

## THE DYNAMICS OF TAMIL-INDIAN COMMUNITY IN PRE- INDEPENDENCE INDONESIA; The Case of *Deli Hindu Sabha* in Medan

Wani Maler (1), Moh. Mudzakkir (2), Ikomatussuniah (3)

Ahli Cagar Budaya Kabupaten Deli Serdang (1), Universitas Negeri Surabaya (2), Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa (3)

E-mail: [swanimaler@gmail.com](mailto:swanimaler@gmail.com) (1) [mudzakkir@unesa.ac.id](mailto:mudzakkir@unesa.ac.id) (2), [iko@untirta.ac.id](mailto:iko@untirta.ac.id) (3)

### Abstract

This study traces the formation, development and decline of the Deli Hindu Sabha organization in the city of Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. This article examines the emergence of Indian Tamil community organizations in the pre-independence period of Indonesia. This paper uses historical research methods to reconstruct events in the past. Data obtained through literature study from various documents. The data obtained were processed using critical methods to determine the authenticity and validity of the data obtained. The analytical method used is descriptive narrative to describe the chronology of events and aspects that affect the course of events. The study found that the Deli Hindu Sabha organization had its ups and downs: it was founded in 1913 and had developed since, but it stopped conducting activities in 1918 until Kumarasamy took over this organization in 1928. After that, Kumarasamy was pivotal role in the development and activities of this organisation. These activities included providing free education with Tamil language guidance, Indian Boy Scout and Mother Paguthi to empower Tamil community in Medan. Besides that, various arts and sports activities were also carried out. However, the organization suffered a setback in 1942 when former chairman of organization converted into Buddhism, making the organization lacked the important figures that could become its spearhead. In addition, it is the same year of the Japanese occupation which had banned all organizations in Indonesia during that time.

**Keyword:** *Tamil-Indian Community; Deli Hindu Sabha; Formation; Development; Decline*

### INTRODUCTION

The arrival of the Indians to East Sumatra was because of the need for labours in plantations. This is due to the European plantation capital investment that flourished in the East Coast of Sumatra in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century AD. This investment was pioneered by Jacobus Nienhuys (1863) who received special permission to use the land from the Sultan of Deli, Mahmud Perkasa Alamsyah to plant Deli tobacco.<sup>1</sup> Deli tobacco was of excellent quality and was also used as a cigar wrapper. At that time, relatively large profits were obtained, making other foreign investors came to East Sumatra. Nienhuys formed a tobacco enterprise which was a public company or *naamloze vennootschap* (*perseroan terbatas* in Indonesian) under the name *Deli Maatschapping* (or *Maskapai Deli* in Indonesian) in 1869.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jan Breman, "Menjinakkan Sang Kuli: Politik Kolonial Pada Awal Bad ke-20, (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti Dan Pervakilan KITLV, 1997), 32.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Josef Pelzer, "Toean Keboen Dan Petani: Politik Kolonial Dan Perjuangan Agraria Di Sumatra Timur 1863-1947, (Jakarta:



Looking back, the Indians had come long before the plantations were opened. G.J.J. Deutz discovered inscribed stone from Lobu Tua (about 12 kilometres from Barus) in 1872. In 1932, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, a professor of archaeology at Madras managed to translate it. According to Sastri, the stone inscribed with the number 1088 AD describes a trade union of 1.500 Tamils who lived in Barus to trade.<sup>3</sup> They resided in Barus and Kalasan, and called this area as Kalasapura. This gives the impression that they had formed their own village. Just like any other cities of trading centres, foreign merchants lived in groups to form villages according to their area of origin or nation. As such, their residence was separated from the settlements of the local native population.<sup>4</sup>

Along with the development of the plantation industry, which was pioneered by Nienhuys, the need for labour also increased. Hence, large numbers of Chinese and Indian workers were brought in. These ethnic Chinese and Indians were originally imported from Penang, Singapore and South India through intermediaries. Plantation entrepreneurs also took advantage of workers from Java through the transmigration program carried out by the Dutch Colonial Government. Since then, the workers who worked on the plantations consisted of ethnic Chinese, Indians, and Javanese.<sup>5</sup> In addition to those who were brought in as coolies, other immigrants also continued to come to this city for the purpose of trading and filling in various available job vacancies.

