

Cultural Assimilation among Malays and Indians in Malaysia

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Abstract

This research is about the cultural elements assimilated within Malays and Indians in Malaysia. The cultural elements are including language, literature, roles and statuses of king, women, poets and Brahmins, beliefs & ideologies and customs & traditions. The scholar Munsyi Abdullah's texts were chosen to identify and analyse the Malays cultural practices because he is the father of Malay modern literature in Malaysia. He had literate his books with historical truths. Besides that, Texts of Tamil classical literature also were chosen to identify and list out the Indians cultural habits. The Tamil classical texts were compiled some 2500 years ago in India and it witnesses the Tamils signified the cultural practices in their daily life. The majority of the Malays in Malaysia recognized as Malay descendants by their mother tongue which is the Malay language. Indians had been visiting Malaya as traders and merchants for over 2000 years, but they did not settle down here as settlers until 19th century. The formation of Malaysia under British colonization with multi races of people encourages a good integration among Malays and Indians and therefore there was a chance for them to adapt and assimilate each other's cultural element.

Keywords: Assimilation, cultural elements, Abdullah Munsyi's texts, Tamil classical texts, Malaysia, plural society, beliefs, literatures, statuses, customs.

Introduction

Malaysia can also be synonymous as a multiracial country which is not only has multi cultures and customs but also specific ethnics with own unique identities. As Charlest said 'Unity has the power to raise up small countries and disunity has the power to break down big countries', therefore Malaysia is recognized as a small country with strong unity which is famous with multi races and cultures. There are more than eighty ethnics in Malaysia and the most popular ethnics are Malays, Chinese and Indians. Malaysia has a variety of customs and languages too. It also

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ruled by twelve major languages and five international races (Ubaithulla, 2001, p. 3). Malaysia is situated in a very strategic position where traders from East and West were strongly interested in trading in the past. Therefore it as an ideal place for traders to trade and prosper. This position encourages more civilians to settle here. The culture of Hinduism and Buddhism was brought in by these civilians. So it is fundamentally regarded as the Malaysian past history where the beliefs of Hinduism and Buddhism can be found in today's Malays lifestyle (Ahmad Jelani Halimi, 2008, p. 8).

After 1800, it was discovered that in Southeast Asia, the majority of Malays were dwelling in Malaysia. A Malay descendant can be recognized by their mother tongue which is the Malay language. Malay language is one the Austronesian language which is spoken by more than twenty million people and it also closely related to the Indonesian language. The origins of the Malays, the native Malay language, are vague because the ancient history of Southeast Asia has not examined fully. Some theorized that the Malay language is derived from a group of people named Austronesian. They came from Yunnan province and traveled to the South and South-East Asia and occupied in South Asia territory. This happened back in 2500 before Christ, came the second wave, they called as Malay Deuteron. They occupied the coastal areas and wetlands in the Southeast Asian and they are smart in sailing and farming. Recent theories indicate that, the origin place of the Malays was the island of Borneo, and they have spread from there into three groups. The first group was from West and moved toward the North Sumatra. The second group was from Northeast and moved toward the Philippine Islands and Taiwan and a batch downloaded to Sulawesi and East Kalimantan. The last group was from South West of South Sumatra and moved to West Java (Nik Safiah Karim, Farid Muhammad Onn, Hashim Haji Musa, & Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2010, p. 3).

There is another historical acknowledgement which had stated that Malays at first primarily live on the eastern coast of the Malaysian peninsula and in the island of Borneo in Malaya. In the beginning there is also another historical statement stating that the Malays originated from the 'Mulukas' island of Indonesia. In the 17th century there was a relation born between the island and Malaya and it was when the Dutch ruling the islands. At that time in 1681, the Buggies was the first race who entered Selangor from the island. As time past by, the Buggies King became the 'Sultan' of Selangor in Malaya in the year 1699 to 1718. By the year 1960, the descendants of the Sultan became the royal family in Malaya. That is how the Malay became the *Bumiputera* of Malaysia now. The Malays were excellent sailors and warriors. They were not only good traders but also good in business and politics (Veerapan, 1988, p. 24). They had the ruling skill and sprit by nature where they have a good ruling reputation among Dutch colonization too. Besides that, Malays also well known for their simplicity, gentleness and courtesy. The constitution of Malaysia stated that the Malays who considered as prince of soil *Bumiputera* have political dominance and therefore they must fulfill some residential requirements as must embrace Muslim religion, speak Malay language and pursuant the Malay culture (Milner, 2008, p. 2).

According to Ariffin Omar, he attempted that at the time of the rise of Malay nationalism was in the early 20th century Before Christ. During the time, the pure Malays were regarded by separating the half-bred Malays either from India or Arabia to be recognised as a nation of Malay. At the same time, R.O.Winstedt quoted in his

book titled *The Malays: A Cultural History*, which they were in two different groups. Firstly Malays were the indigenous people who lived around the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. Specifically, the Malays were the natives of the Malay Archipelago, Formosa, the Philippines and several tribes that inhabited the Indo-China region. Generally said, the original inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula, except the Aborigines were regarded as Malays. In the other hand, based on the Constitution of Malaysia, Malay is defined as a person who must be a Muslim, speaks the Malay language and follow the Malay lifestyle (Ahmad Jelani Halimi, 2008, p. 8).

