they too have come to see him as an Indian historical figure more than a Danish one, and subsequently are writing him out of the Danish narrative. This would make the school and hostel in Admiral Street Christian Indian buildings. As these buildings still receive a notable amount of funding from German and Swedish mission societies the Danish thereby have neither authority nor power over the maintenance or visual makeup of the school or the hostel. The response seems to be the same as the Hindu response to the similar situation with the city walls: the Danish ignore Admiral Street completely. As it does not comprise any part of the Danish ethnoscape in Tranquebar, it becomes effectively a "non-place" to them.

Although it is extensively built out since the Danish era there were enough original structures for the hostel and mission centre to be a location scene for a film dramatization of Ziegenbalg's life. But it is a piece of Indian history, not Danish. As I observed from the Christian Indians (not least the film crew portraying his life), the association of Ziegenbalg as a Great Indian is paralleled in these structures. Albin, the functionary, told me of his impressions of the old structures:

> "It is strange. This building you know is several hundreds of years old. The walls are so thick! But when they renovated one of the walls, the bricks inside were so small, and the middle was just filled with sand and rubble! And still the walls are so strong! It is a strange thing that the old buildings here still stand, when many of the newer ones are falling apart. Some fifty years ago you could still see many houses people had built with bricks taken from the city wall. They would make thick walls using mud mortar. But the roofs were always made from palm leaves. The mud-and-brick walls couldn't support anything heavier. Now there are only a couple left. But some buildings can be torn down. One thing is historical

buildings; another is buildings that are just old. These should be torn down to give room to the new ones we can use."

The churches

There were several churches in Tranquebar during the Danish period. However today only two of the original ones remain. There is a newer church built in the middle of the 19th century on the outskirts of surrounding Tarangambadi by Catholic missionaries, but the Danish have little or no interest in this, as it has no connection with the history of the Danish colony.

The Zion Church is the first standing Lutheran purpose built church in India. It was built some five years before Ziegenbalg arrived in Tranquebar. Zion Church is now owned and used by the Church of South India. The closest thing to a conflict between this congregation and the Danish, was in reality more a misunderstanding between the Indian owners of the Zion church and the Danish. When the local CSI pastor uncovered an old faded daguerreotype showing the church in the 19th century. He misinterpreted the faded purple tone to be the original colour scheme of the church, and planned to repaint it. When one of the retired German priests pointed out that a colonial building never would have been painted in purple, he agreed to drop the project.

The poverty and small size of the CSI it Tranquebar have contributed much to the historical authenticity of the church. The pews in the church appear to be authentic Georgian furniture, possibly more than a century old. The stern Lutheran interior has not been painted with anything but whitewash, although the ceiling is crisscrossed with colourful paper garlands during festivals like Christmas. The stained glass window above the altar was cracked, and the pastor lamented to me that the congregation could not afford to replace it. After one of the services, the pastor's son showed me around the church. The bell tower did not have functioning machinery, and the bells stood in the back of the church. The pastor proudly presented these bells, "bronze cast in Denmark"! The legend on each bell, apart from the names reads "STØBT I TRANQUEBAR" (cast in Tranquebar). There have been some restoration projects at least partially funded by Danish money. One of the Scandinavian graveyards I described in chapter 4 is adjacent to this church, but not in use by the Indians. There were two improvements I saw being made to Zion church during my stay. These were a new fence around the church and a small concrete house being built for the pastor in the

churchyard. Earlier, in 2005 the Tranquebar Association had also cleared the churchyard and restored the grave markers.

The Holy Rosary Church was constructed by missionaries from yet another mission in 1854 and stands outside the city walls. The catholic mission order that built this church came after the Danish had actually sold the colony to the British, so it The Danish attach no significance whatsoever to this church and there is no mention of it on their web page.

However the Rosary Church is larger and better kept than the original "Goa church" built by the Danish in 1669. As the other churches in Tranquebar, the Goa church was handed over

New Jerusalem Church, Tranquebar

To the community using the structure, in this case the Catholic mission in Tarangambadi and Tranquebar. The mission's orphanage, and later St. Theresa secondary girl school had the Goa church on its premises, but did not use it much, according to the headmistress at St. Teresa.

