

# The Existence Of Tamils Civilization In Medan

Septy Denso Damanik, Risnawaty Sinulingga, Agustrisno, Rizabuana Ismail, Henry Sitorus

**Abstract:** This paper shows how the existence and the culture of the Tamil tribe in the city of Medan. Given the city of Medan is known for its diversity with various tribes and religions and one of them is the Tamil Tribe community. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with informants who are Tamil tribes in the city of Medan. The results of this paper indicate that the existence of the culture of the Tamil tribe can be described from several cultural elements that they have, namely language, kinship system, knowledge system, life equipment, arts, livelihood, and religious systems. Through this cultural element, Tamil people residing in the city of Medan began to adapt and adapt to the environment and cultural diversity in the city of Medan. This can be seen from the shifts and changes that occur in the cultural elements of the Tamil tribe. These changes are influenced by several factors which in this paper are divided into internal factors and external factors.

**Index Terms:** Existence, Tamil tribe, Social exchange, cultural element

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural country, which has a lots of varieties of ethnic and varieties of vernacular language spread all over the place in Indonesia [1]. Every area in Indonesia has its culture and its own characteristic [2]. One of the region in Indonesia which is well known as a multi ethnic city is Medan. Aside Malay as the local in Medan, there were also many ethnic whose lived before Malay occupied Medan such as Java, Bataknese, Chinese, Mandailing and Aceh [3] [4]. One of the culture which is well known in Indonesia especially in Medan is Indian culture. It shows from the element which has an interesting and unique along with their characteristic have profound impact across Indonesian and around the world. The arrival of Tamil community from South India to Indonesia started in 1873 as a tobacco farm workers built by Dutch Colonial Government in Tanah Deli, East Sumatera. The first Tamil labor came to Indonesia was around 25 people through Penang and Singapore. At that time, this communities occupied an area around Babura River and they built Shri Mariamman Temple in 1884, which is well known as the oldest temple in Medan, followed by Shri Subramaniam Temple in 1892 and Shri Kaliamman temple in 1905. In 1917, Dutch government finally set this area into a settlement area for Tamil Community based on a concept called 'quarter system,' the concept divided the residential area based on their ethnicity. Ever since, this area has been so popular and synonymous with the placement of Tamil Community which then was named Kampung Keling [5]. Historically, it shows that Indian especially Tamil had done culture exchange with people in Sumatera especially North Sumatera. They came here with purpose such as a merchant, spreading their belief alongside with their culture. In the past, Tamil was used to know as a laborer in so many field such as construction worker, coachman, farm workers and others that need labor as their jobs. This happened due of their difference from other group with low education in India. However, it's different from Tamil whose came to Medan independently. In general, their job is basically selling textile and herb in market. Aside from that, selling food became their bread and butter regularly [6]. Being a part of Indonesia is one their choice which is set by them in Medan generally.

They are persistent with their belief and they do realize about the importance living in Indonesia and they also fight along with the colonizer when Indonesia were still under the reign of Imperialist. They also had their chance to be civil servant as their jobs. But one of their challenge in this era when the young generation became unaware with their identity as Tamil. Half of them do not speak Tamil anymore even the old generation barely talked with their own language within their family. In other hands, there is also a challenge they face this time, where Tamil is divided with their opinion to choose living in Indonesia which is based on their cultural universal such as religion, language, economy, technology, social, education and arts. Their ability to adapt and survive against the exchange that happened inside their culture will be explained in this journal.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Review Stage

This journal uses qualitative method to understand and explain the existence of Tamils Cultural in Medan. The topic itself will be conceived by their cultural universal which had happened in eighteenth century as yet with their experience, acknowledgement by people and reality in society. Through interview, we will collect the data from Tamils in Medan. Sources will be chosen effectively based on the criteria. As for the sources, we will use purposive sampling which use the source based criteria and the source is determined by their adequate knowledge in Tamils. The conception of the sources starts with deepening on research area, especially regions with Tamils as the biggest society within and general people who live side by side for a long time in Medan. Then, the sources will be the key of information is Tamils and any public figure which are the most important in existence of Tamils' cultural, meanwhile the main sources is one of the leader in society and spiritual leaders of Tamils in Medan. Based on their type of jobs of the informer who got chosen in this journal can be seen below.

