

Chapter 5

(De)legitimizing the 2021 Budget Allocation for Tamil Schools in a Talk Show



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Abstract Tamil vernacular schools provide access to education and career opportunities for Indian Malaysians. Tamil schools are perceived to be an important component of Indian minority rights, an avenue for the Tamil-speaking community to establish and institutionalize their language and cultural identity. However, the government reduced its allocation for these schools in the 2021 budget. Indian political leaders, shouldering the responsibility to channel the discontent among Indians, have raised concerns on various platforms, such as newspapers, social media, and television interviews. It is imperative to observe how Indian political leaders prioritize minority rights while preserving their own or parties' political interests. Politicians utilize rhetoric to influence the public, but few studies are conducted on the political discourse of Indian Malaysians. This chapter studies an interview in *Vizhuthugal-Samugathin Kural*, a Tamil talk show televised on Astro *Vaanavil*. Grounded in discourse studies, this chapter analyzes the (de)legitimizing strategies used by two prominent Indian politicians from MIC and DAP. Although the two parties hold opposite ideologies, this chapter highlights their similarities in advocating minority rights for Indian Malaysians.

Keywords Indian Malaysians · Minority rights · Tamil schools · Budget allocation · Talk Show

5.1 Introduction

The Malaysian education system has witnessed developments to expand education opportunities for citizens. With almost 98% of enrollment at the primary level and 48% at the tertiary level, exceeding the target set by UNESCO (Wan et al., 2018), the Malaysian education system is relatively developed. As education is a federal matter, curriculum planning is done at the federal level and centrally administered, having national unity in mind as a priority (Ahmad, 1998). However, the multiethnic

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setting poses various challenges toward establishing an inclusive education system in Malaysia. The policies set have to cater to the diverse needs of the various ethnicities, preserving their socioeconomic stability, political footing, language institutions, and cultural and religious identities (Ishak, 1999).

In post-colonial Malaysia, mother tongue education for minority communities was retained through vernacular schools as a concession to maintain social harmony (Canagarajah, 2005). Therefore, vernacular schools are perceived to contribute to creating values, norms, and beliefs among Malaysians (Sualman et al., 2019), along with the freedom to have religious bodies and political organizations. Tamil vernacular schools are envisioned to be an important component in the Indian minority rights as stated in Article 152 of the Constitution (Loo, 2009). It is an avenue for the Tamil-speaking community to establish and institutionalize their language and cultural identity because vernacular educational entities provide access to education and career opportunities, especially for minority communities to upgrade their livelihoods (Bakar, 2014).

Many Tamil schools were established prior to Malaysian independence by either non-political or religious movements (Rajantharan et al., 2012). Currently, there are 527 Tamil primary schools nationwide recognized and regulated by the Ministry of Education. Rajantharan et al. (2012) state that the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) played a vital role in upholding the recognition of Tamil schools in Malaysia. MIC is also regarded as the guardian of Tamil schools as it has contributed much to obtain funds and land for Tamil schools and is directly involved in issues involving Tamil schools, besides carrying out additional programs to improve students' performance (Venothan, 2008). This explains the role of ethnic-based political parties in sustaining vernacular education in Malaysia. Nevertheless, investigating the role of ethnic-based parties in supporting minority community would further highlight areas for improvement. Thus, this study analyzes the talk of two prominent Indian Malaysian politicians during a television interview on the 2021 budget allocation for Tamil schools.

5.2 Tamil Education Budget

Since 1946, the Indians have had their own communal political party, the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) (Sandhu, 2006). Hence, Indian Malaysians were predominantly represented by the MIC. MIC functioned as an agency to channel their concerns and with whom the government could consult before making decisions on issues involving the Indian community. Furthermore, MIC's Education wing, a separate division designated to manage education issues among Indians, is currently led by Kamalanathan, who also contributes toward upgrading the access for quality education among Indians, either via Tamil schools or obtaining monetary support. Apart from that, Kamalanathan was also appointed as Deputy Minister II and as the MIC representative in the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2014 until 2018, looking after Tamil school affairs.

Table 5.1 Budget allocation for the Tamil schools from 1990 to 2010

Malaysia plan	Year	Allocation (RM)	Percentage (%)
Sixth	1990–1995	27,042,000	2.40
Seventh	1996–2000	10,902,000	0.41
Eighth	2001–2005	13,800,000	0.26
Ninth	2006–2010	56,100,000	1.16

Source Arumugam (2008)

However, the narrative on ethnic-based politics changed when Pakatan Harapan (PH), a multiparty coalition without explicit ethnic-based stance, took over the federal government in 2018 (Dettmann, 2018). PH was made up of Amanah, Bersatu, DAP, and PKR. Although DAP was perceived to be a Chinese dominated party (Samuel et al., 2014) and Amanah an Islamist party (Jan, 2018), it was widely accepted that the PH government was built on a multiethnic platform, in contrast to Barisan Nasional (BN) (Reddy & Selvanathan, 2020).

However, after PH took over the government, there was no Indian representation in the MOE. Recognizing this fact, a special committee was set up by deputy minister Teo Nie Ching to manage the issues of Tamil schools, especially in terms of construction, upgrading, school relocation and maintenance. This committee was called the Advisory Committee on Education for the Indian Community (*Jawatankuasa Penasihat Pendidikan Masyarakat India*).

