

Beliefs And Practices Of Malaysian Indians On The Concept Of The Divine

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Abstract

A belief system is a subpart of the cultural elements of society. It is divided into a number of types. One type of belief shared universally is the one relating to the concept of the divine. Even though this is a universal belief, its practice differs from one group to another, until it forms a type of identity unique to that community. This phenomenon also occurs among Malaysian Indians, where the belief principles and practices relating to the concept of the divine are unique. This is seen in current study, based on Malaysian Tamil dramas shown on the Astro Vaanavil channel. This study will most likely contribute to existing literature on the belief system of Malaysian Indians relating to the concept of the divine.

Keywords: Malaysian Indians, belief system, concept of the divine, Tamil dramas, culture value.

Introduction

Belief in god is a universal concept practices by almost all world cultures (Ember, C. R., & Ember, M., 1977, p. 382). Its practice however differs by ethnic communities. These differences form a unique cultural identity that distinguishes one society from another (Bar-Tal, D., 2000, p. xiv). Based on this statement, the unique cultural values of the Malaysian Indian community regarding their beliefs in the divine is studied based on twenty-seven Malaysian Tamil dramas, shown on the Astro Vaanavil station through its *Drama Producing Project 2010* show.

This particular project, introduced to encourage the producing of Tamil television dramas, was never done before throughout the broadcasting history of Tamil drama in Malaysia excepting Astro Vaanavil. This was an initial project, followed by a second project titled *Drama Producing Project - 2 (Makka Ōcai, 2012, p. S12)*. However, the source of this research was chosen no because it was a first project, but the researcher is also confident that local Tamil dramas have the required qualities as a well of sources for this study. All local Tamil dramas chosen were productions for the Astro Vaanavil broadcasting station competition and chosen by the jury as winners.

The researcher is convinced this media source could be used as a credible material to obtain data on the values and practices of Malaysian Indians on god. This

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is because, according to the postmodernist view, electronic media such as television narrows the difference between mass media-produced reality and reality outside of media culture (Strinati, D., 2000, pp. 231-232). This situation then convinces an observer that media sources such as local Tamil dramas provide data on the Malaysian Indians' concept of the divine, in line with their reality.

Analytical Approach

Although it is hoped that media material such as local Tamil dramas could produce proper data on the belief system of Malaysian Indians on the supernatural, the researcher believes an analytical approach is needed in this study to evaluate the level of reliability and accuracy on theological concepts in local Tamil dramas based on current belief traditions among Indian society. To that end, the authority-defined and everyday-defined approaches are used for this purpose.

The authority-defined and everyday-defined approaches are an analytical tool founded by a Malaysian anthropology scholar named Shamsul Amri Baharuddin to explain in detail the process of identity formation on a community (Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, 2012, p. 35). 'Authority-defined' refer to a social reality formed and approved by a dominant group within one traditional society. 'Everyday-defined' refers to a social reality observed by a member of society as daily experience. The first approach leads to observation and interpretation, while the second is formed due to experience. Although there two approaches are different in the pattern of identity formation, they are closely linked and aid each other in the process of identity formation of a particular community (Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, 2001, p. 365).

As this study is carried out to evaluate the identity of Malaysian Indians based on their concepts of the divine, the researcher is convinced this approach is an effective analysis platform for the achievement of the research objective. The everyday-defined approach is acknowledged for its ability in evaluating the accuracy of a social reality produced by an authority-defined approach (Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, 1996, p. 479). Therefore, it opens a broad space for the researcher to analyse and assess the experiences of certain characters in local Tamil dramas regarding the concept of the divine is in line with the authority-defined approach in the Indian community, or in contrast to it.

Belief in God - Conceptual Approach

In Malaysia, belief in god is a main principle of the *Rukun Negara* (Aziz A. Deraman, 2005, pp. 96-97). The Malaysian Constitution also highlighted this belief and provides freedom of religion for the people, with an emphasis on Islam as an official religion. However, other religions could be practised in peace and harmony (*Federal Constitution*, Article 3 [1]/ Article 11[1]). One of the religions practised by Malaysian Indians is Hinduism, but they also practised Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, *et cetera*. However, in the latest Report on Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics, a majority of Malaysian Indians (7.3% of the total population) are shown to be Hindus (6.3% of the total population of Malaysia) (2010: 9). This reality is reflected in local Tamil dramas, where the majority of characters portrayed are adherents of Hinduism.

