

A Comparison on the Survival and Retention of the Tamil Language among the Tamil Migrants in Malaysia and Mauritius

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes to trace the differences in the attitude of the Tamil migrants in Malaya (Malaysia) and in Mauritius, and the factors that have contributed towards such attitudes that have had differing results in the retention of the Tamil language in their midst. It is based on secondary sources, the many studies made on different topics that have shed light on this matter. More specifically, this research briefly look into the Tamil migration patterns to these territories at different times of history, and its ability to maintain its language as a means of social communication

1. INTRODUCTION

The Tamils have migrated to many parts of the world from South India as well as Sri Lanka. Some have retained their mother tongue while others have adopted other dominant languages in the countries or areas of residence. Even those who had not retained the original structure of the Tamil language successfully maintained essential Tamil cultural words as part of their vocabulary in the adopted languages. Thus, creole languages have emerged with a sprinkling of Tamil words in many parts of the world.

On the other hand, as in Malaysia and Singapore, the Tamil language has been retained in its original form in interactions among Tamils, with Tamil being taught till the university level (Muthusamy & Karpaya, 2017). While this may be due to the large number of Tamil migrants to these regions, especially to work in plantations and labour-intensive areas, their placements in large groups allowed them to interact in the Tamil language continuously.

On the other hand, many Tamils had also migrated to Mauritius, apart from many African countries, during the same colonial era, around the nineteenth century AD, and, despite being in large numbers, they have been unable to retain the Tamil language as a means of communication. In Mauritius they have largely adopted the Mauritian Creole language as their mother

tongue. Symbolically Tamil is taught till the university level in Mauritius as an ancestral language of the Tamils.

There have been many similarities between the Malaysian and Mauritian experience, especially in the process of the recruitment of the labour force by the colonial powers (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2018). While the French brought the first Tamils – as artisans, and professionals – to Mauritius, later, when Mauritius came under the British rule, they brought in the Tamils to work in the sugar-cane plantations in large numbers. The British also brought the Tamils to work in the plantations and to construct the infrastructure for development in Malaya at around the same time.

As both the migrations to Mauritius and Malaya were orchestrated by the British, and the conditions of the workplace were rather similar, it makes a good comparison to study the reasons for the disparity in the retention of the Tamil language both in Malaysia and Mauritius today.

1.1. THE STUDY

This study proposes to trace the differences in the attitude of the Tamil migrants in Malaya (Malaysia) and in Mauritius, and the factors that have contributed towards such attitudes that have had differing results

in the retention of the Tamil language in their midst. It is based on secondary sources, the many studies made on different topics that have shed light on this matter

Broadly this study will briefly look into the Tamil migration patterns to these territories at different times of history, and its ability to maintain its language as a means of social communication

Towards this, the following statements will be analysed for their accuracy:

a. When Tamils, as a migrant community stayed together in large numbers, they were able to maintain their own mother tongue as their means of communication. But when they were dispersed into smaller numbers to live along the native communities in the new environment, the dominant language of the environment had been naturally adopted by the Tamils, while retaining the core Tamil cultural words in their adopted language.

b. The formal Tamil language teaching – learning facilities alone may not make the language the means of communication within the Tamil community if the conditions do not encourage its day to day usage within the community.

c. When the migrated Tamil community maintains close contact with their homeland, receives the visit of Tamil dignitaries, follows the developments in Tamil Nadu, reads books, periodicals and dailies in Tamil, follows the electronic media in Tamil, forms societies that use Tamil as the official language of communication, attends Tamil schools and/or Tamil classes, and watches the Tamil cinema, it is able to maintain Tamil as its means of communication in its adopted nation.

d. Migrant Tamils who were not able to retain their Tamil language have been able to retain their Tamil identity by being staunch Hindus through their temples, festivals and rituals.

2. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.2. MELAKA CHITTIES

Descendants of the Tamil traders who came to Melaka in the 15th century and inter-married with local women during the Melaka Sultanate period (1400 -1511 AD), still live as the Melaka Chitty Community in Melaka, Malaysia. (Muthusamy & Karpaya, 2017). This community has adopted the native Malay language as its mother tongue. Its identity is retained through its

Saivite Hinduism, its festivals and rituals, and the temples and shrines that it had built and maintained through the centuries. The forefathers of this community migrated from India before the arrival of the colonial powers of the West.

2.3. TAMIL MIGRATION TO MAURITIUS

According to Muthusamy (*Mauritius Tamils*, 2010 p 32) the Tamil settlements started in Mauritius from 1719. The French brought the Tamils as handicraftsmen and construction workers when they controlled Mauritius. As the French also controlled Pondichery in India, they were able to bring in the Tamils, both as free settlers, as well as slaves, to work in Mauritius. Some Tamil merchants also settled in Mauritius on the invitation of the French.