Tamil schools have been receiving funds from the former the BN government since the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1990–1995) (Table 5.1), where the percentage reflects the proportion from the total funds allocated for primary education. As seen in Table 5.1, there is a decline in percentage of allocation from Sixth to Eighth Malaysia Plan. It was in the Ninth Malaysia Plan where the allocation for the Tamil schools rose to RM56.1 million or 1.16% of the development allocation for primary education (Arumugam, 2008).

Since 2012, during Dato Seri Najib Tun Razak’s tenure as Prime Minister, Tamil schools received an increased allocation. Under the “Tamil Schools Action Plan” (*Pelan Tindakan Sekolah Tamil*), a special project plan (*Projek Rancangan Khas*) was initiated. Under this project, the government approved RM250 million to be used for five years continuously for upgrading and maintenance purposes. After that, there was no special plan or provision for Tamil schools in terms of funding.

Despite being clearly marked under the 11th Malaysian Plan, the change in government led to the suspension of Malaysian Indian Blueprint (MIB), which outlined financial provisions specifically for Indians and Indian-related government entities, including Tamil schools. In 2018, the PH government allocated RM550 million as a Special Fund for school upgrading and maintenance, and the budget was RM50 million for Tamil schools, which was 9.09% of the total allocation. In 2019, the total allocation for all types of schools was RM652 million, and 7.69% (RM50 million) of the allocation was channeled to Tamil schools. The government

awarded a fixed amount of RM50 million annually for five years despite the annual budget for the education sector increasing each year.

From March 2020, the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government was formed after the PH government could not be sustained. During the PH government, four Indian Malaysians were given full ministerial positions, namely M. Kulasegaran (DAP), Gobind Singh (DAP), P. Waythamoorthi (Senator), and Xavier Jayakumar (PKR). When PN took over, there was an imbalanced ethnic representation in the cabinet, as Saravanan from MIC was the only Indian, assigned as Minister of Human Resources Development. This lack of representation hindered PN from gaining the public's trust in achieving multiethnic harmony.

Based on the 2021 budget announcement by PN, the Ministry of Education received the largest allocation amounting to RM50.4 billion out of RM322 billion ringgit. Notably, the annual Tamil school maintenance funds were downsized from RM50 million (2020) to RM29.98 million (2021). Furthermore, the amount of allocation using special formulas for all types of schools as mentioned by Senior Minister Radzi Jidin during a presentation on Budget 2021 (November 24, 2020), was insufficient for Tamil schools. According to a feasibility study conducted by Subramanian (2020), the total allocation required for improvement and management of Tamil schools was RM55.5 million. Tamil school management lacked an estimated budget of RM25.7 million. Considering the potential financial constraints and its implications on Tamil school students (Kenayathulla et al., 2018), this reduced fund allocation in Budget 2021 caused dissatisfaction among the Indian community.

These budget contractions were deemed to pose numerous financial constraints for Tamil schools. Therefore, minority leaders representing the community, who shouldered the responsibility for channeling the growing discontent among Indians, raised concerns and initiated discourses on this matter in various media, including newspapers, social media, and television interviews. As such, it is imperative to observe how Malaysian Indian political leaders prioritize minority rights while preserving their own or parties' political interests. Meanwhile, political parties and politicians are also required to be mindful and considerate in releasing statements, as they are expected to promote tolerance and communal harmony. Their communication will help minority communities understand the government's political priorities better.

Limited studies have been carried out involving political discourse among Indian Malaysians. This chapter aims to analyze the legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies used by two prominent Indian politicians during a television interview. As both represent parties holding opposite ideologies, it highlights the commonalities shared between Indian politicians in advocating minority rights and addressing challenges faced by them.

5.3 Methodology

Data for this study are taken from an interview titled "Why was the budget allocation for Tamil schools downsized?" in "*Vizhuthugal-Samugathin Kural*," a Malaysian

Tamil talk show telecast on Astro Vaanavil on December 2, 2020 (9–10 pm). Vizhuthugal is the only talk show that has been telecasted live for the past 13 years by Astro Malaysia Holdings Berhad (ASTRO), which speaks of its potential in influencing the masses (M. Nirmala Devi, personal communication April 7, 2021). Notably, this talk show was the only one that highlighted the budget issue.

The invited guests were Kamalanathan, former deputy minister of education, currently representing MIC's Education Wing and Saneeswaran Nethaji Rayer, Jelutong Member of Parliament, representing DAP. Rayer was invited because he was publicly known to be vocal in parliamentary sittings (Annuar, 2020), hence capable of criticizing and arguing against Kamalanathan's statements (M. Nirmala Devi, personal communication April 7, 2021). The interview lasted an hour, but the speakers were only given 35 min to speak, as the remaining time was used for the hosts to interact with the guests, commercial breaks, and a video clip. However, upon transliterating in Tamil, it is found that only 25 min were used to discuss the issue of Tamil schools budget allocation. The selected interview excerpts were Romanized, translated to English, and then screened for micro-level discursive strategies (van Leeuwen, 2007). Keeping ethical considerations in mind, a written permission to use data from their talk show was obtained from Astro Malaysia Holdings Berhad (ASTRO), which owns the copyright. A personal communication also was conducted with Nirmala Devi Munisamy, the producer of the talk show on April 7, 2021 to get more information about the show and the reasons behind selecting the interviewees.

Politicians are known to use rhetoric to influence the emotions and perceptions of the public to achieve their political goals (Chavez et al., 2019). Notably, discursive legitimation strategies contribute to introducing changes in an organization (Hyndman et al., 2018). This chapter analyzed the interview by applying the framework outlined by van Leeuwen (2008) to observe the micro-level discursive legitimation strategies, as was also done by Rajandran (Chap. 3), Yoong (Chap. 10), and Lee (Chap. 12).