The fame of Medan or was called then by the natives as *Tanah Deli* (the Land of Deli) as a high-income area had been recognised by other regions both at home and abroad. The term "*Het Dollar Landsch*" or the land that generates a lot of money was attached to Deli. These stigmas that described Tanah Deli had attracted many immigrants to try their luck living there. Immigrants from the surrounding region came from South Tapanuli (Mandailing and Sipirok), West Sumatra (Minangkabau), Banjar, Sunda, Banten, Java, and others, while immigrants from outside of the Malay Archipelago came from China, Arab, and India.

Immigrants from India who came to trade included people from South India as well as Bombay and Punjab. In the colonial period, Tamil labourers were usually employed as water lifters, ditch repairer and in infrastructure and transportation. When working at plantations, these Indians were always asked to build roads connecting the plantation sites with other locations. Meanwhile, the Punjabis who are Sikhs usually worked as security guards, guards at palaces and offices, and shopkeepers. Punjabis who worked at plantations also worked as night guards, mail carriers, and also raised cattle to produce milk.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century AD, there was a gradual shift in livelihoods, from initially working as coolies at plantations to becoming traders, drivers for transporting goods, private employees and in the government sector. This had resulted in some ethnic Tamils starting to move into cities to get closer to trade centres as well as the city centres.<sup>7</sup> Among the ethnic Tamil immigrants who

---

Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1985), 73

<sup>3</sup> Kallidaikurichi Aiyah Nilakanta Sastri, *A Tamil merchant-guild in Sumatra, Nix, (1932)*, 2

<sup>4</sup> Wani Maler, et al, "Comparison Between Barus And Plak-Pling Tombstones Based On Analysis Of Motif Design, *Bulletin of the Geological Society of Malaysia* 70 (2020): 120.

<sup>5</sup> Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200–2008, Penerbit Serambi, (2008)*, 56.

<sup>6</sup> S. Wani Maler, Jejak Sosial dan Ekonomi Bangsa Tamil India di Sumatera Utara, *Jural Aghniya* 1, No.1(2018): 7.

<sup>7</sup> Zulkifli B. Lubis, Kajian Awal Tentang Komunitas Tamil dan Punjabi di Medan: Adaptasi dan Jaringan Sosial, (USU, 2005), 138.

migrated to the land of Deli, there were also those who earned well enough to attract people in their home country to try to immigrate to East Sumatra. Some of these immigrants had a fairly good educational background, hence when they arrived in Deli they did not work as labourers but as office workers or who at that time was more popular with the term *kerani* in plantation offices.<sup>8</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century AD, these Indians realised that they needed a place that could connect them with their fellow Indians, both those who had settled in Medan or those who had just arrived. An association called *Deli Hindu Sabha* was formed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July in 1913 which was approved by the Governor of East Sumatra.<sup>9</sup> Each word in *Deli Hindu Sabha* has specific meanings, where *Deli* refers to the place they live, *Hindu* expresses their religious identity, and the word *Sabba* means unity. Thus, *Deli Hindu Sabha* means the unity of the Hindu community living in Deli. *Deli Hindu Sabha* was not only for ethnic Tamils, but also for all Indians in Medan whether they were Hindu or Muslim. The founders of this organisation are Ranasamy Sarma, Sedhu Ramasamy, Inder Singh, Ponesamy Pillay, Delip Sing, and others, chaired by Ponesamy Pillay.<sup>10</sup>

## METHODS

This paper used historical research methods to reconstruct events in the past. The data were obtained through literature study by searching for related data in the National Library of Indonesia and Tengku Luckman Sinar Library. Data were also obtained from visits to the National Archives of Indonesia. Then, all of the data obtained were processed using the critical method to determine the authenticity and validity of the data obtained. The next stage was interpretation, where the data obtained were analysed further to write new compositions that were more objective and scientific in nature from the objects studied. The last stage is the stage of writing or historiography, in which the chronological aspect was paid much attention to. The writing method used in this stage was descriptive-narrative, which describes each chronological event as well as aspects that affect the course of the events studied through in-depth analysis and then narrated it using a historical perspective.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Formation of The Deli Hindu Sabha

In 1912, the Indians from the *Adi Dravida* caste in Medan chose to convert to Christianity. *Adi Dravida* is the lowest caste group in the caste system that had been created in India since ancient times. This caste also had little attention in India.<sup>11</sup> Arriving in a new place far from the prevailing customs in India gave them an opportunity to improve the social status of *Adi Dravida*. Many of these groups embraced Catholicism and later converted to Buddhism. The reason they wanted to embrace these religions was because in these two religions there is no element of difference in social level, making them well-accepted with open arms.