The Catholics had the Goa church demolished in 2004, apparently without consulting any of the Danish. When they told me of this church the Danish all showed strong emotions from anger to shock and sorrow two years afterwards. This church is mentioned in historical texts linked to the website of the Tranquebar Association, but no photos of the church or information about the demolition are displayed.

When I asked the headmistress of St. Theresa of an old Catholic church, she first assumed I was talking about the Rosary Church outside Tranquebar. I insisted I had been told there had been a 17th century church on the premises of the school. She confessed uncertainty and asked me to return next week so she could check the files and their library. When I returned, she told me that there had been a former church from the 1600s on the premises.

> "It had later been used as a classroom amongst other things. However it was too worn down to be used in recent times, and only served as a storage room and as a chapel for schoolchildren before commencing classes in the morning. It was too damaged to be saved, and was demolished to give space to a new classroom building sponsored by a local cement manufacturer…we have very little income, so new construction and restoration can only happen by donations."

The New Jerusalem Church is the largest church inside the city walls. Built in 1718 as a mission church it is claimed by its owners to be the first one of its kind. In the church choir missionary Ziegenbalg lies buried.

The Christian Indians consider the church an Indian building, and not Danish. The Christian Indians have in fact been in disagreement with the Danish on the methods and extent of restoration work on the church. Earlier, during the construction of a planned new bell tower the Danish had protested that construction would damage old Danish graves in the churchyard and eventually reported it to the District Collector, who halted the project. This caused resentment with the Christian Indians, and while under restoration the premises were closed for outsiders, the premises walled off with a three-meter tall corrugated iron fence.

Unfortunately I had to leave Tranquebar just before the reopening on July the 11th, but as the project was getting on I could see the upper parts above the fence and scaffolding. The entire tiled roof had been removed, a thin layer of concrete cast under it to make the roof watertight,

then replacing the roof tiles on top of the layer. In addition they had given it a new coat of paint in bright colours and mounted a red neon cross on top of the church spire.

When I talked with one of the TELC pastors, he explained to me why the fence had been put up.

"We were building a new bell tower in concrete, standing free of the church building. To set the foundation we had to *temporarily* move one of the slabs in the churchyard. We were going to move it back when the construction was complete! But the Danish went straight to the collector telling him we moved a gravestone. He then ordered us to stop all construction and forbade us to build any new structures on the premises. So now if you are to enter the premises you need a signed permit."

When I inquired about the neon cross, he told me a resident of Karaikal donated it. "This is how we usually do it. If people donate money and ask us to do some improvement, we do it. Or if they finance things like this cross." I knew that the Danish almost certainly would react to the neon cross. The Scandinavian view (and generally the Western one) is that historical buildings are to be "frozen in time", to look like they did when they were built. The "normal" Indian view (not shared by the Archaeological Survey of India), to constantly improve the buildings obviously clashes with this. When I carefully pointed out that the Danish (who were not present in Tranquebar at this point) would react badly to the neon cross on the old church, the pastor replied "Yes, but they should remember that it is not theirs anymore. This is India today, it is not a Danish colony anymore".

The Moslem compound: Mosques (old and new) and the Dargah

In Tranquebar, inside the old city walls, the Moslem community has their own walled compound. All the historical buildings significant to the Moslems (possibly excepting the city walls) are inside this compound. I only entered this compound a couple of times, as I had few Moslem informants, none of them regular acquaintances of mine. When I entered I was well received and shown around. There were places however, that I could not enter. The dargah, a tomb for the two Sufi saints that had brought Islam to Tranquebar was off limits, as was the Moslem graveyard. The compound was unusually rich in vegetation, with trees and palms giving much of the compound a cooling shade. The children at the nearby Moslem primary school used a small volleyball court on the premises between classes. This area was alive, in a way Dansborg and the streets in Tranquebar were not.