In van Leeuwen's framework (2008), there are four legitimation categories: (1) authorization, (2) rationalization, (3) moral evaluation, and (4) mythopoesis. Authorization is a legitimation strategy utilizing the reference to one's authoritative role in an organization or association with authority. Based on van Leeuwen's framework, authorization can be categorized into six subtypes: personal, expert, role model, impersonal, tradition, and conformity. Rationalization can be classified into two types: instrumental rationalization and theoretical rationalization. Rationalization generally explains "*why such social practices exist*" and "*why they take the form they do.*" Meanwhile, moral evaluation is legitimation based on moral values. Finally, legitimation achieved through storytelling is known as mythopoesis, where the speaker utilizes moral tales or cautionary tales to narrate the consequences of actions.

5.4 Analysis and Discussion

This section explains the discursive strategies found in the statements by Rayer and Kamalanathan to legitimize their political stance while (de)legitimizing the 2021 budget allocation for Tamil schools by PN. The significant (de)legitimation strategies used by the politicians were authorization, rationalization, and moral evaluation. The analysis revealed that both politicians use authorization and rationalization more frequently to delegitimize the budget allocation and opposition's political contribution in preserving minority rights. Meanwhile, moral evaluation is used to reiterate the narrative of ethnic-based policies in Malaysia.

Based on Kamalanathan's argument, he mostly uses the interview to reinforce his contributions during his tenure. He delegitimizes the 2021 budget by blaming the governance of PH for the past 22 months since 2018. He claims that the lack of consideration from PH leaders for the Indian community resulted in the budget reduction. He tried to establish that having a separate ethnic-based entity, like MIC, could resolve Indian issues, compared to PH's model. In contrast, Rayer repeatedly condemns the inadequate responses and lack of evidence received in Parliament during the question-and-answer session. The following excerpts from the interview illustrate how these politicians use discursive strategies to validate their points and positions.

5.5 Authorization

Rayer and Kamalanathan express their discontent against the reduction of funds for Tamil schools. Both politicians use authorization to re-establish their role and relevance in the decision-making process, in their party's interest. Below, (de)legitimation through authorization can be found in Excerpt 1:

Excerpt 1: Kamalanathan (minute 04:07)

Source text: 29.98 milliyaṅ vantu maḱiḷccik kuḍukkira oru ceṅṅāḷ, kēṭṭirkaḷ eṅṅāḷ niccayamāka maḱiḷcci illāta oru ceṅṅitāṅ. ēṅṅāḷ, nāṅ kalvi amaicciṅ tuṅai amaiccarāka irukka, irunta kālakaṭṭattil, 50 milliyaṅ kuḍutta māṅṅiyam kūda pattātu eṅṅu pala pōrāṭṭaṅkaḷ, pala tiṭṭaṅkaḷ pōṭṭu atikamāṅa māṅṅiyam tāṅ nām eduttuk koduttōmoḷiya, inta, inta muṅṅai 29.98 milliyaṅ māṅṅiyam niccayamāka taṅṅipṅalḱik kūḍattukku itu pattātutāṅ eṅṅu nāṅ kūṅṅa virumpuḱiṅṅēṅ

Translation: *Definitely, cutting down the budget to 29.98 million is upsetting. Reason being, during my tenure, as the deputy minister at the Ministry of Education, despite being given 50 million, we strived, encountered multiple challenges and devised strategies in acquiring more funds for Tamil schools.*

Thus, this 29.98 million ringgit fund will definitely not be enough for Tamil schools

Based on Excerpt 1, Kamalanathan disagrees with the budget formulation and reduction in the fund allocated by PN. He also registers that Tamil schools received a RM50 million budget during his tenure. In this excerpt, authorization was used to delegitimize the current budget as Kamalanathan refers to his previous political role in obtaining funds for Tamil schools, and this is a form of personal authorization (van Leeuwen, 2008). Using “*niccayamāka*” (definitely) twice indicates his certainty against the government decision, which delegitimizes the budget. Nevertheless, using the exclusive “*nām*” (we), he informs his and the party’s (MIC) contributions in collecting funds for Tamil schools during his tenure. However, “*pala pōraṭṭaṅkaḷ, pala tiṭṭaṅkaḷ pōṭṭu*” (encountered multiple challenges and devised strategies) indicate that the budget allocation was never smooth. Meanwhile, via stating his contribution in acquiring more funds beyond what was allocated, he delegitimizes the role of PH leaders in prioritizing Tamil school welfare, persuading the public with his superior performance. This illustrates Kamalanathan’s intention to attack the opposition party instead of delegitimizing the 2021 budget drafted by PN.