The decision taken by the *Adi Dravidian* group made some of the ethnic Tamils also took the same decision, in addition to the existence of special Catholic missionaries for the ethnic Tamils in Medan since 1912.<sup>12</sup> This then caused concerns for the others in the ethnic Tamils. Communities

---

<sup>8</sup> Saifuddin Mahyudin, *Biografi D. Kumarasamy*, (Medan: Yayasan Sai Ganesha, 2014), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Luckman Sinar Basarsyah II, "*Orang India di Sumatera Utara*", Forum Komunikasi Antar Lembaga Provinsi Sumatera Utara, (2008), 24.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Mahyudin, 33.

<sup>11</sup> A Mani, *Indian Settlement and Religious Accommodation in North Sumatra: A Reconnaissance*, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, (1981), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Luckman Sinar Basarsyah II, "*Sejarah Medan Tempo Doeloe*", Medan, (2001),76.

that came from the upper class thought about the long-term effects caused by this religious conversion that could make the minority Hindu population in Medan gradually erode and disappear if no actions were taken.

The Deli Hindu Sabha was formed on the 1st of July in 1913, which was approved by the Governor of East Sumatra.<sup>13</sup> *Deli Hindu Sabha*, which means the unity of the Hindu community living in Deli, had its goal to allow all people who came from India to be a part of this organisation. This would mean that not only does this organisation was not devoted only to the ethnic Tamils who were predominantly Hindus, but also allowed Indians of other ethnics and religions to join it. This organisation was also intended as a forum to strengthen relations among Indians who came to the land of Deli, while also made fellow Tamils gather more often and strengthen their interethnic relations.

Permission was granted by the Dutch East Indies government which ruled in 1913 to *Deli Hindu Sabha* for 29 years. Henceforth, it will be determined again in accordance with the activities of this organisation. At the beginning of the establishment of *Deli Hindu Sabha*, the Dutch government was still monitoring it for fear that there would be political elements in it. However, most of the activities carried out were related to religion and social aspects, making it not too closely monitored.

The important figures who founded this organisation were (1) Ramasamy Sarma, (2) Sedhu Ramasamy, (3) Ayer, (4) Inder Singh, (5) O. Welly Samy, (6) Manggaya, (7) Ponesamy Pillay, (8) Supaya, (9) Sene Muthu, (10) Krishna, (11) Delip Singh, and others. The secretariat of *Deli Hindu Sabha* was located on the street of Jalan Darat Medan, and the organisational structure of it then was as follows; Ponesamy Pillay (Chairman), Manggaya (Secretary), Krishna (Treasurer).<sup>14</sup>

The establishment of *Deli Hindu Sabha* further strengthen Hinduism in East Sumatra. Those from the *Adi Dravida* caste were allowed to join the *Deli Hindu Sabha*. But, two years later the *Adi Dravida* group separated from *Deli Hindu Sabha* and formed *The Adi Dravida Sabha*. The existence of *The Adi Dravida Sabha* only lasted for four years. The cause of the *Adi Dravida*'s seperation from *Deli Hindu Sabha* is unknown. However, I suspects that this secession occurred possibly due to the lack of self-confidence of the *Adi Dravida* group that had been rooted for centuries. Their supposed position as the lowest caste was met with the requirement to join with other Indian groups such as the Sikhs, Telegus, Chettyars and Tamils. In addition to working in the religious aspects, the existence of *Deli Hindu Sabha* also strived for the Hindu community in the Medan area in general to be able to improve their lives in the economic, educational, social and cultural aspects.

At the beginning of the establishment of the *Deli Hindu Sabha*, meetings between the leaders of the organisation and its members were still held but there had been no significant change in the activities of the *Deli Hindu Sabha*. The majority who became members of *Deli Hindu Sabha* were the elderly. It was rare for young people to join in it. Most of the activities carried out were

---

<sup>13</sup> Luckman Sinar Basarsyah II, ... 76.

<sup>14</sup> Saifuddin Mahyudin, *Biografi D. Kumarasamy*, (Medan: Yayasan Sai Ganesha, 2014), 33.

in the form of religious events. In 1914 a *tonil* (drama) performance was held with the title "*Samerasan*".