When the British conquered Mauritius in 1810 from the French, there were as many as 9,000 Tamil soldiers in the British army. Many of them settled down in Mauritius. The colonial powers relied on the slaves to toil in their plantations, and when the Slavery Abolition Act was enforced in 1834 the British decided to bring in Tamils from India as indentured labourers to work in their sugar cane plantations.

While during the French rule more Tamils moved to Mauritius, during the British rule more Indians from other parts of India – Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra – came to Mauritius, but the Tamils were preferred for the sugar cane plantations. The indentured labour contract is one that is between the sugar cane plantation owners and the labourers – but in essence it treated the labourers more like slaves of the plantation owners. Agents were used to lure the workers from the villages in Tamil Nadu, with sweet promises.

Muthusamy (2010) cites, from 1874 to 1884, 33,926 Tamils had sailed from Chennai to Mauritius predominantly as indentured labourers. *Mauritius Almanach 1913* shows that a total number of male arrivals of workers from India between 1834 and 1912 was 346,145 while the number of female arrivals was 105,896 with 133,716 males and 33,854 females departing back to India during the same period.

Presently, the Tamils comprise 14.5% or 190,000 out of the Mauritian population of around 1,290,000. The north Indian Hindus are about 40% of the population, while there is also the Afro-Indians of 22%. While the word '*Hindu*' is used to denote the North Indians who use *Bhojpuri* as their means of communication, the Tamils distinguish themselves as from South India professing the *saivite* faith in Hinduism praying in their own temples built from the time of their arrival

in Mauritius. Unlike in India or Malaysia, the word 'Tamil' in Mauritius does not include one who has embraced other religions such as Islam or Christianity, but only the Hindu Tamils. This distinguishes them from the other North Indian Hindus in Mauritius.

While the Tamils who were brought into Mauritius during the French era were predominantly Christians, and in time adopted the local creole language as theirs, the Tamils who were brought to work in the plantations by the British were predominantly Hindus, and they brought along with them their religious beliefs that prompted them to build temples and shrines in the plantations that they were emplaced to work in. Till today the legacy of Tamil-Hindu Temple festivals has flourished to give this community a distinct identity in Mauritius (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2018).

There were attempts to have Tamil classes for their children from time to time on an *ad hoc* basis, depending on the availability of suitable persons capable of imparting the knowledge of Tamil. In the beginning, some of those who migrated had the skills to stage dramas and sing songs in Tamil. But the learning and teaching of Tamil were never formalised through any central body.

The fact that there were a bigger number of Indians from other parts of India who were brought by the British or came on their own to work in the various sectors in Mauritius, created a situation where there were more other Indians rather than the Tamils in this adopted country. As none was the majority, the local *creole* language that was already used by the earlier migrants became handy to all as their means of communication in Mauritius. It is no surprise that today 86.5% of Mauritians speak *creole*, with *Bhojpuri*, a localised form of Hindi is used by 5.3%. Since 1972, the Mauritian government ceased the practice of seeing its population by ethnicity and this has allowed the Tamils to compete equally with the other Mauritians in national matters, including the economic opportunities.

Although in the beginning the Tamil labourers in the plantations, living together in plantations, used the Tamil language to interact among themselves, for their interaction with those out of their plantations, they had to use *creole* out of necessity. Today most Tamils in Mauritius use the *Mauritian Creole* as their mother tongue, leaving their *saivite* Hindu faith and their Tamil-Hindu Temples to be their distinguishing identity.

After independence of Mauritius, Tamil is formally taught in about 100 Mauritian schools as Pupils' Own Language, and Tamil is also taught at the university level. Despite this step, most local Tamils are not able to converse in Tamil even in their homes.

Efforts to create an awareness to use the Tamil language in social interactions by some Tamil organisations are still ongoing, but such efforts are rather limited to songs at temples and social functions as the vast majority does not consider the Tamil language as having an economic value for its upward mobility, especially as the Tamils, who have made Mauritius their home, have received education to move out of the plantations and compete with other Mauritians in their workplace with the nation's policy of not identifying its citizens by their ethnicity.

2.4.TAMIL MIGRATION TO MALAYA

The first Tamils who settled in Melaka, in Malaya (Malaysia), during the *Melaka Sultanate* period (1400-1511 AD), were the followers of the Tamil traders who intermarried with local women, raised their families as staunch Hindus, and still survive as the *Melaka Chitty Community*. (Muthusamy & Karpaya, 2017)

This community has adopted the local Malay language as its language, and uses its own creole form of this language in its daily interactions. Tamil words of cultural and religious significance are retained in this form of language. And its identity as *Melaka Chitties* is retained through its *saivite* form of Hinduism and its temples and shrines complete with their festivals according to the Hindu calendar. This small community survived through the Portuguese, Dutch, as well as the British colonial periods to remain as a distinct Hindu community in Melaka. It has undergone a tremendous process of assimilation and acculturation with Malay, Javanese, and Chinese elements despite maintaining the Hindu practices.