Excerpt 2: Rayer (minute 9:39)

Source text: *nān nādālumaṅrattula eṅṅa kēḷvi kēṭṭanā, “inta aracāṅkattukku vantu ēṅ inta kuṛaivāṅa māṇiyam otukkīdu ceytirukkāṅkā?” appadiṅu kēḷvi kēṭṭum pōtu, takka patil kodukka māṭṭiṅkiṛāṅka, kodukkavum mudiyala, mēṛkoṇdu intiyarkaḷ cārpāka ippa uḷḷa aracāṅkattil iraṅdu piratinitikaḷ; atāvatu Edmund Santhana, Segamat nādālumaṅra uṛuppiṅarum dattō caravaṅaṅ tāppā uṛuppiṅarum avaṅkakiṭṭa inta vicayattai kalantu pēcuṅāṅkaḷā? avaṅkaḷudaiya, avaṅkaḷudaiya feedback etāvatu eduttāṅkaḷā? appadiṅu kēṭṭumpōtu takka patil koṭukka mudiyala koṭukka mudiyāta oru cūṅnilaimaiyila irukkāru namma amaiccaru*

Translation: *When I raised this issue in Parliament, to know the reason behind the insufficient budget allocation, they didn’t and couldn’t give a proper answer. In addition, representing the Indians in the current government, are Edmund Santhara, MP Segamat and Dato’ Saravanan, MP Tapah, were they consulted for the budget allocation? When I raised this question, the minister was unable to answer*

In Excerpt 2, Rayer strongly claims that the finance minister could not answer his questions, indicating that the budget needs to be scrutinized, as he believes that he deserves to know the reason behind the budget formulation. Hence, obligation modality is expressed here via the phrase “*patil koṭukka mudiyala*” (unable to

answer), as Rayer indicates that the minister should be able to justify the budget allocation and his failure to do so may delegitimize the budget. Rayer has repeatedly mentioned his action of questioning the budget formulation and not receiving any adequate answer. This was done to convince the audience that his questions received inadequate responses from the finance minister, Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz.

Next, he also assigns responsibility to Member of Parliament for Segamat, Edmund Santhara, and Minister of Human Resources, Dato' Saravanan, to act on behalf of the community. Rayer indirectly gives importance to ethnic-based opinions when formulating budget for ethnic-based entities, which also falls under obligation modality through “avaṅkaḷudaiya feedback eṭāvatu eduttāṅkaḷā?” (were they consulted), as he emphasizes that Indian representatives should have been consulted. While Kamalanathan compared his past political experience to portray himself superior to PH politicians, Rayer highlights the lack of priority given to Indian representatives, despite the ethnic-based setting of the PN government.

Excerpt 3: Kamalanathan (minute 10:59)

Source text: ippa intak kālakaṭṭattil eṇṇa nadantukoṇdirukkiṇṇratu eṇṇāl, ma.i.kā-viṇṇ tēciyat talaivar tāṇṇsrī cā. Vikṇēsvaraṇṇ avarkaḷum cari, ma.i.kā-viṇṇ tēciyat tuṇait talaivar, tāppā nādāḷumaṇṇa uṇṇuppiṇar, maṇṇita vaḷa amaiccar avarkaḷ, ivarkaḷ iraṇḍu pērum kūda amaiccarkaḷidam; kalvi amaiccum cari, niṇṇi amaiccidam neridayākap pēccu vārttai nadatti, tamilppaḷḷikkūdattukku todarntu 50 milliyaṇṇ riṇṇkiṭ māṇṇiyam vaḷaṇka vēṇḍum eṇṇa oru nōkkattil irukkiṇṇrārkaḷ. atu maṭṭumillāmal iraṇḍu nāṭkaḷukku munṇr(p)u, viyāḷakkiḷamai aṇṇru, nāṇṇ nēridaiyāka kalvi amaicciṇṇ mūtta KSU-vaic cantittu inta muppatu, 29.98 milliyaṇṇ riṇṇkiṭ māṇṇiyam tamilppaḷḷikkūdattukkup pattātu, tayavu ceytu inta māṇṇiyattai nīṇṇkaḷ maruparicṭṭaṇṇai ceyya vēṇḍum eṇṇru kūri, atukku vēṇḍiya nadavaṭikkai eduttukkoḷkiṇṇrōm

Translation: *Now, what's going on is that, both MIC's National President, Tan Sri S. Vigneswaran, and MIC's Vice President, MP Tapah, the human resource minister, are engaging talks with the education minister and finance minister with an intention to request 50 million ringgit as a continuous annual budget allocation for Tamil schools. Also, two days ago, I personally spoke to the MOE's Secretary General, and humbly requested him to reconsider this insufficient fund allocation, and we are taking necessary steps to achieve that*

In Excerpt 3, Kamalanathan introduces the precise political position of every member he mentions. This can be considered as authorization to influence the public regarding MIC's closer association with authority, implying a greater relevance in the decision-making process. He also uses the phrase “nāṇṇ nēridaiyāka” (I personally) to emphasize his personal effort and contribution to resolve this matter, to strengthen his reputation. This is because the use of “nāṇṇ” (I) potentially reflects the reliability, credibility, and moral philosophy (Proctor et al., 2011) of the speaker. However, in

contrast, he reveals that he had to “humbly request” the government to reconsider the fund allocation, which indicates that the opinions of minority representatives were not counted prior to finalizing decisions at ministries. This statement is in line with what Rayer assumed in Excerpt 2, namely the minister’s failure to gather feedback from Indian representatives.