On January 26<sup>th</sup> in 1915, the annual general meeting was held at Jalan Calcutta. This meeting was chaired by Maruthappa Pillay who was from the Chetty community. In this meeting, the annual report was discussed and the election of the chairman for the next generation was carried out, with the ones elected were: Ponnusamy Pillay (Chairman), Maruthappa Pillay (Vice Chairman), Sarma (Secretary), Murugiah Pillay (Treasurer): Ranmaswamy Iyer as Head of the English and Tamil school section.<sup>15</sup>

During the annual meeting, it was decided to open a Tamil and English school at the *Deli Hindu Sabha* secretariat. This school was opened to the general public for the Indians in Medan. In 1917 it was recorded that *Deli Hindu Sabha* had participated in helping to raise funds to assist the Red Cross in India. The Red Cross organised "Our Day" and was assisted by many parties in raising funds to help Red Cross volunteers involved in World War I. *Deli Hindu Sabha* participated by holding two *tonils* and managed to collect \$500 which was then handed over to the British Consulate General in Batavia.<sup>16</sup>

By 1918, the activities of *Deli Hindu Sabha* had begun to stop being carried out. It was unfortunate that the existence of *Deli Hindu Sabha*, which was only five years old, had ceased to operate. This was because the founders of the organisation did not try to attract young people to participate in it. In addition, in the economic field the members of *Deli Hindu Sabha* had not been able to do much to improve the lives of the Indian community in Medan. The members who had more established lives were only able to give some sort of contributions to the members of the lower economic status. They failed to provide the solutions on how to manage the existing funds to be more useful for the long-term benefits of the organisation's members.

*Deli Hindu Sabha* continued to decline with no development or activities conducted until 1928. Various other factors caused the deterioration of this organisation. First, some of the founding members of *Deli Hindu Sabha* were still too attached to old traditions and were unwilling to accept changes. Second, the social and economic lives of the Indian community were still predominantly poor, making each of them busier tending to their own lives first. Third, the management of *Deli Hindu Sabha* lacked the suitable knowledge in the field of organisational management. Finally and perhaps the most important factor, was the absence of a charismatic leader in *Deli Hindu Sabha*.

### **The Development of The Deli Hindu Sabha**

In 1931, D. Kumarasamy or commonly called as DK, was officially appointed as the new chairman of *Deli Hindu Sabha*, but the appointment of the secretary and treasurer remained unchanged. DK was chosen by the elderly people after witnessing his capability in organising when he joined in 1928. DK joined hands with the elders in order to grasp the idea of harmonising the

---

<sup>15</sup> The Straits Times. (1915, January 26).

<sup>16</sup> The Straits Times. (1917, November 2).

minds of the elders with the young people. Before being appointed as the chairman, DK had formed many small groups whose activities had attracted the enthusiasm of youths.

In his first year in charge, DK updated the organisation to become more modern. DK made articles of association and regulations to serve as work guidelines for the management and other members. He then compiled working programs and prepared the appropriate administrative mechanisms as needed. The programs covered the aspects of education, religion, social, culture, and economy.<sup>17</sup>

The secretariat of *Deli Hindu Sabha* moved from Jalan Darat to Jalan Calcutta. The equipments and supplies in this secretariat were more adequate than the previous ones. Funds for office needs were obtained from personal funds donated by DK's friends, namely Deliph Singh and Inder Singh who had a fairly good economic status. In addition to the donors, the source of funds for *Deli Hindu Sabha* was obtained from helping with weddings, from preparing venues for the event to be held to renting out event supplies. Usually the children from the Tamil school also helped, and the money earned were put into the *Deli Hindu Sabha* treasury. The previous management, which consisted of the elderly, saw the performance of DK as a remarkable chairman who was able to develop *Deli Hindu Sabha* beyond their expectations. During the second general meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1935 that was chaired by Mr. Murugappa Chettiar from Pematang Siantar. An election was held to select the next board of directors, namely: D. Kumarasamy (re-elected Chairman), R. Periasamy (Secretary), Subbian (Treasurer), A. Sadasivam (Drama section).<sup>18</sup>

After the election of this new leadership, the *Deli Hindu Sabha* was seen to be freed from the influence of the elderly. *Deli Hindu Sabha* had no other branches in East Sumatra. This organisation only locally existed in Medan. At that time there was also an organisation created by the Indian community in Labuhan Deli, namely *The Krishna Sabha* which was formed by S. Dolsamy. However, the operation of *The Krishna Sabha* was not well known. However, from the results of an interview, it was known that there was competition between *Deli Hindu Sabha* and *The Krishna Sabha* in *tonil* performances. In 1938 it was recorded that the members of *Deli Hindu Sabha* had reached to 870 people. This was considered an astonishing achievement where this organisation was able to become the forum desired by the Indian community in the city of Medan.<sup>19</sup>

