

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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## THE ATTITUDE OF MALAYSIAN INDIA PLANTATION COMMUNITY PORTRAYED IN LATCHIAPPAYANAM

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### Abstract

Malaysia is one of the Asian countries in which Tamil language is largely spoken among the Indian community. Moreover, it is a land of traditional culture. Tamils have rich literature termed as Malaysian Tamil literature. The literary works of Indians indicate a progressive stage of Tamil Language in the society. The Indian society in Malaysia is using Tamil language as a medium of speaking and also to develop their courtesy while developing the Tamil literature. Tamil literature includes novel, short story, drama, essay, etc. There are many novels written by Malaysian Tamils which have various themes such as feminism, love, family, sufferings, laborers, attitude, social status, etc. This article tries to study the attitude of Malaysian Indian plantation community portrayed in the Malaysian Tamil novel entitled, *Latchiappayanam* written by the novelist I. Ilavazhagu.

**Keywords:** Plantation community, attitude, Tamil literature, novel.

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### 1.0 Introduction

The 18<sup>th</sup> century is considered to be the significant one in the development of the modern Tamil literature. This was due to the diffusion of novels and short stories from the West into the local prose literature. This phenomena has also exerted an influence on the Tamil literature to transform from the classical era into a modern one. (Jesuthas, 2010)<sup>1</sup>. The literature works of

Indians indicate a progressive stage of Tamil Language in the society. The Indian society in Malaysia is using Tamil Language as a medium of speaking and also to develop their courtesy while developing the Tamil Literature according to the era (Akilan, 2002)<sup>2</sup>. Tamil literature in Malaysia has its own name as, Malaysian Tamil literature which includes short story, essay, drama, poetry, novel, etc. This article tries to study the attitude of Malaysian Indian plantation community portrayed in the Malaysian Tamil novel entitled, *Latchiappayanam* written by the novelist I. Ilavazhagu.

## 2.0 Novel in Indian Languages

The word *novel* is originated from Italian word '*novella*' means 'a new story' or 'a new minute thing'. This definition is shortened to be *novel* which means new. The word *novel* had been used by the English speaking community since the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Ramalingam, M, 1973)<sup>3</sup>. One of the gifts that the Indian sub-continent received through British colonialism was education. The novel genre was introduced in India through education. The novel genre was started in India at the end of the nineteenth century. The first Indian novel was written in Bengali language. The second of Indian and the first Tamil novel was *Prthaaba Muthaliyar Sarithiram* composed by Mayooram Vethanayagam Pillai which was published in 1876. Whereas Akilan, a very prominent literary scholar in the Tamil Literature world of Tamil Nadu, India states that *Cilappatigaram* was the first Tamil novel.

## 3.0 The Development of Tamil Novels in Malaysia

The Tamils, who migrated to Malaysia for survival, carried their culture along. Literature is considered to be one of the components of that culture. It is natural that the form of literature evolves according to the need of the society then. That is how the form of prose literature such as novel, short story and drama emerged in Malaysia. The novel genre in Malaysia is considered to be quite recent compared with short story and poem. It is totally unfair to compare the development of Malaysian Tamil novels with other genres since it is considered to be still at 'infant' stage. (Ilakkumy Meenatchi Sundaram, 1991)<sup>4</sup>.

Most of the Tamils in Malaysia are immigrants from Tamil Nadu and their contact with Tamil Nadu is inevitable which could be witnessed at any aspect including literature. It is obvious that before independence, the Malaysian Tamils acted based on Tamil Nadu in all the aspects. The earlier Tamil novels in this country were based on novels from Tamil Nadu for the theme as well as the settings. This is evident in the early days of Malaysian Tamil novels which clearly portrayed propagation as the theme. The elements of investigations and dual titles found in Malaysian Tamil novels at the beginning stage clearly portray the style of Tamil novels from Tamil Nadu. A well-known novelist among them was Ka. Vengadaratinam who produced the very first Malaysian Tamil novel entitled *Karunasaaganor Kaathalin Matchiye*. He had earlier