The old mosque is a small building built in Arabian style, with a relatively squat minaret. It is off limits as it is structurally unsafe, and has not been used since the new one was finished. The new mosque is placed directly in front of it, making the old mosque visible only from inside the compound, squeezed in-between the new mosque and the compound wall. The old mosque is believed to be from the 14th century, but it is difficult to tell with certainty. The mullah at the mosque told me the mosque had no written records, so the exact date may be impossible to tell. Danish historical descriptions of Tranquebar mention a mosque when the Danish arrived in 1620, and it may well be this one. It was difficult for me to judge the differences in style between the two mosques, as I honestly have limited expertise in this area and there were few other mosques in the area. But the old mosque was squat compared to the new one, and obviously built in a different style. Whether this represented a separate South Indian building tradition was difficult to say.

Although it receives little or no maintenance the Moslems have not torn the old mosque down, as opposed to at least one old church building in Tranquebar. One of my Moslem informants later told me that the old mosque had been demolished and moved when they built the new mosque. But in spite of the limited space inside the compound the old mosque had been rebuilt just behind the new mosque. The Moslem community has been present in Tranquebar since the 14th century, and all Moslems I spoke with were aware of and proud of this fact. The historical consciousness of the Moslems is likely a strong factor in the preservation of the old mosque. When I asked directly why they did not tear down the old mosque a Moslem informant burst out: "It is not good to tear it down! It is our mosque!" Even if the original builders of the mosque may have been Arabs, Moslems in Tranquebar today consider the old mosque a part of their cultural heritage. The connection the Moslems have with the old mosque is also a contrast to the Sri Renugadevi Amman temple (see below), which is ignored by Hindus living outside the city walls. The Moslems' mosque differs from the Goa church and the Sri Renugadevi Amman temple in one important aspect: the Moslem community has controlled it continuously since it's construction. The Goa church was in all probability run by Jesuits with no relation to the Catholic community in today's Tranquebar and Tarangambadi. Even worse, the Danish colonial masters built it. The Sri Renugadevi Amman temple ended up inside the city walls, where the community of Hindus that today dominate Tarangambadi have no authority. But the mosque stands within the walled compound that belongs to the Moslems. In short, the Moslem narrative can be safely connected to the old mosque. There are no ambiguities there that can threaten the Moslem

identity or social position in Tranquebar, making the old mosque safe to use as a significant place to the Moslems.

The new mosque was built in 1992 with funding from the local Moslem community. It is larger than the old one, and is built in a style influenced more by classical Persian architecture than the old mosque. The twin minaret towers are taller than the ones on the old mosque, and more slender. They are to small to support a place for the muezzin (prayer leader) to call to prayer at the top, and the traditional top perch has been replaced with a loudspeaker system. This is not unusual with modern mosques. The old fashioned call to prayer is often replaced by a loudspeaker system, with the muezzin using a microphone system in the prayer hall instead. The minarets are kept for traditional and symbolic purposes, and although they are too small to support a muezzin comfortably they are built to scale. This gives the mosque a larger-than-life impression, giving the illusion that the mosque and minarets are larger than their actual size. The new mosque was built in concrete, but in attempts of a "classical" style mosque. The main concessions to modernity were the loudspeaker system, and the year of origin 1992 cast in the façade above the main entrance. Other than this the mosque was modelled to look like a classical Persian-style mosque that happened to be built in concrete. Even so the mosque was obviously different in style from the older mosque, and the dargah.

The Dargah is a tomb and shrine where the remains of Sufi saints Sheikh Ismail Sadat Valliyullah and Seiyadina Seiyad Shaib Sadat Valiyullah, the first to spread Islam to Tranquebar now rest. The exact age of the dargah is not known, for the same reasons as with the mosque. This Dargah is not mentioned in Islamic literature concerning India in general, but local travel guides mention it as a sight. There are other Moslem sites in the Nagapattinam district with greater historical meaning for local Moslems, so the Tranquebar Dargah is of importance almost only for local Moslems. The Moslem graveyard inside the compound is the one Moslem informants told me had been given by the governor. The graveyard was closed off with a gate. This was the only graveyard in Tranquebar that did not have animals walking freely inside. Both Danish cemeteries had goats grazing inside, even during the restoration work. The philosophy of the Indians was simply that goats are an effective means of weed removal, feeding the goat and sparing extra labour in one go. Several of the Danish had resigned to this view as well, as grass and weed grows much faster in South India than in Scandinavia. The Moslems did not seem to share this view and in the story of the graveyard, roaming animals was the main reason the graveyard was moved.