Living in Medan had brought a new change in the grammar of the Tamil language among the community. When in Medan they had to adapt to the language used in Medan. On average, those who came to East Sumatra came from the poor and many were illiterate. Going to school was only the privilege of the upper class. Tamil was only used when speaking at home, without knowing the writing script. *Deli Hindu Sabha* saw this as a problem that needed to be fixed. The Tamil language should be safeguarded and preserved. In order to maintain their cultural heritage, they established a Tamil school.

---

<sup>17</sup> Saifuddin Mahyudin, *Biografi D. Kumarasamy*, (Medan: Yayasan Sai Ganesha, 2014),44.

<sup>18</sup> The Straits Times. (1935, March 9).

<sup>19</sup> S. Wani Maler, *Organisasi Deli Hindu Sabha di Medan 1913-1942*, (Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2016), 38.

In 1932, a periodical children's level class was held every Sunday, in the morning at 9.00 to 11.00 AM. The main thing that was taught was about mannerism and human values. Adults were also given education on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with the teaching given on religious matters. The implementation of these education programs was conducted using Tamil as the main language. Compared to Sikhs and Chetty groups, ethnic Tamils had a lower economic level and had difficulties to attend school, so attention was paid to ethnic Tamils. The school also taught how to read and write in the Tamil script. This was done so that not many more would become illiterate and forgetting their mother tongue. Tamil language was also important in religious needs, namely in carrying out religious rituals, prayers and poetry or mantras recited in Tamil.

Schools were established in two places, namely Medan and Binjai. They were located in the courtyard of the Sri Mariamman temple, both in Medan and in Binjai. Teachers in these schools did their work voluntarily without being paid. DK also joined in helping to teach at these Tamil schools. The teachers came from members of *Deli Hindu Sabha* who were literate in both the language and the writing script of Tamil. Religious education was provided by the elderly as well as some priests who understood more about spiritual matters. The existence of these Tamil schools, albeit as a non-formal education, was really beneficial for the lower classes.

In 1935, formal elementary schools or *padasalai* were constructed in the community centres of the ethnic Tamil. The first *padasalai* built was located on Jalan Iskandar Muda. Then, more *padasalai* was built in 1937 in the area with abundant population of the ethnic Tamil in the city of Medan, such as in Jalan Yuliana Straat (now Jalan Asia), Jalan Colombo and in Kampung Sukaraja Medan. The role of *Deli Hindu Sabha* in the development of these *padasalai* was to assist in providing educated teachers. These *padasalai* did not collect fees from children who came from underprivileged families. In an attempt to improve the quality of education in these *padasalai*, *Deli Hindu Sabha* also developed libraries so that the school residents could become more motivated and increase their reading skills. For the adults who were not fluent in the Tamil language, DK published a book containing methods of learning the Tamil language according to both Tamil and Latin scripts in 1937. This was also done because it seemed impossible for adults to attend schools considering their age and limited time due to work.

*Deli Hindu Sabha* established sports facilities at the *Deli Hindu Sabha* secretariat, which included badminton, table tennis, hockey and bodybuilding facilities. The sports section was formed to encourage Tamil teenagers to participate in more positive activities. It was undeniable that Indians were usually associated with drinking alcohol, which many of the youths had been trapped in from an early age. The organisation saw this as something that needed to be fixed. With the establishment of this sports section, it had attracted more young people to join *Deli Hindu Sabha*. This can be said as a tactic to attract the interest of the youth. Hockey was one of the most prominent sports with the formation of the “*Tamilian Hockey Team*”.

Later in the same year, the Amateur Dramatic Section, which was an arts section, was formed which was consisted of 40 people. The Amateur Dramatic Section was actually formed first in 1914 but only men joined. However, in 1934 this arts section was opened for both women and men, which indirectly became a form of modernising the Indian community in which both men and women could be a part of a single program, while not forgetting to adhere to the existing norms. The Amateur Dramatic Section conducted a *tonil* (drama) performance twice a month.

