

An Evaluation of Literatures Related To The Phenomenon of Building Shrines Within The Residence Compound Amongst Malaysian Indians¹

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Abstract

Hindus possess their own unique religious beliefs and practices and they have been inherited from one generation to another for centuries. Yet the religious beliefs and practices of Hindus living in India varies from that of Hindus living elsewhere or outside India. The best exemplification of the differences is the religious practice of Malaysian Hindus as they have introduced a new trend in the Hindu religious practice by building shrines for deities within their residence compound. It is a new phenomenon amongst the Malaysian Hindu community and also it is envisaged as a problem in the nation as most shrines built illegally without the consent of the local authorities. As yet no research is found on the subject and it is recommended that a study must be carried out in order to ascertain whether the building of shrines within the residence compound is permitted in the *Agamic* rules of Hinduism. This article aims at looking at the literatures related to the phenomenon of establishing shrines within the residence compound which would help one to conduct a research on the above-mentioned subject.

Keywords: Malaysian Hindus. Shrines built within the residence compound, local authorities, *Agamic* rules, Hinduism.

Introduction

According to M.N.Srinivas & Shaham, Hinduism is one of the most ancient religions practised by a particular group in India and by sections across the world (1972, pg 358). More than one billion people of the 6.8 billion in the world are Hindus

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(SatguruSivayaSubramuniaswami, 2004, 860). Hinduism originated even long before record system was introduced. Since it originated in the pre-historic period and no concrete evidence found on the founder of Hinduism and the date Hinduism was founded. No one could be named as the originator of Hinduism, Instead, this religious following has been fostered and propagated throughout the millennia by Maharishis (enlightened philosophers and sages) (Sir John Marshall, 1973). There is no monolithic and global institution or movement that oversees or owns the customs and scriptures of Hinduism. However, some ancient scriptures of this religion dating back to 2500 BC have been found in the Indus Valley civilization (M.Rajantharan, K.Sillalee&R.Viknarah, 2012).

In Hinduism, temples play an important role whereby temple can be described as the primary symbol of Hinduism and it is the place of worship for Hindus. A characteristic of most temples is the presence of *murtis* (icons) of the Hindu deity to whom the temple is dedicated. They are usually dedicated to one primary deity, the presiding deity, and other deities associated with the main deity. However, some temples are dedicated to several deities, and others are dedicated to *murtis* in an iconic form. Many temples are in key geographical points, such as a hill top, near waterfalls, caves and rivers, as these are, according to Hinduism, worship places and make it easier to contemplate God (Najan, 2000).

There are vast differences of South Indian temple architecture and North. North Indians temple follow the *Nagara* style of temple architecture with beehive-like tower called *gopura*. made up of layer upon layer of architectural elements such as *kapotas* and *gavaksas*, all topped by a large round cushion-like element called an *amalaka*. Whereas South Indian temples has a pyramid shaped tower consisting of progressively smaller storeys of small pavilions, a narrow throat, and a dome on the top called a *shikhara* (Manimaran S., 2008). The rules of building temples are stipulated in Hindu religious texts called *Agama*. Only the temples following the *Agamic* rules of building temples are considered to be temples. As far as Malaysia is concerned, since South Indians, especially the Tamils make up a majority of the Indian population in Malaysia, they built their temples according to South Indian style. Yet there found a few North Indian temples built by North Indians following the *Nagara* style (Krishna GopalRampal, 2008).

Although temple worship is an ancient religious practice of Hindus, a new phenomenon is now prevalent amongst present day Malaysian Hindus which is building shrines within the residence compound. This phenomenon seems to have begun in the 1980's and it has been practised almost for the past 25 years now. It is totally a new phenomenon amongst Hindus and it is also being a problem to the authorities as most shrines are built illegally without obtaining legal permits from the authorities concerned. Sometimes this makes the authorities take legal actions against the shrines by demolishing them. It makes the Hindus upset and causes uproars and dissatisfaction. As such, a study must be carried out to ascertain whether the building of shrines within the house compound is acceptable or permitted in the *Agamas* or religious texts to ensure it brings a solution to the phenomenon and preserves racial harmony in the nation.

