

Thaipusam & Kavadi Ceremonial Procession & Vows in Diasporic Context

Beesanna. T

University of Hyderabad

Abstract: Scattering of Tamils across the globe is not of a recent phenomenon. This scattering was started with cultural trade and later with slavery in age old days. However this trend was changed with the imperial system introducing new labour system through which large scale human migration has occurred across the new Islands. Indentured labour was one such system provided labour migration during the early 19th century under colonial authority. Abolition of slavery in 1834 engendered the labour requirement which ultimately caused mass migration from India to the British colonies.

Today Indians form a largest community in all parts of the world. This particular research explores the ways in which Indians have migrated to Malaya peninsular and will try to make an attempt to understand the process of Tamil Migration from South India to Malaysia under various migratory systems under the purview of colonial regulations. The vital aspect of this study is to make a detail examination of the Tamil Distinctive cultural festival known as *Thaipusam* and proceeding to understand *Kavadi* ritual procession.

Keywords: Diaspora, Hinduism, Indentured Labour, Kavadi, Migration, Murugan, Tamils.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Diaspora may well be regarded as International phenomena. It has its presence in more the hundred countries across the globe. The South India Tamils are conspicuous in Malaya archipelago much prior to the British colonialism. A millennium back Malaya peninsula was occupied by a Chola kingdom in 11th century. Since then Tamils have spread their culture and established their trading guilds. The viable cultural and trade relations have continued till modern times. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a large chunk of Tamils have migrated under British rule through Bay of Bengal to South East Asia. Most of them were from Salem, Madurai, Chengalpattu districts of Tamil Nadu and were boarded at Nagapattinam port and landed at Penang in Malaysia.

Today Indians form a largest community in all parts of the world. The research explores the ways in which Indians have migrated, particularly to Malaya peninsular and will try to make an attempt to understand the process of Tamil Migration from South India to Malaysia under various migratory systems and colonial regulations. The vital aspect of this study is to make a detail examination of the Tamil Distinctive cultural festival known as *Thaipusam* and proceeding to understand *Kavadi* ritual procession.

The Indian labours who came to Malaysia were mostly Tamils from Madras. The British brought them from India under the Indenture system i.e. on contract based. They worked as slaves on the plantations for growing commercial crops like tea, coffee, rubber, sugarcane and spices which were of great source of revenue for the British colonial power. Besides these, there were many others who worked in the railways and public works department. Later clerks, traders, doctors, teachers, lawyers and other professionals came to Malay Peninsula in search of employment and higher wages. As a result of the emigration of the Indians, Malaysia which at the beginning of the 19th century had mainly a Malay population had become at the time of independence an ethnically mixed society. This completely transformed the racial, ethnic and cultural character of Malay Peninsula making it the most diversified and plural society in Southeast Asia.

The overseas emigration has become so wide spread from the middle of the 19th century. With the expansion of colonialism and western capitalism during last two centuries, a large scale movements and settlements of people from Indian subcontinent into Malaysia. Continuous links with the region and with the settled Indians have supplemented a new arrival and settlement of various groups of people from India. Almost all the ethnic Indians in Malaysia are the product of the process initiated by the western colonialism and capital expansion and trade during last two hundred years. They are still very much part of the process at an every respective stage imprinted by the colonial power.

British colonial rule has facilitated the movement of Indians to Malaysia. Their arrival, distribution and final settlement of Indians are closely related to colonial history. The initial large scale migration has consisted of South Indian labours that were mostly unskilled but later on it was professional and non labour Indians.

Unlike in other countries the process of integration and assimilation of Indians in Malaysia has happened at very fast. In Malaysia and Singapore, Indians have been recognized as an important political group, thus allowing integration to take place selectively between Malayan and Indian Muslims. Like in all other countries also in Malaysia the newer generation particularly local born have become integrated more closely through education and economic participation. Indians despite living in other countries have given much priority to their mother tongue and have learnt their ancestral language for socio economic and cultural purposes. Thus, Tamil Punjabi and Sindhi are still maintaining their culture and language. Nevertheless, Indian community in Malaysia speaks English as their link medium for commercial and economic activity.

There were four important migration streams, each of which was associated with specific economic roles. In the first, the pre-colonial migration, in which there was significant Indian mercantile and religious travel across the world surpassing Indian regions. Indian culture, especially Hindu and Buddhist traditions as a cultural system was established in South East Asia and considered to be a dominant external cultural influence in the Island regions. With the available records it is believed that the Indian migration was much prior to the arrival of Europeans in South East Asia and they were comparatively very smaller in number than Indians. The second phase of migration was the Indentured labour system, consisted mainly of Tamils and Telugus who went to work in plantations and some were worked in construction of roads and railway lines and the ports. The third stream of migration from India comprised predominantly of North Indians who were recruited mainly for the police and security services. The fourth phase comprised of traders, Indian merchants and the *Chettians*. North Indian migrants were relatively less in number than the South Indians.

In last hundred years nearly two million ethnic Tamils from South India were exiled mainly to British colonies. This colonial migration of south Indian labourers was typically typified as indentured and *Kangani* labour migration under government regulations.

Tamil workers were sent mainly to British colonies under the supervision of Tamil headmen. The labour recruitment from rural villages and supervision on the plantations were given to such headmen known as *Kangani* or *Maistry*. Such a migration was largely flown through Bay of Bengal and reached South East Asia. Such a paternalistic flows under the purview of British officials helps us to understand and analyze labour migration. Not known much about pre colonial Indian migration but the cultural dispersion across distant regions and distribution of various communities such as linguistic and lower castes offers a better indication of the continuous migration of within the Indian subcontinent. Taking into concern the geographical region of Tamil and its socio ecological composition of the population from the last century onwards gives a clear picture of a strong flow of immigration, along with a significant number of Telugu population has also moved overseas.

According to Nicholas Tarling (1992) India's contacts with Malaya goes back to the pre-Christian era. However, despite the historical continuum of the Indian overseas migration to Malaya and their cultural contact to ancient India, the number of the Indians in Malay was not much significant. The large chunk of Indians came during the colonial era. Today 1.6 million Indians in Malaysia are either immigrants or descendents of the recent immigrants. The same view has expressed by Arasaratnam(1970) that the long history of the Indian migration to Malaya made a easy way to the recent phase of continuous association of Indians with Malaya. Even before the Christian era, it was Bay of Bengal which brought both the economies and cultures and its people closer.

There were some differences between the pre modern and modern migration of Indians to Malaysia. The basic difference could be that earlier India supplied goods while in the later period it primarily supplied labour. In the past the movement of the people was insignificant but the goods and ideas were predominant. In case of modern times, the movement of the

people was to serve the interests of a third party. The cultural spread and its influence through Indian traders, merchants, their settlements and from the religious rituals and ceremonies adopted and deeply embedded in Malayan culture, despite Malaysia being an Islamic state.

This study analyses the role and status of Indians in Malaysian economy and society. This analysis is as historical, from the colonial era and continuing after independence, as well as contemporary. In studying the problems of plantation workers, this study locates them in the global context of the plantation economy.

Thus, the commercial and political connections with Malaya many Indians have been settled there. For instance, a sub-urban city of Malacca called Kampong Kling was occupied by Indians where many settled as teachers, petty traders, goldsmiths and craftsmen. There Tamil Muslims had their own mosque and settled around it. Therefore the area is also known as Kampong Palli. I mean while this area of Indian population have met with Malayan population and became a permanent part of Malaysia. Likewise Hindu of this place came to be commonly known as Malacca Chettiars, as they are prolific in engaging with commercial occupations. Indians had retained their religious and cultural identity. Indians have strengthened their relation with Malaysia by a continuous immigration from the Coromandel Coast. Tamils being the largest population living in Malaysia had continued their literary language as their mother tongue and their children were educated in Tamil. Thus, their coming generations would keep in touch with culture and age-old traditions.

A classic example of the blending of the Malay and the Tamil Islamic traditions can be noted in the work of eminent Malay writer Munshi Abdullah who belonged to the early 19th century. He was from a family of mixed Arab, Tamil, and Malay descent that had been settled in Malacca for three generations. He was educated in Arabic, Tamil, and Malay, and made significant contributions to Malay literature. It is equally important to know the cultural background of the Indian immigrants. During colonial time there are two major ports in India from where the Indian laborers were shipped to plantation countries. One was Madras which sent mainly Tamil and Telugu speaking people and the other one was Calcutta which sent mainly Hindi speaking people. Besides these there were many passenger Indians and traders who came to Malaya Peninsular. Over the years Hinduism has been a subject for many changes fostered by a range of factors. Religious innovations including revival of ritualism, continuous migration and incorporating the new landscapes, political shifts, and new religious reform movements.