- Correspondence author: [rizabuana@usu.ac.id](mailto:rizabuana@usu.ac.id) and: Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

**Table 1. List of Informant**

No	Type of Jobs	Total
1	Spiritual Leaders	4
2	Public Figure	2
3	Civil Servant	1
4	Private Employees	2
5	Seller	6
Total		15

Source: Review Research (2018)

### 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The Existence of Tamils Civilization in Medan

The cultural of India is filled with syncretism and cultural pluralism [7], this culture has absorbed the customs, tradition, and thoughts from the imperialist and immigrant whose lived up and stayed in their deep roots, and propagated theirs into another place aside in Asia especially in Medan. Their tradition and cultural have their own hierarchy which is uptight for their own. Since they were early, they had to know about their roots, deity, and spirit which had biggest role in their life. For Tamils who finally settled down in North Sumatera, especially Medan, they maintain their relationship meanwhile they still do their own activity related to their roots. Keeping their spiritual activities, they set up their own organization from the first temple, Shri Mariamman. Nowadays, the temple has spread widely around thirty temples. Their relationship who finally attached with Tamils and their different ethnicity begun in third century BC. They brought along with their belief, Hinduism and Buddha [6]. In Indian, hierarchy has set as their social status, and limitation in their social life. There are types of hierarchy which had so many things to be done by many hereditary who practiced their endogamy, which is classified as hierarchy or caste. Indians respect their own value even its traditional. Nevertheless, houses in city mostly occupied by main family. It caused limitation of economy and social to live with big family. In country land, they still have four or five family live in one house. Their biggest problem comes along with patriarchy inside. Majority of India married in early age with arranged marriage by their parents or elderly in their family, agreed by the groom and the bride. Their marriage often seen as their destiny and the number of divorce in their marriage is lower than expected. Hence, early marriage still being a tradition with some of them hasn't reached legal age to betrothed. The cuisine of India cover so many local cuisine from other side of India. The characteristic of their cuisine combined with herbs and seasoning that makes their own varieties. Wheat and rice are their staple along herbs such as pepper, which came from subcontinent of India. Red pepper being popular due to be found by Portuguese and being well known in Tamils until it became habits. Clothing in India is different with other tribes in India. Varieties of color and style often depends on element such as climate. The fabric often attached with popular style in India. Women wear clothes called saree, men with their Dhوتي or often called as Lungi. The fabric were sewn due their popularity within like Salwar

Kameez which often being worn by women. Men with Kurta like as pajama, aside slacks and shirt with famous European style. Hence, Indians also have secular festival being celebrated without looking at hierarchy, caste and beliefs. Their festival often being known by people around India like Diwali, Ganesh Chaturhi, Ugadi, Thai Pongal, Holi, Onam Vijayadasami, Durga Puja, led Mubarak, Bakr-id, Christmas, Buddha jayanti, and Vaisakhi.

#### 3.2. The Elements of Existence in Tamils Cultural

##### 3.2.1. Language

In Medan, Tamils is a tribe with high population in Medan. Tamils live in Medan and speak Indonesian as their first language with Medan dialect. Still, there are some speaking Tamils with own Tamils fellow like family and friends. Aside from their wedding ceremony, funeral, worship and many other cultural aspect which use many Tamils and still being used daily even though they do not understand the meaning of Tamils. However, there's priest who speaking Indonesia in wedding ceremony held by Tamils with reason has been agreed by grooms and bride. In other hands, language they do not speak eventually bring some misunderstanding. It happens because generation nowadays do not fully understand Tamils likewise the worship song and prayer who often being echoed in Temple and Monastery. Based on the use of Tamils language can be seen below:

**Table 1. Percentage Selection language**

Percentage of Personal Language	Selection Language						Total
	IL	TL	I-TL	EL	I-EL	E-TL	
Household	54,0 %	15,5 %	30,2%	0,2%	0,2%	0,0%	100%
Society	69,5%	17,0%	17,3%	0,0%	0,3%	0,0%	100%
Culture	67,3%	20,1%	12,6%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100%
Average	64.3%	18,9%	16,4%	0,0%	0,4%	0,1%	100%

Source: Review Research (2018)

Information: IL (Indonesian Language); TL (Tamil Language), IT (Indonesian- Tamil Language), EL (English Language), I-EL (Indonesian- English Language), E-TL (English-Tamil Language).

Based on table above, it can be seen the selection of their language by Tamils is mostly by Indonesia around 64,3 % and Tamils around 18,9 %, Indonesian and Tamils around 16,4 %, Indonesian and English around 0,4 % and English Tamils around 0,1 %. Meanwhile English considered zero because it took decimal percentage in conclusion. The diversity between age and jobs really affect the use of their language ability. In matter of time, it happens so fast because there's no time for young generation to spend their time with elderly to learn about their roots. Hence, it can be seen the parents has their own fault at the stake of Tamils ability to speak their own language. Based on the data above, it can be concluded, the factor of Tamils has occurred so many change in their cultural, such as;

#### Internal

The fact that Tamils language has been on the edge of the

extinct is less they speak and the interest to speak Tamils has decreased and they lack maintain their own language.

### External

The effect of other culture regarding their culture has affected Tamils in many aspect. If the effect of other culture can be achieved without enforcement called demonstration effect. If it refuse each other called cultural animosity. If a cultural has earned highest culture from others, it will give proceeding in imitation which can replace other cultural elements inside. In this matter, the use of Tamils language in Medan has changed drastically from their own living hood in Medan. Choose to stay in Medan forced Tamils speaks Indonesian in their own circle. Likewise it happened in Tamils as they have place called The Little India which is famous in Medan. It's located in Kampung Madras where about Tamils live there without speak Tamils within.

### 3.2.2. Livelihoods

The arrival of India in large amount has changed along with their stay in many regions of Sumatera has conceived a community within especially in Medan around the nineteenth century. Immigrant from India come as trading whose came from South India (Moslem Tamil) and Bombay with Punjab aside their agreement as a laborer in plantation. Many Indian came to Medan to participate in many business sector as growing of economy has occurred in Medan like Chettiars or Chettis (works as debt collector, trader and seller), Vellalars and Mudaliars (works as farmer which is involved in trading), Sikh and Uttar Pradesh, aside of those, there are Sindi, Telegu, Bamen, Gujarati, Maratti (Maharasthra) around 40.000 people live around Medan. For supporting their own living, they have their own jobs or main job, till their jobs labelled as their own unique and characteristic of their own ethnic group as their identity. The livelihoods is a source of their economic life for filling their own living. Every human is required to have proper job in society as well likewise they will have class or high position if their livelihood tends to be better [8]. Based on the data above, it can be seen the fact that caused the exchange of Tamils cultural is;

### Internal.

Based on the history of colonialism which Tamils were laborer for plantation in Indonesia, nowadays there's still laborer who works in plantation, parking ticket and food seller like martabak and herbs in Medan with minimum wage.

### External

Tamils has desire and ability to social with others and being friendly with others, so as the result, their lifestyle and social became modern and it's proven with the existence of Tamils in many fields under the government or private, then it will lead the change of their particular image since colonialism era.