Hinduism And Malaysian Indians

In the late 18th century, Indians were brought to Malaysia as labourers by the British (Arasaratnam, 1970). Although Indians migrated to Malaysia so long ago, they still preserve their religion, culture, customs, traditions. When Tamillians first migrated here, they begun worshipping deities such as goddesses *Kali*, *Amman*, *Draupadi*, *Mariamman*, and guardian deities such as *Madurai Veeran*, *SanggiliKarupar*, *Aiyyanarand* so on (M.Rajantheran, ManimaranSubramaniam, 2006). They worshipped their family deities and guardian deities by building shrines for their deities within their houses. Tamillians living in estates spent their leisure time by engaging in traditional activities such as *Tiruvizha*, traditional dances and the like. They also followed Traditions of Tamil Nadu such as slaughtering animals, carrying milk pots and *teemithital*. These traditions are practiced until today (Rajoo, 1984). These guardian deities are considered to be their family deities. Besides the worship of Goddess Mariamman, Lord Muruga, LordGanesha and Lord Shiva in estates, Indians also practised their religious practice in urban areas by worshipping their family deities. They managed these temples individually as well as with their families.

Moreover the Indians then practised their guardian deity worship to protect themselves from evil spirits, unseen forces, witchcrafts and magic spells (Rajoo,R., 1984). They used multifarious religious symbols like tridents, spears, swords and bricks and the religious symbols were found in places such as trees, t-junctions, road sides and jungle areas and they also practised their beliefs by putting red or yellow colour clothes over the tree. Whereas some also used the statues of deities made out of cement, calcium, woods and sand (Raymond Lee &R.Rajoo, 1987). Understanding this, the British who were the owners and managers of estates gave full freedom to the the estate workers to practise their religion and worship their family deities (Janakey Raman Manickam, 2009). By using this opportunity, Indians conducted their prayers and practised their traditional religion (popular religion) without any obstacles. In this type of worship, the practice of sacrificing animals is prevalent. Moreover, they also conduct the prayer by offering the deities liquor, cigars, dried fish, cooked meat and by playing musical instruments like pambai, udukai, urumi and other types of drums.

Besides the Indians living in estates, the Sri Lankan Indian community living in town areas established temples for their family deities such as *Amman*, *Murugan* and *Vinayaga* (Rajakrishnan R., 1988). In the late of 1970's and the beginning of 1980's, the trend of temple worship and religious practice of Malaysian Indians witnessed some changes when the Indians living in estates moved to urban areas and other types of settlements such as *taman* and *kampung* (village). The lifestyle of Indians accustomed to living with their own community witnessed changes when they begun living together with multilingual and multicultural (Janakey Raman Manickam, 2009). Yet their religious belief and practices were relentless and that they begun building shrines for their family as well as guardian deities. Most of these shrines are built unlawfully without obtaining a legal permit from the authorities concerned. Moreover, as they have a shrine within their residence compound, they begun conducting special Poojas and festivals for their deities. It makes people of other races and faiths living around them feel uncomfortable. In some cases, it also makes them lodge complaints to the authorities which until legal actions are taken against those shrines built illegally (Ida Lim, 2013 November 10, The Malay Mail)

As a matter of fact, such shrines are built illegally and it is a problem to those of other faiths with whom the Hindus having shrines within their residence compound living around. So a rigorous research must be conducted in order to ascertain if the Malaysian Hindu community needs such shrines within their house compound and building of shrines are allowed in the Vedas and *Agamic* rules of Hinduism. This article looks at the preliminary outcome of the research conducted on the phenomenon of building shrines within the residence compound amongst Malaysian Indians which would be helpful to others to conduct a research in the future on the same field.

Research Materials Serving As A Guide To Conduct A Research On The Building of Shrines Within The Residence Compound

Academic researches on Malaysian Indians can be classified into three main categories. i) research on history and location of Malaysian Indians in pre-independent Malaya. ii) research on Indian estate labourers in Malaysia. iii) other multifaceted researches on progress of the Malaysian Indian community in politics, social, economy, culture, religion which occur in the community itself. The current research is classified in the third category which involves progress and many challenges confronted by Malaysian Indians, Hindus especially. Also, the Hindu religion encounters various types of challenges alongside the progress of Malaysian Hindus in multifarious fields. As far Hinduism is concerned, there found many books and scholarly works. There are also many books and scholarly articles found about Hindu temples and Hindu festivals celebrated by Hindus. But no much work is found about the shrines built within the residence compound.