However, in this study, all elements and behavioural conducts of Malaysian Indians on their beliefs in god is analysed through the lens of the Saivite School,

although Hinduism has six orthodox schools, namely Saivism, Vaishnavism, *Kaṇāpatyam*, *Keḷamāram*, *Cāktam*, and *Ceḷaram*, as taught by the saint Athi Shankarar. However, today the six schools have been incorporated into two main schools, the Saivite and Vaishnavite schools (Nagappan Arumugam, 2008, pp. 33-38).

Attention is more given on Saivism in this study as it is one of the schools widely practised, alongside Vaishnavism, by Malaysian Indians. In addition, the Saivite School is observed by the majority of Malaysian Indians as most of them originated from South India, itself strongly influenced by the *Saiva Siddhanta* philosophy (Rajantharan, M. and Manimaran Subramaniam, 2006: 44-48). Almost all local Tamil dramas describe the rituals of Malaysian Indians as based on the Saivite School.

Findings

The information on the beliefs in god in local Tamil dramas is depicted in elements such as prayer rituals as well as religious ceremonies at home, in temples, the display of sacred pictures and statues of gods in the house, the wearing of religious symbols, the acts of supplication, and the fulfilment of vows. These elements are shown in the following table:-

Table 1.0: Information on the beliefs of Malaysian Indians on god in local Tamil dramas

Belief in god Drama	Prayer ritual/ prayer at home and in temples	Display of sacred pictures and statues of gods at home	Wearing of religious symbols	Acts of supplication	Fulfilment of vows
<i>Appā Am'mā</i>		√			
<i>Arai 109</i>		√			
<i>Ariyāmalē</i>		√		√	
<i>Aval Peyar Tamil</i>	√				
<i>Cakkara Nārkaḷi</i>	√				
<i>Duplicate</i>					
<i>Iram</i>	√		√		
<i>Eṇ Naṇṇaṇ Ōr Anniyan</i>	√			√	
<i>Eṇ Ceyti Tāḷ Nanpan</i>	√				
<i>Enna Pilai Ceytēn?</i>	√	√	√		
<i>Jalan Annamalai</i>			√		
<i>Katakarāci</i>	√		√		
<i>Katitam</i>		√			√
<i>Kai</i>	√	√			√
<i>Natpu Natpu</i>	√	√			
<i>Nērru Illāta Mārram</i>		√			
<i>Niṇaivukaḷ Maraikiratē</i>					
<i>Ratha</i>			√		
<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>		√			
<i>Teyvam Tanta Vītu</i>	√	√			

<i>Toṭu Vāṇam</i> <i>Tūramillai</i>					
<i>Uṅṅavāṭum Neṅcam</i> <i>Kalavātip Pōṇāl</i>					
<i>Vāy Collil Vīraṅ</i>	√	√	√		
<i>Veliccam</i>	√		√	√	
<i>Yār Anta Nilavu?</i>	√	√			
<i>Yār Kurram?</i>		√			
<i>Yār Colvatu?</i>	√				

The practice of prayer rituals at home is depicted in five dramas, *Īram* (Episode 1, 00:35-00:55), *Yār Anta Nilavu?* (Episode 1, 01:33-02:00), *Cakkara Nārkaḷi* (Episode 1, 00:32-01:05), *Enna Pilai Ceytēṅ?* (Episode 2, 01:47-02:09) and *Teyvaṅ Tanta Viṭu* (Episode 2, 22:02-22:10). These drama scenes depict prayer rituals carried out by family members, either the head of the household, the spouse of the head, or both, in the morning. In two local Tamil dramas titled *Natṭu Natṭu* (Episode 2, 23:21) and *En Nanpan Ōr Anniyaṅ* (Episode 1, 17:34), they depicted prayer spaces or oratories in Kala and Selvi's houses. This depiction proves that prayer rituals are given priority and practised in the family institutions.