The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple

For the Hindus living inside Tranquebar the most important place is the ancient Hindu temple next to the beach. This temple, dated around the year 1305 is slowly being eaten away by the sea. Less than half of the original temple compound remains intact and even before the 2004 tsunami it was in a precarious position. The tsunami washed away part of the soil underneath the edges of the temple and parts of the old structure is literally balancing the on edge of the sea, some parts even hanging out over the ocean.

In spite of its dilapidated and partly dangerous state, the Tranquebar Hindus use the temple still today, and a Brahmin priest holds impromptu services and blessings for local Hindus and foreign tourists alike. The effigies of several gods are still in the temple and clothed in new fabric "garments", and a neon light is installed in the main chamber of the Shiva lingam. These are telltale signs that the temple is in daily use (and not only by tourists).

The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple is a popular holiday prospect for tourists. This is for the most part Hindu Indians visiting from larger, more developed cities like Chennai or Pondicherry. There are some foreign tourists as well; however the Danish tourists are mainly concerned with the fort.

When I visited the temple I was surprised to be approached by an old Brahmin priest, offering to perform a *pujah*, or Hindu blessing on me. Having assumed that the temple was abandoned due to its dilapidated state I had though of the temple only as historical ruins from India's middle ages. However the temple did not only still keep blessed effigies (recently decorated with clothing) it had also installed neon tube lighting in the main chamber housing the *lingam* (Holy Shiva symbol). As mentioned the sea had washed away parts of the foundations, and I was slightly unsettled when I realised the holy chamber we occupied during the *pujah* was partly hanging out over the sea. It seemed the priest intended to use the temple until it would be completely washed away by the ocean.

A cupola from the original temple complex, now eroded by the receding coastline

For several Indian cinematographers and public relations professionals The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple is an irresistible backdrop. One of India's leading mobile telephone operators used the fallen cupola seen above as one of several backdrops for its PR campaign in the spring of 2006 (others were the old city gates and Dansborg fort). In several other videos/feature films The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple was also used as scenery, giving a romantic feel to romantic song numbers.

The Hindu narrative mentioned in chapter 2 is the dominant one in South India if one is to judge from newspapers and television. Historical dramas focus on the classical age, and the film production I participated in would have been the first Tamil language actually portraying European characters.[72] The use of the temple ruins has a positive overtone: Young Indians standing on top of the fallen cupola, waving a banner with a company logo. Lovers singing and courting with the ancient temple as a backdrop. The overall effect seems to show literally the future of Indian standing on top of its rich past, and the lovers as parts of an ancient

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[72] The Indian feature film *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (Aamir Khan Productions Ltd., 2001) would be an appropriate North Indian parallel. This film portrays the struggle against British oppression, and thus falls within the Hindu historical narrative outlined in chapter 2.

tradition even in modern life. To return to Sharma, the Hindu concept of history is as moving in circles. It is important not to forget then, that the circles are *progressing.* That
 The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple is not painted, unlike active temples in India today. The local climate is very damp and hot, so paint needs to be applied more often than in milder climates. Many restored temples in India are repainted in bright strong colours. Western viewers often perceive the Indian colour schemes as "gaudy" or "flashy" as Western views on aesthetics vary significantly from Indian ones. In contrast The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple would be seen as "classical" and "pure by the former. This can probably be traced back to the idea of bright white classical Greek temples and statues (erroneous, as the Greeks also painted their structures).

