Article

Hybridity and Ethnic Invisibility of the "Chitty" Heritage Community of Melaka

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Abstract: Migration has produced many ethnic minority communities worldwide owing to sea-borne trade, religious evangelicalism, and colonialism. For centuries, these communities have existed alongside other cultures, creating multiethnic societies. However, changes in political, economic, and sociocultural conditions have caused these communities, typically with varying degrees of social alignment and sociocultural adaptation, to re-strategize their inter-ethnic interactions. One such minority community is the "Chitty" of Melaka, a distinct Tamil community that migrated to Melaka, a coastal port city that has flourished in trade and commerce since the late 14th century. This paper investigates the historiography, its hybridity and adaptation, and the concerns of ethnic invisibility faced by this community throughout its 700-year history. Through historical analysis and ethnographic observations, the study finds that the Chitty community has contributed significantly to the sociocultural, economic, and political fabrics of Melaka in different periods of history. Secondly, the Chitty's hybridity nature enabled them greater dexterity to socioculturally adapt to the changing surroundings and dynamics in Melaka for the last seven centuries. Thirdly, the study finds that due to their marginality in numbers and the mass arrival of new Indian migrants, the ethnic visibility of the Chitty has diminished in the new Malaysian demographic.

Keywords: Chitty; Melaka; hybridity; adaptation; ethnic visibility; historical amnesia; Hindu

1. Introduction

For many ethnic minority communities, the struggle for recognition and visibility in the midst of living in multiethnic societies has always been challenging. The term "ethnic minority" refers to communities that are smaller in numbers and reside with other larger and more dominant communities in a society. In many multiethnic societies, there usually exists a single ethnic community that is more dominant in numbers and status relations with other communities. These status relations are often characterized by the nature of power politics relations, socioeconomic structural differences, cultural differences, and how ethnic minorities are factored into the dynamics of group equality, social justice, ethnic harmony, social stability, and political unity [1]. Ethnic minorities also go through some degree of sociocultural adaptation, usually adapting to the cultural dynamics of the dominant group. In the post-modernistic and globalized eras, social relations significantly impact the structural, cultural, and behavioral features of modern societies. These changes manifest into the development of pluralism and multiculturalism worldwide, where the prior emphasizes some levels of equality between different ethnic identifications, while the latter underlines the significance of the co-existence of those ethnicities. However, these ethnic identifications and recognition need to be interpreted into behavioral changes in the shift in perception, actions, and meaning between ethnic groups [2].

Ethnic minority communities were created when groups of people traveled across land and seas to other destinations for various reasons. Sea-borne trading adventures increased rapidly with the invention of steam-powered vessels, which means trading ships no longer had to only rely upon the seasonal monsoon wind patterns to plan their trading

activities. Together with the traders came religious missionaries, vigorously spreading their Abrahamic faiths to the new world, and soon after, Western powers began to colonize new lands and countries around the world. It was mainly Western colonialism that created many multiethnic or plural societies around the world. Malaysia, a former British colony till 1957, is one country that inherited a vibrant multiethnic population through multifaceted interactions between Malay kingdoms and the Chinese, Indic, and Islamic civilizational encounters with Western colonizers and through centuries of sea trades with communities domiciled in the Malay Archipelago. Around 70 percent of Malaysia's 32.7 million population consists of *Bumiputera* (a politically defined group consisting of ethnic Malays, the aborigines, and the indigenous sub-ethnic groups of the states of Sabah and Sarawak, in the island of Borneo). This is followed by ethnic Chinese at about 23 percent, ethnic Indians at around 7 percent, and other minorities that make up the rest of the percentage [3]. Smaller ethnic minorities such as the Baba-Nyonya (Straits-born Chinese) and Melaka Chitty (Straits-born Indians) provide distinguishing features of the Malaysian multiethnic mosaics. These communities display unique sociocultural adaptation to the dominant Malay community and other communities that exist in the surrounding.

One such ethnic minority community is the Chitty of Melaka. The origin of this heritage community can be traced back to the Melaka Sultanate period in the late 14th and early 15th centuries. The Chitty, also known as Peranakan Hindu (Melaka Straits-born Hindus), are a hybrid community that emerged from intermarriages between the Hindu traders and local Malays, Chinese, Javanese, and Bataks in the port city of Melaka [4]. Even before the arrival of Parameswara (the founder of Melaka, a Hindu prince from Palembang, Sumatra) in 1401, spice traders (mainly Hindus) from India had already visited and traded in Melaka port. Growing trade with the Malay world, especially in Melaka, attracted many Indians, especially traders from the Coromandel Coast in India, to settle in Melaka. A unique feature of this community is the extent to which it has assimilated into the culture of the indigenous Malays. Its people's choice of clothing, spoken language, food, and perhaps appearance bears a resemblance to the Malays and Baba Nyonya (the Melaka Straits-born Chinese). However, despite the onslaught of Islam and Christianity in the city-state, the Chitty have steadfastly remained Hindus. Although they have lost their roots with India and become inarticulate in Tamil (the Indian language), they have held on to their Hindu names and consistently observe customary and religious practices. Despite its long presence in Melaka and active contributions in trade and the politics of Melaka, the community has been largely ignored by the rest of the society.