In the other hand, many Indians came to Malaya as religious and language teachers, craftsmen, businessmen, farmers and so on. This happens 2000 to 3000 years before. The traces those they left still can be seen in Malaysian language, traditions, food and in dressing of people's in Malay land (Ubaithulla, 2001, p. 189). Indians were the world's best migrants in their ancient times. Began 250 years before the birth of Christ the Cholas sceptered into the Malay land to conquer and rule Asian countries. In the earlier second century the Indians start their business by trading with other countries. Trading business was successfully done by Indian merchants through the Indian Ocean. Evidences had written by Latin teachers in detail. Besides them, Chinese tourists and history teachers also state about this in their daily records. Proofs also can be seen in the inscription, badges, coins, literature texts, journey and historical books (Ubaithulla, 2001, p. 248).

In the year Before Christ 502 to 556, as stated by Veerapan (1988, p. 13) from his extract that there is historical proofs written in 'Liang'. It had stated that in Before Christ 1012, the first person who ruled Kedah was King Rajendra Cholan and therefore he had a special name '*Kadaram Kondan*' which means the person who conquered Kedah. He was a powerful and intelligent King who also ruled Nikoba, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and West Malaya at the same time. The archeologist of Malaysia still collects the proofs of the statues of Lord *Vinayaga* and writings at Bujang Valley in Tamil and Sanskrit languages. During King Rajendra Cholan's time, he had the flag of tiger which has been adapted by Malaysia as a national symbol. In 11th and 12th century, it has been proved that Indian merchants and traders had a flourishing business at the Panchur seashore which is situated near to Beruas. In 1743 they also built ships and ports along the seashore which attracted many Dutch traders.

According to Kumaran (2011) although there are some historical evidences stated that Indians had been visiting Malaya as traders and merchants for over 2000 years, but they did not settle down here as settlers until 19th century. Indians were migrated from India to Malaya as cheap labours in 1786 by British colonization when they ruled and keep the state Pinang under their control. On 11th August 1786, Francis Light stepped in Pinang and rose up the Union Jack flag and named Pinang Island as Prince of Wales. The British colonization planned to start the works to increase the economic level of Malaya and therefore the Indians were migrated in huge groups as farmers and infrastructure builders. The majority of Indians who had migrated to Malaya found themselves in a multiethnic, working-class environment. The British administration at that time took initiative's to integrate the ethnic groups. The main reason of Indians especially Tamils brought from South India as Coolies by British because of the economic activities in Malaya. The British knew well of Indians capability as handworker's and they labeled them as rubber tappers and infrastructure builders. At the same time, there also Indians who

came from educated background served as administrators and small businessmen. Susan Oorjitham (1984) added that in this millennium the population of Indians in Malaysia was six percent in West Malaysia, about eighty percent of the Indian community is made up of South Indian Tamils. The people who know Malaysian and Malay literature will definitely recognize Munsyi Abdullah. He was the pioneer of Malay modern literature. This is because he was the first writer who wrote about his historical events which he experienced in his lifetime. But before this, the former writers of Malay literature wrote on illusion and myths (Ubaithulla, 2001, p. 169). The texts of Abdullah Munsyi are one of the exemplary works in the Malay land since his existence. Munsyi Abdullah, whose real name is Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi lived before more than hundred years and came from an educated family. He was born in Malacca on 1796 and passed away in 1854 in Mekah. He descended from Yemen in Arabia. His father, Sheikh Abdul Kadir was an utterance in Malacca. He was a religious and Arabic language teacher who lived in Southern India and was married with an Indian lady. Abdullah is a half-bred of Arab and Tamil, but grew up among the Malay culture in Malacca. Like his father, Munsyi Abdullah also worked as a language teacher and writer. During the British colonization, he worked as a language teacher and received the title 'Munsyi'. He received the title from Hindustan disciples who called him Munsyi which means teacher in Hindi. Through them Munsyi Abdullah also learned Hindi language as well (Hamzah, 2007, p. 32). Even though he was a half-bred of Arab and Tamil, but he learned many languages such as Tamil, Hindi, Arab, Mandarin and English. He was interested in finding out new knowledge and explores it. He always advised people to explore new knowledge and do not believe in ancient beliefs and practices.