These *tonil* performances depicted themes related to religion and moral values. *Tonil* was not only just a form of entertainment, but it was intended for the audiences to understand the values contained in such performances. Special performances usually took place every Deepavali night in the grounds of the Sri Mariamman Temple. A music section was also opened within the arts section. These arts were incorporated into one section in hopes that there would be a continuity created when performing *tonils*. Watching *tonils* was a distinct form of entertainment for the Indians in Medan that could be watched for free because they were only performed in certain events.

The Tamil organization also formed The Indian Boy Scout or also called as *Pramuka Anak India* was formed in 1937. The formation of the Indian Boy Scout in Medan took its origin from the Indian Boy Scout that had been founded in India in 1916 at Madras by Annie Besant and George Arundale. It can be said that the Indian Boy Scout formed by *Deli Hindu Sabha* was adopted from India because it had the same laws, mottos and symbol. There were three sections in Indian Boy Scout which were distinguished by age: *Pramuka Anak-Anak* (Cub Scouts) aged 6-10 years old, *Pramuka* (Scouts) aged 10-18 years old, and *Dewasa* (Rovers) aged 18-25 years old. These three sections also had their own distinctive mottos, namely *Koshish Karo* (do your best) for *Pramuka Anak-Anak*, *Taijar* (be prepared) for *Pramuka*, and *Seva* (service) for *Dewasa*. The scout promise was as follows:

“Pada kehormatan saya, saya berjanji bahwa saya akan melakukan yang terbaik dalam melaksanakan tugas saya kepada Tuhan dan negara saya, untuk membantu orang lain setiap saat dan mematuhi UU Pramuka.” (On my honour, I promise that I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country, to help other people at all times, and to obey Scout Law).

The Indian Boy Scout was involved in various community development projects which included digging wells, assisting in adult literacy campaigns, and the organisation of schools in villages.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, a woman in Indian customs has many rules in her life. Starting from an early age, girls have been taught how to play a role in life. There are norms that they must follow. For centuries the position of men was considered superior to that of women. Men and women are considered two completely different types of creation, with different rights and dignity. Men are considered more valuable and higher in position than women. In India, gender gaps can still be found everywhere.<sup>21</sup> Also, A woman is no longer allowed to leave the house upon entering her adolescence. This continues even after the woman is married. In this case, it is the husband who is in charge of earning a living, while the wife's role is to be a housewife. Women have always been seen as belonging to men. Only men are considered as beings who have wisdom, while women are considered unwise and therefore must be supervised by men. This situation continues from generation to generation. A woman is not encouraged to socialise in public, making the lives of teenage girls rather monotonous and would only prepare themselves to be good future wives.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Lalita Janin, *The Bharat Scout and Guides Facts*, (India, 1916).

<sup>21</sup> Renate Syed, *Ein Unglück ist die Tochter!': zur Diskriminierung des Mädchens im alten und im heutigen Indien*, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, (2001), 53.

<sup>22</sup> Babita Tewari and Sanjay Tewari, "The History Of Indian Women: Hinduism At Crossroads With Gender", *Politics and Religion Journal* 3, no. 1 (2009), 25-47.



A special section in *Deli Hindu Sabha* exclusively for women were established for the first time in 1938. At the beginning of its establishment, this section received opposition from parents who had daughters. This section was considered useless and against the customs, because a girl should not be outside of the house. DK as the chairman of *Deli Hindu Sabha* explained that discrimination between men and women must begin to be abolished. Teenage girls also need socialisation with the surrounding environment in order to find their true identity. The establishment of this section, called Mother *Paguthi*, was focused on teaching ethics and mannerism appropriate for teenagers who were entering adulthood. Apart from that, teenagers were also taught with Indian dances which were usually performed at religious events, such as the *Bharatanatyam* dance.

The last program of Deli Hindu Sabha was founding of the cooperative union *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (translated as Collective Help Union). It was a union developed from mutual trust between fellow citizens with the aim of fostering cooperation and togetherness in dealing with difficulties that sometimes befall residents. *Serikat Tolong Menolong* or STM was a medium that functions economically as well as socially, in terms of religious rituals (especially those related to the issue of death), as well as other social activities. The economic function of the STM system could be seen from the amount of money collected either voluntarily or obligatory which were donated or given to community members who had died or in the form of equipment needed for a certain event. The social function of STM can be seen in the form of solidarity from fellow citizens who felt the same fate and shared the same responsibility to work together (*gotong-royong*) in implementing and working on something.<sup>23</sup>

*Deli Hindu Sabha* founded the Cooperative Union (*Serikat Koperasi*) and STM in 1937. This was where the role of *Deli Hindu Sabha* in helping the poorer Indians became centralised. Such situations were not only focused on advancing education and culture, but also aimed at the economic aspect. This form of cooperation became an effort to raise funds available to its members or a kind contribution money to be developed jointly in order to compete in the free market at that time. Personally, the Tamil people had not been able to compete freely in trade during that time.