Dramas titled *Avaḷ Peyar Tamiḷ* (Episode 1, 08:06-08:15 & Episode 2, 16:45-17:00), *En Ceyti Tāl Nanpan* (Episode 1, 08:18-08:21), *Kaṭakarāci* (Episode 1, 03:37-04:30 & Episode 2, 02:06-02:30), *Kai* (Episode 3, 06:09-07:20), *Vāy Collil Vīraṅ* (Episode 2, 11:45-12:00), *Veliccam* (Episode 1, 20:04-20:30 & Episode 2, 19:04-19:15) and *Yār Colvatu?* (Episode 1, 05:37-05:50) depict prayer rituals and ceremonies performed in temples. This information is featured in Table 2.0:-

Table 2.0: Information on prayer rituals/ceremonies by Malaysian Indians in local Tamil dramas

Beliefs in god Drama	Prayer ritual at home	Prayer ritual/ceremonies in temples
<i>Avaḷ Peyar Tamiḷ</i>		√
<i>Cakkara Nārkaḷi</i>	√	
<i>Īram</i>	√	
<i>En Nanpan Ōr Anniyaṅ</i>	√	
<i>En Ceyti Tāl Nanpan</i>		√
<i>Enna Pilai Ceytēṅ?</i>	√	
<i>Kaṭakarāci</i>		√
<i>Kai</i>		√
<i>Natṭu Natṭu</i>	√	
<i>Teyvaṅ Tanta Viṭu</i>	√	
<i>Vāy Collil Vīraṅ</i>		√
<i>Veliccam</i>		√
<i>Yār Anta Nilavu?</i>	√	
<i>Yār Colvatu?</i>		√

Analysis

The elements of belief in god depicted in local Tamil dramas could be seen in five forms, as mentioned in Table 1.0. It consists of prayer and ceremonial rituals at home and in temples; the display of sacred pictures of statues of gods at home; the wearing of religious symbols by the community; acts of supplication, and the fulfilment of vows carried out by the characters.

First, the prayer ritual or ceremony practised by Malaysian Indians is depicted in fourteen local Tamil dramas in total. Seven of the local Tamil dramas showed prayer rituals at home, while the rest are basis of prayer ceremonies in temples by Malaysian Indians. That equal attention is given to the two types of prayer rituals in local Tamil dramas prove it succeeds in accurately depicting the manifest identity of Indian society.

This is because an adherent of Hinduism is encouraged to take part in both prayer rituals. Usually, the two worship rituals or ceremonies are known *āṅmārṭta vaḷipāṭu* and *pirārṭta vaḷipāṭu*. Other popular terms used by Indian communities to refer to the two types of rituals are *illa vaḷipāṭu* and *ālaya vaḷipāṭu*. *Āṅmārṭta vaḷipāṭu* refers to prayer rituals at home, while *pirārṭta vaḷipāṭu* refers to worship or ceremony carried out in temples (Sivaccariyar, A. P. M., 1992, pp. 8-9; Rajoo, R., 1975, p. 51). *Āṅmārṭta vaḷipāṭu* is usually carried out by one person or the whole family for personal benefit. The *pirārṭta vaḷipāṭu* is carried out in mass under the guidance of a priest in a temple based on agamic for the good of the community (Manimaran, S., 1996, p. 229). This concept is clearly shown in the dramas in study whereby the prayer rituals at home are managed by the head of the household, the spouse of the head, or both, for the prosperity of the family. In addition, the existence of a prayer space in the house is depicted in two local Tamil dramas that also show prayer rituals being carried out by family members. The service of priest's in administering prayer rituals in temples is depicted in local Tamil dramas such as *Aval Peyar Tamil*, *Kaṭakarāci*, and *Vāy Collil Viraṅ*.