Excerpt 4: Kamalanathan (minute 04:46)

Source text: kalvi amaiccar vantu pōna vāram oru putiya formula onru arimukappaṭuttinār. anta formula-vai nān vantu ērṅukkoḷratāka illai. ēnenrāl, anta formula enta vakaiyil ēṭṅukkiṛatuṅu eṅakkuṭ teriyavillai. ānā, inta 50 milliyaṅ riṅkiṭ māṅiyam, atāvatu penyelenggaraan sekolah-sekolah Tamil enru ovvoru āṅḍum vaḷaṅkappaṭṭatu. atu iraṅḍu, oru āṅḍō iraṅḍu āṅḍō muṅḍu kidaiyātu. ovvoru āṅḍum nān kalvi amaiccarāka irunta kālakaṭṭattil 2013-ām āṅḍiliruntu 2017 āṅḍu varai 50 milliyaṅ riṅkiṭ maṭṭumallāmal, utāraṅattirku irupatti, 2017-ām āṅḍu 50 milliyaṅ riṅkiṭ penyelenggaraan-kkum 10 milliyaṅ riṅkiṭ atikam koduttu pālarpaḷḷi kaṭṭuvataṅku eṅakku 50 pālar paḷḷi kaṭṭuvataṅkum nāṅkaḷ antak kālakaṭṭattil, najīp tuṅ racāk talaimaittuva kālakaṭṭattil itu vaḷaṅkappaṭṭatu

Translation: *The education minister has introduced a new formula, however, I refused to accept it, because it does not make sense to me. Noteworthy, Tamil schools have been receiving 50 million ringgit for maintenance each year, not just in the past two years. During my tenure from 2013 to 2017 as the deputy education minister, funds were not limited to 50 million each year, specifically, in 2017, apart from the 50 million ringgit for maintenance, an additional 10 million ringgit was given to set up 50 pre-schools. This was given during the tenure of Najib Tun Razak*

Kamalanathan tends to highlight his previous experience in the Ministry of Education in every question he answers. Unlike previous excerpts, Excerpt 4 portrays authority of tradition to an extent, as Kamalanathan mentions a consistent practice of getting RM50 million over a specified period, from 2013 to 2017, during his tenure. Kamalanathan chooses to explain the tradition of receiving RM50 million to delegitimize the fund reduction in the budget by indicating the fund allocation as an obligatory practice by the BN government. Mentioning the fact that the consistent budget allocation was drafted during the former Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak’s tenure shows the association of the practices with the BN government, thus legitimizing the ethnic-based government. Furthermore, he also informs the public of his successful attempt in getting an additional RM10 million allocation to build Tamil pre-school facilities. This sets a stronger example in advocating minority education rights.

Generally, politicians try to maintain their power by conveying their ideological position. Political discourse has always been considered a planned discourse, which

involves an advisory team to review the words to be uttered by politicians. This is known as intentionality, related to the act of political legitimization (Capone, 2010; Reyes, 2011). As Kamalanathan repeatedly mentions his political contributions throughout the interview, his motive to use this is seen as an opportunity to highlight his political relevance. According to Sadeghi et al. (2014) personal authorization is the most often used approach in political discourse. In line with their opinion, the results of this study show that both Kamalanathan and Rayer utilized personal authorization to delegitimize the 2021 budget and by extension, the PN government.

5.6 Rationalization

Both politicians rationalize their arguments at multiple instances, using their past and present political experiences. Reyes (2011), based on Lakoff (1991), describes that part of legitimization involves a story where there is a villain, a victim and a hero. Thus, through rationalization, it can be observed how both politicians are competing to be the hero who solved the Tamil school budget issue, by listing their contributions. Selected excerpts below are discussed to highlight the differences between the two politicians.

Excerpt 5: Kamalanathan (minute 5:44)

Source text: *onru vantu amaiccar colkiṛār “atu vantu oru putu formula”. atu enakku ērukkollā muṭiyātu. ēnenrāl anta formula vantu eppaṭi uruvākkunānkaṇu yārukkuṁ teriyātu...iraṇṭāvatu kāraṇam enṇavenrāl, oru aracāṅkam nitiyamaiccu vantu ovvoru amaiccukkuṁ ovvoru āṇḍukkuṁ māṇiyāṅkaḷ vaḷāṅkavum. utāraṇattirku nitiyamaiccu kalvi amaiccukku 100 milliyaṅ kuduttārkaḷ enrāl, utāraṇattirku 2018-ām āṇḍu 100 milliyaṅ kuduttāl 80 milliyaṅ payaṇpaduttiṅārkaḷ enrāl, 2019-ām āṇṭu kuṭukkum pōtu 100 milliyaṅ kuṭukka māṭṭāṅka 80 milliyaṅ tāṅ kuṭuppāṅka. So, anta mātiri antanta kāla kaṭṭattirku ērra anta amaiccu evlō payaṇpaṭutturāṅkaḷō, atukku takunta māritāṅ adutta āṇḍu māṇiyam vaḷāṅkappadum itu tāṅ iyalbu. tanta pōtu tāṅ payaṇpaduttiṅārkaḷā oru cantēkamāka irukku*

Translation: *Firstly, it's a new formulation, which no one is aware of, and with which I totally disagree...The second reason is the Ministry of Finance allocates a budget for each ministry every year. For example, if the Ministry of Finance allocates 100 million to MOE in 2018, and when MOE only uses up to 80 million, then for budget 2019, the Ministry of Finance will reduce the funds to 80 million, and not 100 million. This shows that the allocation for every year depends on the previous year's utilization. This is the norm and I doubt whether the money allotted previously was utilized fully by them*

Excerpt 6: Rayer (minute 07:00)