### 3.2.3. Relationship

Cultural of Indians has social hierarchy which is strong in roots, in early age, children being taught about their role and position in society. This tradition has prevailed in their belief of deity and Gods which is important and can't be part away from their life. Caste in India set as the social stratification, and border within their social life in India. The class of their society being shaped by hereditary whose practiced endogamy called caste. India has big respect for traditional family. Nevertheless,

houses in city mostly occupied by main family. It caused limitation of economy and social to live with big family. In country land, they still have four or five family live in one house. Their biggest problem comes along with patriarchy inside. Majority of India married in early age with arranged marriage by their parents or elderly in their family, agreed by the groom and the bride. Their marriage often seen as their destiny and the number of divorce in their marriage is lower than expected. Hence, early marriage still being a tradition with some of them hasn't reached legal age to betrothed. Based on the data from informer, it shows relationship between people often being used as the border within their class and caste in Tamils. Only in Medan, Tamils apply the caste which is highest caste in Tamils Hinduism are Kshatriyas and Brahmin. But in modern India, it has evolved and brought them being an Indonesian, they against the concept of caste happens in Indonesia. Proven as the lowest caste in India, Sudra, Tamils shown the existence and ability to survive aside from highest caste in learning and principle. Based on the date above, it can be seen the factor why the exchange happened in Tamils cultural is:

### Internal

The increasing of citizen in Tamil has changed their accretion of people in many regions of habitation. The habitation of people, in the beginning, used to be the center but changed a lot abide their social exchange. The highest caste in Tamil still obedient with their tradition with arranged marriage and it's their fault once they get betrothed with people with low caste since some Tamils still do the caste principle in their own life.

### External

As an Indonesia, many Tamils has reached the conclusion living as Indonesian without abide with caste system as usual they have in Indian culture. They said it's different from what they have been learned in Indonesia.

### 3.2.4. Living Supplies

Mehendi is an art form as body art embodied like a temporary tattoo which drawn by in the body of women especially when they held the wedding ceremony as the tradition form of women in India. Marriage in India is incomplete without a Mehendi ceremony. But as time progressed, Mehendi became fashion in artificial and luxury in women not only in the wedding ceremony between India and Middle East People. Mehendi is a part of Body Art or Body painting where hands and part of women body often being painted with Henna and will leave some residue and color will surface at the top of their skin. Mehendi in Indian tradition is typically applied during Indian special wedding tradition without have a religion background and it's still living inside their blood. Mehendi became their roots and often being occurred and applied in many formal wedding ceremonies and became their main culture. Mehendi has approached not only as Indian tradition but general people still applied this Mehendi as one of the part in fashion. Based on the date above, it can be seen the factor why the exchange happened in Tamils cultural is:

### Internal

In so many aspects there are so many elements has changed the perspective of Mehendi became a trend in women not as the generalization as Indian tradition but became the epidemic of fashion as Mehendi is part of India tradition yet they still

abide their tradition with using Mehendi as their part of a wedding ceremony.

### External

Such as Javanese, they also use henna or Mehendi as the part of wedding ceremony, capable to do Mehendi in the wedding ceremony and became a trend in Javanese. Even Indonesia hold still the trend of henna and along enthusiasm with applying henna as the part of fashion when wedding ceremony happens.