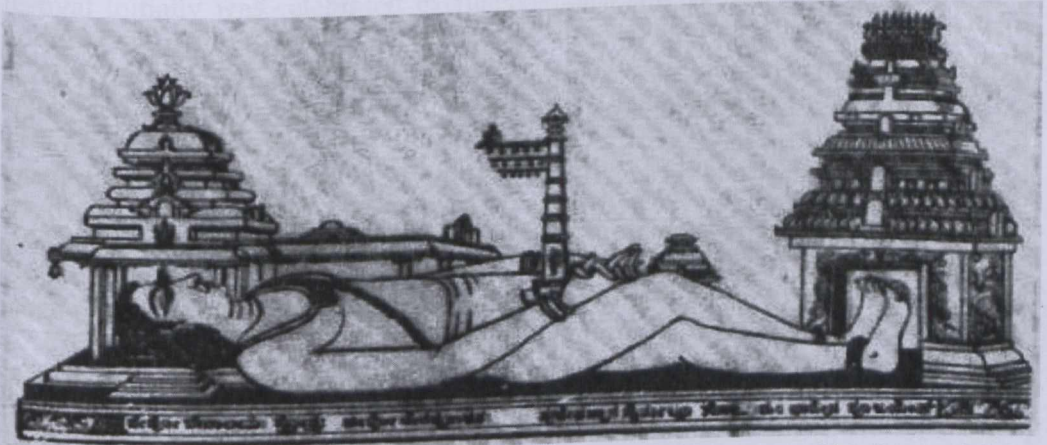
The local Tamil dramas listed in the depiction of prayer rituals or temple ceremonies in Table 2.0 also show mass worship. The temple is valued as a shared asset of the Indian community and each Indian community settlement must have a temple facility. For this reason, the British typically knew the Indians as a 'temple building race' (Kanthasamy, S. N., 1982, p. 19). Tamil maxims such as '*kōyil illāta ūril kuṭiyirukka vēṅṅām*', '*ālayam toḷuvatu cālavum naṅṅu*', and '*Kōpura taricaṇam kōṭi puṅṅiyam*', capture the essence of the concept of the divine in Indian society. All this Tamil maxims explain the need of prayer ceremonies in temples in Indian society (Balasubramanian, R., 2007, pp. 172-176).

Mass involvement in worship ceremonies in temples for communal benefits is a general definition for the understanding of this concept. However, a specific definition is also justified by Hindu saints for a deeper understanding of this concept by its adherents. The temple or *kōyil* in the Tamil language means a dwelling of god. The term *kōyil*, consisting of two root words *kō* and *yil* (*kō + yil = kōyil*) here refers to god and his dwelling. This also applies to another Tamil term typically used to refer to a temple: *ālayam*. *Ālayam*, a combination of two root words of *ā* and *layam* (*ā + layam = ālayam*) defines the temple as a centre of spiritual discovery of the divine or a place where each life realises the truth behind their existence. The meaning of temple can be condensed to a philosophical finding that explains the truth of birth to every

adherent and stimulate them to achieve *mōkṣā* or *mukti* (spiritual freedom / freedom from his/her birth) (Moganavelu, N., 2007, pp. 256-257).

The technique of temple construction is also planned in detail by Indian tradition to prove the veracity of this philosophy. The image of the temple is constructed by the ancestors based on the structure of the human body to explain the idea of birth, and linking man to god (Subburettiyar, N., 1984, p. 381). This situation is explained in the following illustration:-

Illustration 1.0: Image of a temple constructed based on the structure of a human body



(Source: Retrieved from <http://templetn.blogspot.com/2013/01/structure-of-hindu-temple.html> on 15/04/2013, 11:07am)

Based on this illustration, it is understood that a person visits a temple not only to be involved in prayer ceremonies conducted by temple administration and pray, but also to realise the religious philosophy underlying the agamic nature of temple construction. A person, according to Hindu teachings, has to undergo six levels to achieve *mōkṣā* or *mukti*. The six levels are related to six types of structures inherent in all agamic temples. Table 3.0 shows the spiritual levels a person goes through and the corresponding temple structures.

Hindu sages also acknowledge the human body as a temple linking the human and the divine through their works (Manimaran, S., 1996, p. 212). For example, the sage Thirumoolar in his work *Tirumantiram* states the human body is a temple where the mouth, used to chant mantra, is the entrance of the temple; the pure soul without negative elements is described as god; the five senses that stimulate an individual as a potential light that invades the darkness in the temple. The darkness referred to by the sage in his poetry refers to the darkness that consumes the soul (*Tirumantiram*, 1799). However, it should be noted that the local Tamil dramas in this study do not display the philosophy behind the temple rituals. It only describes the practice among Malaysian Indians practised for generations, and a general understanding of the prayer ceremony.