Little tradition incorporates village deities and were brought to Malaysia in a manner of speech (language) by low caste groups. They built shrines and temples mostly dedicated for female goddess which reflects the village or the region of origin. The most popular goddess is Mariamman, a goddess of health and rain. Animal sacrifice plays a major role in the festival celebrations, in Angami Hindu worship vegetarian is offered to the deities this where exactly both the traditions are completely differed¹.

Murugan is a phenomenal South Indian Tamil deity. About this God Zvebil describes in two fundamental points. Murugan as a composite deity and the components are apparently comparable with different ethnicities. Indian Historian and scholar Nilakanta Sastri wrote about this particular god as "transparently indigenous Tamil deity known as Murugan or Velan". Ancient Tamil corpus literary texts such as Paripatal, Thirumukurupattai, and Silappathikaram Pattuppattu narrate many events ascribing Lord Murugan. The affection of early Tamils for this deity was such that he figured even in the grammatical illustration.

Indians or people of Indian origin were the most prolific merchant, highly educated, shrewd businessmen, hard working and affluent groups in Malaysian society. In formal political sphere, their participation is negligible although one cannot completely disown the secret thread between politics and economics. In fact the most important aspect about the Indian Diaspora particularly South Indian Tamils in Malaysia is their social compactness, cultural resilience, despite the division within socio-cultural, and at outside, under the dominating assimilation of native Malaysian's and Chinese culture.

Scattering of Tamils across the globe is not of a recent phenomenon. This scattering started with trade and later with slavery in age-old days. However this trend was changed with the imperial system introducing new labour system through which large scale human migration has occurred. Indentured labour was one such system provided labour migration.

¹ The non Agamic temples are not built according to the agamic styles. The Idol inside Sanctumsanctoriam of the temple is made with simply cement but in the Agamic temples the idol mostly made of with black granite.

during the early 19th century under colonial authority. Abolition of slavery in 1834 engendered the labour requirement which ultimately caused mass migration from India to the British colonies

The indentured migrants from India have left their home on a contract signed for a precise period, and the terms of contract varied between the colonies. Agreement consists of the nature of work in plantation, remuneration, food and return passage to home after the completion of work period etc. But very few have returned home, by 1870 not more than 20 percent have returned to their home. However, this has changed by the early 20th century, when every two had migrated, one of them returned.

The South India Tamils are conspicuous in Malaya archipelago much prior to the British colonialism (H. G. Quaritch Wale, 1940). A millennium back Malaya peninsula was occupied by a Chola kingdom in 11th century. Since then Tamils have spread their culture and established their trading guilds in the region. This viable culture and trade relations have continued till the modern times. During 18th and 19th century, a large chunk of Tamils have migrated under British rule through Bay of Bengal to South East Asia.

Most of them were from Salem, Madurai, Chengalpattu districts of Tamil Nadu and they were boarded at Nagapattinam port and landed at Penang in Malaysia. There are many literary and archaeological evidences shown the sharing activities between South India and Malaysia which dates back to 2000 years. However, until 19th century Tamils had not been much conspicuous in Malayan archipelago. Since early 18th century Malaysia has experienced strong south Indian culture many south Indian merchant guilds were established in many places. Most prominent migrant merchant groups among early Tamils were Chittyars. There were regular sailings between Penang and Coromandal coast such as Nagapattanam and Nagore, from where the south Indians have migrated. They were temporary migrants came to earn and leaving after saving some money. Most of them have returned and some were also settled permanently and married from Malaya families. The Tamil Muslims who came through Coromandal coast were exclusively known as “Chulias”. By the end of 19th century those who have settled in Malaysia had assimilated into Malaya community constituting a separate group called Jawi Pekan. Malaya writer Munshi Abdhulla in his work has given a classical description of the Malaya and Tamil traditions (Parvati Raghuram pp.53). In 1940s, Indians were about 14 percent of the Malaya’s population. But, by 2000 the number rose to 1.8 million, represented 7.7 per cent of the Malaysian total population of 21.89 million. In which approximately nine tenths of Indians may be classified as of south Indian origin and remaining from north India.

Today Indians living in Malaysia constitutes nearly ten per cent of the country’s total population. The growth of the Indian population in this country has been spectacular with considerable fluctuations. The proportion of Indians in the Malayan populations increased steadily till the First World War and from then it generally maintained its level until it was affected by the great depression, governments ban on labour immigration and the depredation of japans occupation. During the 1947-57 decade, significant increase in the Indian population.

However, following growing stabilization of the indian and other populations, the proportion of Indians in the populations of such states too gradually began to settle down to the overall Malayan norms. Thus, the proportion of Indians in the total population of Singapore has been about seven percent since the beginning of the 1970s and in Malaysia between 10 to 11 percent.

The spread of Indians in Malaya and its economic development went hand in hand with the expression of trade, transport lines, plantation industry and especially rubber. Thus the main concentration of Indians had been in the rubber zone of Malayan and remaining are primarily plantation workers. At present more than half the total Indians are estimated to be urban dwellers, the significant point to note about the urban –rural structure of the Indian population is that while the proportion of urban dwellers in the total Indian population has been steadily increasing that of the estate inhabitants in the rural segment has been gradually declining.

2. RELIGION & CELEBRATION OF FESTIVALS

Religion is a binding factor for People of Indian Origin (PIO) residing in Malaysia and may well be so for Indians in other parts of the world. There is a ferociously upheld perception within the Malaysian Indian community that switching religions is tantamount to discarding one’s own identity, will be considered an ultimate betrayal of the ancestral lineage. One ceases to be Indian once one embraces Islam. One ceases to be Punjabi once one practices Buddhism or Christianity. Switching religions is taboo amongst the PIO and is a cause for expulsion from the basic family unit and ultimately, the

cultural group altogether. Generation after generation of PIOs guard the religions they were born into., to maintain first and foremost, as they believe, the religion itself, second, family ties; third, the gene pool of a particular Indian sub-group and fourth, the larger identity which is linked to survival as a cultural group in a predominantly Muslim country.

This inherent fear so ingrained in Indian families is explored in this paper through the analysis of perceptions and personal histories of selected PIO's born and bred in Muslim dominated Malaysia. A persistent trend is observed of PIOs, stifled by the Indian community's iron-like grip on its members, whereby they tend to shed their Indian identity once the birth religion is abandoned. Reasons for such changes in cultural behavior and its impacts on the individual as well as the Malaysian Indian community are a core focus.

Hindus arrival in Malaysia was not a sudden occurrence but it's a gradual process which may have begun long back in the history. With monsoon seasonal sailings, few ships from India to Malayan coast might be institutionalized a small trade across the native settlements along the Malayan coast. Once the goods selling was finished they had to ship back to India within that year.

The immigrant trader who is settled there in Malaya was treated by natives as a person of prestige, and considered par equal in position of a local ruler, because of his wealth potential power. There was a good rapport between Indian Hindu traders and the local ruler; this apparently led to the acceptance of Hindu ideas, ideas of kingship, and an introduction of Hindu ceremonial practices. However, Hinduism in Malaysia has developed in the complete absence of monasteries and Hindu religious learning centers which are considered as a main traditional source for Hinduism. Orthodox Brahmin castes have shaped Hindu scriptures, Mythology and patterns of worship in India. However, as vadiville belle rightly opined out that Malaysian Hinduism has historically been dominated by Dravidian folk cultures or the so called "little traditions". These little traditions characterized with folk beliefs based on Tantrism and animal sacrifices. These folk traditions of Hinduism are prevailed at every level of Malayan Hindu society irrespective of castes and educated elite strata of people.

Like in urban areas the temples structures are built even at the villages in the rural districts of the peninsula. These temples became a centre for all the socio cultural and ritual practices of hindus. Hindu religious activities were regulated under the purview of temple authorities constituted an emergent elite Tamil groups to whom the social responsibilities and leadership was attributed. These elite trading groups cultivated cultural model of their homeland and they have established coherent religious social institutions in the colonial society.