Whereas the main wave of Tamil migration to Malaya began after the British took control of the Straits Settlements in 1824, and wanted to open up Malaya for coffee, sugar and later rubber plantations. Tamils were picked for indentured labour – as the case was for other British colonies.

The recruitment of labourers under the indentured system to Malaya between 1881 and 1890 as an example, saw more than 24,000 recruits from the Tamil districts of Nagappatinam, Madras, Tanjore, Madurai and Tiruchy arriving in Penang, as cited by *Janaky Raman Manickam (2009, p 61)*. Although the indentured labour recruitment was later replaced by

the *Kangani system* the arrivals were steady with some returning to their homeland after their contract period, as the return trip was sponsored by the employers. But many decided to stay back and continue working in the plantations. Most of such workers were Tamils, and this group relied on its mother tongue for its day-to-day communications.

There were other educated South Indians who came to Malaya as professionals – teachers, doctors, engineers, administrators, accountants and the like – and these educated South Indians were mostly Malayalees, with

some Tamils. The Sri Lankan Tamils joined these as all of them were proficient in English. The British used these educated Indians in the management of their various departments and plantations. This group used English in its communications with Tamil used only when dealing with the Tamil labourers.

S.Arasaratnam (1966) had given the breakdown of Tamils in comparison of the other South Indians in Malaya from 1921 till 1957, when Malaya became independent as follows:

COMMUNITY	1921	1931	1947	1957	
				MALAYA	SINGAPORE
TAMIL	387,597	514,959	460,985	556,453	78,228
MALAYALI	17,190	35,125	44,339	51,188	21,783
TELUGU		39,986	32,541	24,093	27,089
OTHER SOUTH INDIAN			15,968		
OTHER INDIANS		26,893	41,384	54,231	61,442
					24,073
TOTAL	471,666	624,009	599,616	696,172	124,084

The above data shows that the Tamils constitute a great majority of the Malaysian Indian population as its proportion varies from 88% in 1921, 91% in 1931, and 79% in 1957 in Malaya.

Currently, in independent Malaysia, the total estimated population in 2018 was 32.4 million as indicated by the *Department of Statistics on 31 July, 2018 through its Press Release*, with an estimated 2.01 million Malaysians of Indian origin. About 86% of the Indians are of Tamil origin.

In 1816, the Penang Free School conducted the first formal Tamil classes, and the Christian missionary bodies began organising Tamil classes in the Straits Settlements. Most were in towns with the aim of spreading Christianity.

Only in the early twentieth century, as *Sivachandralingam Raja (2016)* points out, the colonial government considered the establishment of Tamil schools as useful to maintain the Tamil workforce for a long period of time. Some planters started Tamil schools voluntarily. In 1912, when the Labour Code Ordinance required an estate, with at least 10 children of school age (defined as between the ages of 6 and 12), to provide schooling facilities, the planters were obliged to provide such facilities. But most of such schools were of poor standard.

The general attitude of planters was that these schools were to serve mainly to attract potential labourers and

to preserve the children of workers as future labourers. Some planters feared that the education given may create greater labour activism among the workers. They preferred to provide the *creches* that took care of the children rather than schools with the right facilities. Most were one-teacher schools with the elders in the estate taking such roles – with the curriculum covering reading, writing and arithmetic with some rudimentary natural sciences and morality.

But, in towns, some individuals and the missionaries founded Tamil schools with better facilities and teachers were brought from Tamil Nadu. In 1922 there were 6 Tamil schools sponsored by the urban communities in the Straits Settlements and 122 estate schools in the Federated Malay States with about 4,000 students. This number increased later to 235 Tamil schools in 1925 with 8,153 students. A small grant of \$6 per pupil was given by the government in 1930 with the appointment of an overseer in the Malayan Education Service to supervise the Tamil schools. In 1937 an official Inspector of Schools with knowledge of Tamil was appointed by the government. After the Japanese occupation, in 1946, the Malayan Union Council Paper No.153 was passed, under which six years of free primary education in Tamil schools was possible, and the enrolment of students in the Tamil schools increased. The Malayan Indian Congress formed in 1946, urged the government to provide pathways for the Tamil school children to pursue their secondary education.

Upon independence, the *Razak Report* on education accommodated the primary Tamil schools to teach the national curricula in Tamil and the students to move into the secondary schools through the Remove class. It also provided facilities to learn Tamil in the secondary schools, provided there are requests from 15 parents of students for their children to learn the language.