The paper aims to examine, firstly, the Chitty's sociocultural, economic, and political endeavors at different times of Melaka's history. Secondly, it investigates the community's hybridity nature and its agility to adapt to the rapidly changing surroundings of the multiethnic settings in Melaka over seven centuries. Thirdly, the paper explores the issues of historical amnesia and ethnic invisibility that the Chitty experienced due to the modernity and changing ethnic demographics of Melaka. The study is novel because, at present, there is no other published work on the Chitty that looks at the nature of "hybridity and adaptation" and "ethnic invisibility and historical amnesia" of this community.

2. Background

2.1. Pluralism in Malaysia

Ethnic identity is integral to the Malaysian socio-political and cultural dynamics. In the Malaysian context, the term pluralism was first used by the British official and scholar J.S. Furnival who researched Southeast Asian history before the Second World War. He claimed that "a plural society is one in which many races or ethnic groups live side by side in separate geographical and sociocultural enclaves, meeting only in the marketplace" [5–8]. The term was used to describe a society of which at least two social orders are observed, that is, to co-exist side by side (even without mingling), in a single political unit, but which is also prone to instability. Despite being of the same nationality, most Malaysians see themselves in ethnic terms first, especially concerning their relationship with other

individuals of different ethnicities [9]. This is primarily due to the way the social dynamics are arranged, with heavy political and socioeconomic deprivation undertones. This state of affairs has given rise to increased ethnic consciousness among Malaysians. The country's *Bumiputera* policy, which accords preferential treatments that strongly favor the majority ethnic Malay over others, has been blamed for Malaysia's racial problems since its inception in 1957. The asymmetrical status relations among ethnic communities that manifest in almost all spheres of life have solidified the feeling of social exclusion among minorities, in a situation where individuals are disfavored or denied access to rights, opportunities, and resources other groups enjoy. However, some scholars supporting the social cohesion approach have claimed that interracial relationships in Malaysia at multiple levels can moderate and assuage tensions in society [10,11]. Although they might be limited, the access to education and other opportunities have contributed to the upward social mobility of the minority communities. For example, the ethnic Chinese are more resilient in business, emphasize their Chinese-based education system, and are less dependent on government assistance. However, minorities such as the ethnic Tamil group appear too dependent on the government's help for their endeavors.

Plural societies often exhibit heterogeneous characteristics resulting from the co-existence of diverse ethnic groups, often sharing the same social and work spheres. The differences in terms of spoken languages, faiths, physical appearances, customs and practices, and the demands for social inclusion as a result of nation building, work pursuits, and social appropriateness often offer unique patterns of interactions among individuals in a plural society. From an anthological perspective, pluralism enables the identification of ethnic uniqueness and emphasizes diversity in society, simultaneously promoting the acceptance and tolerance of those differences. Pluralism also has a political undertone, which is how power and influence are distributed in a political process. The relationship between ethnic communities within a society is determined by how groups try to maximize their interests due to scarcity of resources and the competition to secure them. Ethnic groups often face conflict situations as they participate in the bargaining process between competing groups. According to Chaikin [12], although minority communities are recognized by other communities, they may not necessarily be accepted by the larger society, as the differences may be deemed exclusive and alien to the majority.

In most cases, the levels of acceptance are determined by whether a minority community chooses to move in the direction of assimilation with the majority or remain self-segregated. In some cases, the majority population may even exclude or marginalize ethnic minorities due to ethnic prejudices and stereotypes, for example, the treatment of African Americans as slaves during the late 19th and 20th centuries. The movement towards assimilation requires varying degrees of sociocultural adaptation by the minority communities as they strive to accommodate the many demands of life that plural society imposes. They need to make social alignments to adjust to the dynamics of their surroundings and, at the same time, make serious initiatives to maintain and preserve specific characteristics of their own ancestral culture. In the context of Malaysia, there appears to be conscious levels of adaptation to the traits of the dominant Malay group, such as the adoption of the Malay language as the national language, taught in all schooling systems in the country, the demand for loyalty to the ethnic Malay king and Sultans as heads of the nation and states, and some notion of acceptance of the "social contract" between races. The heritage communities such as the Baba-Nyonya and the Chitty, which have a long history of presence in Melaka compared to other recent immigrants, display a greater degree of sociocultural adaptation with the Malays. They adopted Bazaar Malay, a creole version of Malay, as their mother tongue. Malay cultural traits appear, in adapted form, in the cultural practices and their day-to-day life.