There is another temple both smaller and more recent. However this was damaged badly by the tsunami and temporarily abandoned. The effigies of various gods have been moved to a building further inland serving as an interim shelter. The Hindu community are considering a tsunami-proof future temple, but funding was still a problem at the time I interviewed them. The shelter building has no actual status as a temple, although priests conduct the occasional pujah in front of the statues for visitors.

The Danish told me a noted Indian architect who had just finished restoring an UNESCO-listed Hindu temple in Tanjavur was planning a restoration project for the temple. This was not begun before I left, and the plans were still at an early stage. But there are problems with the restoration: More than half of the temple grounds are under water today, eaten away by the sea. There is already a coastal protection program to erect barriers against erosion. But to rebuild what has been lost would require building up a new coastline.

Coastal protection

The Tranquebar Association launched a program to fight the coastal erosion. First this was meant to protect Dansborg fort, but the program was extended to the entire coastline in Tranquebar. In the wake of the tsunami the Tranquebar Association applied the Tamil Nadu government for permission to build a coastal protection barrier along Tranquebar. The authorities granted this 30th August 2005, and the work began the following year in February. The barrier consists of groundwork by broken bricks and sundry building debris topped by

granite boulders. Eventually this will be strengthened by planted vegetation and trees, creating a composite barrier to withstand the power of the sea.[73]

The eroding coastline is not in itself unusual on the east coast of India, not even locally. The neighbouring town of Poreyar was a fishing village itself when first mentioned in literature two thousand years ago; today it is one kilometre from the coast.[74] Several temples and cities in Tamil Nadu have been either eaten away by the sea or landlocked by silt in historical times. Still, all groups in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi appreciate the need for a means to preserve the historical buildings in Tranquebar as well as the fishermen's colony from the sea. The 2004 tsunami impressed the danger from the ocean on all groups in the area as well as the bureaucracy in Chennai, but as house after house had steadily been lost to the sea all local inhabitants already knew of it.

Temples outside the city walls

There are as many as three Hindu temples in the Tarangambadi village area alone, not counting the ones in nearby underlying factories. There is some evidence that the communities (or at least the priests) cooperate but little that Hindus living outside the city walls use the temple(s) inside the city wall, or vice versa. The main temple for the Hindus living outside the city is a concrete structure built relatively recently, in 1965. This is the largest temple in Tarangambadi, larger than The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple, and located a block away from the fish market area in the fishermen's colony. The architecture of the temple is not particularly original, modelled as countless other recent Indian temples after a vague classical Hindu ideal with stock figurines perching on the walls, gates and roof steeples. This is also the only temple in Tarangambadi and Tranquebar with an inner sanctum.

Of the two others one was damaged by the tsunami and not in use (its effigies also moved to the shelter mentioned above), the other temple is located on the beach outside where the northern portion of the city wall used to be. This temple is styled as a miniature temple complex with shrines to the most important gods set up in booth-like structures around the edges of the walled compound surrounding it. This temple is also of relatively new date and modern style. It should be mentioned though, that decorative details of The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple is echoed in the details of this temple. The "mini complex" temple is painted

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[73] The official Tranquebar website http://www.trankebar.net/dk.htm gives a detailed report on the progress of the coastal protection program.
[74] Nagaswamy (1987) Op Cit

in a uniform yellow suspiciously like the colour Dansborg fort was painted during its restoration in 2004. This temple also has a loudspeaker system like the mosque, but rather than calls to prayer it booms out tapes of Indian popular music for much of the day and evening. Where the presence of the (new) mosque can be seen from most of Tranquebar and parts of Tarangambadi, the "mini complex" temple is heard from large parts of Tarangambadi and parts of Tranquebar.

The reasons the new temples have been built are various. The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple in Tranquebar would not have been large enough to service a Hindu population of the size the fishermen's community alone today, not to mention the rest of the local Hindu society. Other temples in towns like Mylaradurai are more important locally, and during important festivals many Hindu families will travel to these places rather than worship in any of the local ones. This saved many lives during the 2004 tsunami, when many of the Hindus were in Mylaradurai for just such a festival. Another reason is that the temple lies inside the old city walls, and thereby outside the reach of the fishermen's panchayat. Just as the market area was moved from nearby or inside the fort some time after 1845, new temples firmly inside the panchayat's authority have superseded The Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple.