Although there were 720 Tamil schools in 1967, at present there are only 524 Tamil schools in the country, mostly with less than 100 students and with poor infrastructure. Many of these schools are in private land, and they do not get the full support of the government in allocations. But the government trains the teachers, pays the teachers, and provides student educational dues to these schools, although the physical developments of these schools are left to the community. Only a portion of the Tamil schools are fully aided by the government as these are in land owned by the government, and these schools are maintained by the government.

The statistics given by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia (*Quick Facts – MOE – 2017 & 2018*) confirms that there were 524 Tamil Primary schools with an enrolment of 81,483 pupils in 2017, showing a decreasing trend from 85,473 in 2015, and 83,343 in 2016, but with untiring efforts from the Tamil activists, the enrolment in 2018 has moved to 81,488 – a slight increase from 2017.

The Tamils have formed many organisations that use Tamil as a means of communication in Malaysia. Before independence there were two Tamil dailies, but today there are four Tamil dailies, with two dedicated radio stations for Tamil. Apart from some programmes in the government-run television, there are numerous Tamil channels through the *Astro* network for the viewers. For the Tamil cinema, Malaysia is an important market, and films are screened simultaneously in Tamil Nadu and Malaysia.

The renaissance in the Tamil language brought about by the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu, India, principally by *E.V.Ramasamy* and his disciples *C.N.Annadurai* and *M.Karunanithi*, had a great impact in Malaya, and the visits of these powerful orators in Tamil to Malaya, and later Malaysia, created a deep love of Tamil among the Tamils in Malaysia. Tamil, being a UNESCO recognised classical language with rich literary resources, has been a source of pride and passion to the Tamils.

Periodicals and books from Tamil Nadu had a strong influence, with the efforts of *Ko.Sarangapany* of

Singapore, the editor of *Tamil Murasu* daily in his organisation of the annual *Tamils' Festival* in the month of *Thai* in the Tamil calendar with invited Tamil literary orators from India. His effort to galvanise the Tamil youths in the Tamil Youth Bell Club throughout the nation created social awareness and a love towards the Tamil language among the youths. Many other Tamil language and cultural organisations sprung up in all locations with a Tamil presence.

The National Union of Plantation Workers had its own Tamil organ in *Sangamani* which gave the information on workers' matters to the plantation workers. The government's Ministry of Information have been issuing pamphlets in Tamil on national matters for the benefit of the Tamils in the country.

Thus, the Tamils, who form about eighty six percent of the Indian population in Malaysia, were able to withstand many obstacles and retain the standard Tamil as their means of communication mostly because the majority of them are descendants of the workers brought into Malaya in groups by the British, and the prevalence of the continuous influence of the *Tamil Renaissance* movement in Tamil Nadu.

After independence, the Malaysian government has recognised Tamil as the main Indian language and has incorporated the Tamil primary schools, the teaching and learning of Tamil in the secondary schools, as well as Tamil language 24 hour radio broadcasts, apart from Tamil programmes and news bulletins in the national television network.

3.THE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1. LIVING PROXIMITY AND THE RETENTION OF THE MOTHER-TONGUE

When many families of a particular ethnic group live within a neighbourhood, and interact regularly, its mother tongue continues to play a role. This situation changes when only men from a particular ethnicity begin to inter-marry local women who use the native language of the place; the language of communication in the home is usually the local language of the woman as the man would already have had a grasp of the local language during his trading or business activities in the locality. This can also happen to families of any migrant group, especially when they are in a small number and scattered in a new locality, as the native language in the area will be necessary for their day-to-day conversation in society, even if the mother-tongue is used at their homes.

The *Melaka Chitty* experience, (Paramasivam/Narayanasamy (2017) illustrates the former, and it is not dissimilar to the experience of the first Tamils who were brought to Mauritius by the French in the eighteenth century. These Tamils adopted the local creole language, as it was the main means of communication. The retention of the Tamil/Hindu cultural/religious words in the *creole Malay* language by the *Melaka Chitties* and the Tamils in Mauritius in their *Mauritian Creole* language can be seen clearly today.

In the sugar-cane plantations in Mauritius, during the British period, a large number of Tamils lived as communities where the Tamil language was used for interactions in the early stages. Whereas those who were scattered in different parts of Mauritius for their livelihood, had to interact with the locals and other migrants from different parts of India who did not understand Tamil, and the local *creole* language played the role. Even when there were not many inter-marriages with local women as in the case of the *Melaka Chitties* this became a reality in Mauritius.