The profits from the collected cooperative funds are then channelled or redeveloped through STM. This was not only to provide assistance to those who were suffered in disasters, but also to those who needed business capital. Since there was a sense of trust among fellow Indians during that time, this had made STM easier to manage. This was also inseparable from the basis of ethnic and religious similarities that were in the same area.

### **The Decline of Deli Hindu Sabha**

Organisation is a social unit formed to achieve a goal or group of goals. An organisation can be formed because it is influenced by several aspects such as the unification of vision and mission. An organisation that is considered good is an organisation whose existence can be

---

<sup>23</sup> S. Wani Maler, *Organisasi Deli Hindu Sabha di Medan 1913-1942*, (Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2016), 48.

recognised by the surrounding community because the community provides the maximum contribution,

Every organisation must have experienced its ups and downs, and *Deli Hindu Sabha* is no exception. Having experienced a major setback for almost 10 years, the organisation was able to rise and recuperate for the benefits of the Tamil community. The success in recuperation could not be separated from the role of its leaders and management. But the success did not last forever. By 1942, the activities of *Deli Hindu Sabha* began to recede yet again.

There were several factors that caused this second decline of the *Deli Hindu Sabha* organisation, including cultural factors between the upper and lower classes, namely the dominance of a certain class. For example, the Sikhs were mostly funders and did not become involved too much in the management. In the initial rules of the organisation, all Indians regardless of ethnic groups were allowed to join the organisation. But, in practice, the Sikhs and the *Adi Dravida* did not want to mingle and cooperate in running the organisation.

Another factor was the old-fashioned and conservative nature of certain members that were associated with customs, culture and traditions. Most members of the *Deli Hindu Sabha* organisation then were young people. However, these young people were not supported by some of their parents. They argued that the activities in the organisation were not beneficial, especially for Indian women whose life line had always been assumed to be predestined, hence following such activities was seen as breaching the appropriate boundaries for an Indian woman. Another reason for the decline of *Deli Hindu Sabha* was that in 1942, Japan entered Medan and prohibited all forms of association and organisation, including *Deli Hindu Sabha*. With the chaotic organisational conditions and the absence of a leader who was able to accommodate all of its organisational activities as well as the Japanese regulation of prohibiting organisational activities, *Deli Hindu Sabha* stopped its operation. The secretariat of *Deli Hindu Sabha* was closed by the Japanese and all the inventory items and goods of the organisation were given to the Sri Mariamman Temple.

A vague system, especially in the organisation's statutes and by laws or AD/ART (*Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga*) was also another factor of the organisation's decline. Initially, this organisation was founded as a gathering medium for the Indian community in Medan, so there were no written rules regarding the system within this organisation. However, during the leadership of DK, regulations and systems related to AD/ART in the organisation began to be implemented. In this regard, the author had not obtained any authentic data regarding the AD/ART of the organisation.

Perhaps the most important factor for the decline of *Deli Hindu Sabha* was the largely significant role of DK as the chairman that had made no other individuals able to take on the duties and roles in the organisation after the resignation of DK. At the beginning of the formation of this organisation, it was hoped that all Indians in Medan, both Hindu and Buddhist, could all join and mingle. But, in practice, not even the leadership of DK had made this aspiration to come to life. DK had a great attention to the Buddhist Indians because the community was mostly in the lower class.

In an attempt to make it easier for him to help the Buddhist Indian community, DK embraced Buddhism in 1942, which indirectly made him resigned from his position in *Deli Hindu Sabha*. With his conversion to Buddhism, he aspired to be able to guide and mingle more with the Buddhist Indian community considering he had the same faith with them.

## CONCLUSIONS

Arriving at East Sumatra as coolies were how the Indians actually got to Medan. The results of the indenture system made by the British government in India was one of the factors of this Indian diaspora. Although previously it had been stated that there was a stone inscription in Lobu Tua that had been written in Tamil script narrating the presence of Indian traders in East Sumatra, the surviving generations of Indian up until the current fourth generation in Medan largely had their origin from the opening of plantation industry in the region. They did not only come as labourers tied to plantations, many of the Indians also came with their own financial capital to develop business. In fact, many of them became quite successful. This situation made Indians who had migrated to East Sumatra, especially Medan, became reluctant to return to their homeland and stayed there permanently. Some even chose to settle in Malaysia and Singapore.