Evidently there are many architectural manifestations of sacred places, Hindu Temples and Durghas in Malaysia. A distinctive style of South Indian Islam has shaped the sacred landscapes of Malayan straits. Today there is a big Durgha (shrine) in Penang and also in Singapore which were built subsequently one in 1801 and the other one 1820. Both of these shrines stands today as a replica of Nagore Durgha built in the name of Saint Shahul Hamid in Tamil Nadu. This particular Durgha also had an influence on Jamae Masid or Big Mosque the largest Tamil worshipping place in Singapore. These sacred structures are not just worshipping places but became centre for Socio economic and cultural activities the devotees beyond Tamil Muslim community. Chettyars, prosperous trading Tamil community began constructing Hindu temples in the early 19th century. In 1827 and in 1830s colonial authority had granted land for the temple constructions where in the Sri Mariamman temple in Penang and such similar temples were built at several places in Malaysia by Indians².

Sacred Temple, cultural practices and religious symbols represent a great transformation in Diaspora. Religious cultural practices by Indians in Malaysia undergo a change in order to accommodate Chinese as well as native Malayan audience as to share their culture. Apart from being centers of worship, temples were the centers of social and cultural activities. Various ritual processions and festivals will be organized in these temple structures and in fact all these activities became regular public events in the town and villages. Temple authorities normally get a permission to run public procession during Kavadi and other festivals. The festivals in Malaysia will be celebrated mutually by Indians like any other Indian

² In 1933 the Queen Street Mariamman Temple was the first in Malaysia to open its doors to lower castes and untouchables². This challenge to caste hierarchy and orthodoxy grew out of the "temple entry movement," a campaign mounted by the Pan Malayan Dravidian Association (PMDA) that was inspired by the Adi-Dravida movement of low caste and untouchable groups in Tamilnadu (Arasaratnam 1979; Collins 1997:55; 101).

Diasporas. The major festivals are Holi, Diwali, Sivaratri and Muharram is celebrated by Hindus as well as Muslims each other. The most vibrant festival celebrated by Hindus particularly Tamils is Thaipusam. Celebration of festivals has been another vital cultural trait of Indian community in Malaysia. Thaipusam, Indian Tamil festival became popular culture despite Malaysian state Islamization. The festival is also celebrated by many non Indians as well in this way it has transformed into widely accepted a globalised tradition. This means that religious festivals are way of life and shown a liberal attitude towards other community. This is an evidence of how Indian would mingle during festivals with other community despite of their strong assertive cultural conservative attitude. The festival accommodates all segments of Indian population including high and low strata groups. Over the years Thaipusam had generated an impulse which collectively comprises Malaysian Hindu identity. Caste and class differences in Indian community in Malaysia have gone down with the development of Murugan tradition.

In every village where there is a substantial number of Indians one would find a temple and a mosque. Apart from temple constructions, what makes an interesting observation is almost all an average Indian houses would look like same as in India. Such assertiveness in maintaining the Indian architectural and other art forms are prevalent throughout country.

Thaipusam & Kavadi

The impulse to move from one place to another is an inherent nature of human being. Displacement of people in search of new opportunities has changed the world's landscape and transformed it into myriad ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and racial groups. The dispersal of Tamils around the globe is not of a recent origin. This scattering of people has been started with trade, slavery and culture in the age old days. This phenomenon which continued over centuries has resulted into mass migration under a new imperialism. The upsurge in Indian migration was vigorously continued for two hundred years under British colonialism. Migration of Indians to South East Asia is a remarkable event in the history of colonialism. As Isabel Hofmeyr (2013) has argued in her brilliant work on Indian Ocean print cultures, 'the epic mobility of nineteenth century imperialism engendered a rich array of transnational imaginings, as displaced and dispersed communities had to envisage their position in a new order'. The port cities of the Indian Ocean – including those of the Malay world were not 'simple melting pots but, rather, areas that crystallized new lines of allegiance, belonging and exclusion'

Indians comprise the largest section of the population (2,012,600)in Malaysia, and in this paper I propose to deal chiefly with the religious and cultural festival known as Thaipusam celebrated by Indian Tamils, and more particularly of those who professed the Murugan faith, and assess the impact of Indian values upon the structure of their society. I also would like to focus to study on how the festival is celebrated in Tamil Nadu and thereby making a comparative understanding of the link between home and its Diaspora abroad. The study describes the cultural procession called kavadi as part of Thaipusam.

The Indian Diaspora, especially wherever there is a Tamil presence, they are very much assertive of their culture and tradition, making it a unity and identity. In South East Asia in particular Malaysia, Singapore and in Indian Ocean Islands such as Mauritius, Reunion Island Vis a Vis witnessed Tamils being vibrant in these gigantic cultural ceremonies. This festival is celebrated in the name of Lord Murgan. Murugan is a South Indian Deity worshiped particularly in Tamil Nadu. The literary meaning of Murugan in Tamil connotes Young, beautiful, valiant and vibrant. This cultural fusion can be seen primarily in two Tamil literary texts, one is Paripadal and the other one is Thirumurukkarupaatai. (Zvelebil 1991).

In Hinduism there are also non Brahmanical rituals been performed which were unique to their local customs. However, time went on these local rituals became Brahmanized with close involvement of Brahmins in the rituals. The majority of the Hindus in Malaysia are belonged to the non Brahmanical castes. They, however, shared the world view of the Brahmins. That this non Brahmanical rituals got mixed up with Brahmanical way of performance is primarily because of the emergence of social institutions such as grand temples, language based schools, and which directly or indirectly taught religion to their children and to the community and provided all sorts of religious help

The local customs and little traditions been transformed into Hindu Sanskritized great tradition is also because of the arrival of new religious organizations such as Arya Samaj, Andhra Mahasabha etc. Author calls this trend as new religious traditions (Hinduism and the Diaspora, 2013, pp.23-30,). Other religious a binary category was Non Vegetarian-Vegetarian Goddess worship. Non vegetarian goddess worship has a pan Indian phenomenon. Druapati. Amman, Mariamman, Ankalesvari, Gangamma are the famous Hindu goddess in Malaysia.(Pratap Kumar 2013) Draupati Amman expects devotees only to walk on fire but Ankalesvari Gangai Amman expects blood scarification so to speak.

What is Thaipusam?

Thaipusam is an annual festival celebrated by Tamils in the month of January and February. The word Thai refers to a 10th month of Tamil and Pusam is an auspicious star. The festival is celebrated by Tamils in South India and also the celebrations of this festival is very much visible across the world where ever there is a good number Tamil population such as in Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Reunion Island, South Africa, Fiji, Trinidad and Surinam etc. Usually it is celebrated for three consecutive days in the end of January or early February.

Author takes into account the historical continuum to get a better sense of Hindu traditions. He argues that Hindu religion is not that something which is fixed. But, in the historical process it got applied many changes. In order get into more he illustrates vaisnava tradition in south India. During the early centuries of Common Era, it arose out of the devotional tradition of alvar Singers. During medieval times it became a sophisticated philosophical tradition in the hands of the early teachers, Yamuna, Ramanuja et al. but simultaneously, it also become grounded in a ritual tradition called the Pancharatha agama tradition. Today if you visit any typical Vaishnava community in India one would find a highly ritualistic Vaisnavism. If one were to study only alvar singers, a natural conclusion would be that the south Indian vaisnavism is a more religious. But, then one fails to see the subsequent changes (P.50-51). The popularity to the non Sanskritic rituals got increased in the Indian Diaspora. For instance, author notes that the kavadi worship is so pervasive that the people do not want to give it up.

Thaipusam is an annual festival of a Hindu deity Lord Murukan. The second son of lord siva and parvathi. This festival has been celebrated in South Indian state Tamil Nadu. However, it has gained huge popularity in recent years, particularly in Malaysia. Thaipusam is famous in Kaula Lumpur and is also growing rapidly in other cities in Malaysia, especially in Penang and Ipoh. It is the largest public event in the country and has grown continuously over the past three decades.

Thaipusam is usually described as a festival commemorating granting of Sakthi vel or vetrivel to Muruga by parvati, consort of shiva, at the outset of his campaign to defeat Surapadman, head of the asuras (Karl Vedivella Velle,p.13).

The Malaysian Thaipusam draws thousands of devotees from Indian, not only Tamils, but across the country and even from overseas. In fact, the festival has been very much attracting Malaysian Chinese. There has also been instances of Caucasians participating not only as an onlookers but also have participated in self mortifications.

Scholars like Raymond Lee and Andrew Willford have analyzed Thaipusam and stressed its importance for the revivification of Tamil and Hindu identity, also brought an intensification of 'Indianness' in the face of Islamic modernist and nationalist discourse.

In Kaula lumpur at bathu caves devotees represent a sense of unity and making Thaipusam not just indian incorporativeness, but embracing and making the participation of Chinese who are numerically more in number and economically very strong. Thaipusam has also became an assertive factor of non-Malayan unity in relation to what is called as 'otherness' something other than the master version of national unity. By the non Indian inclusion without their religious conversions the festival has got to show its universality and its openness of its cultural source.