Table 3.0: Spiritual levels of every person and the corresponding temple structure

Spiritual level of person	Corresponding temple structure
<i>Pūtāṇmā</i> (The regular individual, without religious and philosophical awareness)	<i>Muṇ kōpuram</i> (Entrance tower)
<i>Antarāṇmā</i> (The individual at the lowest level of religious and philosophical awareness)	<i>Makā palippītam</i> (Sacrifice of individual sins)
<i>Tattuvāṇmā</i> (The individual in awareness of philosophy of existence without external stimulation)	<i>Koṭimaram</i> (Flagstaff)
<i>Civāṇmā</i> (Individual ability of indifference to desire and moderation in all things)	<i>Karuvarai</i> (A holy of holies that house the statue of the main god)
<i>Mantirāṇmā</i> (The individual practising yoga based on mantra with the goal of release from ego)	<i>Pūcai ceyvōṇ/ arccakar</i> (The priest conducting the prayer ceremony based on mantra)
<i>Paramāṇmā</i> (Merujuk kepada keadaan moksha atau mukthi)	<i>Puṇaveḷi</i> (Temple space)

(Source: arranged from Kanthasamy, S. N. (1982). *Intu ālayaṅka* (Hindu Temples). In L. Sadaseevan & e. al. (Eds.), *Journal of Tamilōḷi* (Vol. 13, pp. 19-30). University of Malaya: Tamil Language Society, pp. 26-27).

However, the temple is used as a centre of festivals, where the drama *Kaṭakarāci* depicts this information through two scenes. The first scene depicts the performance of dance plays staged for the festival in one temple near Sami's residence. The second scene depicts the celebration of the fire walking ceremony by a temple near Sami's residence. Both scenes clearly portray the form of celebration of a popular festival by Malaysian Indians. Fire-walking is generally practised by Saivite Hindu adherents. Saivism is one of the Hindu orthodox schools, other than Vaishnavism, *Kaṇāpatyam*, *Keḷamāram*, *Cāktam*, and *Ceḷaram*, as outlined by the sage Athi Shankarar. However, the six schools have been incorporated into two main schools, the Saivite and Vaishnavite (Nagappan Arumugam, 2008, pp. 33-38). In this study, however, attention is focused on Saivism as it is one of the schools, with Vaishnavism, widely practised by Malaysian Indians. Furthermore, the Saivite School is adhered to by the majority of Malaysian Indians as they originated from South India, which was strongly influenced by the Saiva Siddhanta (Rajantharan, M., & Manimaran Subramaniam, 2006, pp. 44-48). This reality is portrayed in almost all local Tamil dramas.

The fire-walking ceremony is a part of an annual festival performed in the goddess Mariamman temples. Generally, Indian festivals, especially Hindu, are divided into two types, the main festivals, and the annual festivals. The main festivals refer to calendric festival widely practised by Hindu devotees without regard to class and location. The date and time of festivals are also near uniform and celebrated

universally by Hindus in all corners of the earth (Nagappan Arumugam, 2008, pp. 306-320). One poem by a Saivite saint named Thirunyana Sambanthar also lists the total main festivals celebrated by Hindu devotees of the Saivite school annually (*Tirumuṭai* 2, 47). These include the festivals *aippaci oṇa viḷā*, *tirukkārttikai*, *tiru ātirai*, *taippūcam*, *māci makam*, *kaṭalāṭal*, *paikūṇi uttiram*, *cittirā peḷarṇami*, *tirupponṇūncal ātal* and *peruñcānti* (Nagappan Arumugam, 2008, p. 306). Other festivals are also widely celebrated by Hindus without regard to sect or school. Among the popular festivals celebrated by Malaysian Indians observing Hinduism are *tipāvaḷi*, *taippūcam*, and *ponkal* (Rajantharan, M., Silllalee, K., & Viknarasa, R., 2012, p. 90).

The annual festivals here refer to special festivals conducted by the community for a special reason. The fire-walking is one ceremony within this category. This festival initially was celebrated exclusively by estate Indian communities for the goddess Mariamman for protection against diseases such as pox and cholera (Rajoo, R., 1975, pp. 39-40). Later, this practice becomes tradition where it is annually celebrated in almost all Mariamman temples (Manimaran Subramaniam, 2006, p. 210) as portrayed in the drama *Kaṭakarāci*. Typically, this festival is carried out in a grand fashion with the organisation of authorities of the Mariamman temples, the length being at least three days. During this period, Indian art heritage such as plays, dances, songs, and other forms are given time in the festival, as portrayed in *Kaṭakarāci*. Undeniably, this annual ritual of Indians is a basic platform of development of Tamil stage plays in Malaysia in the early stages (Canhthirakantham, P., 2008, p. 46).