written two novels *Karunaanathan* and *Gokularamani* in Tamil Nadu itself while operating a newspaper entitled *Sagalakavalli*. Thus, it is evident that the influence from Tamil Nadu had definitely favored the emergence of Tamil novels here. The novel *Karunasaagan* written by Ka.Vengadaratinam who migrated here for job opportunity is an evidence that the Tamil novels of Malaysia are the continuation of Tamil novels from Tamil Nadu. Moreover the Malaysian Tamil literature itself emerged after the First World War. Probably it was only in between the period of Indian independence (1947) and Malayan independence (1957) the thought of having a separate Tamil Literature emerged.

#### **4.0 The Malaysian Plantation Indian Community**

The plantation industry is considered to be one of the earliest economic activities which boosted this country's economy. The Industrial Revolution in Britain highly demanded commodities from the colonial countries like Malaya. Initially they cultivated herbal crops such as pepper followed by sugar cane in 1830-s and coffee in 1870-s. Finally, rubber was widely cultivated at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a lucrative commercial crop. (Varatharasu.M, 1993)<sup>5</sup>.

Rubber plantations needed large number of workers for planting, maintaining, collecting the yield and also weeding the unwanted plants that wildly grew. The colonial British government identified the South Indians to be the most suitable people to develop the rubber plantation in this country. They brought large number of these Indian immigrants in phases to fulfill their needs. A study was mooted by the Indian government in 1897 in order to study the living condition of these immigrants in plantations. Satisfied with their living condition, it allowed free flow of immigrants into the plantation. An agreement was signed between the Indian and Malayan governments in 1900 to favor this agenda.

Several organizations were formed for the welfare of these Indian laborers. The formation of The Tamil Labor Fund was the initial effort by the British. Later this was changed to South Indian Labor Fund in order to accommodate the immigrants from the other south Indian states as well like Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Later, the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) was formed by the British in order to protect the rights of these plantation workers. Besides these, several co-operative societies and investment organizations such as, The National Land and Finance Co-operative Society and Plantation Workers Co-operative were found to help these plantation communities. Despite all these efforts, the present state and the plight of this community is still a question mark in this country (Janaki Raman Manikam, 2011)<sup>6</sup>.

Researches reveal that the personal attitude of this plantation community is unfavorable for their progress. The Malaysian Tamil novels portray many significant social problems of this community which has affected their progress in this country very badly. The Malaysian Tamil novels with plantation background well portray the attitude of this community in this regards.

The researcher has chosen the topic in order to unveil the attitude of this plantation community which is the reason for their present state of life.

Tamil novels are written in different aspects like feminism, patriotism, love, attitude, struggles, etc. in different periods. Attitude is one of the aspects in which Malaysia Tamil novels are published.

## **5.0 Attitude**

Hogg and Vaughan (2005)<sup>7</sup> define attitude as, a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols.

Moreover, it is described as, a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993)<sup>8</sup>.

Further, an attitude is an expression of favor or disfavor towards a person, place, things, or event i.e. the attitude object. Attitude can also be as the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology. Attitude can be formed from a person's past and present.

Generally, attitude can affect a person's behavior in two ways such as positive attitude or negative attitude. Moreover, people may not always be aware of their own attitude or the effect it is having on behavior. People with the attitudes towards work may likewise affect those around them and behave in a manner that reduces efficiency and effectiveness. Hence, this article focused on the attitude of Malaysian Indian plantation community portrayed in the Malaysia Tamil novels.

## **6.0 Objective and Research Question**

This article is based upon the following objective and research question.

At the first, objective is, to study the attitude of the Malaysian Indian Plantation community portrayed in the Malaysian Tamil Novels.

And the research question is, what is the attitude of Malaysia Indian plantation community portrayed in the Malaysian Tamil novels?