Process of Ritualistic Celebrations in Thaipusam

Thaipusam festival is the most significant event celebrated in Malaysia, honoring lord Murugan an ancient Tamil deity who later associated with lord siva as son. Of all the festivals celebrated by Hindus in Malayasia, Thaipusam and Kavadi are the most dramatic and fascinating. The festival is celebrated for three days, and it commemorates the day that Murugan was given the vel, an invincible lance by his mother, lord Shiva's consort Parvathi. With Lord's powerful instrument Vel, Murugan defeats asura (demon) Taraka, an oppressor of the Gods. Vel resembles Sakti, power of goddess. In the history of Tamil tradition Lord Murugan came to be regarded as a war god, and his vel represented destructive and creative power, a symbol of warrior.(Clothe 1978).

The first day of the festival begins from pre-dawn puja performances, a special abhisekam or ceremonial bath to lord Murukan's image with panchamrutam, water, milk, ghee, honey, ashes and rose water. This ritual is performed by a Brahmin priest. After this, circumambulation ceremony in which Images of lord Murukan and his consorts Valli, Devasena are carried around the temple three times in a clock wise and accompanied by musicians playing traditional instruments. The procession of the chariot pulled by two bulls and a few devotees makes its way through Main Street of

the town followed by large crowds of devotees. The chariot stops at some shops with banana trees tied to the two ends of the front door. This is to signify that the shops are owned by Hindus who wish to receive darsanam from Murukan. In the evening the temple grounds at Batu caves resembles a carnival with many stalls opened for business and amusement park attracting crowds of children.

The stalls set up by Hindu organizations distribute pamphlets advertising their activities. The public treated to Tamil Movies, bhajan performances and speeches given by Hindu ascetics from India. Below the main shrine at batu cave, a small temple of lord Murugan and his two consorts are installed, here pandaram performs puja. When the procession reached Batu cave temple Murugan image is carried to the main shrine climbing up through 272 steps deep in to the cave.

The second day of the festival is marked by the kavati ritual ceremony. Kavadi is made of a wooden or steel, designed with peacock feathers and flowers. Kavadi looks like a palanquin (in Tamil Pallaki) which the devotee carries on his/her shoulders as a part of procession till reaching the temple. Each devotee who bears kavadi is followed by group of his inmates supporting him with bhajans, Murugan Lyrics, Drums beating etc. On this day the Ustavar murti, Murugan is taken to the nearby river for ritual bathing abhisegam. However, the attention of the vast crowd is focused upon spectacular event of the devotees who bear Kavadi, there are others who meet their spiritual obligations in less obvious ways. These may include annathanam (free food service), distributing free cool drinks especially butter milk and sweet curd. Rendering service to religious organizations and participating in the religious entertainment such as Bharathanatyam, and dramatic plays of Puranas. Chavalam, head shaving is another essential ritual, part of the festival, associated with the infancy and ideally conducted by the child's parents. This head shaving is usually done by barbers who are specially recruited for this occasion. For many head shaving is form of rendering devotional obligation to the God. In the case of an infant chavalam helps the child to rid from the contamination garnered during and since birth. Then the shaven bald heads of devotees are applied sandal wood paste which is regarded as cool and purifying. Shaving of hair is closely associated with the south Indian holy Murugan shrines particularly at thiruchandur and Palani. Hair offering is a common practice in Hinduism in India.

The second day of the festival Thaibusam is most crowded and the Malaysian state has declared five days public holiday for the festival. With this the festival became very popular in the country and it made ease for devotees to travel Batu Caves. Prior to the festival many pilgrims and families who come from outside areas, reach Batu caves by own vehicles, by buses and through specially arranged trains. More than one million devotees are expected to be on Thaibusam at Batu caves and most of them are Hindus.

Third day Lord Murukan idol is opened for Darsanam. In the morning devotees are allowed to worship the image with puja and archanam. This is the day that devotees offer material wealth to the God. This day the kavati bore devotee must visit surapadman temple to offer puja, and serves sacred food to his inmates. This is the day, after a morning puja lord Murugan and his consorts would make a return journey to the Sri Maha Mariamman Kovil. The golden vel would be removed and carried from the hill shrine to the down stairs and restored at ustavar murti within the sanctum sanctorum. The lord Murugan and his consorts are reinstalled in a silver chariate and then the chariate leaves Batu Caves to Maha Mariamman temple. Devotees who accompany this ceremony are comparatively less in number.

However, some orthodox Hindus trying to interfere into the process of entire ritual ceremony by saying that there are many wrong things involved in the Kavadi ritual procession. Thus, the ceremonial procession must follow the sanskritized Hindu code of procedures. Likewise there is another section of the society saying no to this ritual practices, particularly some Europeans and indian urban educated community saying these practices are barbaric in nature therefore should be stopped.

3. KAVATI PROCESSION AT BATU CAVES

Kavadi is a palanquin elegantly decorated with peacock feathers and flowers carrying with an image of murugan. There has been a continuous development in terms of Kavadi making and its elaborate decoration. Today Kavadi is comparatively very large in size and they made of different metals more often with steel and also made of with silver and gold exhibiting their status. Dramatically, even the larger Kavadi are also hooked to the body pierced with long and sharp spikes. Devotees usually pierce the lance (Vel) into tongues and cheeks. Bearing these ritual ordeals the devotee believes to gain powers directly from the God.

The ritual procession begins usually in the early morning at around 6:30, however due to the Traffic concerns chariot bearing Murugan leave at 4 in the morning hours, with a Kavadi procession from Mariamman temple in Kaula Lumpur, the image of Murugan is carried in a kavadi to the Batu Caves temple which is about 12 kilo meters away. This procession would be followed thousands of people through the busy streets of Kaula Lumpur, capital city of Malaysia. a most visible ritual event in which non Indians were exposed to Hinduism. Lawrence Babb points out that “In traditional South Indian ritual the processional idiom often serves as a means for the expression of socio-spatial relationships.

Motifs and the Growth in Commodification of the Festival ‘Thaipusam’

In Tamil tradition Murugan had been depicted in many motifs associated with the deity. Iconographical depiction of Murugan is been reminiscent from the legendary myths. He is often depicted as a youthful and physically beautiful god, with vel in the hand and his two consorts Devayani and valli standing besides. The Lord is seen riding a peacock which symbolizes a totality of primordial control over nature through its colorful feathers. Again, it’s a symbol of omnipotent power of God. Besides these legendary myths the motifs were also been projected and were popular in Tamil India. For instance, the motif of Agastya being taught Tamil by Murugan appears in palani. Elephant, snake and later on peacock became a major motif of Murugan.

These myths, motifs which were nevertheless been written down, and thus form a part of local oral lore. These texts embody local traditions which had penetrated into Greater Tamil tradition. Subrahmanya Murugan of Tamil tradition is a blend of essential two cultures, Indo-Aryan and Indo-Dravidian, then the other Tamil sources knows too. Many concluded by saying that Murugan is nothing but Tamilization of Aryan Skanda kumara. This fatal mistake is happened because of their limited textual reading of *Paripatal* and *Tirumurukarruppattai* ignoring completely the old Tamil analogy poems and archaeology, epigraphy and iconography

The mode of worship in Diaspora has drastically changed over a period of time. The commodification³ of kavadi with increasing size, with more decorating elements differs completely from original kavadi used in Tamil Nadu. Body piercing is another radical change in Diaspora. The body is pierced with big hooks and large lances, sometimes with hooks devotee hangs down from bamboos hanging like a Garuda. One would surprise to see the kavadi celebrations in this passion and it obviously amounts to millions of questions.

Thaipusam celebration in Malaysia is not just a traditional worship of god but it means more than that to Indians. Raymond and Andrew Willford both have stressed the importance of Thaipusam for the revival of Hindu and Tamil Identity. With these primary differences I would like to explore more on the change that Diaspora exhibits in Thaipusam differently from where they have memorized and carried. Murugan meaning the hill god, the example complex at Batu Cave was all modeled based on same modes of ritualistic worship observed in South India, particularly those associated with the Palani, one of the major pilgrimage centers of Murugan in South India. On similar line of Palani, a numerous motifs are closely associated with Malaysian Murugan cult, including Hilly caves, surrounded by dense jungle and Sungai batu river for ceremonial bath etc. thus, the shrine represents whole Murugan cult and considered as ordered and very much patterned. Comparing with the celebrations held in India, diasporic celebration of this ritual mode of practice had been dramatically transformed.