### 3.2.5. Arts

India Traditional music is an art with a piece from India. Although, India has a large population in music and variety with their cultural, but to be the part of this heritage, their tradition is still same. Music started in this country since long ago and it passed down in many generation. It caused in this country where as Buddha was born, the effect has passed down in so many country aside from India along with the rail of religion. It centered from Natya Shastra, a scripture from ancient history about stage along with dancing and singing. India Music started around two centuries BC. Aryans had immigrated to India bring the biggest impact in music industry in India. Music in India has their own meaning, which has impact in magic, religion, literature, science and arts. The beginning of their music are worshipping the deity and Gods. Based on legend, Shiva created song, rhyme and dancing whom he has passed down from wise man and being taught to human. A teacher named Narada, a spiritual and singer whose wrote a book, Naradasiksa. A teacher named Barata wrote Natya Shastra about music, dancing and play stage. A tradition since long ago hasn't been spoken yet it's hard to detect even evaluated [9]. The presence of Muslim has given a great impact in development of Music in India which to be happening as smelting two difference culture from India, Persians, and Arabia until Egypt. Kind of music and instrument has appeared as brand new in their cultural. In this era, Vine instrument appeared to be Sitar. Interest thing about the development in Muslim period is a coalescence of music with painting. About the art system in Tamil Medan which has been the center of people and being recognized with their rhythm and song which are involved and labeled as being phenomenal and popular. For Tamils themselves, their song and instrument often being played in temple while praying especially in weekly worship in Tuesday and Sunday. However in their daily life, it's rare to see and listen on their own song with instrument even with they do practice for praying and wedding, it's a rare moment to listen on their own song. It has become rare and the fact of this interview show about art and music in Tamil has gotten many things happened from outside. Kanjira, an instrument from Tamil traditional music has used by many Tamils for praying, wedding and many festival of worshipping. It has been developing as the modern instrument which being mixed with Kanjira like piano, keyboard with the essence of Tamils music and wedding reception has mixed their instrument into modern one for a great ambience.

### 3.2.6. Knowledge System

Tamil with their knowledge has been affected by their ancestor. Part of their life as Tamils has received a great impact from their culture between generations. As many as they has run their own tradition that being passed down from generation to generation without being known about the value within inside.

Aside from Tamils education has given any impression to their growth of education for Tamil in Medan. Indirectly, the role of Tamils people in education level being perpetual and grown as today.

**Table 2. Informant based on Education**

Total Informant	ELDERLY		ADULT		TEENAGER		Total	Percentage (%)
	M	F	M	F	M	F		
SD	5	17	3	2	1	0	28	14%
SMP	11	6	7	17	3	3	47	23,5%
SMA	10	5	19	18	18	28	98	49%
SARJANA	7	0	8	0	8	4	27	13,5%
TOTAL	33	28	37	37	30	35	200	100%

Source: Review Research (2018)

Information: M (Male), F (Female)

As seen as the data above, the level of education of Tamils in Medan has changed in average between finished their study in high school. Based from the interview, we can conclude Tamils has realization for being educated. They already made a great progress with studying until high school level as seen as the data above. There are beyond average for being educated based on the regulation from government that they abide with studying for nine years as default. Even there are Tamils who reached education in university level. Based on the observation that researcher does, there is a change happens with their education background as seen as the reality and they have been labeled as laborer yet never get any proper education as people called them. A significant change has slightly increased along with encouragement and motivation for getting a new perspective in life and don't want to get a label as a poor with poverty living within Tamils. Beside, government made a regulation that Tamils had to abide for getting a formal education.

### 3.2.7. Religion

Hindu had been called by Persian whose came to India[10]. They called Hindu/Hindus which streamed down from West India as Hindu River. When Muslim came to India, Hindus often being called as Hindustan. Indians with Muslim as their own religion called Hindus. Hindus often being called Sanatana Dharma (Sanskrit) which means eternal or everlasting. Hindus doesn't have any leader and it spread and affiliated by Brahmin. Aside no one being called as leader, Hindu has a difference with other religion. There's no prophet, but there's Guru, Rsidan and Maharsi. In Hinduism, God is a creator of human life. Hinduism in Indonesia worshipping God as Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. Aside often being called Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, they often being called as Bhatara, the highest position or supreme God, Sang Hyang Parameswara as the Noble Lord. Based on the interview by the researcher, Tamils often affiliated as majority in their tribe with Hinduism as their religion along with Catholic, Cristian, Buddhism and Muslim. Tamils is often being known with their festival. Their festival is festive yet so sacred. Along with their sacred festival