After a long and insightful deliberation, it is known that the common phenomenon of conformation of shrines within the residence compound amongst Malaysian Indians is completely new, especially in the state of Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan. There found only a few works on the phenomenon. That is one of the reasons why this phenomenon must be researched on the basis of exploratory research principles. First and foremost, the establishment of shrines receives no consent of religious leaders and experts.

There found certain scholarly works which aid in holistically comprehending the background of the new phenomenon of instituting shrines within the compound of the houses amongst Malaysian Hindus. The works can be divided into two i) Works directly related to the research on the phenomenon of building shrines within the residence compound amongst Malaysian Indians. ii) Works indirectly related to the research on the phenomenon of building shrines within the residence compound amongst Malaysian Indians.

Works Directly Related To The Research

In this context, the book entitled *aalayangkalumaagamangkalum* (Hindu temples and Hindu scriptures) written by Najan (2000) is indeed important for this research and it is also directly related to the research. In this book, the author presents his work based on 28 Hindu religious *Agamic* texts. Unfortunately, no much information found on the rules governing the building of Hindu temples in any chapter of this book. But it can be used as a guide in order to ascertain additional explanations by the researcher. Although the chapter is brief, the chapter gives insight about this

contemporary phenomenon and the chapter guides the researcher in understanding the Hindu religious rites concerning establishment of temples better.

Besides that, the academic work of Premla Nandakumaran entitled *Malesiyavil Inthu Kovil Udaippu* (demolition of Hindu temples in Malaysia): a view (2010) is vital for this research. Although this is a graduation exercise, the work is of a great help to this research. In this work, the researcher also has had a quantitative table of rare Malaysian Hindu temples published. It includes the number of Hindu temples found in Malaysia, number of Hindu temples according to states, number of temples legally registered and vice-versa. The information about 17 temples had to be relocated and demolished from 2006 to 2007 is also found in her work. In this work, the researcher also speaks about the rudimentary factors which led to the demolition of 17 temples and the way the matter was resolved by the authorities of the temples and other parties concerned. The main part mainly concentrated is the analysis and suggestion for is very little in this work. Yet this work is of great help to the current research, for a lot of information found in this work can be used as the basic data for the current research. Although this is a graduation exercise, it is regarded important in the research on shrine building and demolition.

The write-up of the author Suganthi Rajagopal entitled *Hindraf: Palkalaikalaka Manavarkalin Karutthu Or Ayoyu/Hindraf*: research on varsity students' views is one of the scholarly works to be focused on the current research. The main motive of this research is to collect the views of varsity students on Hindraf movement. So this research concentrates on the foundation of Hindraf and the factors contributed to the foundation of this organisation in 2007. Back then, demolition and relocation of Hindu temples in Malaysia grabbed the attention of Malaysian university students. University students are also said to have agreed on the fact that demolition of temples in Malaysia is the root cause for the Hindraf assembly in 2007 in Batu Caves, Selangor. The author also added many schedules and quantitative charts which are only used to explain or to support the main or core matters by the author. Those materials are still deemed to have inadequate information on the phenomenon researched which is the culture of constructing shrines or temples within the compound of the houses popular among present-day Malaysian Hindus.

In relation to this research, the paper work of G. Sivapalan entitled, *Hindraf Peranikkup Pinthiya Malaysia Inthiyargalin Nilai/The Status of Malaysian Indians After Hindraf Rally* (Tamilaga Malaysia Tamil Uravu Endowment Seminar, 2011, 16 Feb 2011 to 18 Feb 2011, Department of Tamil Literature, University of Madras.) In this presentation, he states the background of the Hindraf assembly and the factors contributing to the Hindraf assembly. Also in his work he states the life style of Malaysian Indians after the Hindraf assembly which explains the mental state and emotions of Malaysian Indians. In this presentation the 'temple problem' is said to be the main aspect perturbing the Malaysian Indian community. The presenter also proposes that this matter must be given serious consideration and this type of problem must not take place again. The feedback of some chosen respondents is also used as the basic analysis in the presentation. Suggestions and views of the respondents ought to be deemed deeply and widened so that a useful understanding can be produced from the current research conducted.