Source text: itukkup pōtiya patil inta amaiccar kodukkavillai. ēṇ enrāl inta varudam kodutta aṛikkai, itāṇ inta paṭjeṭ odaya tākkal ceyta paṭjedōda puḷḷivivaraṅkaḷ. aṇaittu amaiccarukkum kodutta puḷḷivivaraṅkaḷ. inta paṭjeṭ aṛikkaiyile vantu niccayamāka tamilppaḷḷikku otukkīdu ceyta māṇiyam vantu puḷḷivivaraṅkaḷākak kuṛippidavillai carṛu pōtu dattō pi. Kamalanātaṇ conṇār, nampa kēḷvi eḷuppum pōtu nānum tōḷar kulacēkaraṇ, tōḷar civakkumār inta, inta, inta vicayattaip patti nādāḷumaṇṇattil kēḷvi kēṭṭa pōtu amaiccar colluṛāru “nāṅka taṇippaṭṭa muraiyila oru formula ēṛpadutti ēṛpaduttiyirukkōm. anta formula mūliyamātāṇ kācu koduppom” appaṭiṇu colliiyirukāru. irunta pōtilum, anta formula, nāma puḷḷivivaraṅkaḷ kēṭṭumpōtu, anta formula avaruṇāla kodukka mudiyala. itu varaikkum anta formula inṇum nammakiṭṭa camarpikkavillai. ataṇāla tāṇ ēṇ enra kēḷvi. anta formula enṇa formula? antap puḷḷivivaraṅkaḷ enṇa puḷḷivivaraṅkaḷ? anta, anta formula ēṛrukkoḷḷa mudiyumā illaiyā? mutal muraiyāka anta, intap paṭjeṭ namma ēṛruk koṇḍālum anta kā, 29 milliyaṇ pōy cērumā illaiyā appadiṇuṭṭu oru oru kēḷvi

Translation: *The minister did not provide an acceptable response because this is the booklet given this year (showing a green booklet), containing budget information and statistics. This was given to all ministers, definitely does not contain statistics on Tamil school budgets. As Dato’ P. Kamalanathan mentioned, when we raised the question, my fellow members Kulasegaran, Sivakumar, and myself were present in the Parliament when the minister replied by saying that there is a separate formula that they complied with in order to decide on fund allocation. Nevertheless, when we raised questions on the formula, he could not share the formula. To date, no formula or statistics was shown to us. That’s a concern, why? What formula and what are those statistics? Is the formula acceptable? Despite us accepting the budget for the first time, will this 29 million reach the schools?*

Throughout Excerpt 5, Kamalanathan rationalizes why the budget was cut. He suggests that budget 2021 was dependent on the monetary management in previous years under PH. Also, his mention of 2018 and 2019 as examples refers to PH’s period as the ruling government. Lexical choices, such as “ovvoru āṇḍukkum” (every year) and “iyalbu” (norm), are used to explain the government’s practices in allocating funds as well as assuring the public of his experience in government. These statements delegitimize PH’s ability to acquire funds to sustain minority education rights. This is classified as theoretical rationalization, referring to the natural order of things to legitimize one’s statement (van Leeuwen, 2008). Furthermore, by stating his doubt, he attempts to delegitimize the monetary management of the PH government. Although Malaysia was under BN for 60 years, Kamalanathan chose to blame PH’s two budget allocations for the flaws in the 2021 budget.

In Excerpt 6, Rayer asserts his stance against the budget formulation by explaining his parliamentary experience, strengthened by mentioning the other Indian representatives from his party, DAP. This is a form of instrumental rationality, referring to the means and outcomes, as Rayer implicitly stressed the means of getting clarification on the budget. As an elected representative, he claims that the Indian opposition MPs have raised questions, thus fulfilling their duty to argue against the budget cut. He also stresses the outcome of his questions, the failure of the minister to provide adequate answers, which strengthens his claims. By questioning the legitimacy of the budget formulation, while simultaneously emphasizing the failure of the PN government in providing evidence and statistics, Rayer delegitimizes the budget formulation. As Kamalanathan did in Excerpt 5, Rayer too raises suspicions on the conduct of fund distribution and its effectiveness.

Excerpt 7: Rayer: (minutes 31:08)

Source text: niyāyamāka, inta patil yārukittā iruntu varaṇum. ippō ullā education minister, amaiccarakittā iruntu varaṇum. atāvatu “2018-la kodutta māṇiyattai Pakatan Harapan celavu paṇṇula. 2019-la kodutta māṇiyattai Pakatan Harapan amaiccarakaḷ celavu paṇṇula, ataṇāla tāṇ, inta varucam kuraiṅvā koduttirukkōm,” appaṭiṇuṭtu

Translation: *By right, who should we obtain these answers from? The current education minister should be able to say that “PH did not utilize the budget in 2018 and 2019, thus we reduced the budget this year.”*

To invalidate Kamalanathan’s assumptions in Excerpt 5, Rayer emphasizes the bureaucratic means of obtaining the answer in Excerpt 7. Here, by implying that the most qualified person to issue such statements is the current education minister, Mohd Radzi Md Jidin, Rayer restricts Kamalanathan’s credibility to make sensational statements. Kamalanathan is merely representing a minority party’s education wing, not representing any ministry in the current PN government. By rebutting Kamalanathan points via means-orientation, Rayer is using instrumental rationalization. For instance, “niyāyamāka” (by right) here implies the correct thing to be done, based on Rayer’s political experience. He uses rationalization by highlighting PN’s politicians’ failure in obeying parliamentary procedures, thus delegitimizing the budget allocation, as also seen in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 8: Kamalanathan (minute 14:22)