2.2. Heritage Communities in Southeast Asia

Conquest of new lands by ancient empires, sea-farers and sea-borne trade, religious evangelicalism, and Western colonialism has created many heritage communities in many

parts of the world. In most cases, these communities have existed together with other ethnic communities, forming multiethnic societies. However, the degree of hybridity and adaptation experienced by these communities may differ from one community to another. Before the coming of Western powers, the concept of border demarcation and people's movement in maritime Southeast Asia were more fluid. People could travel, trade, and take domicile more freely. People of the region were connected more through their languages, their origins, their religious beliefs, and the kind of work or businesses they conducted [13]. Port cities in maritime Southeast Asia were known to be cosmopolitan, to embrace the diversity of cultures, and to be trade-friendly, with numerous languages used in trade and interactions. In Southeast Asia, periodic occupations by Hindu-Buddhist empires from South India and other Southeast Asian empires (both from maritime and mainland) have led to significant Indic influences in the local communities, seen clearly in their sociocultural, religious, and linguistic characteristics. In later centuries, even after the coming of Islamic and Christian missionaries, Indic influences are still prevalent in their cultural orientations and traits. This influence over centuries gave birth to several Indian-based heritage communities, such as the Chitty (in Melaka) and Tamils (in Indonesia).

Similar to the Chitty of Melaka, the Indonesian Tamil community has had a long history. The *Lobu Tua* inscription (dated 1088) and the 14th century *Suruaso* inscription prove the existence of Tamil settlements in North Sumatra. The Tamils, mostly merchants or craftsmen, resided in the ancient port town of *Barus*, and some of them migrated to other areas of *Karoland* and *Kota Cina.* The Tamils assimilated with local Karo people and the Sembiring clan. Moreover, many sub-clans, such as the Colia, Berahmana, Meliala, Pandia, Depari, Muham, Pelawi, and Tekan, are apparently of South Indian stock. The Karo traditions such as disposing of the dead and *urung* (death rituals) may have been influenced by medieval Tamil culture [14]. Tamils may have also assimilated with Acehnese, and many of them have physical resemblance to the Acehnese, but they no longer practice and speak the Tamil language and culture.

There also several Chinese heritage communities in Southeast Asia such as the Baba-Nyonya community of Melaka (the Melaka Straits-born Chinese) and Benteng Chinese in Indonesia. The Baba-Nyonya of Melaka are also known as *Peranakan Cina*, which refers to communities that have existed locally for a long time and have gone through some degree of assimilation and sociocultural adaptation. The Baba-Nyonya are a hybrid minority community that emerged from intermarriages between ethnic Chinese and the local Malay people. They are descendants of Chinese immigrants to Melaka in the 15th century. They speak a creole version of Malay called Baba-Malay, and they have become inarticulate in Chinese languages [15]. They have also gone through cultural adaptation to the indigenous Malay culture, such as wearing Malay lady attire—the *sarong-kebaya*—and adopting culinary styles and choices which are similar to the Malay. The community owned businesses and plantations, and several of its members became prominent politicians. Besides Melaka, the Baba-Nyonya can be found in Singapore and Penang [16,17]. This is similar to the Peranakan "Benteng Chinese", a mixed descent, native to the Tangerang region in the modern-day Indonesian provinces of Jakarta, Banten, and West Java [18,19]. Their lineage can be traced to at least 1407 CE [20]. Benteng Chinese also embrace some degree of adaptations to the local surroundings; their culture is a mixture of Betawi and Chinese cultures.

The European colonialism of Southeast Asia also created several Eurasian heritage communities. The Portuguese were among the earliest Europeans to arrive in Asia, with a presence in India from 1505 and in Melaka from 1511 to 1641 [21]. Marriages between the Portuguese and local ladies gave birth to the Eurasian descendants in India, Melaka, and Macau. Eurasian families also emerged from Dutch settlements in Melaka, Sri Lanka, and the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), as well as from British colonies in Penang, India, and Bencoolen (now the Indonesian city of Bengkulu) [21]. In Melaka, the Portuguese-Eurasian descendants are called *Kristang*. They are the smallest ethnic group in Malaysia, and most of them reside in Portuguese Settlement, a beach-side fishing village in Melaka

town. The Portuguese were the conquerors of Melaka in 1511, ending the Malay Sultanate rule, but unfortunately, their descendants ended up as poor fishermen in modern-day Melaka. They speak a creole language, also called *Kristang*, a mixed Portuguese, Malay, and old Portuguese vocabulary, with some Malay grammatical structures. They assimilated into the Malay language, culture, and customs but remained as Catholics till today. In terms of looks and physical appearance, they resemble the native Malay people. This is not surprising, considering the intermarriages with the locals over centuries. Like the Malays, they also believe in *bomoh* (Malay shamans) and often secure shamans' services to cast spells and ward off evil spirits. They also observe Malay cultural taboos and restrictions. Their acculturalization to local cultures can also be seen in their cooking styles, spices, and food varieties. The *Kristang* dance, *Branyo*, is an offshoot of the local *Malay Joget* dance. They also introduced Western musical instruments such as the violin (*biola*) and the ukulele into Malay music [22,23].