Rajoo in his article entitled, Sanskritization in the Hindu Temple of West Malaysia", (1984, *Indian Studies Journal* Vol.2.pp-159-170) discusses changing

non-*agamic* temples to *agamic* temples. This article is useful, for information on temples built according to the rules of *Agama Sastra* and temples not built according to *Agama Sastra* is found with examples from Malaysia in this article. This discussion is academic in nature and facts are analysed in a proper manner in this article and supported by proofs. He presents a good review about the sanskritization process and his criticism about the concept is also clear. The phenomenon is envisaged in the perspectives of the temple structure, temple worship and deity worship. These are important aspects for someone who wishes to conduct a research on Malaysian temples as the previous knowledge enables the researcher to comprehend better the basic concepts of history of Malaysian Hindu temple progress.

Another valuable book aids this current research is that written by Krishna Gopal Rampal which is entitled, 'Sacred structures: Artistic Renditions of Hindu Temples in Malaysia and Singapore (2008)'. This book contains complex paintings of temples in Malaysia as well as Singapore produced by 10 professional artists of multifarious races. These pictures play a crucial role in researching and analysing to what extent the temples conform with the standard rules of building temples found in Hindu holy scriptures. This book also contains 4 best articles. Amongst the articles are the write-up of K. Ramanathan entitled, 'Hindu Temples in Malaysia', which analyses the basic history of temples, classification of the Hindu temple building based on the *agamic* and *non-agamic* structure. Besides that, the author also states the classification of Hindu temples in estates, Hindu temples built by government servants in towns and cities since the British rule, temples maintained by Nattukottai Chettiyar, temples instituted by the 'Pattar' clan (goldsmiths), Ceylonese temples, historical temples erected by the 'Malacca Chettis', individual temples, temples owned and managed by the public, societies' temples, North Indian temples, temples maintained by the Hindu constituencies and other bodies. This article is very useful in the current research in obtaining a complete picture about history of temple development and classifications of Hindu temples in Malaysia.

In this context the article written by S. Manimaran, entitled, 'Hindu Temples: Architectures and sculpture (2008)' must also be focused in the current research. This is regarded as an important article by the researcher as it has been written based on the Hindu temples in Malaysia. It is evident that this article is of a great help for the current research. In this article the author gives us information on how the aspects of temple architecture are explained in Hindu religious scriptures. Furthermore, the author also gives detailed information on properly-built temples conforming with the rules of temple in building stated in Hindu religious scriptures. Matters concerning the architectures, symbols, holy sculptures of deities are also stated in this article. Also the author gives a general picture about the situation of Malaysian temples in this matter. It must also be noted that this article fits in some information on history of temples in Malaysia which is very useful for the current research.

Sundram Govindasamy in his graduation exercise (1998/1999) entitled *Struktur Pembinaan Kuil Hindu: Kajian Kes Sri Ramalinggeswarar Kovil Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur*, discusses the aspects of temple structure and explains about temple architecture based on Hindu tradition. This research does not involve other aspects and more focus is given on that temple alone and just discusses the architecture and architectural ways. It must also be noted that the author explains the characteristics

of temple structure stipulated in Hindu religious texts and this research also benefits the researcher.

Works Indirectly Related To The Research

Also, another research entitled *PengantarHinduisme* (first and second publishing 2012) which is written by M. Rajantheran, K. Sillalee and R. Viknarasa must also be given consideration as far as this research is concerned. This book mainly comprises 14 chapters and 13 of which speaks about teachings of various sects of Hinduism. This book is regarded an important material as it meets the needs of Malaysian Hindus in understanding Hinduism better. So this work is important as it is created out of previous researches on Hindu rituals and rules governing the building of Hindu temples.

Amongst the historical research includes the research conducted by K.S. Sandhu (1969), Netto (1961), Mahajani (1960) and Arasaratnam (1979). Sandhu in his book, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration And Settlement, 1786-1957*, gives a comprehensive picture about migration and placement of Indians in Malaysia from the year of 1786 to 1957. Arasaratnam in his book, *Indians In Malaysia And Singapore*, also discusses the aspect by emphasizing on the progress of the Malaysian Indian community since the middle of the 19th century, political status before independence, which is the British and Japanese imperial period. The author also discusses the changes undergone by Malaysian Indians in the sectors of social and religion until the year of 1970. Besides that the author also depicts the situation of Malaysian Indians in Malay politics from 1957 to 1970s. Although the author's discussion is about the socio-economical situation of Malaysian Indians during 1970s, problems regarding Hinduism and Hindu temples are not deeply discussed.