Indian beliefs regarding god is also shown through the display of sacred pictures or statues of deities in space in houses, as depicted in twelve local Tamil dramas. In reality, the concept of the divine is understood as an abstract according to Hindu sacred texts, where the god is in reality formless. This characteristic is referred to by the term *Piram'mam* (Rajantharan, M., & Manimaran Subramaniam, 2006, pp. 44-45).

The *Piram'mam* is generally divided into two elements: the *Nirkuṇa Piram'mam*, and the *Cakuṇa Piram'mam*, to clearly explain the concept of the divine. The *Nirkuṇa Piram'mam* refers to a abstract concept of god without identity, name, form, hue, quality, *et cetera*. However, the problem usually faced is that *Nirkuṇa Piram'mam* is a difficult concept for the average person to fathom and appreciate, and could only be embraced by those with high spiritual development. To avoid this problem and allow all to understand the concept of godhood, the *Cakuṇa Piram'mam* concept was introduced. This concept allows for the introduction of names, forms, and traits to the divine one. This concept opens room for mortals to perceive the abstract concept of the divine with relative facility. Many symbols are introduced in Hinduism to explain this concept of god to man. The sacred statues, pictures, and drawings of gods are symbols produced to explain this concept (Rajantharan, M., Silllalee, K., & Viknarasa, R., 2012, pp. 27-28). This concept is probably a basis for the attributes of certain characters in local Tamil dramas that placed sacred pictures or statues of deities in their houses. This statement could only be inferred as local Tamil dramas only portray the practices among Malaysian Indians, but do not portray the concept behind these practices. This perception also applies to the depiction of the forms and names of god in local Tamil dramas. The variety of form and shape of god show the endless manifestation of the divine. Furthermore, the concept of polytheism, a belief in the plurality of gods, is prohibited in Hinduism. In fact, the monotheistic concept stressing the oneness of god is a basis of Hinduism (Rajantharan, M., & Manimaran

Subramaniam, 2006, pp. 44-45). Additionally, the sacred forms of god as symbolised by sacred statues and pictures are not produced at whim, but produced by Hindu sages and saints through experience. For example, a Saivite saint named Thirunyana Sambanthar described his perception of the form and traits of Shiva through one of his poems that began with the line '*tōṭuṭaiya ceviyaṅ*' (*Tirumuraṅ* 1, 1).

Next, the wearing of religious symbols by certain characters in seen local Tamil dramas is also an act by Hindu devotees that portray their beliefs in god. The religious symbols portrayed in all dramas consist of sacred ash, sandalwood, and kumkum and also *uruttirāṭcai*. sacred ash and *uruttirāṭcai* are religious symbols of the Saivite school, while sandalwood and kumkum are common among the six schools of Hinduism (Vengadaramaiyah, K. M., 1998, p. 157). Outwardly, these religious symbols are worn as identity of Hindu adherents, but if closely looked, it contains unique and inner meaning (Guru Subramaniam, 1996, p. 130).

Sacred ash is also known by other names such as *pasmam*, *piracātam*, *raṭcai*, *vipūti* and so forth. Its application is through two ways, by *tiripuṇṭaram* and *uttūḷaṇam*. *Tiripuṇṭaram* marks the wearing of the sacred ash on the forehead by lines of three, while the *uttūḷaṇam* shows the wearing of sacred ash through wide application on the forehead. Both ways are recommended in Hindu sacred texts, especially in the Saivite tradition (*Intu camaya pāṭam*, 1999, p. 77). However, today both methods of application are rarely practised by almost all Malaysian Indians. They prefer to apply sacred ash in a thin and short single line. This depiction is evident in local Tamil dramas where most characters in the seven Tamil dramas practised this form of sacred ash. Only the character of Malliga's father in the drama *Vāy Collil Viraṅ* wore the sacred ash in the *tiripuṇṭaram* form.