The *Deli Hindu Sabha* organisation was originally formed by the upper class which mostly consisted of the elderly who hoped that there was a place where fellow Indians could depend on this organization. The decision of the *Adi Dravida* caste to embrace Christianity was the trigger for the formation of *Deli Hindu Sabha*, because some of the ethnic Tamils were influenced by this situation. *Deli Hindu Sabha* tried to increase the number of religious events in order to uplift fellow Indians and increase their sense of solidarity. Equally important, economic limitations made it difficult for children to get education. *Deli Hindu Sabha* played a key role in forming schools that used Tamil in its language of instruction so that children would not experience illiteracy again as happened to their parents who worked as coolies.

Having experienced a setback of almost ten years did not dampen the Tamils in rebuilding *Deli Hindu Sabha*. Activities related to education were re-established. In this case, some of them were adapted directly from India. Various ways had been done to attract the interest of young people to work, in order to show that the Indians also wanted to progress even in their own circles.

After 29 years, the organisation experienced an inevitable decline caused by several factors, including cultural factors that continued to dominate and made it difficult to organise activities, as well as leadership degeneration and the unclear *Anggaran Dasar /Anggaran Rumah Tangga* (AD/ART) system were the triggers for the process of decline. Another significant factor was D. Kumarasamy who resigned from the position of chairman of the *Deli Hindu Sabha* organisation which coincided with the arrival of Japanese into Indonesia that had banned activities of all organisations.

## BIBLIOGRAFI

- Basarsyah II, Luckman Sinar. "*Orang India di Sumatera Utara*." Forum Komunikasi Antar Lembaga Provinsi Sumatera Utara (Forkala-Sumut), 2008.
- Breman, Jan. "*Menjinakkan Sang Kuli: Politik Kolonial Pada Awal Abad Ke-20*". Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti Dan Perwakilan KITLV, 1997.

## Wani Maler, Moh. Mudzakkir, Ikomatussuniah

- Janin, Lalita. *The Bharat Scout and Guides Facts (2nd ed)*. India, 1916.
- Lubis, Zulkifli B. "Kajian Awal Tentang Komunitas Tamil dan Punjabi di Medan: Adaptasi dan Jaringan Sosial." USU. 2005.
- Mahyuddin, Saifuddin. *Biografi D. Kumarasamy*. Medan: Yayasan Sai Ganesha. 2014.
- Maler, S. Wani. *Organisasi Deli Hindu Sabba di Medan 1913-1942 (Unpublished Degree's thesis)*. Universitas Sumatera Utara. (2016).
- Maler, S. Wani. "Jejak Sosial dan Ekonomi Bangsa Tamil India di Sumatera Utara." *JURNAL AGHNIYA* 1, no. 1 (2018): 1-13.
- Maler, Wani, S. K. M. Shyeh, R. W. Oetomo, and Mokhtar Saidin. "Comparison Between Barus And Plak-Pling Tombstones Based On Analysis Of Motif Design." *Bulletin of the Geological Society of Malaysia* 70 (2020).
- Mani, A. *Indian Settlement and Religious Accommodation in North Sumatra: A Reconnaissance*, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, No. 5.
- Pelzer, Karl Josef. *"Toeang Keboen Dan Petani: Politik Kolonial Dan Perjuangan Agraria Di Sumatra Timur 1863-1947"*. Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan. (1985).
- Ricklefs, Merle Calvin. *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200–2008*. Penerbit Serambi, 2008.
- Sastri, Kallidaikurichi Aiyah Nilakanta. *A Tamil merchant-guild in Sumatra*. Nix, 1932.
- Sinar, T. Luckman, *Sejarah Medan Tempo Doeloe*, Medan: Tanpa Penerbit, 2001.
- Syed, Renate. *"Ein Unglück ist die Tochter": zur Diskriminierung des Mädchens im alten und im heutigen Indien*. Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001.
- Tewari, Babita, and Sanjay Tewari. "The History Of Indian Women: Hinduism At Crossroads With Gender." *Politics and Religion Journal* 3, no. 1 (2009): 25-47.
- The Straits Times. (1915, January 26).
- The Straits Times. (1917, November 2).
- The Straits Times. (1935, March 9).