Muthusamy (2008.) in his discussion on the most frequent motivation for codeswitching between languages, lists *Communication, Conceptual, Emphasis, Interlocution* and *Lexicon* as important factors that come into play. He says, '*Interlocutory factors signal the importance of the participants for the codeswitching events with attention to literacy, status, solidarity, group membership and audience. CONCEPTUAL factors in turn show the extent to which concepts, their familiarity or lack of familiarity with them, may induce a bilingual speaker to switch; hence, conceptual experience in one or the other language, misunderstanding and semantic load do all contribute.*'

Hence, the Tamil cultural concepts were retained in the *Mauritian creole* as well as the *Melaka Chitty's Malay creole*. In both cases the Tamils moved into the realm of the other dominant languages, and the adoption of the local languages with appropriate codeswitching of cultural and religious terms allowed the *Mauritian Tamils* and the *Melaka Chitties* to retain their identities through time through their adopted mother-tongue.

Initially, when large numbers of Tamil families were settled in rubber estates in Malaya and in the sugar cane plantations in Mauritius, their commune-style living allowed them to use the Tamil language in their interactions. This was also true in the labour lines in the urban and semi-urban areas where a large number of Tamil labourers had their homes in Malaya. Tiroumalechetty's (2017) assertion that '*The central*

market, dominated by the Tamil merchants, provided a sustained interest in speaking Tamil' in Mauritius, is a moot point to note.

In Mauritius, Tamil youths from the plantations migrated to the urban areas due to their upward mobility through education, and such moves had shifted them out of the Tamil speaking environment. Mauritian *creole* with a sprinkling of Tamil words became handy as the mother tongue to the Mauritian Tamils leaving their Hindu religion, identified as *Tamil Religion*, as their main identity.

The living proximity was important in earlier times as the electronic communication channels, and even the print media were limited. Currently the rise in these media keeps the spoken language close to even single families living far away in the midst of other language users as the family members can still listen to, and speak their mother-tongue from wherever they are.

Compared to the Mauritius Tamils, the Malayan Tamils had more organised Tamil schools, societies and movements that used the Tamil language, especially in the West Coast of Malaya, including Singapore. The Tamil traders, businessmen and labourers in the urban areas were also active in using Tamil as opposed to those Tamils who were English educated professionals, government administrators, and plantation administrators who generally preferred the English language as their means of communication – even in their homes - and chose the English school as the preferred choice for their children. The effects of this division have been far-reaching, and can be felt to this day.

When the estates in Malaysia were sub-divided, and many Tamil families in the estates were displaced, and had to re-launch their lives in semi urban and squatter areas, the electronic media and the communication facilities kept the use of the Tamil language intact within their families. As an example, for families that subscribe to the *Astro* television packages in Malaysia, multiple Tamil programmes are available 24 hours a day to keep them in the world of Tamil, if they so wish. There are two radio channels that have programmes throughout the day in the Tamil language. The various apps in the mobile telecommunications in Tamil further strengthen this position.

Whereas, in Mauritius, the volume of interest in Tamil programmes is not high enough for commercial providers of such facilities to emerge. According to the figures given in *statsmauritius.govmu.org*, only 7,000 Mauritians claim to be able to speak Tamil at home at present. For Mauritians, they have to make special efforts to organise and participate in Tamil speaking-

listening environments, although it must be noted that most Tamils in Mauritius have a love towards Tamil as their ancestral language as expressed by *Muthusamy* (2010).

The other important factor is the single national identity policy in Mauritius without any racial recognition. This policy has brought about competition in all sectors on equal footing, and this has naturally diminished the desire to cling on to ethnic linguistic pursuits.

In Malaysia, its citizens are still classified by their ethnic origins, even in their identification papers. Affirmative policies for the dominant race have resulted in the minorities to strive to keep their identities, including their language and culture as a mark of passive resistance and resilience.

3.2.DOE TEACHING OF TAMIL IN SCHOOLS GUARANTEE ITS USAGE IN THE COMMUNITY?

Tiroumalechetty (2014), while discussing Tamil education in Mauritius says, 'The recruitment of Tamil teachers by Government on regular basis started from 1964,' and further mentions, 'from 1981 to 1987 students were not recruited for the Indian languages due to over recruitment in the previous years.' A total of 258 Tamil teachers were trained between 1964 and 1996 and in 1997, of the 84,186 children who studied Indian languages in the Mauritius primary schools, only 7,916 studied Tamil.

Uma Allaghery (2018) says that currently the teaching of Tamil in schools in Mauritius is to safeguard the ethnic identity of the Tamils in Mauritius, but it does not really fit in any of the usual approaches: first language/mother tongue instruction or second language or foreign language teaching and learning. She says, 'There is no denying the fact that the majority of Mauritian Tamils do not acquire Tamil as first language/mother tongue as during the course of time the Tamil language which had the status of mother tongue among the Tamil immigrants had gradually shifted to second language owing to different influential factors. It is considered to be an ancestral language to safeguard the ethnic identity of the Tamils in Mauritius....'