Besides them, Rajeswari Ampalavanar (1981) in her book entitled, *The Indian Minority and Political Change in Malaya 1945-1957*, discusses Malaysian Indians political history since the Japanese era until independence in 1957. The author gives an objective evaluation about the influence of nationalist movement in India on Malaysian Indians. The author also states the contribution of Indians to workers union movement and their response towards Malaysian legal system back then.

Rajoo also examines the effects of Hinduism on Indian economic status in an article entitled, 'Hindu Religious values and Economic Retardation Among the Indian Plantation Workers in Peninsular Malaysia: A Myth or Reality' (1986, *Jurnal Pengajian India* Vol.4, pp.42-50). The author states to what extent the Hindu beliefs such as *Karma* (the fruits of past deeds), *dharm*a (justice or obligations) and rebirth as well as traditional social organisation values (caste system) play their parts in the progress of social status of Malaysian Indians living in estates compared to middle class Indians living in cities in peninsular Malaysia. The author concludes that those factors do not have any major impacts on Indians living in estates. In this research the author did not discuss in detail about Hindu temples and problems related to them.

Ramanathan (1996) and Willford (1998) are two researchers to be focused on as far as the current research is concerned. Ramanathan states that progress and revivalism of Islam in Malaysia puts pressure on Malaysian Hindus to take positive steps towards bolstering the status of their religion in Malaysia. It includes the effort to introduce new changes required and make simple interpretations of the main

teachings of the religion. Whereas Willford evaluates the socio-economic status and political situation which contribute to the formation of ethnic feeling and religious awareness amongst Malaysian Tamillians. He opines that the rise of 'Tamil-Hindu' awareness could be seen amongst the Malaysian Tamil estate workers more prone to receiving popular reformations in Hinduism and they were in the process of forming cultural organisations.

Another article to be focused is that written by Parameshwari Krishnan in the Tamil language entitled, *ThirumuruganAlayam-SabakBernam, Selangor-varalatrinnuth alkannottam*(KuilMuruganSabakBernam Selangor-the first analyse according to the perspective of historical facts. This is one of the articles in the collection of articles of the book *FalsafahMuruganBicaraPelbagaiPerspektif*(2012). In this article the author states a brief history about Murugan temples in Malaysia as well as detailed history of Murugan temples in SabakBernam. This article is written academically with good proofs. Although this article just focuses only on a Murugan temple in SabakBernam, explanation and analysis of this article are good and help us to understand temple of that nature is located in Malaysia. This article is also useful for the current research in terms of historical values of Malaysian Hindu temples.

SujatavaniGunasagaran in her graduation exercise (1999) entitled, *KajianPerkembanganKuil-Kuil Yang Terpilih di Ipoh danPerbandingandarisegiKesenian*, explains the aspects of Indian arts in terms of temple architecture and compares them with temples chosen for this research. In this research the author has spoken about aspects of temple architecture in terms of the artistic perspective. In this the author does not discuss the problem with building temples and matters and problems concerning relocation.

Puvana ArulArumugam in her graduation exercise (2003) entitled, 'A Comparison of Architectural historical studies on Hindu Temple in Selangor', states historical backgrounds of architectural of some temples in Selangor. This research is useful in finding to gain information on some important temples in Selangor and this research explains history of some temples and the development of the temples found in her research location.

Analyse shows that as yet there is no specific research about the problem of the current research. But the information in the above-discussed researches will help the researcher to understand about the Indian community and the problem of constructing shrines within the compartment of the houses in Malaysia and they will also be useful in analysing the problems that the temples encounter. These pieces of information are also important in finding resolutions, that have yet to be obtained from the current research.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the phenomenon of establishing shrines within the residence compound is being studied and the study on this phenomenon is funded by Education Research Grant Scheme (ERGS) of the University of Malaya. This study is expected to provide a solution to the phenomenon as well as the problems caused by the shrines built unlawfully to the owner, authorities and the public. As yet here is no any concrete explanation available on this scenario. Hence the research which is being conducted is expected to produce and deliver the best explanation and solution. In order to understand the phenomena well, the researcher is required to possess good and

profuse knowledge on history of Malaysian Indians, history of Malaysian Hindu temples and rituals, rules and regulative principles involved in building of a Hindu temple. This study ascertains if it is permissible or proper to build shrines within the residence compound. If it is found permissible, this study will be a guidance about how to accommodate the new religious practice among other practices of Hinduism. If it is found impermissible according to the religious texts and scriptures but the people still need such shrines, the study will suggest ways to build them in such a way that it never affects any parties and breaches the law.

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