## 7.0 Theory

In this article, the *Theory of Reasoned Action* developed by Icek Ajzen & Martin Fishbein (1980)<sup>9</sup> is used as a framework to collect and analyze the information from data based on the qualitative method.

According to the theory of reasoned action, a person's intention is a function of two basic determinants, one person in nature and the other reflecting social influence. The personal factor is the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behavior; this factor is termed attitude towards behavior. It simply refers to the person's judgment that performing the behavior is good or bad, that he is in favor of or against performing the behavior. The second determinant of intention is the person's perception of the social pressures put on him to perform or not perform the behavior in question. Since it deals with perceived prescriptions, this factor is termed *subjective norm*. Generally speaking, individuals will intend to perform a behavior when they evaluate it positively and when they believe that important others think they should perform it. The assignment of the relative weights to the two determinants of intention greatly increases the explanatory value of the theory.

The theory of reasoned action has been used in many studies as framework for examining specific kinds of behavior. Similarly, in this article, this theory is applied in order to explain the attitudes of the Malaysian Indian Plantation community which had determined their socio-economic status. Their attitudes will be explained according to the above mentioned two basic determinants, one personal in nature and the other reflecting social influence according to four components intention, belief, performance and reflection.

## 8.0 The Novel *Latchiyappayanam*

The author of this article has taken the novel *Latchiyappayanam (Ambitious journey)* written by I. Ilavazhagu and published in the year 1983 by Uthayasoorian Nilayam.

The novel *Latchiyappayanam* depicts the story of Maruthan, a young man who happens to be one of the workers' leaders in the plantation named Padang Estate. He works with a few people of positive character to form a trade union among the plantation workers in order to protect their welfare and plight. This creates dissatisfaction among the supervisory group of the plantation management especially Muthu, the junior conductor who fear that the unity among the workers might be a threat to their exploitation. Maruthan faces many challenges despite of his popularity among most of the workers. The resistance comes from many angles including his parents and his lover Ratha's family. He has to sacrifice his love in order to achieve his ambition. Finally, after his father's death, he leaves the plantation with his mother and siblings and starts his own business in the nearby town. His determination and hard work yields good returns and eventually he succeeds in his ambition of owning a plantation and manages it as a role model

plantation benefiting both the owner and the workers unlike the conventional way of exploiting the workers for maximum profit. Finally, he accomplishes his life by getting married and settling down with the blessing of everyone.

## 9.0 Portrayal of Attitude among the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community

The table below shows how the attitude of each character summarized based on the 4 elements found in the Theory of Reasoned Action focusing on 'Attitude'. The findings are summarized below:

Table 1

*Summary of the Attitude Shown by Some of the Characters In Latchiappayanam According to the Sub Elements.*

Novel	Attitude				Status
	Intention	Belief	Performance	Reflection	
<i>Latchiappayanam</i>					
Character 1 <i>Maruthan</i>	√	√	√	√	Positive
Character 2 <i>Shanmugam</i>	X	X	X	X	Negative
Character 3 <i>Andiappan</i>	X	X	X	X	Negative

The summary shows that Maruthan, the main character in this novel *Latchiappayanam* possesses all the four sub elements which comes under attitude. He has good intention, belief, performance and reflection. Hence, his status is positive. This positive attitude portrayed in the novel enables Maruthan to become a very successful businessman. In order to summarize and analyze the attitude in detail, the selected novel has been researched in detail according to the four elements of attitude such as intention, belief, performance and reflection. The findings are based on the narrations and dialogues found in the novels as evidences.

### 9.1 Belief

There are also many evidences to prove that Maruthan has good a belief that education is the fundamental aspect in improving the socio-economic status of himself and also the plantation community. This is very clearly shown in the following lines:

*Sumaar pathinainthu pillaigalukku Maruthan maalaip pozhuthil Tamizh pothitthu vanthaan.*

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 8)<sup>10</sup>

Maruthan engaged himself in teaching Tamil to around fifteen children in the evening.