Source text: nāṇ irunta kālakaṭṭattil nāṭṭilirukkum ellā, 524 tamilppallikkūdukkum nāṇ māṇiyam vaḷaṅkappaṭṭatu. itu ēṇ vaḷaṅkappaṭṭatu enṛāl, adimaṭṭattil kuṛippāka utāraṇattukku colkiṛēṇ. nam kaṭci mā.i.kā.-viṇ kiḷait talaiṅvarkaḷ antanta kālakaṭṭattil vantu, paḷḷikkūduṭṭirṅkā,

antap paḷḷikkūdap piratiniyāka vantu eṅkaḷudaṅ pēccuvārttai nadatti,
paḷḷikkūda utavi ceytu koṅṭirukkinrōm

Translation: During my tenure, all 524 schools in the country received funds. This was given because fundamentally all our MIC branch leaders, in a timely manner, on behalf of the schools, approached us to request funds for schools, and we helped

In Excerpt 8, Kamalanathan also delegitimizes the capability of PH in satisfying minority needs by highlighting what MIC has done for Tamil school budgets. In explaining how committed MIC branch leaders as Tamil school representatives were, he justifies the importance of ethnic-based entities to advocate minority rights, while implicitly delegitimizing PH's model. Kamalanathan emphasizes the outcome of having ethnic-based parties, which has contributed to getting funds for Tamil schools.

Rationalization involves processes or procedures defined by a specific society (Reyes, 2011). Through rationalizing their statements to delegitimize the current budget formulation, both politicians revisit their actions in compliance with the bureaucracy, indicating they have done their best within their capabilities. Hence, statements which explain their step-by-step actions and its outcomes were classified under instrumental rationalization. Meanwhile, speculations were classified as theoretical rationalization.

5.7 Moral Evaluation

Moral evaluation is a strategy to influence the cognitive perspective of the audience by referring to a specific society's value orders (Höög & Björkvall, 2019). The target audience for Kamalanathan and Rayer is Indians, who account 6.9% of the Malaysian population (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2020). From the following excerpts, it is observed that both express similar social values to gain the favor of Indian Malaysians.

Excerpt 9: Rayer (minute: 08:56)

Source text: nām intiyarkaḷ vantu inta nāṭṭiṅ kudimakkaḷ. nampaḷukkup pālar paḷḷikaḷ uṇdu taṁiḷpaḷḷikaḷ uṇdu. adippadayāka intiyarkaḷ vantu mukkiyamāka intap palar paḷḷikkum taṁiḷpaḷḷikkum tāṅ namma mukkiyattuvam kodukkiṟōm. ēṅā nammaḷōṭa camutāyattap porutta aḷavula, taṁiḷ kalāccāram, taṁiḷ parru, taṁiḷmoḷiyiṅ parru itu ellām vantu taṁiḷ school illāviṭṭāl inta taṁiḷ parru, taṁiḷ kalāccāram ellam illāmal pōyirum. ataṅāla, intat taṁiḷ mēla oru parru illāma oru, oru akkaraiyillāta oru aracāṅkam tāṅ appadiṇuṭṭu makkaḷukku uḷḷa uḷḷa tōṇutu

Translation: Indians are Malaysian citizens. We have Tamil pre-schools and Tamil schools, and basically, Indians have given importance to both schools. This is because, according to our community, the culture and loyalty to the Tamil language will disappear without the existence of Tamil schools. The government's lackadaisical attitude on these values drives the public to feel that the government lacks care for Indians

From Excerpt 9, by equating Indians with Malaysians, Rayer emphasizes their access to equal rights. However, by associating the sustainability of Tamil culture and language with the existence of Tamil schools, he portrays the value he shares with those who subscribe to Tamil schools. Thus, he implies that the outcome of the budget reduction can threaten the existence of Tamil schools and consequently language and cultural identities. He delegitimizes the PN government, which largely involves politicians from BN, who pay less importance to the welfare of Indians. Emphasizing the outcome of insufficient fund allocation can be categorized under instrumental rationalization. Rayer evokes community-specific sentiments through his statements, which is only relevant to Indian Malaysians.

Excerpt 10: Kamalanathan (minute 52:35)

Source text: *tamiḷppaḷḷikkūdam vantu molī maṭṭum campantam oru viṣayam alla. kalai, kalāccāram, pārampariyam, nam camuṭāyamē orrumaiyāka irukkīra oru taḷam tamiḷppaḷḷikkūdam. inta tamiḷppaḷḷikkūda muṇṇērrattukkāka aṇaittu intiyarkaḷum orrumaiyāka irukka vēṇṭum. ciṟanta vēlai ceytāl pārāṭṭa vēṇṭum. ciṟanta vēlai ceytāl pārāṭṭa vēṇṭum. ciṟanta vēlai ceytāl mutukil kuttakkūdaṭu, enṟuṭāṇ nāṇ kūṟa virumpukirēṇ. orrumaiyāka ceyalpaṭṭōm enṟāl, enṇa 523 paḷḷikkūdam, 530, 540 tamiḷppaḷḷikkūdam kaṭṭalām orrumaiyāka irukka vēṇḍum camuṭāyam orrumaiyāka iruntāṭṭāṇ tamiḷppaḷḷikkūdam muṇṇērram peṟa vēṇḍum enṟu niṇaikkiṟēṇ*

Translation: Tamil schools are not only language institutions, but also a place where cultural values and heritage are manifested. All Indians should be united for the development of Tamil schools. If we have done a commendable job, please praise, do not backstab. If we stand united, not only 530 schools, we can target for 540 Tamil schools in the future

Kamalanathan expresses ethnic-based sentiments by highlighting the role of Tamil schools in language and cultural maintenance. He calls for Indians to be united, implicitly indicating that MIC is a symbol of Indian unity, expecting Indians to support MIC. Using “mutukil kuttakkūdaṭu” (backstab) may trigger guilt among those who choose otherwise, as a way to demand loyalty. Moreover, knowing the impact of quantitative evidence, Kamalanathan sows hope that supporting his party would lead to an increase in the number of Tamil schools nationwide.