3. Methodology

This review article adopts two frameworks for analysis. The first, historical analysis, is used to examine the historiography of the Chitty community. Scholarly literature was referred to in order provide the historical background of this heritage community. The second framework is ethnography; through interviews and participant observations, the paper explains the nature of hybridity, sociocultural adaptation, ethnic invisibility, and historical amnesia faced by the Chitty community. The author analyzed primary data from a series of semi-structured interviews with senior members of this community collected since 1997. In addition, major scholarly works on the Chitty and other heritage communities were utilized in the investigation. The analysis is presented in Sections 4 and 5.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. The Chitty Historiography

The Chitty have lived through the period of four colonial powers—Portuguese (1511–1641), Dutch (1641–1824), British (1824–1942), Japanese (1941–1945), and again British (1945–1957). Only a few hundred in numbers, most of them still live in their cultural village at Kampung Tujuh (Village No. 7), in the city of Melaka. This village was built on a piece of land granted by the government during the Dutch period. The village was initially known as Kampung Keling (village of Indians) and was also known as Kampung Balanda (Dutch village) during the Dutch reign. It is located within the municipality of Gajah Berang, in present-day Melaka city [24]. The village has been the focal point for the Chitty for the last several hundred years. Besides tracing their lineage to Hindu traders, there are also claims that the Chitty may have originated from Indian convicts (criminals and anti-British nationalists), brought by the British to Melaka from the Andaman Islands to work on public projects. These may have, after their release, married local girls and settled in Melaka. However, this claim of origin can be challenged. Several historical indications of the existence of the Chitty, namely, from the Malay Annals, the Portuguese, and later from Dutch sources, all point to periods preceding the year 1795, which marks the British arrival in Melaka [4,14]. Additionally, based on oral traditions, Chitty community elders also claim that their ancestors were followers of Parameswara, the Hindu prince from Palembang who founded Melaka around 1400 A.D. [25]. However, there is no historical evidence to support this claim.

The Chitty have a unique place in Malaysia's multiethnic historiography. Their forefathers, the Indian traders, have been traversing the sea routes and ports in Southeast Asia since prehistoric times. In the Christian era, interactions between these ports intensified, witnessed by increased trading activities and the movement of Indian traders and Hindu priests between India and numerous port cities of Southeast Asia [4]. Collectively, they paved the way for the "Indianization" of the Malay way of life [26]. Melaka port thrived mainly due to the trade brought in by Indian merchants. Records show that Indian traders made profits at times as high as 300 percent on their business transactions in Melaka, while

increased trade brought vast revenues and incomes to the city through trade, levies, and presents [26,27]. The advent of Islam in Southeast Asia and Melaka around 1400 A.D had somewhat diminished the influence held by Indian traders (mainly Hindus) in the Melaka court. The Muslim-Gujaratis (also known as Moors) and Muslim-Tamil merchants began to have more influence in the Melaka court [28]. The rivalry among these groups for trade and influence in Melaka deepened in the later years of the Melaka Sultanate. With greater political affinity with the Melaka court, the Moors expanded their control over trade in the Melaka port [29]. This situation resulted in the wealthier Hindu traders diverting their activities to other ports in the archipelago, while less wealthy ones sold their ships and businesses to the Moors and went into agriculture [4,30].

The reign of the Sultanate of Melaka ended with the Portuguese invasion of Melaka in 1511. At that time, more than 1000 Hindu merchants were living at the Kling village, and they owned ships and still had a fair share of the textile business in Melaka [31]. During the Portuguese period, the Chitty were accorded special privileges. Their leader, Nina Chetu, enjoyed a special friendship with Alfonso de Albuquerque, the conqueror of Melaka. He was appointed headman of the Chitty community and later as Bendahara (chief administrator) of Melaka. Alfonso relied on Hindu traders' assistance to prevent the Moors from expanding their trade to Southeast Asia [29,32,33]. The Dutch period of Melaka (1641–1824) witnessed the steady decline in Hindu trade in Melaka. Stiff competition from Indian Muslim traders compelled Hindu traders to sell or rent out their vessels and their remaining port businesses to the Muslims. The Hindu traders, mainly the Chitty, slowly took up agriculture and moved inwards to cultivate the land. The Chitty migrated from Kampung Keling (known as Kampung Balanda during the Dutch reign) to the areas now known as Tengkera, Gajah Berang, and Bachang [24]. The Chitty also accrued large strips of land from the Portuguese and the Dutch mainly for religious, commercial, and settlement purposes. These lands came in handy when they left trading and went into agriculture. However, they did not fare too well in agriculture.