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 8)<sup>10</sup>

*Veettin mun paguthiyaiyum thannudaiya padikkum paguthiyaaga aakkikkolvaan Maruthan*

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 9)<sup>10</sup>

Maruthan used make use of the front part of the house also for his studies.

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 9)<sup>10</sup>

## 9.2 Intention

There are many evidences found in the Novel *Latchiappayanam* to portray the main character Maruthan to have good intention and one of those is illustrated in the following lines:

*'Maruthanin manam mattum thottatthu makkalin parithaabamaana vaazhkaiyaip pattriye ennik kavalai kondathu. Thaan siruvayathu muthal kanavu kanduvarum oru suthanthiramaana thottatthaippatrik karpanai seithu paarththuk kondaan. Appadippatta oru thottatthai intha Malayagatthil uruvaakkic chaathitthukkaatta vendum enra vairakkiyam kondaan. Athuve thanathu vaazhvin latchiamaagavum moocchaagavum kondu atharkaana muyarcchiyil eedupada vendumenavum uruhthi kondaan.*

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 8)<sup>10</sup>

'But the mind of Maruthan worried thinking the pitiful life of the plantation community. He imagined his dream since his childhood to witness a liberal plantation. He determined to establish and prove such a plantation in this Malaysia. He further determined to regard this as his ambition and life while determined to strive for it.

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 8)<sup>10</sup>

## 9.3 Performance

Maruthan is well exhibiting his positive attitude through his performances in *Latchiappayanam*. Maruthan's performance depicts real maturity in handling crisis

between Kothandan, the worker and the plantation junior conductor Muthu. Muthu slaps Kothandan when Kothandan reprimands Muthu for recording less amount of latex on his account which would reduce his income. Physically strong Kothandan rushes towards Muthu in order to attack him. Maruthan as the secretary of the union passifies Kothandan by the following narration and discourse:

*konjam porungga Kothandan, ippadi neengga aatthirappatta niyaayam sitharippoyidum' enraan Maruthan.*

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 5)<sup>10</sup>

'Be a bit patient Kothandan, if you react with anger in this manner, justice may not prevail' said Maruthan.

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 5)<sup>10</sup>

Maruthan further passifies Kothandan by the following discourse:

*'muraippadi naama nadavadikkai eduppom. Ippa neengga pesaama pongga!'*

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 5)<sup>10</sup>

*'we will take action in a proper way, now may just leave!'*

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 5)<sup>10</sup>

#### 9.4 Reflection

There are many incidences found in the novel *Latchiappayanam* portraying the element of reflection in the attitude of Maruthan. He reflects a high level of patience in his dealings with people in the plantation as a leader. He is very badly chastised by the old man Muthusamy when Maruthan tries to stop a fight between Muthusamy and his son Periasamy. Muthusamy uses abusive words against Maruthan as below:

*'dei podipayale... un samaacchaaram ellaam enakkuth theriyum. Nee poi unga appanai adakku. Ingge vanthe, mothalla un thalai than odaiyum,'*

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p. 27)<sup>10</sup>

'hei little boy.. I know all your stories. You go and control your father. If you come here, I will break your head first,' shouted Muthusamy at Maruthan,'

(I. Ilavazhagu, 2013, p.27)<sup>10</sup>



## 10. Conclusion

This approach is positively emphasizing on the relationship of the research and the interest of community. This study conducted is also indirectly providing specific opportunity and picture while assisting the researcher to reach, to establish and to acquire quality outcome of research. Various approaches and methods are used in order to gather clear and suitable information based on the selected title. The accomplishment of a research closely related to the selection of an accurate research methodology which is systematic, organized and stable. As conclusion, the researcher has explored into the attitude of Malaysian Indian Plantation community portrayed in the Malaysian Tamil novel, *Latchiappayanam* based on the *Theory of Reasoned Action* developed by Icek Ajzen & Martin Fishbein (1980)<sup>9</sup>.

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