Excerpt 11: Rayer (minute 50.51)

Source text: *enṅaip porutta varaiyila, araciyal rītiyila namma karuttu vērupādu iruntāl kūda, eṅkaḷ takappaṅāru colluvāru, “iṅamtāṅ iṅattaik kākkuṁ. iṅamtāṅ iṅattaik kākkuṁ.” nām ellāmē tamiḷarkaḷ. nām onṅrāka ceyalla iraṅki, onṅrāka ceyalpaṅṅu, inta nādālumaṅṅrattil niccayamāka onṅrāka kural koduttu, inta kuṅainta māṅiyattai maṅupadiyum niṅaiṅu ceyya vēṅṅduṁ enṅru enṅudaiya tāḷmaiṅyāna oru karuttu...We should not discriminate Tamils appadiṅṅuttu namma adippadaiṅyāka we have a basic understanding. nammaḷudaiya purintuṅarvu enṅṅāṅā, tamiḷarkaḷa, tamiḷppaḷḷiya poruttavaraiṅiḷ taṅippaṅṅa muṅaiṅyila otukka avaṅka otukkīdu ceyyak kūṅātu. Discriminate paṅṅak kūṅātu, so, enṅṅaiṅyila karuttu enṅṅāṅā, niccayamāka inta viṅṅayattirṅku namma kural koduppōṁ*

Translation: *My opinion is, despite our differences in political ideologies, we should always stand united. My father used to say, “One is always protected by his own kind.” We are Tamils. We must work along together under one voice to obtain sufficient funds, is my humble request...We should not discriminate, is our basic understanding, and when it comes to Tamils and Tamil schools, they should not be disregarded or discriminated. So, my opinion is for us to work together speak up collectively on this matter*

In Excerpt 11, Rayer expresses that he shares the common intergenerational sentiments that prevail among the community by mentioning “eṅkaḷ takappaṅāru colluvāru” (my father used to say). Rayer intends to unite Indians, while sounding neutral regardless of political differences, to advocate for sufficient funds for Tamil schools. By making the budget reduction seem like a form of discrimination, he reiterates his role in being the voice of the community. As DAP lacks a separate wing for Indians, Rayer establishes his intention to safeguard minority rights through his personal capacity, by quoting it as his personal view. By expressing that only Indians will stand for Indians; he encourages the audience to buy into the ideology of ethnic-based politics, probably due to the Malaysian political scenario.

Regarding the value-laden arguments for moral legitimization, both politicians use ethnic-based sentiments. They tend to narrate the budget reduction as a result of the lack of consideration for Indian Malaysians. This financial constraint can potentially challenge the existence of Indians in Malaysia, as it can threaten their language and culture. Though Rayer sounded more neutral by highlighting equal rights, if a spectrum were to be drawn, both were disagreeing with the budget formulation, while delegitimizing each other’s role as politicians.

Politicians safeguard their power by explaining or justifying their acts in a specific way to gain people’s support (Reyes, 2011). Here, both Rayer and Kamalanathan attempt to highlight their Indianness to make them seem relevant to the Indian community. This is mainly due to the existing political setting in Malaysia, which promotes ethnic-based representation when addressing community issues.

5.8 Conclusion

As the budget cut caused dissatisfaction among the Indian community, both Kamalanathan and Rayer disagreed with the allocation and the new formulation used. They expressed their objections by using discursive strategies. Comparatively, Kamalanathan's arguments were more systematic than Rayer when using authorization. Kamalanathan's experience in MIC and as an MP has helped him to delegitimize the 2021 budget and PH. Meanwhile, he promoted the MIC as the ruling party for a long period of time and listed the party's contributions. Unlike Kamalanathan, Rayer's lack of experience in managing Tamil schools resulted in difficulties on his part when legitimizing his arguments. Nevertheless, his experience as an opposition MP has trained him to critically question points presented by Kamalanathan.

Based on the excerpts classified under rationalization, Rayer's statements seemed to be firmer than Kamalanathan. This is because Rayer used instrumental rationalization which includes asking for evidence, mentioning the proper parliamentary procedures, and describing the outcome of his questions. In contrast, Kamalanathan's arguments for rationalization were more theoretical, as they were arresting but lacked evidence. Despite coming from opposing political parties, both of them held similar views on Tamil schools, regarding them as important institutions for the Indian community. Both argued that the sustainability of Indian culture and loyalty to the Tamil language are highly reliant on the existence of Tamil schools in Malaysia. Through this budget issue, both attempted to portray their capabilities and superiority in advocating minority rights. Both politicians claimed that the educational needs of Indian Malaysians were not fulfilled, which showed that they deserve equal access to funds. Nevertheless, they firmly believed that these can only be manifested through firstly building communal spirit among Indians.

As Malaysian political parties operate in several languages to accommodate their multilingual audience, studying the political discourse of Indian Malaysian politicians enriches the understanding of issues facing different ethnicities. Comprehending their discourse regarding social issues helps minority communities make wise decisions and helps political parties evaluate their representatives. As this study examines the discourse of two politicians on a Tamil talk show, future studies could also focus on other political discourses in public speeches, election campaigns, or a party's Annual General Meeting, to understand the discursive representation of issues faced by minorities in Malaysia.

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