Poompuhar

Admittedly I only realised the importance of Poompuhar late in the fieldwork, as books or Internet resources on the area of Tranquebar and the Danish colonies in India completely failed to mention it. Today Poompuhar is a small fishing village with a technical high school and varied attempts on a tourist industry. The success of making a tourist destination of Poompuhar was impossible for me to gauge. The period I lived in Tarangambadi (January through June) fell outside the tourist season, and includes the hottest season of the year in Tamil Nadu. But the importance of the place for local Hindus was obvious.

My visit to the village of Poompuhar was for only one day. Adil, a local informant who was to visit his brother-in-law invited me to join him. In Poompuhar Adil showed me some of the sights before we visited his relative. The village had a newly built seven-tiered temple style art gallery commemorating one of the Sangam epics concerning old Poompuhar (See chapter 3). Inside a series of 36 bas-reliefs portray the different tableaux of one of the epics. It is not clear from the displays if the bas-reliefs are original historical artefacts, copies of

archaeological artefacts or present-day monument. But as the building is referred to both as an art gallery and a museum it is likely that these are modern artwork. Still, the engraved tableaux are treated with reverence by the visiting Indian Hindus. The story arc has great significance both in the local variants of Hindu faith and of Tamil identity. Clearly the epics are central parts of the Tamil scripted narrative.

The village has been the site of several archaeological excavations funded by Indian authorities, both from Tamil Nadu State authorities as from Indian National institutions. Along the beach there are several tourist cottages shaped like conches. A small park lined with palms and trees, creating a fresh oasis for visitors, surrounds the museum/art gallery. In the park, four-meter tall statues depicting legendary heroes of the Sangam epics stand in roofed pavilions. The park alone speaks of some effort, as fresh water is scarce along this part of the coastline. The statues strengthen this image, and the level of funding to make the museum/gallery and the surrounding park

As mentioned in chapter 5, the ancient city of Puhar (present day Poompuhar) has great significance for Tamil culture, as it is the scene of several Sangam epics. However as the city was destroyed around 500 A.D. it is not mentioned in the colonial history of India (I am referring here to the historical literature written on, or by the colonial powers active in India from the 16th to the 20th century). The village is marketed with flyers available among other places in the lobby of the luxury hotel in Tranquebar. The Danish website does not mention the village of Poompuhar or the historical city, but it is not unlikely that the place is unknown for the Danish volunteers restoring the buildings in Tranquebar.

In retrospect it is not difficult to see the place of pride this site has in the Hindu (and for that matter Tamil in general) consciousness. Adil was annoyed when it became clear I had forgotten my camera. If I was researching the local Tamil people and structures, this should have been obvious! Adil, a Hindu fisherman, knew the history of this place well, and could quote several of the poems and epics of the Sangam era. But also relatively strict Christian Indians know Sangam poetry, as it is taught in schools. A Christian informant borrowed me his copy of *Thirukkural*, a collection of two thousand year old words of wisdom written in verse. A passionate Bible reader, he described *Thirukkural* as "the second best book ever written".