During the early British period of Melaka (1824–1957), many Chitty people started to take up salaried government jobs in the British civil service [30,34]. Some English-educated Chitty people left for other cities such as Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore to take up salaried positions [26]. This period also witnessed the influx of new migrants, mostly Tamil laborers from South India, brought in by the British to work in the sugar and rubber plantations in Malaya. In 1921, there were about 18,851 Indians laborers in Melaka, with 14,000 of them working in plantations, while the rest were employed in other parts of Melaka. The Indian population in Melaka increased from 23,237 (in 1931) to 23,266 (in 1957) [26,27]. The migration of laborers has rapidly changed the population demographics of Melaka. The Chitty community, numbering only several hundred, became less visible and less prominent in the social fabric, often submerged in the greater South Indian population of Melaka.

4.2. Hybridity and Adaptation

In ethnic and race studies, hybridity refers to the mixture or assimilation of cultural traits while retaining part of their ancestral cultural identity [35]. The Chitty community displays strong cultural hybridity as a result of nearly 700 years of existence in Melaka. The Chitty have mostly adapted socioculturally to their predominantly ethnic Malay surroundings; they embraced Malay cultural traits and practices and embraced the Bazaar Malay language as their mother tongue. They have lost their roots in India and have lost the knowledge of their mother tongue, Tamil. The exposure to other cultures and the adaptive nature of Bazaar Malay (Malay Creole) had hastened the sociocultural adaptation of the Chitty. Bazaar Malay mainly consists of Malay words, infused with lexicons and syntax structures of other languages spoken in Melaka, making it easier for communication among ethnic groups. It is also used widely used in family and community interactions. This creole serves merely as a contact language in intra- and inter-group communication, and it did not develop into the language of knowledge, literary, or business. The indigenously Malay

community was also known for being humble, sociable, and welcoming to foreigners, which could be why the Chitty were so comfortable adapting to the Malay culture. They also established strong sociocultural linkages with the Baba-Nyonya community (the Melaka Straits-born Chinese). There appears to be some similarity between the Chitty and the Malay and Baba-Nyonya communities, especially in the choice of apparel, language styles, culinary habits, and perhaps in appearances. Melaka port (in the 15th and 16th centuries) was a melting pot of many cultures from near and afar, which laid the foundation for the Chitty community.

As their Indian ancestors, the Chitty, have retained their Hindu names and have remained devout Hindus of the Saivism sect, their religion is a great source of pride in this community. The community manages several temples in Melaka city, and the country's oldest temple, the Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple, is owned by this community. They frequently observe the rituals and religious celebrations in the temples and their homes. These events usually attract the Chitty residing in other parts of Malaysia and in Singapore to return to their ancestral village in Melaka for these festivals [4]. What is perplexing is how the Chitty managed to remain Hindu and successfully thwart the spread of Abrahamic faiths into their community. Despite sharing a very close affinity with the Muslim Malay, the Chitty managed to preserve their Hindu belief. During the Melaka Sultanate (early 15th century), the Chitty married local Malay ladies, who were Muslims. However, the Chitty were not compelled to convert to Islam; instead, wives would have followed their husbands' religions. Although Islam had started to gain footing in Melaka, the practice may not have been widespread throughout the society, and the religion may not have been strictly observed. Another reason is perhaps that there were pockets of non-Muslim Malay communities in Melaka in the early 15th century. The empires of Sri Vijaya (Buddhist) and the Majapahit (Hindu) had once covered parts of the Malay Peninsula and the Malay Archipelago. There may have been communes of local Hindu and Buddhist groups in that period [15].