Abdullah is the first Malay author who had deviated from traditional writing patterns and therefore he was named as the father of modern literature. At the same time, he had translated the gospels into Malay language during his missionary movements in Singapore and Malacca. The texts wrote by him were *Hikayat Abdullah*, *The Voyage of Abdullah*, *Hikayat Panca Tanderan*, *Stories of Abdullah*, *Abdullah and Malay Community* and many more. His texts were all about the development of people's lifestyle and his efforts to raise the Malay language. The texts those chosen by researcher are *Hikayat Abdullah*, *The Voyage of Abdullah*, *Hikayat Panca Tanderan*, *Abdullah Munsyi and Malay Community* (*Abdullah Munsyi dan Masyarakat Melayu*) and *Memories of Abdullah Munsyi* (*Kenang-kenangan Abdullah Munsyi*). Although he wrote many books, the most significant were *The Voyage of Abdullah* in 1838 and *Hikayat Abdullah* in 1849 because they were the most memorial books given by him to the Malaysian literature world. These books are still used as the most precious referable books (Hamzah, 2007, p. ii).

Munsyi Abdullah wrote the text, *The Voyage of Abdullah* to merge all his memories and experiences those he went through in his life in 1849, while he seafaring up the east coast peninsula. After this, he started to write about his autobiography in *Hikayat Abdullah* in 1843 and completed in 1849. He wrote this book upon requested by his European friend. He added his own life experience and his relation with most important personalities in the Malay land such as Raffles, Farquhar, Sultan Husin Shah, Crawford and many others. At the same time, the book *Hikayat Panca Tanderan* is a translated verse of *Panchatantira Kathaigal* which he translated from a Tamil text with his friend Tambi Mutu Pirapathar's guidance. Eventhough the content of the

text is similar, but he had written it based on Malay people's lifestyle (Yusof, 1985, p. iv).

Through the texts, Munsyi Abdullah produced with a distinct lifestyle of literature but also reveal new things due to a clash of western and eastern cultures. His works are not bound by any form of writing. He also produced works based on the observation of environment around him. Munsyi Abdullah grew up when British Imperial was great in Malacca. During this time, the British colonies planned to expand their imperial in Malay land and therefore Raffles arrived in Singapore on 1820. In the 19th century the Malay community from Malacca and Singapore were became the mixed multiracial people. All the incidents quoted in this book were based on historical truths (Hamzah, 2007, p. iii). Abdullah Munsyi's texts enlightening with Malay land's historical events, Malay community and also other racial are lifestyle, customs and practices.

In this research, the researcher chose the Tamil classical texts to identify Indians especially the Tamils cultural elements. This is because Tamil classical texts are recognized as the best medium to identify and explore the Tamil people's cultural habits and elements. According to Professor Vimalanatham where he stated in his book titled *History of Tamil literature* that Tamil classical literature's period was from 300 B.C to 250 AD. At the same time, the Tamil classical literature's texts also were found in between 500 B.C to 100 AD. Even though the ending of Tamil Classical literature's time was at 300 B.C, but its beginning period cannot be confirmed until now. This Tamil classical literature's era defined as a golden era by historians and Tamil poets. It was mainly because the Tamil people played a good role and became the pioneer in associating the social, political, economic and developments. So this is the suitable to analyze the Tamil people's cultural habits and elements. Therefore this period also marked as a golden age in Tamil people's life (Vengkadesan, 2007, p. 25). We can conclude that the Tamils culture and traditions clearly identified at Tamil classical literature's time period. At that time, the Tamils started to practice their cultural knowledge and cultivate the cultural habits to their descendants. Tamils began to learn and value their cultural practices. Meanwhile, Indians who's arrived in Malaya from India in 17th century brought along their cultural practices and started to practice them in Malaya. The other racial people in Malay land had a chance to adapt, learn, practice and assimilate Tamil people's cultural elements.

As one of the philosopher said, Tamil classical literatures were rooted more than 2000 years, and from that we learn the ancient Tamils lifestyle and customs. Until now the Tamil classical literatures have been considered as a treasure of the Tamils. Tamil classical literature texts are divided to *Etthuthogai* which consists of Eight Anthologies and *Pathupattu* which contains Ten Idylls. The texts in *Ethuthogai* are *Akananuru*, *Narrinai*, *Kurunthogai*, *Pathirrupathu*, *Kalittokai*, *Purananuru*, *Paripadal* and *Ainkurunuru*. Meanwhile the *Pathupathu* consists of *Thirumurugarrupadai*, *Maduraikanji*, *Malaipadukadam* and many more. In the ancient time, the poets wrote their poems on palm leaves. Later after third century, the poems were collected and compiled into books of *Etthuthogai* and *Pattuppathu*. Therefore the actual time of the poems sung were much earlier than the time of the poems compelled. The total numbers of poems are 2381 and the total poets were around 500 people (Vengkadesan, 2007, p. 26). The Tamil classical texts are divided into two categories which are about human's internal and external values. The poems with the themed internal behaviors

which are named as *Akam*, reflecting human's nature by emphasizing one's love, behavior and habits. Internal values will mold and discipline the human. On the other hand, the *Puram* which is containing external matters in poems which pictures' one's presentation and reaction towards others such as in war, business, studies and extra.