The transformation is not just in terms of intensive assertion of Tamilness but also an increasing use of materia. Here I would precisely like to bring into light the degree of change brought forth by the Indian Diaspora in celebrating the festival. The change particularly in terms material used in the festival celebration has reckoned with huge transformation. The commodification and its variety shown in the festival blended with richness is truly a sign of Indian Diaspora in abroad. The change from its originality to the current mode of practice, especially in Malaysia and Singapore is what my concern to bring to the notice. Kavadi ritual procession is central to the Thaipusam festival. It involves ascetism and self mortification making its arduous journey to the shrine and from which devotees believe to get healing powers from lord Murugan. Murugan along with his two consorts Devayani and Valli are mounted on a peacock shrine, accompanied by temple musicians playing the Nadaswaram and drum, the image of the deity will be taken on wooden poles. Rathnam the chariot used to be made up with wooden and decorated with beautiful flowers, green leaves and this chariot is still

³ I have used the term “Commodification” to refer the application of modernity in the Murugan cultus particularly Indian Diaspora. Making different types of kavadis and chariots made of fine metals of gold, silver and steel, Modern drums, musical instruments, and electric sound system etc.

continues to be made with wood in rural India. However, in diaspora this is no longer the case, the chariots made with steel and iron and ornate with silver and gold colour. Chariot is often decorated with the images of other deities such as lord Rama, Ganesha and little Krishna. This clearly is an indication of wealthy Indian diaspora and an amalgamation of Sanskritized Hinduism.

4. PAIN MODULATIONS, SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN THAIPUSAM

Thaipusam, so far is been studied from the social and cultural point of view despite the fact that the individual psyche is very important to this festival. The ritual trance in Kavadi procession is accompanied by pain induction or self mortification practices such as, fire walking, lance piercing and pulling huge Kavadi chariot etc. To understand Thaipusam ritual trance we must consider the facts involving biological, psychological and social terms giving appropriate emphasis to relevant cultural believes. The pain in these cases has controlled by psychological and social factors⁴.

According to ward the pain is reduced because of altered state consciousness in which an individual behavior is radically different from ordinary functions. Alter state of consciousness has naturally occurred in ritual trance as a state of being non aware. While trance defined as a possession explained in terms of central possession and peripheral.

The other important factor for reduction of pain is sensory bombardment in other words sensory deprivation is to making sound, chanting vel vel, singing devotional songs, drums beating, clapping etc., will certainly produces endorphins in the body which may contribute to the ability to control the pain. Undoubtedly the in kavadi piercing ritual is highly personal experience depending upon cultural learning, social situations and other factors.

Thaipusam ritual procession is a complex learned behavior. Ritual central procession is distinguished by its function to uphold official morality, religious traditions and it is generally voluntary, desirable religious ceremony. It is considered as a ritual procession in which trance as a part of public ceremonial occasion where culture specific practices are supported by social norms. According to Colleen Ward the most commonly involved precipitator in the trance ritual is sensory bombardment or sensory deprivation. Singing, chanting, drumming, clapping and repetitive circular dancing are the techniques stimulate the kavadi procession

It is said that the altered state of consciousness being non aware this is not entirely true is the reason because though the Vel pierced Murukan devotee falls into trance he will be having the sufficient degree of conscious control over self body. Here we must understand two important factors one is the ability to understand the cause of the pain and the distractive attention and giving meaning to the situation so that pain become bearable. Therefore the sensory bombardment helps one way or another but I doubt that there is sensory deprivation because if it is he will completely loose his outer consciousness which supports him a lot. Ritual trance is often seen as the possession by spiritual powers and it evolved in the context of religious ceremonies.

Trance is a state of functional non awareness, a detachment, and exists in various forms may be linked to possession. In anthropological terms Lewis maintains that central possession is distinguished by its function-to uphold official morality, religious traditions, and established power. Ritual possession may be understood as a desirable temporarily voluntary trance exhibiting in the religious ceremonies. It may be characterized as a state of mind in which the individual believes that he/she is unwillingly possessed by "demons" and exhibits contingent behavioral responses which he/she attributes to the spirits' influence (Colleen Ward 1984).

Thaipusam ritual procession is a complex learned behavior. Learning plays an essential part in the ritual trance and they acknowledge that it is easy when u fall into trance during Kavadi. Bleeding has been diminished by the sharpness of the needle. Thaipusam practices an aid to pain reduction such as superficial piercing with extremely sharp needles. Ritual central procession is distinguished by its function to uphold official morality, religious traditions and it is generally voluntary, desirable religious ceremony.

⁴ Ritual possession is not only dependent upon physiological factors but also involves psychosocial influences. Expectations, beliefs, and suggestion, as well as setting, costuming, and group participation, may affect trance induction(Colleen Ward, *Thaipusam in Malaysia: A Psycho-Anthropological Analysis of Ritual Trance, Ceremonial Possession and Self-Mortification Practices*, Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association, Ethos, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1984), pp. 307-334)

It is considered as a ritual possession in which trance as a part of public ceremonial occasion where culture specific practices are supported by social norms. According to Colleen Ward the most commonly involved precipitator in the trance ritual is sensory bombardment or sensory deprivation. Singing, chanting, drumming, clapping and repetitive circular dancing are the techniques stimulate the Kavadi procession. It is said that the altered state of consciousness being non aware this is not entirely true is the reason because though the vel pierced Murugan devotee falls into trance he will be having the sufficient degree of conscious control over self body.

Here we must understand two important factors one is the ability to understand the cause of the pain and the distractive attention and giving meaning to the situation so that pain become bearable. Therefore the sensory bombardment helps one way or another but I doubt that there is sensory deprivation because if it is he will completely loose his outer consciousness which supports him a lot. Learning plays an essential part in the ritual trance and they acknowledge that it is easy when u fall into trance during kavadi, bleeding diminished by the sharpness of the needle.

Thaipusam practices an aid to pain reduction such as superficial piercing with extremely sharp needles. Endorphins may contribute the ability to control pain. Various physiological theories of pain have been put forward and it has recently been suggested that endorphins may contribute to the ability to control pain in ritual ceremonies. (Colleen Word, 1984) Psychological advantages 1. Withstanding the ordeal the devotee demonstrates purity of heart. 2. Devotee receives praise and support from family and friends. 3. Display of invincibility and power enhances self concept. 4. Experience of self satisfaction. the subjective reports of trance experience often includes light feeling, over floating, sense of timelessness etc. The general advantage of ritual procession is that helps an individual in establishing relations between individual and community. Obviously it also gives recognition to an individual in the community. It also gives an emotional relief from the daily ordinary functions.

Endorphins may contribute the ability to control pain. Psychological advantages 1. Withstanding the ordeal the devotee demonstrates purity of heart. 2. Devotee receives praise and support from family and friends. 3. Display of invincibility and power enhances self concept. 5. Experience of self satisfaction. The subjective reports of trance experience often includes light feeling, over floating, sense of timelessness etc. Obviously it also gives recognition to an individual in the community. However, some orthodox Hindus trying to interfere into the process of entire ritual ceremony by saying that there are many wrong things involved in the kavadi ritual procession. Thus, the ceremonial procession must follow the sanskritized Hindu code of procedures. Likewise there is another section of the society saying no to this ritual practices, particularly some Europeans and indian urban educated community saying these practices are barbaric in nature therefore should be stopped.

5. CELEBRATION OF THAIPUSAM IN SOUTH INDIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Thaipusam and Kavadi ritual procession is a popular form of practice in South India. My study on the festival of Thaipusam and Kavadi ritual practice made me to acknowledge the fact that this particular festival celebrated in Malaysia is almost replaced and symmetrical to the Indian patterns. Therefore it cannot be said that the original form of the festival has remained unchanged as it is celebrated at a very high caliber in Malaysia than in India.

Indeed it is interesting to understand how the festival has been celebrated in India, particularly in south India. The official description of the festival is published by Arilmugu Thandayuthapaani⁵ temple of Palani. The ritual followings mentioned in Palani temple could easily be referred to many those practiced at Batu Caves in Malaysia. This festival is generally includes self mortification, body piercing with vels and the practice of hook swinging etc, These religious practices have been undervalued by colonial officials and often described them as evil practices, gloomy and weird rites. Borrowing the similar views of orientalist, piercing part in the kavadi procession has been banned by Madras govt. in 1935. Even there is no public holiday on the day of Thaipusam festival.