The village of Puhar is central to the understanding of Hindu self-perception in Tarangambadi, as the churches in Tranquebar to the Christian Indian and Danish, and the mosque and dargah in the walled compound to the Moslems. Where historical buildings three centuries old signify colonial history (Danish and British being merged in the historical perception) the ruins of Puhar, easily two thousand years old, signify one of the cradles of Tamil culture, and a golden age of wealth and power. To return to Sharma, this can be seen as a circular view of history in the Hindu sense: The colonial powers have come and gone, but Tamil culture remains.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the preceding text I have attempted to show how different groups in the town of Tranquebar and the surrounding village of Tarangambadi have different conceptions of the historical buildings in the area, mainly the Danish colonial buildings in Tranquebar. In roughly dividing the inhabitants and agents in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi into four groups I have treated them as different ethnic groups, as I shared the experience of Frøystad (2003) of the different religious communities as ethnic identities. These groups have different experiences of the same space, often overlapping and not always following clear boundaries. My use of Appadurai (2002) in his analysis of societies without boundaries as *neighbourhoods* set up through different landscapes has been only in one small locality rather than in a globalised milieu. But the use of different "landscapes" or dimensions of creating different neighbourhoods is an analytical tool I have modified somewhat, with "invented" landscapes like soundscapes and the interpretation of ethnoscapes as places of significance to ethnical groups. The creation of these places does not seem to have been consciously to build different neighbourhoods, but the result of Friedman's (1992) definition of mythopraxis. Friedman and supplementary Harrison (1999) discuss how historical events are shaped and in some cases invented by ethnical groups to form historical narratives. I found similar narratives either reinterpreted or reinvented in various degrees with all four groups, but most important was the role these narratives played in establishing or maintaining significant places, and the creation of different neighbourhoods for the groups. The narratives shape identities not only in what they include but also in what they exclude, creating "non-places" as well as places of significance. The term "non-place" is one Marc Augé as a place "…lacking any historical significance and strong symbolism". Although I disagree in general

with Augé's analysis the term "non-place" is a good description of places one given group has no interest in or relationship with.

No one claims every part of Tranquebar as part of their neighbourhood, and no one lays claim to the entire chronological history of the area as base for their narrative. Each and every group has its own neighbourhood tied around different places of significance. Just like they ignore or reshape parts of history that do not fit into their narratives, different groups ignore places that do not fit into or connect to their individual narratives, making a place of significance for one group a "non-place" for another.

For the Hindus and Moslems, the two groups with the "oldest" identities and historical narratives, this means clearly defined "neighbourhoods". The Moslems have their own area within Tranquebar, with their own significant places walled in. the Hindu fishermen ignore all places within the old city walls (except one well they may use, and the schools for some of their children), making virtually all of Tranquebar a "non-place". The few Hindus living inside the city walls have some connection with the Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple, but by living inside the city walls they place themselves outside the Hindu society in Tarangambadi. The only building in Tranquebar the Hindus in Tranquebar and Tarangambadi openly recognise is Dansborg fort. This fort has negative connotations with the Hindus however, who fit the fort into the colonial part of their historical narrative.

The Danish volunteers and the Christian Indians are the two groups with the "youngest" historical narratives. As the historical narratives of the Danish and the Christian Indians are so intertwined, they share many significant places in Tranquebar. They do not however share the historical significance of many buildings however, and this has lead to conflict between the Danish and the Christian Indians. As the narratives that make the significant places are formed from the identities of the two groups, the groups want the physical structures that comprise these places to reflect the narratives as well as the social positions and self-images of the different groups. The Danish, who focus on the colonial era 1620-1845, wishes as much of the old town within the city walls to resemble Tranquebar during that era. The Christian Indians do not only want to emphasise just the missionary effort in Tranquebar, they want to leave their own mark in history, both as a group and as individuals. This is done by building upon existing structures, in some cases building new ones in distinct modern style. Indians relate to significant structures not in the sense of restoration, but of improvement.

This falls into the general Indian narrative, where development is regarded as a positive phenomenon as opposed to stagnation. The colonial history has far more negative connotations with the Indian groups than with the Danish, whose narrative reflects the Danish era in Tranquebar as a golden age for Denmark. When the Christian Indians improve the historical buildings they also suppress the colonial aspect of their historical narrative, giving the structures and places an Indian identity rather than a colonial one.

To the Danish in Tranquebar the historical narrative is of a "little piece of Denmark in India". Incorporating the arrival of Ziegenbalg and other missionaries would weaken this narrative, as they were German by birth. The Kingdom of Denmark today differs radically from the historical Danish-Norwegian kingdom of the colonial era. The Danish-Norwegian kingdom was an eclectic amalgamation of different nationalities rather than the relatively homogenous national state Denmark has become. Another aspect of the Christian Indian narrative is slavery, an uncomfortable and problematic side of the Danish colony. The response by the Danish in Tranquebar has been to ignore or downplay these elements in their narrative, which is reflected in their places of significance. King Street with its relatively uniform European buildings, especially New Jerusalem Church are places where the Danish are in conflict with the Christian Indians. Other places, like the hostel and school in Admiral Street are ignored, as they do not fit into the narrative.