A great Greek intellectual Homer said that the two greater things than all are love and war. Tamil Classical texts depicted that the Tamils not only gave importance to love and war through their literary poems but they also signified them in their daily life. Vaiyapuri Pillai stated that Tamil classical literature has become the mother and the best guide to other modern literatures. He added that, Tamil classical literatures are one of the influences of the late Tamil. Today they serve as the beacon lights to guide modern poetry in the Tamil land (Vengkadesan, 2007, p. 27). A revival of Tamil classical literature continues with the deontology texts such as *Thirukural* which is emphasizing on human behavior and lifestyle. It is clearly known that the interaction of Tamils on those days through these classical texts.

There are many definitions and meanings given to the word culture. A debate has taken place in England in the year 1870 for the definition of the word culture. After the debate the word culture was strongly defined by Mathew Arnold and he progressively brought it into use internationally. Based on Mathew Arnold, culture described a person's characteristics and social behavior in the society. The word culture '*panpadu*' in Tamil is very new and was first brought to be practiced by Professor D.K. Sithambaranathan Muthaliar. Even though its new in Tamil field but Tamil scholars identify that culture has closely related to our character (Vaiyapuri, 1958, p. 2). Based on Winslow's English - Tamil Dictionary, the scholar defined culture as a human's daily practice and the achievement that he made. It also reflects the person's behavior, and character. He also added that culture is a tool to discipline one's character and with moral behaviors (Appaswamy, 1994, p. 298). There also some scholars opined in Illustrated Oxford Dictionary and in the Malay Chambers Dictionary that, culture is closely related to the cultivation of mind or manners, especially when the human involved in artistic and intellectual activities.

Therefore, culture is rarely practiced by a community who civilized and had progressed in mind. It is the manifestations of human intellectual achievement. As same as that, for Rohana Yusuf culture is referring to a person's intellectual thought where is should be pure and genuine. Therefore, cultural heritage through the writings of the past record of colonization, life, advice, sarcasm, criticism and descriptions are symbolizing the importance of genuine culture and manners. At the same time, Storey and John wrote in their book's preface that social activities and everyday life practices capable to consummate a person's culture. According to this, we can assume that a person's practices are regarded as a culture (Storey & John, 1950).

The cultural consumption also comes together with articulation of a person's creative freedom and his dependence to the culture industry. Dominic Strinati wrote that original culture exists among people who have strong polished roots. From this he created his own autonomous and modular type of disciplines where they able to reflect one's own life and experiences (Dominic, 2007, p. 11). There is another view of culture where in the past, culture was symbolized as custom of life with certain rules and practices. But in this millennium, culture is recognized as how a person lives

his life in the correct path (Effindi, 2010). Culture also asserted that should be filled with a variety of styles in thinking and physically manifested in kinds of faces and carving. He added some illustration to define culture where he stated that culture is like a water which is able to flow either in the stream or in rivers. Here is what he tried to say is, culture is a matter which can be adjustable and acceptable by the group of people through the times go on (Shamsul, 2007, p. 198). All the values occurred in a community is determined as culture where the group of people followed and owned them in their society themselves. This concept also indicated as Cultural Determinism. Culture has variety of concepts and definitions, but culture is signified as a habitual practices which are able to drive a human's entire way of life. Culture is a matter of knowledge which is created by a certain community to perceive, interpret, express and respond to the social realities around them.

People start to implement their cultural practices and customs referring to many reasons. The customs which are capable to rule a person's life today are called as rituals. As a Malay proverb, 'Let the child die, but not the custom', refers to the importance of customs and practices in the Malay community. The Malays in Malaysia have a strong cultural background and their cultural habits those have been followed in the past and are still followed by them in this millennium are such as language, literature, visual and performing arts, traditional dress, cuisine, games, religion views, traditional games and many more. One thing that cannot deny is, Malay people are strongly tightening with their religious views and therefore they believe the religious thoughts can mold a person to be good for him and also can serve better to the community. The series of Abdullah Munshi's texts are emphasizing on Malay's lifestyle where he asserted their customs and cultural elements too. Abdullah Munshi, the father of Malay modern literature who had deviated from traditional writing patterns merged his writings with historical truths on whatever he saw and found out among the Malays during his lifetime.

Indians, who are rich with cultural elements and recognized as ancients in the world, start to practice their cultural habits 2000 years before and they are still following the practices until this era. For Indians, culture is the root of a person's life which is able to drive him into the correct path. As intellectual Meenachi Sundranar defined, Indians culture was born when it became a mark of human's significant life where he can live wisdom in the world and also after he dies (Thatchanamoorthy, 2005, p. 5). Indians culture is visible notably in India, Sri Lanka and in other Diasporas like Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore, London and also across the world. Indians who are rich with sculpture arts and architecture, exquisite their culture in Hindu temples and expressed their culture through literature, performing arts, language, colourful garments, religious thoughts, cuisine, celebrations, rituals and many more. The Tamil cultural elements also emphasizing on human behaviour and lifestyle. With the growth of these cultural elements, people's life began to blossom in a proper way.