and get so many impact aside for Tamils whose participant inside. Therefore, Amman Tiruvilla, a festival which often being held by different temple in Medan even outside Medan like Pematangsiantar, Tebing Tinggi, Lubuk Pakam, Kisaran and Binjai. General people also very considerate and have a big enthusiasm with their festival by Tamils and Hinduism. It also receive a nice feedback by general people around their neighborhood. There are so many fact that receive many impact with validation of their religion like external fact that being considered as one of them is exchange wedding with difference religion which given big impact in validity of their religion. There are many Hinduism who converse their own religion into others due of some conflict happened in their tribe especially caste happened in their tribe. Caste caused many conflict and this caste also give them any harm. Usually the caste who often converse their religion. It means, the conversion of religion became an "it" thing based on idea, act and artifact [11] if the conversion happens in Tamil, it will affect the behavior, act yet artifact. Nevertheless, the converse of religion will change their perspective of their religion and habitual when they were in Hinduism and it stimulate the change between Hinduism and other religion that they converse.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Those seven cultural elements which researcher has shown about the existence of Tamils cultural is a religion they believe, which is Hinduism, where rest of them are the part of Hinduism and the half of history in Hinduism connect with their tribe and India. Other element which is language caused Tamil has lost its local language by themselves. Tamils nowadays don't have any realization about the importance of their language between family and other relatives in their circle. It can be found in Medan where there's a place called Little India and it's happening right now because the assimilation between Indonesian language and Tamils has mixed together and became dominant in their daily life. From livelihood elements, based on the fact from inside and looking back at their history in colonial, they were given a prejudice as a servant or laborer in plantation. They came to Indonesia and became slave. The slavery which happened in their life back then has become a prejudice in their predicament ever since. It's also happening right now since many Tamils live with short of money and can't afford proper meal. Aside from Tamils live under poverty, there's also Tamils who lives under prejudice but live to the fullest and keeping aside their prejudice. They live with an open mind resolution. It can be found based on their economic standard, house even the way they afford their living. It shows the changing between Tamils after colonials had left them. As conclusion, it can be said, Tamils already spend their life with showing some cultural beyond their existence which is important for them aside for general people. It shown based on interest and uniqueness in their culture as Tamils even Indians which is still famous and well known in public especially in Medan.

#### 5 REFERENCES

- [1] V. Khana, B. Sibarani, and B. Gurning, "Language Shift in Tamil Ethnics in Lubuk Pakam," 2018.
- [2] M. Miftah, "MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE DIVERSITY OF NATIONAL CULTURES," QIJIS (Qudus Int. J. Islam. Stud.), 2016.
- [3] I. Muda, "Potensi konflik horizontal di kota medan," *Perspektif*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 138–144, 2013.
- [4] D. Humaizi, D. Ermansyah, and R. Salam Sinaga, "Concord Communications and Interactions between Ethnic Groups Supporting The Candidate; Case Study on Paguyuban Suku Tionghoa Indonesia dan Joko Tingkir In Election of Medan City, 2015," 2018.
- [5] M. Siagian, "Mutualistic Social Relationship Between Tamil and Chinese Communities in the Formation of Social Space in Kampung Keling Medan," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, 2016.
- [6] L. S. B. II, *Orang India di Sumatera Utara*. FORKALA-Sumut, 2008.
- [7] O. Mahyarni, D. Fakultas, I. Sosial, and U. I. N. Suska, "Manajemen Indonesia dan Perbandingannya dengan Negara China dan India Pembahasan," pp. 180–187, 2006.
- [8] Koentjaraningrat, "Kebudayaan Mentalitet dan Pembangunan," in Bab 1, bab 2, bab 3, bab 4, 1974.
- [9] B. B. Satpathy, "Indian Culture And Heritage," *DDCE/M.A Hist./Paper-VIII*, pp. 1–361, 2010.
- [10] Muhammad Takari bin Jilin Syahrial, "Mengenal Budaya Masyarakat Tamil di Kota Medan," *ReasearchGate*, no. April 2013, pp. 2–3, 2016.
- [11] Clifford Geertz, *Tafsir Kebudayaan*, Terjemahan. Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1992.