Many children from Tamil families learn Tamil only in school, as there is no immediate environment outside the classroom – including their homes – available for them to speak or write Tamil. The context that they live in does not encourage them to use Tamil

continuously as there is the overall influence of the mother tongue – *the Mauritian creole*. A sprinkling of Tamil words relating to food, prayer and clothing are used within their *creole* language. For the temple rituals, Tamil prayers and songs are written in the Romanised form and duly rendered even without knowledge of the Tamil language.

Uma Alaghery (2018) contends that '*Tamil is not associated with most of the career goals of the Tamil population*' and, '*Tamil is appreciated as part of their religious identity as well, since Tamils have their own sectarian temples and rituals wherein the use of Tamil plays an important part, whether they understand Tamil or not. ...It is the culture that is predominant and gives the identity as Tamils of Mauritius. So we can deduce that Tamil serves as an ethnic identity, but the knowledge of Tamil language is not an integral part of this identity.*'

There is a difference in spoken and written Tamil. Tamil learners who live in a Tamil environment will be exposed to both the forms. In Mauritius, *Uma Allaghery* (2018) says that the Tamil language syllabus seeks to accomplish both the spoken and written forms through their lessons from Grade 1 to Grade 9 as the home front is absent to aid the teaching of formal Tamil in the schools. In the absence of motivational factors for the proper learning and use of the Tamil language in society, it is a herculean task for the teachers of Tamil in this setting.

In Malaysia, the *Melaka Chitty* experience is the same. Although some of the children of the *Chitties* attended Tamil classes in the 1960's, *Muthusamy and Karpaya* (2017) note that it was short-lived due to the non-conducive home environment. Even in the environment of the *Chitty Village* where the *Chitties* live as a community, the impetus to learn the Tamil language was not there. This situation is similar to the Mauritian Tamil experience.

But, the situation among the Tamils who migrated during the British occupation of Malaya, especially those from the labour class who lived in commune styles, and continued to learn and use the Tamil language, weathered many obstacles to keep both the spoken as well as the written forms of Tamil alive in their midst.

Only 55% of the Tamil parents in Malaysia send their children to Tamil primary schools. There are provisions to teach the Tamil language if there are requests from at least 15 parents in the National Primary Schools and at the National Secondary Schools in Malaysia. Pupils' Own Language classes

in the national schools are attended by some Tamil students as an exposure and contact with formal Tamil with few taking the language in the national examinations.

The Malaysian government has recognised the Tamil Primary Schools and train teachers for these schools through the Teacher Training Colleges in the country. The National Curriculum Department has Tamil language officers to continuously update the syllabi, while the National Examinations Syndicate prepares the national examinations for the Tamil language and Tamil Literature subjects. Graduate Tamil teachers for the secondary schools are also specially trained by the Teacher Training Colleges and the Sultan Idris Teaching University.

Some secondary schools still do not have full-time residential teachers to teach Tamil, and rely on part-time teachers to play the role. This coupled with the problems associated with the land-ownership status of the 524 primary Tamil schools, have prompted some Tamil activists to claim that the Tamil education is being sidelined in the country. *Normardhiah Ibrahim (2018)* on her paper entitled, '*A case of Tamil education in Malaysia: Is Tamil education being sidelined?*' says that '*Tamil language is not being sidelined or marginalised in Malaysia, but rather the language is being deprioritised by the responsible parties*'....and concludes '*The intricacies of the problem are presumed to be rooted in the fact that we are dealing with the notion of minority language in a heterogeneous country.*' The Tamil community has to shoulder much of the responsibilities to keep the Tamil language education vibrant in the nation.

Pachaibalan, N., a Tamil teacher and an activist through many Tamil literary organisations in Malaysia, through an article to the Tamil press (*Tamil Osai, Tamil Nanban 27 January, 2019*), states that annually about 16,000 Tamil students move into the secondary schools in Malaysia, and only about 12,000 of them take the Tamil Language paper at the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* or the 'O' Level examination. Further he states that at one time there were less than 500 students taking the *Tamil Literature* paper; whereas, with the efforts of the Tamil activists and organisations, the number rose to 4,500 in 2007, although the number is decreasing at present that needs proactive actions from Tamil lovers in Malaysia.

The interesting fact is that there are no provisions to teach *Tamil Literature* as a subject in schools, and the Tamil language teachers volunteer to teach literature and prepare students for the examinations (Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2016). Some teachers volunteer to

teach students from many different schools and prepare them for the examinations. The activists target 5,000 students per year for the *Tamil Literature* paper that has components of Malaysian Tamil literary creations. In every state Tamil teachers have volunteered to do this as a service, with many organisations donating the textbooks to the students who choose the subject.