However, the festival and ritual procession is been highly celebrated in Tamil Nadu and in some parts of Kerala and even in Andhra Pradesh⁶ till the date. Lord Murugan is also referred to as Arumurugan. As there are six major temples of him

⁵ According to the skanda purana and sangam literature, a mythical story goes as asura Surpadman was killed underneath the water by lord Murugan with his vel(lance) and asura turned into a peacock. Henceforth the temple is called Thandayuthapaani Temple.

⁶ I have personally witnessed the festival in Kandukuru in Ananthapur district of Andhrapradesh where some section of Tamil migrated people who might have settled from a long time had celebrated thaipusam same like a IndianTamils in abroad.

in Tamil Nadu. Clothey describes them in his study as major pilgrimage centers associated with the Murugan cultus. Devotees now and then unanimously accepted these six pilgrimage centers as authentic special sacrality.

However, among six sacred temples, today only five are considered as more authentic because the devotees generally acknowledges that the every Murugan Temple anywhere will be taken as sixth one. The five temples are 1.Palani, located near dindigal junction, 2.Tiruchendur, on the southeastern coast near Thirunelveli, 3.Thiruttani, near Chennai, 4.Tirupparankuram which is near Madurai, 5. Swamimalai it is near kumbakonam. The remaining all other Murugan temples are considered as Sixth one. This assertion aptly expresses the God's ubiquity in Tamil Nadu.

Among six clothe lists out two major Murugan temples in South India to which those conducted in Malaysia are held their pooja proceedings in similar. The first of these is Tiruppanarankunram near Madurai where Murugan said to have married Thevayani. The other one is Palani Temple associated with traditions of Murugan and witnesses several major and number of minor festivals incorporating Murugan worship.

The major festivals other than the thaipusam celebrated in the name of lord Murugan are Panguyuni Uttiram⁷ which attracts nearly 50,000 devoties annually. The other major festival is vaikasi visakam held in the Tamil month of vaikasi(may-june) draws devoties predominantly peasants from the regions adjacent to the temple. The most fascinating thing about Murugan cultus is the existence and the popularity of these six pilgrimage centers in Tamil Nadu. Religious and symbolic significance of these temples suggests the meaning of Tamil religion and an inherent manifestation of the contemporary Murugan cultus. All these five temples are located exactly as such reflecting historical and mythological past. These pilgrimage centers show us the significance of motifs associated with deity and its complex symbol system which not only carries the religious imaginary and Tamil history but also reflects the mood of the Tamil society.

Another important feature of the pilgrimage centers is their association with a hill. According to the myths Murugan is born in the mountains, as a child he gambols on the mountains, as a young man he wages war on the mountains, and yet one point he destroys the mountains because in order to kill surapadman who hides in the mountains. Thus, different symbolic patterns develop around the hill which with Murugan is associated (Zvelebil, 1991,P.15) Apart from the symbolism of hills, the symbolism of water is also much important. Water is virtually Pan Indian sacrality. Murugans mother Parvathi is association with water and generally water comes from mountains. The other reason is suggested by the Thiruchandur myth that god killed Asura in the ocean and transformed him into peacock. These allusions are enough to understand the association of hills and water with Murugan cultus.

Today across Tamil Nadu its ritual practice of lord Murugan as so varied, most of the urban people take part in the traditional puja. At the same time the rural folk present in Murugn temple in large numbers participating in kavadi dance, fire walking ceremony etc. Murugan's current popularity is no small measure, is derived from the fact that god has been so thoroughly identified with Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu is the God's domain.

6. CONCLUSION

Indian Diaspora has witnessed a long span of historical changes in Malaysia, by participating in the process of nation building. However, majority of them are still at the lower rungs of the society. Since the independence of Malaysia, Indians have been completely marginalized in all the spheres. Socio religious marginalization of Indians has made them asserting their basic rights in recent years. During the visit of Indian prime minister to Malaysia in 2015, while addressing the Indian Diaspora, he begun by saying that "India is not confined to its territory but India also exists with every Indian in every part of the world". This is a clear indication of India's outlook towards Indian Diaspora and it raised expectations among ethnic Indians from their home Country.

The number of Indians in Malaysia has rapidly increased, primarily through immigration under colonial spectrum. In the beginning of the Malayan political Independence majority of the Indian population did settle well and domiciled. Indian migration phenomenon to south East Asia did not operate in a spontaneous way rather it took place with in multiple network system. Migration was primarily kind of chain migration, from within the family, kinship and caste based groups, played a key role in the Indian migration. More over migration would minimize both financial and destitute problems that

⁷ "Panguyuni Uttiram" is a festival of Marriage held in commemoration of Murugan and Devayani's Marriage. The festival held every year in the march and considered as auspicious for marriages.

migrants generally face. This cost minimizing factor was a crucial factor in migration during colonialism. It could be said that the end of colonial rule in Malaya encouraged Indians in almost every walk of Malayan economic life, and political hierarchy ranging from cabinet ministers and wealthy franchises and market vendors to country side bread sellers and toddy tappers. However, still many of the Indians were labours mainly in agricultural and this made the country's economic enterprise, although the proportion of Indians being labour in Malaya had steadily decreased. Subsequently Indian female workforce has also been declined, in over all the population of Indians living in plantation agriculture is decreasing due to the urbanization. Thus, the present movement of Indians to and from Malaya is very much limited.

Anyhow the truth is that the modern men/women are not free to come and go, rather subjected to various legal procedures. In the longer view of Tamil migration to Malaya the unskilled labour was never really been free. Vadivelle Belle argued that the Malayan government had used the idea of projecting Indian formers as colonialists, as they would not only help to maximize economic resources of the country but has also to foster the growth of a permanent labour force. This is because that they were expected to settle permanently in Malaysia.

It is essential to understand Hindu revivalism and how India is imagined in Diaspora and practiced by Indians or Malaysian Tamils. Andrew Willford provides an interesting observation of Hindu religious revivalism and categorized it as poor and working class cultural revivalism and religious consciousness as being expressed through dramatic rituals. For many years in Malaysia Marugan sacred temple sites became a major pilgrimage centers, principally the Batu caves temple in Kuala Lumpur. It certainly reveals the "Tamilness" and proves a significant popularity to Hinduism. Locating an effectively minority population like Indians in a polity which is completely at the edge of ethnic religious tensions, a community which has not recognized in the overall political process, and were economically marginalized and dominated by Malayan natives in all the spheres including with a powerful Chinese community, given these conditions it can be easily professed that the festival of Thaipusam represented and enforced Indian social conditions to be better. Thus, Thaipusam played a pivotal role to enable underprivileged oppressed and alienated community of Indian in Malaysia.

Indian Diaspora, in South East Asia, particularly Malaysia where religion was defined by caste and sub-caste hierarchies within Hindus, predominantly dominated by Non-Brahmins. But if we see the new Hindu Diaspora societies in many other countries, it is proven that caste will never be a criterion to be part of Brahmanical rituals⁸. The process of reification and modern manifestation of Hinduism in which newly arrived organizations and associations seeks historicity for the incarnations of its deities encourages the idea of centrally scarified book.(Vertovec, 2000, pp.10-12).

According to Vertovec the construction of Hinduism has happened under two distinct diversified factors which he calls as 'Official and popular Hinduism'. "Official" religion can be taken to mean a set of tenants, rites, proscriptions, and prescriptions which are promulgated through some institutionalized framework. 'Popular' religion can be understood basically as beliefs and practices undertaken or maintained by lay believers. How Hinduism has been popularized in Indian Diaspora? We must see the other binaries that are considered as important categories to understand process of Hinduism abroad, such as 'little tradition and great tradition', 'classical vs. folk', and 'textual vs. ritual'. These binary understanding of Hinduism possibly led to describe the variety of Hindu beliefs and practices among overseas Hindus in terms of North and South Indian divide. Proceeding from the premise that rural local Hindus prefer conservative modes of worship it is true that Hinduism in these islands got replaced by local cults of Murugan. Hence, it is important to recognize that such categories or binary models as they are merely abstractions which inseparably linked to believers and in their social relations. The creation of temples, collective festival celebrations, establishment of schools, publications, religious organizations and associations are prior elements of institutionalized Hinduism.