The Chitty have been referred to as a hybrid community because they are a product interaction or crossbreeding of two or more different cultures and traditions. They are offspring of intermarriages between Indian Hindu traders in Melaka with the local Malay, Chinese, Javanese, and Batak girls. This community had taken domicile in Melaka since the Melaka Sultanate period in the early 15th century. The community is commonly referred to as the Hindu Peranakan of Melaka, which means locally born Hindus and original speakers of a foreign language. This term also refers to communities that have existed locally for a long time and have gone through some degree of assimilation and sociocultural adaptation. The term Peranakan Melaka (Melaka Straits-born) refers explicitly to the Baba-Nyonya and Chitty communities. "The Chittys, are uniquely assimilated with the indigenous Malay's sociocultural fabrics, such as in terms of language, dress, food habits and other aspects of general social conduct" [19]. However, despite these sociocultural adaptations, the Chitty have maintained some aspects of their ancestral culture and value systems. For example, in faith, they have remained staunch Hindus like their forefathers, they maintain several Hindu temples in Melaka, and they strictly observe many religious and customary rituals and practices. Intermarriages have also made their skin complexion and appearance look similar to the Malays.

The hybridity of the Chitty also manifests in their spoken language. They speak a creole version of Malay, which is the language of the dominant ethnic Malay community. Malay Creole is the only maternal language spoken by the Chitty, and they do not speak ancestral Tamil, or any other Indian language [36]. Nevertheless, there are various Tamil and other local languages' expressions and words in the Chitty language. The nature of sociocultural adaptation undergone by the community manifests in their language, displaying unique patterns of adaptation to the local surroundings. Much of the lexico-phonological description and its syntax resemble a stabilized form of Bazaar Malay [37–39]. It contains a substantial mix of Malay and Tamil vocabularies, while its grammar and syntax structures appear to be a diluted version of Tamil structures. English expressions

also manifest sparingly in Chitty conversations. Malay Creole was originally spoken for trading activities in the Melaka port. It was popular among foreign traders due to its easiness to master. Although it functioned as a reliable contact language, it did not develop into a language of literature and knowledge [40].

It is interesting to note that despite several centuries of separation from ancestral India, Tamil language lexicons continued to be used in conversations among the Chitty. The enunciation of these words is slightly different from native Tamil speakers. Tamil words are inserted into Malay Creole sentences, usually to explain a specific process or meaning that does not exist in the Chitty language. Table 1 shows some Tamil words employed by the Chitty in conversation among themselves.

Table 1. Tamil lexicons in the Chitty language.

Pronouns and Terms of Endearments	Wedding Matters	Temple/Festival	Food	Others
amma mother	*varusai* wedding gifts	*ponggal* harvest festival	*kauci* fish/meat food	*akani* fire
appa father	*jatakam* horoscope	*kavadi* religious ritual	*marekari* vegan food	*besti/vesti* white apparel
akka elder sister	*raasi* horoscope	*kappu* religious ritual	*eraci* meat	*maadu* cow
atte mama male cousin	*panjangam* horoscope	*ratam* Hindu procession	*kari* curry	*kolem/kollam* floor designs
anni sister in-law	*maapelei* groom	*ubayam* religious ritual		*kanni* virgin
aneng/annan brother		*arjanai/archannai* religious ritual		*kutung/kuutum* group
periyaani eldest sister in-law		*tirunur* (holy ash)		*ama-ama* yes/agreement
periyaamma maternal aunt		*aiyer* Brahmin priest		*yenna* question/why
kudumbam family		*pandaram* non-Brahmin priest		
		Koovil temple		

Source: adapted from [40].

Since Malay Creole is a basic contact language, it does not have vocabulary strength and spread to explain specific meanings and abstractions. Moreover, some of these meanings may not exist in their language. Instead, the Chitty resort to using Tamil words to refer to specific meanings, situations, and events; for example, the word *ubayam* (see Table 1) refers to a specific religious ritual that a priest performs in a Hindu temple on certain auspicious days. Further, the Tamil words *jatakam, raasi,* and *panjangam* all refer to the Indian horoscope. Indian culture places great importance on astrological predictions; even the selection of life partners usually goes through a compatibility check performed by trained astrologers. The Tamil words above are used to explain specific concepts since the equivalent terminology does not exist in Malay Creole. Although enunciated with an accent, using these words in conversation enables the Chitty to maintain their connection with their ancestral heritage. Tamil words are usually used to refer to names, pronouns, and terms of endearments, words related to Hindu marriage processes, and terminology related to Hindu customs and religious practices, food types, and others.