In Malaysia, cultural integration can be seen widely due to the multiracial community. This multiracial community began at the time of British colonization in Malaya. British aimed to bring in Indians and Chinese in Malaya for economic reasons. Once they were here, the British administration made effort to integrate the ethnic groups. Thus, politically it would be a threat to British if these groups were integrated together. As a result the 'divide and rule' policy was utilized to create much competition and distrust among ethnic groups. Even after independence in

1957, the government political policies have had to contend with such elements of competition and suspicion. At the same time, British wish to create Malaya as a multiracial country where they need labours' energy to explore Malaya's economic wealth. Therefore in the earlier stage at the British colonization period, J.S Furnivall brought in the plural society theory to create a good social integration among the multiracial community. The term 'plural society' which is common today, means as people from different races or ethnic groups. Where they can be differentiated from their appearance, language, culture and religion. During the British colonization period, there were divisions and specialization of each race. The main motive of this division and specialization in the works was economic. The main factor was British colony had believed that there will be unity among the multiracial community, where the people trust that they will be secure economically and politically. During British colonization in Malacca the multiracial people lived in peace and harmony. The people believed that each problem will be settled by the British colonies (Zahari, 2008, p. 41).

When the integration among Malays and Indians start to get closer, and they began to practice each other's customs gradually. The Malays and Indians easily adapted each other's because of their closeness in their neighbourly surroundings. Indian traditions were the main elements stated in Malay histories. As Ubaithulla said, Malaysia's race practices and customs spin tightly with Indians' tradition. As same, Indians tradition followed in China, Korea, Japan and we need not be surprised that it also influenced by Malaysia's local people (Ubaithulla, 2001, p. 165). The great cultural assimilation happened between Malays and Indians when the Indians from India came to Malaya and started to practice inter marriages. As the author Abdullah Munsyi revealed that he is half-bred of Muslim and Hindu who came from Hindu descendant. He stated that his grandmother was a Hindu before and converted to Muslim once moved to Malacca from Kedah (Hamzah, 2007, p. 6). Abdullah Munsyi also notified that Keling or Indian is a race came from the continent of South India either Muslim or Hindu, where their native language is Tamil. The Hinduism includes races such as Tamil, Gujarati, Malabar, Bangali and Chetty (Hamzah, 2007, p. 26). During the British colonization time in Malacca, there is a Hindu community who recognized as descendants of Indian subcontinent rarely called as Chitty. Abdullah Musnyi categorizes them into Indians. At the British colonization time, some of the Indians came from India settled in Malacca and lost contact with their native land. Later, they married with local Malay women. It was a beginning point for cultural assimilation among Malays and Indians in Malaya. However, at first these inter marriage couples' lifestyles based on Hindu religious belief. Abdullah Munsyi also indicated that the Malay people willing to accept and imitate other cultures. There were many incidents seen by him in Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan were a cultural shock among Malays and he does not really understand the spirit and the psychology of Malay people who received traditional Malay customs and old feudal system rather than follow their own cultural path. He also asserted that this phenomenon versus with an Indian Muslim community where this group of people more prefer to gain new knowledge (Zahari, 2008, p. 214).

At the same time, Abdullah Munsyi certified that Indian merchants brought in wide knowledge of culture into Malay land. It was proved where in past days, while local merchants trade in Malacca with Indian merchants and they need to

know arithmetic, calculation and ability to speak Tamil language. As time goes on, the Malay merchants and local people start to learn arithmetic, calculation and Tamil language from Tamil merchants for running their business. At the same time, people from Malacca do not want to look for a job in other states, but people from other states came to find work in Malacca. The people who came from other states started to settle in Malacca and had families (Hamzah, 2007, p. 53). From these acknowledgements, we can identify the main factors of cultural assimilation among Malays and Indians are from the inter marriages of Malays and Indians and also the Indians cultural elements which had greatly influenced the Malays.

Assimilation theory formed when there are immigrants came into another nation which is not theirs. As Gordon recognised, cultural assimilation was born when there is a process of acculturation among the immigrants who like and adapt the lifestyle patterns such as customs, behaviours, beliefs and ideologies (Richard, 1997). But in Malaysia the cultural assimilation started when the people lived in own nation like Malays influenced by the immigrants' cultural habits and would like to follow them. On the other hand, as indicated by Gordon, the immigrants as Indians also had influenced by the local people's cultural practices. This is because, there was a chance between multiracial people to live together and communicate, and the cultural assimilation happened without their realisation. This phenomenon became common in Malaysia where the people live in understanding and respecting each other's customs and practices. The main reason they learn, follow and adapt each other's cultural practice was because they were greatly influenced and interested in learning them. Besides that, the other factors of cultural assimilation in Malaysia are the educational, political and occupational background and also intermarriages.