Various components have emerged which are crucial in constituting Hinduism outside India⁹. The most Significant among these factors are language, regional back ground and size of migrant community, in addition the peculiar history of their arrival on these new shores. To provide a better understanding of about Hinduism in any context, the socio economic

⁸ Religion in Trinidad Surinam and Guyana was offered to all sections of society irrespective of caste and sub-castes. The communal meal during pujas and kathas was an indication of caste demise. (Steven Vertovec, *The Hindu Diaspora Comparative Patterns*, Rutledge, London and New York, 2000)

⁹ Hinduism is reconstituted as an ethnic label through a conflation of Hindu and Indian identities. Vineeta Sinha, 'Unpacking the Labels "Hindu" and "Hinduism" in Singapore,' Brill Publication, Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science, Vol. 25, No. 2,(1997) Special Focus: Transformations of Ethnic Identity in Malaysia and Singapore (1997), pp. 139-160

political and cultural dimensions must be made part of an analysis. Therefore "Hinduism" should be seen differently in accordance to the locale. The Indian community in Malaysia constituting larger Indian Diaspora is particularly interesting and it as a basis for examining the nature of Hinduism. Diasporic Indians take their "religious and cultural" status as Hindus for granted (Vineeta Sinha, 1997). And they are unaccustomed to think that their religious status (Hindu) is separate from their total identity as Indians.

The range of beliefs in the caste system, practice of the institution of dowry, the persistence of arranged marriages, non consumption of beef, celebrating festivals such as Diwali, visiting Hindu temples, participating in Thaipusam Festival celebration, wearing a saree, placing a Pottu or bindi on the forehead, to eat spicy or chilli hot food. These elements are associated with ethnic category of "Indian" in the Hindu Diasporic context. So this is being ethnically Indian and having a Hindu religious identity. In fact, the words "Indian" and "Hindu" are often used interchangeably by Indian Diaspora, and most frequently by non-Hindus (Indian and non Indian). (Vineeta Sinha, 1997 pp. 146-147).

Coming to my core study, the festival of Thaipusam in Malaysia, it is just not a festival but it is a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage may therefore furnish an excellent opportunity to examine the broader social conditions that influence how these potential are handled and how they manifest? Thaipusam in Malaysia essentially attracts only non Malaya people since their participation in non Malaya religious activities are forbidden as it is against state's Bhumi Putra policy the son of the soil. Giving oneself in different styles and considerable innovations in modern religious setup would make problems to these innovations.

We have seen politicians and temple officials playing very important role in sponsoring public festivals which is no doubt crucial for the expression of Tamil Hindu identity. Today the celebration of Thaipusam in Malaysia is a significant feature of Indian community. In the words of Raymond Lee the festival of Thaipusam connotes the plausibility of an inchoate Hindu identity. Hindu religious revivalism and its process in one hand and the development of Tamil culture in the other does not seriously imply the decline of Agamic cultural worship in Hinduism. This Agmic or Sanskritized feature continues to hold Malaysian Indians and influencing Hinduism through a various Vedanta organizations. Nevertheless, Thaipusam in Malaysia is appealing to a larger section of the non-Brahmin Tamil population and at the same time influencing the popular Hinduism.

As Zvebil rightly says that the Hinduism is a product of a particular kind of mind in a particular environment. Therefore Hinduism is a special kind of religion which must be met on its own terms, it is a phenomenon with its immense over power, complexity and diversity and thus, any kind of reductionism or any attempt to interpret and explain off on the basis of single approach, how so ever sophisticated, religious and advanced it is, will be bound to end in failure.

In the process of their social assimilation and religious practice they had to adjust to the changes in a colonial society under a dominant western culture. They have slowly got adopted to the western education and to the colonial conditions. Nevertheless, food habits and dress styles were changed to the western modes. Thus, the community was gradually transformed, however this transformation did not stop them to preserve their Tamil culture but have kept alive their religion and culture. Indian Tamils have maintained echo of their culture and religion even after their economic mobility in Malaysia. Especially the chettiar community which maintained cohesion as far as religious and their basic culture is concerned. Similarly, this attitude prevailed even among plantation workers on the estates. Impact of Tamil cultural practices and their coherent religious activities cannot be seen as little. Despite social tensions based on ethnic and racial lines, Tamil community could exert to assert their customs and traditions and also made their religion and traditions be acceptable by the society and governments officials. Politicians, officials of respective governments in Malaysia are attending the festival celebrations and thereby showing their dominant Tamilness in Malaysia. Popular celebrations like Thaipusam have promoted social cohesion and have become means for basic assertion of their community consciousness.

The contribution made by the North Indians to the emergence of Hindu identity is profound especially the Gijarati and Sindi merchant groups. The coming generations were fascination about their Indian and Hindu cultures, this is reminiscent with the great number of youth taking part in the cultural festivals in Malaysia. It has been argued that the principle role in shaping the Tamil community of Malaysia has been played by the Tamil merchant community known as chettiars and other Indian merchant groups.

They (Chettiars) were the most prolific merchant, highly educated, shrewd businessmen, hard working and affluent section of the Malaysian Tamil society. In formal political sphere their participation is negligible although one cannot

completely disown the secret thread between politics and economics. In fact the most important aspect about the Indian Tamil community there in Malaysia is their social compactness, cultural resilience, despite division within socio cultural, and outside, under the dominating assimilation of Islamic rule. Probably the Indian society in Malaysia can be compared to the refined gold out of the burning furnace. Indians were emerged economically and socially while cherishing to their Hindu worship and cultural practices.

Finally, all this suggest that there is something which appeals for the totality of Hindu culture in Indian Diaspora. Unlike other Hindu festivals, Thaipusam has gained wider recognition within and outside of Indian community. Although, there is a western perception of ridiculing body piercing and ritual trance as barbarous. However, the popularity to this festival is increasing in Indian Diaspora, it attracting non indian populous at where ever is celebrated. Malaysia, Singapore and Mauritius etc, of state governments have declared public holiday on 24 January 2016 shows how significant the festival is in Indian Diaspora. Today the religious significance of this ritual ceremony, the meaning and intent of the Murugan cultus is grounded in the historical and mythical past and the extent to which it reflects the character of religion in Indian Diaspora. There is a constant flow of persons, good, and information between India and the rest of the world which now makes Hinduism Transnational. Therefore I invite scholars to understand the socio-religious dynamics in settings outside India. For example Bhiku Parekh wonders why the Hindu Diaspora has not thrown up one new deity or for that matter any religious leader. It is likely the fact that many Diasporic Hindus themselves refer to India as the source of authority

REFERENCES

- [1] A.K. Ramanujan, 1992. 'Talking to God in the Mother Tongue'. India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1992), pp. 53-64
- [2] Alexander Kent, 2004. 'Transcendence and Tolerance: Cultural Diversity in the Tamil Celebration of Thaipusam in Penang, Malaysia'. International Journal of Hindu Studies. Vol. 8, No. 1/3 (2004), pp. 81-105
- [3] Amith Kumar Mishra, *Indian Indentured Labourers in Mauritius : reassessing the 'New System of Slavery' vs Free Labour Debate*. Studies in History, 25, 2, (2009): 229–251 SAGE Publications Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC DOI: 10.1177/025764301002500203
- [4] Andrew Willford, 2002. "weapons of the Meek": Ecstatic Ritualism and Strategic Ecumenism among Tamil Hindus in Malaysia'. Global Studies in Culture and Power, Volume 9.
- [5] Arasaratnam Sinnappah, Merchants, Companies, and commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740, published by Oxford University Press, 1986.
- [6] Azila Kasim, 2011. 'Balancing Tourism and Religious Experience: Understanding Devotee's Perspectives on Thaipusam in Batu Caves, Selangor, Malaysia'. Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management, 20:3-4, 441-456 ,DOI: 10.1080/19368623.2011.562437.
- [7] Baumann, Martin, 2001. "Vows in diasporic contexts: Hindu Tamils in Germany." *18th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Durban, South Africa*.
- [8] Belle, and Carl Vadivella, 2004. 'Thaipusam in Malaysia: a Hindu festival misunderstood?' . Ph. D. Deakin University.
- [9] Brij V. Lal , 1996. *The odyssey of Indenture :Fragmentation and reconstitution in the Indian Diaspora* '. Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, Volume 5, Number 2,Fall 1996, pp. 167-188, Published by University of Toronto.
- [10] Brij V. Lal, and Reeves Peter and R. Rajesh. 'Encyclopedia of Indian Diaspora' . Oxford University Press,
- [11] Burton Stein, 1985. *Peasant, State, and Society in Medieval South India* '. Oxford University Press,
- [12] Carolyn Prorok, 2011 'Dancing in the Fire: Ritually Constructing Hindu Identity in a Malaysian Landscape'. Routledge Publication
- [13] Christophe Z. Guilmoto, The Tamil Migration Cycle, 1830-1950, *Economic and Political Weekly* /vol. 28, No. 3/4 (Jan. 16-23, 1993), pp. 111-120, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4399307>