Rather than the Ministry of Education's policies, the Tamil community's involvement and activism have kept the cause of Tamil education alive in Malaysia. Currently there is a movement sponsored by Tamil organisations and the Tamil media to encourage the Tamil Malaysians to enrol their children in Tamil schools as an effort to retain their mother tongue, culture and identity. Many competitions and programmes are organised for the benefit of Tamil children in the country using the Tamil language by the Tamil organisations in Malaysia.

3.3. SOCIAL FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE THE USE AND THE LEARNING OF TAMIL

In Malaysia, temple functions that assemble the Tamil devotees in all parts of the country create opportunities to use Tamil in a very informal setting. Wedding receptions, and Tamil cultural shows take place regularly for Tamils to gather and interact. *Little India* in the major towns and cities in Malaysia give the Tamils a chance to gather to communicate in Tamil regularly (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016).

Tamil cinema in the *cineplexes* attract many Tamils, while in every city and town, there are many Tamil eateries where Tamil is in use daily. Then there are the numerous Tamil channels in the television, some from Tamil Nadu, India, which allow the Tamil families to be in a world of Tamil. The 24-hour radio programmes in Tamil keep those in outdoors connected with Tamil, with many opportunities to interact with the presenters in Tamil through the mobile phone.

Tamil applications are available in the hand-phone today, and there are many Tamils who use these facilities to engage with others. The Tamil print press in Malaysia gives ample opportunities for those who wish to write in Tamil for publication, and there is a vibrant Tamil Writers' Association that gives support and training to budding writers in Tamil.

Henrard K (2000) contended, '*Bilingual education may be needed to allow linguistic minorities to fully integrate into the school system and compete equally in society. In this manner the rights for minorities strengthen the nation-building project, as members of minorities see their interests well-served and willingly*

accept the legitimacy of the nation and their integration (not assimilation) within it. It is obvious that in Malaysia, the national policies are aimed at *integration*, while in Mauritius the policies are aimed more towards *assimilation*. 'Unity in diversity' is an often repeated slogan in Malaysia.

The affirmative policies towards the *bumiputras* in Malaysia, that does not give real equality among the races, have a bearing on the vigour with which Tamil is being used for identification by the Tamils in Malaysia (Muthusamy et al., 2014). The government has the MITRA programme, which was previously known as SEDIC, specifically to help to uplift the socio-economic status of the Indians in Malaysia, under the Prime Ministers Department. Most activities of this unit are in the Tamil language, as the Tamils are the target group.

In Mauritius, the Tamils are seen as a specific group during the *Thaipusam* celebrations, which is a national holiday, but except for the songs and music, all interactions are in *Mauritian creole*, the mother-tongue of the majority Mauritians.

Mauritian Tamils do love the Tamil language, and appreciate it as their ancestral language. Many of them understand the beauty and the richness of the Tamil language and literature judging by the manner they respond to Tamil visitors to their land (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2018).

Muthusamy (2010) says, *'Many (Mauritian) scholars praise Tamil as a sweet language. The spoken Tamil mainly exhibits this quality. There are dialectal differences in the spoken Tamil variety in Tamil Nadu. In Malaysia, spoken Tamil is refined in the estates but in towns, many multi-lingual words are mixed up with the spoken forms. In Mauritius, two forms of Tamil are found, the pure Tamil variety used by the trained professionals and the variety mixed with words from other languages. People following both these forms try to speak in Tamil only when they come across Tamils from other countries like India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. In the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, to teach the degree course, they have the practice of conversing in conventional Tamil. Otherwise, when two Tamils meet, they use the Creole language only.'*

All the non-governmental Tamil organisations in Mauritius conduct meetings in the Creole language and Tamil is scarcely used. Muthusamy (2010) says, *'Organisations like Tamil League, Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation and Mauritius Union of Tamil Associations are fighting for the cause (of reviving the spoken form of Tamil) in an organised way. The*

evening schools functioning at the temples are also engaged in teaching Tamil. But there are many practical difficulties in bringing back to force the use of the spoken form of Tamil.'

Parwathy, N., (Makkal Osai, 13.1.2019), in her research article entitled *'Tamil usage among the young Tamil Malaysians'* cited that 74.8% of youths spoke Tamil at home, with 23.9% using English with only 0.7% using Malay. 63.4% of youths spoke Tamil to Tamil neighbours with 33.0% using English. In religious settings, 83.7% spoke Tamil to other Tamils while 11.9% used English. In the survey done in Gombak, a semi-urban area with many Tamil families, the research was based on 109 Tamil youths, it was found that those from professionally successful families preferred the use of English at home. It is interesting to note that the choice of Malay as the preferred language at home is not significant – it may be different in rural areas (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016). In Tamil eateries, 89.9% youths speak Tamil.