Life of the Malays and Indians in Malaysia which is forming a multiracial society, cultivate them to promote and adopt each other's culture and customs easily. By this way, the assimilation of culture came into Malaysia. The assimilation of Malay and Tamil people's cultural elements are listed below such as language, literature, roles and statuses of king, women, poets and Brahmins, beliefs and ideologies and customs and traditions.

Language

Before several decades, there was a language spread through the land of India. It was an anterior than Dravidian's language. Some of the intellectuals regarded it as the most conservative language. At the same time, this conservative language set a path to some new Dravidian languages. That is why, until today there are twelve Dravidian languages in India. One of the ancient and distinguished new Dravidian languages is none other than Tamil. The word 'Tamil' can be defined as sweet or euphonious. In Tamil classical texts, such as *Maduraikanji* and *Purananuru*, the authors described about the Tamil language as special features. In *Maduraikanji* is written that Tamil language was highly developed and protected in Tamil classical era. Besides that, some lyrics in *Purananuru* explain that, Tamil language will sustained anytime and therefore Tamil classical era is named as Tamil language's best plight (Vaiyapuri, 1958, p. 27).

Munsiy Abdullah who is a half-bred of Muslim and Hindu, identify himself as a *Keling* which means he is an Indian. Munsiy Abdullah who is smart enough in Malay and Tamil language bravely proved that many terms in Malay language was adapted and assimilated from Tamil language. He rarely used some of the

words in his texts. Hamzah Hamdani (2007) who wrote back Abdullah Munsi's *Hikayat Abdullah* mentioned some words such as *nista* (p. 28) means stigma, *supai* (p. 45) defined as policeman, *kuli* (p. 48) which means porter and the word *rupiah* (p. 49) where its referring to Indian currency which widely had used in Malaya. Surprisingly, these words carry the same meaning in both languages. Furthermore, in Munsi Abdullah also wrote his another book titled *Hikayat Panca Tanderan* by using a few Malay words those synonymous with Tamil language (Yusof, 1985). The words are *khadam* (p.9) refers to slaves, *sida-sida* means the eunuchs in the palace officials. Ubaithulla opined that, clear language assimilation can be seen among Malays and Indians in Malaysia by referring the Malay words and sentences those closely similar with Tamil and Sanskrit languages (2001, p. 165).

Based on Munsi Abdullah, his father is so smart in Tamil language, and he has been taught to read and write in Tamil language since childhood. He said that his father wrote a letter to a Tamil teacher to teach Tamil language to him. On those days in Malaya, all the wealthier and educated peoples' children should learn Tamil language. It has been the custom in Melaka from ancestral times. He asserted that Tamil language was also useful to do calculations where at that time Malacca was crowded by Indian merchants. The Indian merchants were the rich people and because of their existence Malacca became famous trading port. Therefore the kids required to learn Tamil for become a good merchant or businessman in the future. Through his texts, Munsi Abdullah was mentioning about wealthier and educated peoples' children learned languages and mathematics. Here he actually pointing to the Indians whether they religiously Muslim or Hindu who had success in the economy, including his own family (Zahari, 2008, p. 25).

According to Abdullah, Malay children were not sent to school to learn the language or mathematics but only to study the Al-Quran at that time. He also indicated that the person who learned Tamil language had a bright future in the past where his was so smart in Tamil language even he used the language to do written work, calculations and correspondence and authoring by wrote letters to the Malay rulers (Zahari, 2008, p. 198). Tamil language also very archaic where in Munsi Abdullah's era he experienced an incident. A day in *Gelam* hutment when he was there with Mr. Raffles, the workers found a stranded rock with certain writing. The Hindu, Chinese and Malay respectively said that the writings were from their own languages. But, none can ensure the reading. Finally, Mr. Raffles said that the writing sure was from Tamil language, because Indians were the earliest people arrived to the land of Java, Bali and Thailand (Hamzah, 2007, p. 188).

Munsi Abdullah also asserted, where he had heard that great nations of the world such as Arabic, English, Chinese and Hindus have intelligence to read, write and preserve their language. With their nature, they can teach and guide other people. After 19th century the language assimilation among Malays and Indians changed was the Indians start to learn Malay where it became the national language. Moreover, the Indians who from India start to settle in Malacca. They lost contact with their native land and married with local Malay women whether non-Muslims, Javanese, Chinese or slave. So by then, the Tamil language was replaced by Malay (Zahari, 2008, p. 33).