Intermarriages also paved the way for stronger identification of hybridity among the Chitty. Intermarriages did not only alter their offspring's physical features but they also facilitated intense sociocultural adaptation to the culture of their maternal parent, the Malays. Being inarticulate in Tamil and having severed ties with ancestral India, it was only natural for them to be closer to their maternal side. The Chitty embraced many Malay customs and practices into their culture. For example, Chitty weddings blend customs and rituals from Malay and Tamil with their traditions. While Chitty marriages are usually conducted in Hindu temples, other wedding-related events and the use of wedding items show a strong flavor of Malay culture in them. The Chitty wedding attire for the couples also differs from the usual traditional Indian wedding attire. The bridegroom wears the *baju daboh* (long shirt with a matching sarong), a handkerchief, a sash on the shoulder, a folded headdress, and a *keris* (doubled-edged wavy dagger) wedged in the cummerbund. The bride dresses in a matching baju laboh (long blouse) and *sarong* with an elaborate necklace of gold filigree, a matching apron, and a beautiful headdress called *sanggul serkup*, which is decorated with diamante and sequins [41]. These attires show a strong resemblance to the Melaka Malay wedding culture. The Chitty also observe the bersanding (sitting side by side on a bridal pedestal) and *perarakan* (procession) ceremonies, which are similar to Malay wedding rituals. Sociocultural adaptation is an important characteristic of minority communities. These adaptations are carried out consciously and unconsciously, as these groups manage their relations with other ethnic groups in their surroundings.

4.3. Historical Amnesia and Ethnic Invisibility

Despite being present for almost 700 years in Melaka, many Malaysians are oblivious of the existence of the Chitty community. One could claim that they have been ignored by mainstream Malaysian society despite their historical significance to Melaka. Being marginal in numbers and socioeconomic importance, the Chitty failed to garner similar attention to the wealthier and more prominent Baba-Nyonya (Melaka Strait-born Chinese). The Baba-Nyonya produced famous politicians, landowners, and business people. Tan Cheng Lock and his son, Tan Siew Sing, both Babas, rose to become ministers in the Malaysian Cabinet in the 1950s right through to the early 1970s. The former was one of the founding fathers of the nations. With such importance, most Malaysians know these profiles and their origin quite well. In contrast, most Chitty did not hold high civil or business positions, and they mainly take up clerical positions. There has been no prominent statesman, politician, or business person coming from this community. While the educated younger generation of Chitty has gone on to pursue a variety of vocations, the community, as a whole, is lesser known to the public.

The population demographic changed drastically due to the arrival of new migrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The new Indian migrants started to dominate the social, cultural, and religious life of Indian Hindus in Melaka. New temples and Tamil-medium primary schools sprung up in Indian domiciles in plantations and towns, and the Tamil language became the medium of communication among most Indians in Melaka. The Chitty now remained a tiny group nestled in their largely hidden cultural village, with not much socioeconomic importance to modern Melaka. After independence from the British in 1957, the new Indian migrants, now citizens, dominated the political, economic, and civil service sectors. In addition, the majority Malay community and the new Chinese and Indian migrants formed a sizeable population segment of the country. They have also entered the country's political fabric through a power-sharing arrangement with other races, namely, the Malays and Chinese. These developments further reduced the visibility and importance of the Chitty in the new Malaysian demographics. The Chitty are now relegated into a heritage community. Their numbers began to dwindle as many migrated to other cities such as Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore in search of employment. Waning in numbers, the community has somewhat faded into the larger fabric of the Indian community in post-independence Melaka.

As Malaya ushered into independence in 1957, the major communities gained prominence as they formed the national political, economic, and social life narratives of the nation, leaving very little space for the smaller heritage communities [4]. The ensuing social development discourse has focused mainly on these communities. One could argue that the preoccupation with the major ethnic groups has, to a large extent, over-shadowed smaller communities and made them less visible in the public policy dimension. Nevertheless, the authorities started to pay more attention to all minority communities to create balanced development and progress for all population segments. In Melaka, the Chitty and Baba-Nyonya communities were given the title "heritage communities", a fitting acknowledgment of their long presence in Melaka. The Chitty Cultural Museum, located at their cultural village, is a must-see tourist destination in Melaka. The community also participates actively in many state and national cultural activities, showcasing their unique culture.

However, despite their long presence in Melaka, there is a dearth of scholarly works regarding the Chitty. Apart from some ethnographical works, their racial heritage has been gravely omitted except for the works of historians where they are mentioned, but in passing [14]. The Chitty have been often mistaken, even by scholars, for the Nattukottai Chettiars, the wealthy money-lending community, due to their homonymous names. During the period of the Melaka Sultanate (1400), and in the subsequent Portuguese (1511) and Dutch (1641) reigns of Melaka, the Chitty played prominent roles in trade, commerce, and administration. Nina Chetu (a Chitty) rose to the position of *Bendahara* (similar to the prime minister) of Melaka in the Portuguese period. The Hindu–Muslim rivalry in the Melaka Sultanate period drove Nina Chetu to help the Portuguese prisoners in Melaka and later provide intelligence to the Portuguese during the invasion of Melaka in 1511. His actions led the local Malays to see him as a traitor. The Chitty were also prominent in trading and business during the Portuguese and Dutch periods. The Western occupiers of Melaka favored this community in the business and administration of Melaka. Therefore, the scholarly amnesia of local historians regarding this community is truly unfortunate, especially when the Chitty have been a significant player in history during the post-Melaka Sultanate period. The Portuguese and Dutch records provide invaluable sources of historical data on this community during those periods.