Nevertheless, significantly, the languages used in official interactions by the Tamil youths are, 33.7% Tamil, 28.2% English, 34.1% Malay and 1.6% Mandarin. Among the youths interviewed, 74% claimed to be able to speak Tamil well, with 24% able to speak a little while 2% claimed that they could understand, but are unable to speak Tamil. This writer has urged the Tamils in Malaysia to take enough steps to safeguard the spoken Tamil as a means to keep the language alive in Malaysia.

3.4. RETENTION OF THE TAMIL IDENTITY WITHOUT THE TAMIL LANGUAGE

In Mauritius, the Tamil identity is being retained through the Temples and the *Saivite* Hindu (Tamil) religion. The fact the word *Tamil* excludes anyone not professing the religion keeps this community apart from the numerically superior other Hindus from Northern India.

Although they do not speak Tamil fluently, the Tamil language is taught in schools right up to the university – with limited economic value – as an attachment to the Tamil roots of this community. They revere the Tamil language as their ancestral language (Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2017).

An incident that illustrates their love towards their ancestral language happened in 1998 when the Mauritian government issued new currency notes. In the Mauritian currency notes three languages appear – English, Tamil and Hindi in that order. This was altered in the new notes with Hindi preceding Tamil.

The Global Nonviolent Action Database (1998) shows that even though the Hindu population is 40% compared to about 14% of Tamils in Mauritius, the Tamils organised a protest, claiming precedence on the banknotes based on traditional practices, and further claiming to have arrived on the island prior to the members of the Hindu community. The protests held in strategic locations gathered thousands of Tamils spontaneously with representations made to the President of Mauritius. Tamil members of Parliament threatened to resign from the positions, if the new notes are not withdrawn. On November 18, one month after the release of the new notes, the government decided to withdraw the notes, and reprinted the new versions with Tamil in its place, with a cost of 50 million Mauritian Rupees or more than two billion USD.

Hence, the identity of the Tamils in Mauritius is retained through the Tamil religion, with their ancestral Tamil language retained in their education system, and symbolically in their banknotes. But there is no denial that the Tamils are caught in the process of assimilation into the Mauritian melting pot, as Mauritians (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2017).

In Malaysia, the identity of the Tamils is strongly maintained through the spoken Tamil language, the position of Tamil in the Malaysian Education System, the media, and the activism of the Tamil organisations. Further the race-based political parties, and the race-based policies are theoretically aimed in integrating the various races into Malaysians, but have been responsible to create the '*resistance and resilience*' forces to the fore.

Ravindra K.Jain (2011) referred to the predominantly Tamil stirring in Kuala Lumpur on 25 November, 2007 known as HINDRAF, '*the invisible Indian minority was really not that non-existent; in other words, this turbulence, though technically Indian, was a wake-up call for the non-Indians also.*' This rally put forth many neglected Tamil matters to the fore, and the setting up of SEDIC and later MITRA as units under the Prime Minister's Department to address these grievances is evidently in the direction of keeping the Tamil identity alive in Malaysia.

Hence, the circumstances in Malaysia allow the Tamil language to flourish as a social language although its economic value is limited. Due to passive resistance to official policies, there is a strong resilience among the Tamils to keep their identity intact, and the fear that they will lose their language – as in some other countries – have made them more steadfast in their responses.

4. CONCLUSION

The spoken form of the language is important for any language to survive as a living language in society. Our discussion has shown how in Mauritius, the Tamil language has lost its battle, and is considered as an ancestral language with symbolic retention through the Hindu-Tamil religion.

Among the Melaka Chitties in Malaysia, Tamil is definitely their ancestral language as they have adopted the Malay-Creole language as their mother tongue. Their identity is the Hindu religion and their temples in Gajah Berang, Melaka.

Whereas among the descendents of Tamils who arrived after the British took over Malaya in 1824, efforts to retain the Tamil language were made by many individuals and organisations earnestly, due to the political climate that engulfed Malaya, and later Malaysia. Although as a minority language, Tamil does not have much economic value, it is still used widely, both in its spoken as well as its written forms. While there is a growing Tamil population, that was educated in English, in the colonial period, and later, in Malay, after independence, veering away from the use of Tamil due to economic considerations, it is undeniable that the majority of the Tamil Malaysians still consider the Tamil language as their main identity.

This discussion establishes the assertion that formal education of a language alone will not suffice, if the spoken form is not alive within the community for its continued existence in a locality.

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