One of the Abdullah Munsi's exemplary works is *Hikayat Panca Tanderan* which is written by him, based on moral values and ethics of life in five chapters. This text of tales is originated from Tamil language where it is known as a translation of *Pancathantira Kathaigal*. In 1835, Abdullah Munsi translated this text with his friend Muthu Prapathar's guidance who was a Tamil linguist (Yusof, 1985, p. vii). Munsi Abdullah explained the main reasons that encouraged him to do this translation work were because the words and parables in this tale had the capability to wise the knowledge of readers. There phrases and words might be emulated to compose books and will be beneficial in the future (Hamzah, 2007, p. 343). Even though some of the contents similar with *Hikayat Kalila va Damina* which written by Ibnu Al Mustafa, it's also referred from *Pancathanthira Kathaiga* which already exists in Tamil language before. In this text, Abdullah Munsi not only discussed about the Malay people's lifestyle but also compared their customs and believes with other races of people in different short stories. Meanwhile, Munsi Abdullah also claimed that, story frame which is one of the modern literature styles was originated in India and brought to Persia, and then through Persia it reached the Malay world. In the new edition of *Hikayat Panca Tanderan*, the author Mohd Nor Yusof wrote, this tale is able to connect Malay readers back to the old literary treasures which received many influences from Arabia, Persia and India, so that it becomes a guidance to do a comparison with Malay literature at this age (Yusof, 1985, p. ix). Besides this literature work, Munsi Abdullah was acquainted with Ibrahim who is a Indian correspondent came from and stayed with Mr Raffles. From Ibrahim who is an Indian, Munsi Abdullah learn letter writing patterns and get know that some Malay grammar verdicts were adapted from Tamil language. At the same time, Mr Raffles also asked Abdullah to gather the letters and compile them into books with his Indian friend Tambi Ahmad bin Naina Marikan's help. Various articles were written by them, such as tale, letters and some of them stated about Malay origins and poetry (Hamzah, 2007, p. 67).

Roles and Statues

Tamil classical era is the golden age for women too. That era had given path to womanhood itself. As written in one of the classical Tamil poems *Purananuru* lyrics, ancient Tamil people including men and women were brave enough. The poets wrote about women bravery where they were equal brave with the men and fought well for their states (Vengkadesan, 2007, p. 67). Besides that, a woman according to Indians belief, has the significant place in a family where she considered as the most responsible and powerful person who capable to bring a family into correct path. Therefore each and every women in Tamil classical era recommended to study well where education can guide them with wide knowledge of being good with surroundings and carrying their huge duties in their families. These cultural practices among Indian women were assimilated by Malay women too. At British imperial period the Malay people in Malacca were lived their life with religious knowledge but they not gave importance to other educations such as learning languages or mathematics. Munsi Abdullah stated that Malay children were not sent to school to learn the language or mathematics but only to study the Al-Quran (Zahari, 2008, p. 27). This situation changed when Munsi Abdullah's family immigrated to Malacca. His grandmother who was an educated person became the headmistress of the primary school and started to teach the children with language and mathematics

knowledge. She was a Hindu who grew up in Kedah and converted to Islam once reached Malacca (Zahari, 2008, p. 198). By then, the women and children in Malacca started to learn new knowledge and children were sent to teachers' residences to obtain the education.

Another women's role in Tamil classical text *Akananuru* was shown is, a married woman is not allowed to leave her family and follow her husband. This rule was very common among the Indian ladies where they have to take care of their children and elder people in family while their husbands went abroad to work or business. The sorrow of married women because they away from their husbands was sung by poets in Tamil classical texts (Vengkadesan, 2007, p. 59). This tradition was assimilated and followed by Malay ladies where there was a rule among Malays stated that wife cannot follow husband to abroad. Abdullah made the decision to bring his wife and children move to Singapore because of his duties while Abdullah's wife agreed to that at first. But his relatives did not allow them because it is against their tradition. Sail Taboo seems to be a strong belief in the community at that time. For women who sails, it is considered as an act of contempt and lack of respect (Zahari, 2008, p. 184).

Ancient Tamils were great poets too. The strong relationship lasted between the poets and the kings. In Tamil classical era, the poets recited poems by worshipping the kings and did not misuse their talent by worshipping injustice kings and they also not motivated on receiving incentives or gifts from the kings. The king welcomed the poets and prefers to hear them because through poems the poets developed Tamil language and sent messages to the people. The kings and poets lived by respecting and praising each other through their poems. Some of the poets in Tamil classical era are *Punailukkarra Antanalan*, *Nallikai Kabilan* and *Selva Nallicai Kabilan*. Moreover, the women also recognised as great poets in Tamil classical time. More than thirty female poets lived that time including *Auvaiyar*, *Atimantiyar*, *Kakkaiyatiniyar*, *Okkur Macattiyar* and many others. They were praised by other poets and they manage to establish peace through their poems during war. Besides that, we can notice that Indians especially the kings, warriors and poets were intelligent and knowledgeable (Vengkadesan, 2007, p. 25). This tradition of Indian palace was as same as in Malay king's custom. Munsyi Abdullah wrote a story on Malay king's custom that, whoever intelligent and thoughtful yet eloquent in speech, loved by the king (Yusof, 1985, p. 5). Therefore it's became reality among Munsyi Abdullah and his friends who were from Malay community when they served British colonies with Malay knowledge, they will be served back better by them. When Abdullah helped Mr Newbold to translate the Malay letters, he was treated by Mr Newbold with Malay foods which include various ingredients of Malay sauce (Hamzah, 2007, p. 315).