Since most of the Chitty resided in their cultural village in Kampung Tujoh, they did not have much opportunity to interact with other Indian migrants in Melaka. Further, being inarticulate in Tamil and having non-Indian physical features often discouraged the Chitty from participating in other Indians' functions. The Chitty speak Bazaar Malay, while the other Indian immigrants were less conversant in this creole, making communication only at the basic contact level. Moreover, a large part of the Chitty culture seems alien to most Indians. Therefore, the newer Indian migrants often see the Chitty as outcaste or caste-less since intermarriages with non-Indians are a social taboo for most Indians. Nonetheless, there was still some interaction between them, but largely on religious and temple matters, since both share a similar faith. Although there were several intermarriages between the Chitty and other Indians, the interaction between these groups has remained on the fringe. As such, the Chitty remained closely knit and often confine their interaction within the community.

One notable aspect of the Chitty community is its ability to maintain the uniqueness of its hybrid culture. Despite the changing dynamics of modern society, the Chitty could cushion these changes and preserve their age-long cultural traditions. Nevertheless, there are some changes observed in the Chitty culture, especially in language use, dress etiquette, and the nature of their interactions with other communities and institutions. Improvement in education has made them multilingual; they can interact with other races in Standard Malay and English, with educated Chitty people even adopting English in filial conversation. Modern attire is preferred for most occasions, and traditional attires are used in religious and customary events only. Some Chitty people have left the cultural village to settle down in nearby modern housing schemes. Some have even left the state for reasons

of employment. However, the cultural village holds a significant attraction to most of the Chitty, as many would return to the village for special religious and family events. Despite these changes, the Chitty have remained strong in their unique ethnic identity in Melaka. They also make special efforts to showcase their unique culture through cultural events, exhibitions, and talks.

The Chitty take pride in being known as the "heritage community" of Melaka, a recognition given by the Melaka government due to their long existence. Despite their Indian origin, the Hindu faith, and intermarriages with newer Indian migrants, they do not see themselves as Indian ethnically. The Chitty find themselves closer to the Baba-Nyonya of Melaka, perhaps because these two hybrid communities share similar traditions and have a history of mutual interaction in the course of Melaka's history. The Baba-Nyonya are often invited to partake in social and religious functions, and this is reciprocated to the Chitty [4]. In terms of their worldview, the Chitty often see themselves within their community, "without any clear conception on how they fit into the larger public and nation" [19]. While the younger Chitty are agile, the older generation often presses on the importance of preserving their unique culture, usually through language use, social and religious events, and the preservation of their cultural village. The village remains as the main symbol of the Chitty history, culture, and heritage in Melaka.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the paper highlights three major findings from this study. Firstly, on *historiography*, the Chitty community has played a significant role in the history of Melaka, and Malaysia as a whole. This community has witnessed almost 700 years of Melaka's modern history. They were great merchants and had helped to flourish trade and commerce in Melaka port as early as the 15th century. They were also prominent in the Melaka Palace and have held many influential positions in the administration. They were also highly favored by the Portuguese and Dutch for their administration skills and business acumen. For these contributions, the state government has recognized the Chitty as the "heritage community" of Melaka.

Secondly, on the "*hybridity and adaptation*", the uniqueness of their hybrid culture, due to centuries of sociocultural adaptation with the local population, owes testament to the cosmopolitan structures that existed in Melaka for centuries. To maintain this uniqueness, the Chitty made conscious efforts to preserve much of their sociocultural and religious practices, and living in the enclave of the Chitty village has helped this effort. Nevertheless, the Chitty are also vulnerable to the changes posed by modernization. Challenges associated with socioeconomic pursuit, education levels, intra-state migration, intermarriages, and changing value systems have made it harder for the community to maintain its cultural uniqueness.

Thirdly, on the "*ethnic invisibility and historical amnesia*", the community has faced an arduous task to keep themselves relevant and on the government's radar. Lacking in numbers and economic clout, it is an uphill task for the community to gain greater visibility in Malaysian society. Many Malaysians are still unaware of the existence of this community. Despite time-protracted sociocultural adaptation, the Chitty still have to deal with the power relations dynamics of Malaysia's plural society, which, to no small extent, has weighed down inter-ethnic relations. Since the last decade, the Chitty community has been trying to get the state government to accord them the *Bumiputera* (son of the soil) status, which will allow them to enjoy many special privileges from the government, similar to the privileges enjoyed by the indigenous Malay community. However, they are unable to stake a claim to such status, since they are often associated with later Indian immigrants of the 19th and 20th centuries [42,43].

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