- [14] Christopher John Baker, 1984. 'An Indian Rural Economy, 1880-1955: The Tamil Nadu Countryside'. University of Michigan, Clarendon Press,
- [15] Colleen Ward, 1984. 'Thaipusam in Malaysia: A Psycho Anthropological Analysis of Ritual Trance, Ceremonial Possession and Self Mortification Practices'. Published by Wiley, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1984), pp. 307-334
- [16] Demelza Jones, *Being Tamil, being Hindu: Tamil migrants' negotiations of the absence of Tamil Hindu spaces in the West Midlands and South West of England, Religion*, Routledge Publications, 2015, pp.4
- [17] Denis Vidal and Gilles Tarabout and Eric Meyer, 2003. Violence/non-violence: Some Hindu Perspectives, ed. (Newdelhi: Mnohar)
- [18] Denise Cush, Catherin. Encyclopedia of Hinduism, ed. (London&Newyork: Routledge, 2008)
- [19] Don Handelman, *Myths of Murugan: Asymmetry and Hierarchy in a South Indian Puranic Cosmology* The University of Chicago Press, History of Religions, Vol. 27, No. 2 , pp. 133-170), 1987
- [20] Don Handelman, *Myths of Murugan: Assymetry and Hierarchy in a South Indian Puranic Cosmology*. The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- [21] Doniger Wendy, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, Oxford University Press, 2010.
- [22] Elizabeth Fuller Collins, *Pierced by Murugan's Lance: Ritual, Power, and Moral Redemption Among Malaysian Hindus*, Northern Illinois University Press, 1997
- [23] Else Marie Elmholdt Jegindo, Lense Vase, Jens, Jegindo, Armin W. Geertz. *Pain and Sacrifice: Experience and Modulation of Pain in a Religious Piercing Ritual*. Routledge, 2013.
- [24] Fred. W. Clothey, *Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan*, : Oxford University Press, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Mar., 1972), pp. 79-95 , Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1461919>
- [25] Geert De Neve, Patronage, and "Community": The Role of a Tamil Village Festival in the integration of a Town. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britton and Ireland, 2000.
- [26] George Netto, *Indians In Malaya: Historical facts and figures*, published by the author for distribution in Singapore and the federation of Malaya, *Journal of Asian Studies*, pp.23, 1961.
- [27] Hazaresingh.K, *The Religion and Culture of Indian Immigrants in Mauritius and the Effect of Social Change*. Cambridge University Press, 1966. Vol. 8, pp. 241-257.
- [28] Hobsbawm Eric, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, Orion Publication, London, 2010.
- [29] Institut Analisa Sosial (Malaysia), *Sucked oranges: the Indian poor in Malaysia*, the University of California, INSAN, 1989
- [30] Jain, Ravindra K. "Culture and economy: Tamils on the plantation frontier in Malaysia revisited, 1998-99." *Conference on Culture & Economy in the Indian Diaspora" held at the India International Centre*. Vol. 8. 2000.
- [31] Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *Chariots of the God/s: Riding the Line Between Hindu and Christian*, University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- [32] Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *The Diaspora of the Gods: Hindu Temples in the New World System 1640-1800*. Association for Asian Studies, 1999.
- [33] K. Hazareesingh, *The Religion and Culture of Indian Immigrants in Mauritius and the Effect of Social Change*, *Journal Citation: Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Jan., 1966), pp. 241-257.
- [34] Kamil V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Traditions on Subrahmanya Murugan*. (Madras: Institute of Asian Studies, 1991)
- [35] Karin Kapadia, *Dancing the Goddess: Possession and Class in Tamil South India*. Cambridge University Press 1996.

- [36] Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1969.
- [37] Lily Kong, *Religious Processions: Urban Politics and Poetics*. National University of Singapore.
- [38] Lipi Ghosh, Ramakrishna Chatterji. *Indian Diaspora In Asians and Pacific Religions: cultures, peoples, interactions*. (Jaipur: Rawath publications, 2004)
- [39] *Malaysian Hindu Pilgrimage: Kavadi Worship at Batu Caves*. By Karl Vadivella-belle.
- [40] N.E. Marjoribanks, Khan Bahadur, A.K.G. Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar, Sahib Bahadur, *Report on Indian Labour Emigrating to Ceylon and Malaya*, Printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, Madras 1917.
- [41] Netto, George. *Indians in Malaya: Historical Facts and Figures*. Singapore:1961.
- [42] Nirmala Gopal, *Music, Trance and Dance in the Thaipusam Kavadi Festival: Reflections of a Selective Group of South Africans*, 2013.
- [43] Office of the Economic Adviser to the Government of India, *Indians in Malayan Economy*, Published by the Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1950.
- [44] P.V.Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Shrines*. (New Delhi& Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1993).
- [45] Philip Spratt, *Hindu Culture and Personality: A Psycho analysis Study*. (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966)
- [46] Pierre Yves Trouillet, *Overseas Temples in Tamil Migratory Space*. *South Asian Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 2012.
- [47] Pratap Kumar, *Hinduism and the Diaspora*, Rawat Publications: New Delhi, 2013
- [48] Punitha, S., and S. Kumaran. "Cultural assimilation among Malays and Indians in Malaysia." *Journal of Indian Culture and Civilization* 1 (2014).
- [49] Rajasekhar Basu, *Search for Pastures :Tamil migrations to Malayan Plantations in the 19th and 20th centuries(Indian Diaspora In Asian and Pacific Regions edited by Lipi Ghosh, Ramakrishna Chatterjee, Rawath Publications, 2004)*
- [50] Rajesh Rai & Chitra Sankaran. *Riligion and the South Asian Diaspora*. Routledge, Taylor&Francis Group, 2011.
- [51] Ramachandran selva kumaran, *Indian Plantation Rubber(Malaya)*, Kuala Lumpur, 1994
- [52] Ramasamy Sumathi, *Language of the People in the World of Gods: Ideologies of Tamil before the Nation*, Association for Asian Studies,1988, pp.123
- [53] Raymond L.M. Lee, *Contributions to Indian sociology (n.s.)*23, 2(1989) SAGE Publications New Delhi/Newbury Park/London, 1989
- [54] Sandhu Kernial Singh, Mani A, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia (First Reprint 2006)* Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006
- [55] Satyapraksh, *Hindu Religion and Morality*. (New Delhi: Asian Publications Services, 1985)
- [56] Selvakumaran Ramachandran, Bala Shanmugam, *Plight of Plantation Workers in Malaysia: Defeated by Definitions*, Published by: [University of California Press](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu) *Asian Survey* Vol. 35, No. 4 (Apr., 1995), pp. 394-407. DOI: 10.2307/2645803 Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645803>
- [57] Sigmund Frued, *Civilization, Society and Religion: A group psychology, civilization and its discontents and other works*. (Penguin 1991)
- [58] Sigmund Frued, *The Origins of Religion*. (Penguin, 1990)
- [59] Sinnappah Arasarathnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970
- [60] Sita Anantharaman, *Popular Pujas in Public Places: Lay Rituals in South Indian Temples*. Springer, 2001.

- [61] Steven Vertovec, *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative patterns*. (London&Newyork: Routledge, 2000)
- [62] Subramanian.P, *Social History of Tamils (1707-1947)*, (Printworld, 1996)
- [63] Sunil S. Amrith, *Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal*, Indonesia and the Malay World, 41:120, 183-197,2013.DOI: 10.1080/13639811.2013.795299.
- [64] Tarling Nicholas, *Imperialism In South East Asia "A fleeting, passing Phase"*. Published by Routledge, Taylor&Francis, London and New York, 2001.
- [65] Vineeta Sinha, *'Unpacking the Labels "Hindu" and "Hinduism" in Singapore,'* Brill Publication, Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science, Vol. 25, No. 2,(1997) Special Focus: Transformations of Ethnic Identity in Malaysia and Singapore (1997), pp. 139-160
- [66] Vineeta Sinha, *Pierced by Murugan's Lance: Ritual, Power and Moral Redemption among Malaysians Hindus* by Elizabeth Fuller Collins. Northern Illinois Press, 1997. (Review).
- [67] Wan Kamal Mujani, *The History of the Indian Muslim Community in Malaysia*) This article can be found in the internet with this IP address <http://www.aensiweb.com/old/anas/2012/1348-1353.pdf>
- [68] Andrew Willford "Weapons of the Meek": Ecstatic Ritualism and Strategic Ecumenism among Tamil Hindus in Malaysia, *Identities*, 9:2, 247-280, 2002. DOI:10.1080/10702890212203