In Indians history, Brahmins are recognized as educated and knowledgeable persons. As they served themselves to God in temples and became the teachers who responsible to educate the community. The Brahmins are highly respected by the Indian community includes the king. When the Indians came into Malaya most of the Brahmins were coming to Malaya to spread their Hindu religion knowledge and develop the Tamil language. The day after, they became as priests in temples. Munsyi Abdullah accepted that Brahmins are educated people and they had educated not only the people but also the king's descendant. Therefore the Brahmins blessed by the king with some properties and other valuables (Yusof, 1985, p. 2). As Ubaithulla said, at first the Brahmins played role as ministers and advisers to the kings. They

also had taught and command some rituals and ceremonies in Malay king's palace. Besides that, in Tamil literature we can see that the priest play an important role in advising the king, enhance the rules and also to guide the people to run the rituals and ceremonies in correct path. In the *Hikayat Abdullah*, Abdullah Munsyi has stated that these cultural ceremonies blossoms among Malays with the guidance from Brahmins and they guide the people with the reference from the classical literature texts (2001, p. 123).

Beliefs and Ideologies

The Tamil classical era also gave importance to a family structure where it is closely tied to religious values. As in all other traditional societies, religion legitimizes the family structure. Among to Indian principles, a human must pass through *Gurukulam* means the stage of celibacy. This stage marks that the bachelor who has to practice celibacy and undergo rigorous academic and spiritual training (Susan, 1984, p. 173). Usually in India, the children were sent to their *Guru* or teacher to undergo these practices. The teachers are notably Brahmins. This Indian ideology was assimilated by the Malays in Malacca at British imperial time. Munsyi Abdullah asserted that the children were handed over to the teacher for a few months to learn academic and spiritual knowledge. Munsyi Abdullah wrote in his reminiscences that he was handed over to the teachers do to so. The rules to admit the child also adapted from the Indians were at first the parents of the child worship the teacher, as well as bringing a betel tray along with their child who wants to study there. Then the child will be submitted to the teacher (Zahari, 2008, p. 207). Hamzah Hamdani in his book *Hikayat Abdullah*, wrote that It has been the tradition for the mother or father of the child who wants to study to meet with his teacher with bringing a tray of betel. Then the son have to worship the teacher's foot to get his blessings. Then, the teachers will read the prayers (2007, p. 24). Then, the parents will pay the teacher's fees and after graduation, child was commanded to worship the teachers and the parents. The teachers were given a shirt, handkerchief, a pair of shoes and a sum of ten dollars. It was applied to legalize all the teachings taught to the child (Hamzah, 2007, p. 26). The tradition of child who start the education with teachers and parents blessings, bringing a tray of betel with sweets and finally the parents pay the teacher with some money to legalize the education were similar with Indian tradition. But in Malay tradition the child will be back to home after schooling hours which was different with Indians traditions where the child have to stay in the teacher's residence or in hostel until he complete his studies.

Customs and Traditions

As Ubaithulla indicated in his book, we can clearly notify the cultural assimilation of Indian ritual practices in Malays' ceremonies. We can identified that Malays followed Indians style in king crowning ceremony, palace ceremonies, social functions and other family rituals. Some types of Indian's tasteful cuisines and colourful garments also adapted by Malays. Besides that, the Malay ministers and people also obeyed the king's instruction as in Indian culture. As same as Indians, Malay kings and leaders also preferred to give not only gifts but also awards to people to recognize his or her social responsibility. The awards such as Sri, Tuan, Sang were quite famous in those

days (2001, p. 165). In those days, the Indians who came to Malaya as merchants planned to stay here and married with the local Malay people. They start to imitate and adopt some Malay customs, especially in terms of food and way of dressing. But this group of people had followed Hindu religious beliefs. They still carry on Hindu religious ceremonies but in Malay language. Therefore until today some of Malays ceremonies are similar with Indians (Zahari, 2008, p. 33). By times move on, they more indulged with the assimilated culture. In Tamil classical era, the kings and princes were very generous and they wished to give incentives either in form of money or valuable gifts. Even, the rich men and women also followed this principle in their lives. We can see the proof in *Purananuru* lyric which is stating a woman gave money and jewels to musicians who look after when her husband not around (Vengkadesan, 2007, p. 68).

Conclusion

Malaysians, now living in a multiracial community had received much assimilation of cultures and customs in their daily life. As time goes by, the community is more indulged with their assimilated culture. The researcher identified the origin of each Malay and Indian culture based on Abdullah Munsyi's texts and Tamil Classical texts. In addition, the cultural assimilation among the two different communities in Malaysia, form a sense of understanding among themselves. It's not only creating a better social integration but also bond the people live in harmony and stayed united by respecting each other's customs. The assimilation of culture shows the community which is willing to receive the good influences of culture those are equivalent to them. As a result, until today, the cultural assimilation among Malays and Indians in Malaysia is welcomed and accepted happily by the two ethnic groups of people.

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