Sandalwood and kumkum are typically placed in the bindi or *poṭṭu* form at the middle of the forehead, between the two eyebrows. The *poṭṭu* serves social and religious function, but in this study the religious aspect of the *poṭṭu* is studied to portray the Indian belief in god. The Kumkum is usually red and placed by almost all Hindu women, while men only put *poṭṭu* during or after a religious ritual. This portrayal is seen in the dramas studied, where the *poṭṭu* is placed by the majority of women (Rajantharan, M., & Manimaran, S., 1994, pp. 49-50). The tradition of *poṭṭu* has been practised by Indian society for long, where records on the practice could be seen in one classical work titled *Akanāṇūru* (253, 24-25). The *tilakam* is a popular term used among early Indians to refer to the *poṭṭu* (Visayarangan, V., 2005, p. 416).

From a Hindu religious point of view, the centre of the human forehead has special properties, as it is described as the centre of control of spiritual power usually known as *Piramāṇantam*. This part is known as the third eye of the god Shiva, the head of the Saivite school. Therefore, this part is very important to an individual that aims for *mōkṣā* or *mukti*. This part is rarely shown to the public as this exposes one to risk of hypnotism. Therefore, the Indian community is encouraged to wear the *poṭṭu* on their forehead to close this part to the public (Rajantharan, M., & Manimaran, S., 1994, p. 51).

In addition, the kum kum is described as a symbol of cosmic energy represented by the goddess Shakti. It is placed on sandalwood, a symbol of the god Shiva. Sandalwood naturally has cooling properties. Therefore, it is placed at the centre of the forehead, a place where the nerves connect with the goal of calming one's mental being and emotion. This peace is the basis of spiritual awareness (*Ibid*, p. 52; Guru

Subramaniam, 1996, p. 131). The *uruttirāṭcai* is also an important religious symbol among Saivite Hindus. Each adherent is required to wear the *uruttirāṭcai* in a round form, on their wrists or on their necks. However, this is rarely practised by most Indians (Vengadaramaiyah, K. M., 1998, p. 157). The dramas in study clearly shows this situation, where only the character Logen in the drama *Enṇa Piḷai Ceytēṇ?* wears the *uruttirāṭcai* with his chain, from a total of twenty-seven dramas studied.

Finally, the beliefs of Indians regarding god could also be seen through acts of supplication and the fulfilment of vows as shown in seven local Tamil dramas. The two elements are related to one another, whereby if one act of supplication is answered by god, then the individual carries out the fulfilment of his vows to the god as a show of gratitude. This vow fulfilment or *nērttikkaṭaṇ* depends on the physical and mental strength of an individual and the type of supplication. If the prayer is serious, then the fulfilment of vows is as serious. Usually, the vow fulfilment is carried out during a special festival (Kannaaththaal, K., 2007, pp. 117-120). This depiction is clearly seen in *Kaṭakarāci* where two types of vow fulfilments, the fire-walking ceremony and the breaking of coconuts were carried out by certain characters during the fire-walking ceremony in a temple. In summary, an act of supplication is a basis for the fulfilment of vow in Indian society (Ramakiruddinan, A., 2001, p. 105). The statement of Kathir's mother in the drama *Kai*, who desires to go to the temple to fulfil her vows after praying for the securing of a contract for her husband also proves this argument.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the beliefs of Malaysian Indians on the concept of the divine in local Tamil dramas are seen based on the practices. All daily rituals are in line with authority-defined approaches suggested by scholars. This also proves the basis of postmodern theory that suggests the media as a general interpretative agent for the observation of a culture following its ability in describing a reality. The media of course is considered as culture-dominant in general.

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Keywords: culture, materialistic culture, thinking, beliefs in Tamil Culture.

Introduction

Culture is said to include all the branches of the thinking and behavioral patterns of a group of people in a community. Culture is a complex system of meaning and behavior to explain the way of life of a particular group of community. According to Malabar (2008), culture is the legacy and growth of goods, behavioral patterns, ideas, habits and values that inherited as a cultural component. Materialistic culture is the knowledge about the production, handling, and use of items associated with social values based on religious ethics and regulations. Their life culture encompasses human thinking about the beliefs, values, knowledge, morality, language, art, law and behavioral patterns based on custom, faith and history. (157-161)

Objectives of The Research

This research is conducted in order to derive parameters of culture inherited by the indigenous Malay and Tamil in an effort to find the definition of the term culture. The researcher found that there is a disconnect between the Malay and Tamil scholars. Thus the researcher called for a study to explore the relationship between the indigenous Malay and Tamil scholars.