These two groups are in conflict not because the historical narratives clash, but because they are connected to the same places. At no point do the Danish or the Christian Indians contest each other's narratives, and the conflict has been one of communication problems rather than of direct quarrelling. This is reflected in that no groups in Tranquebar or Tarangambadi without places in their neighbourhoods overlapping others' have any open conflicts. As the other groups ignore one group's narrative, so are the significant places of their neighbourhood.

The Moslems integrate their social position in Tranquebar and during the colonial era with a historical narrative connected to a significant place. With the story of the dream visit of the Sufi saint to the Danish governor the Moslem community in Tranquebar places itself beneath the Danish colony masters, but the Moslem god (manifested by the saint) is above the Danish. The myth of a tunnel from fort Dansborg to the royal city of Tanjavur further integrates the

Danish colony into the historical Indian hierarchy of power. By linking this narrative to the Moslem graveyard the Moslems in Tranquebar reproduced their identity and social position, as well as the mythical tunnel establishes the fort as a part of the surrounding Indian kingdom. By not demolishing the old mosque after they built a new one, the Moslem community also shows the differences narratives may have on the significance of places. The mosque was built by the ancestors of the Moslems living in Tranquebar today. The Catholics tore down a church not originally built by their community, but by a colonial power for another congregation not connected with the one today, while the Hindu community in Tarangambadi claim no current affiliation with the Sri Renugadevi Amman Temple, as it falls outside the fishermen's panchayat, which almost exactly matches the Hindu neighbourhood in Tarangambadi (again, with the Hindus living inside Tranquebar being the exception). The "unbroken line" of the mosque with the Moslems serves to strengthen the Moslem narrative, and thereby their social status. In my opinion the old mosque remains a part of the Moslem neighbourhood for just this reason.

When one of my Hindu informants showed me the museum in Poompuhar, I had no idea at first of its significance. I understood immediately the importance of the bas-reliefs to my Hindu informant from his behaviour, and that this was a source of pride to him. First later, as I connected the Sangam epics and the Cola golden age with the small village of Poompuhar today did I comprehend fully the role of classical Poohar and the relics (real or not) displayed in modern Poompuhar to the Hindus living in the area. The reason was simply that Danish sources regarding Tranquebar are ignorant of Poohar, which was never mentioned among my Danish informants. The Colas were gone before the Danish arrived, and thus never entered the Danish narrative. Conversely, although some of the Hindus I interviewed knew of the people of the Tranquebar Association, none of them knew of the Danish's history in Tranquebar. The Danish period was in the middle of a period where the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British also wrested for control over a region that would lose more and more of its sovereignty, becoming in the end a colony. This painful period would last for more than a century after the Danish sold their colony to the British, and is not. The struggle that would lead to independence in 1947 remains central to this part of the Hindu (and largely the other Indian groups') narrative, which refers to the colonial time as "the British period". The merging of the Danish and other powers into the British Raj is a simplification of the Hindu narrative as much as not dwelling on the rise and fall of a myriad of South Indian kingdoms and dynasties before the arrival of the Danish.

This difference in narratives is an illustration of the different places of meaning, more than it is a result of them. But when a place cannot be confirmed as a part of a groups identity, or it threatens their social status it is removed, ignored, or becomes a "non-place". The places largely have different meanings for each of the groups, even contrary meanings. As the places constitute different neighbourhoods they support different historical narratives, which again reproduces the meanings given to them by different groups. When these places, especially buildings, are reshaped by another group they become arenas for conflict, but only because the risk of becoming irrelevant in relation to a given groups narrative. The narratives themselves are only for internal consumption within the groups, and the narratives themselves never directly clash with one another, when they conflict. Then, the narratives simply speak past one another, maintaining the identities of their own groups.

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