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Indo-Malaysians within the Malaysian Education System

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies
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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved grandmother, Madam Thanaletcheeme,

for being the person she is, who has always shown me unconditional love –

and

to my parents, Dr. K. Prabakaran and Mrs. G. Parimala Devi,

who told me to go confidently in the direction of my dreams and live the life I have

imagined.

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore the factors that limit the freedom of choice and access of the Indian community to tertiary level education in Malaysia. Issues of ethnic minorities are of concern for all multi-cultural societies. In Malaysia, it was the indentured labour system, introduced by the British colonial rulers who brought non-Malays into this previously mono-ethnic society. British colonisation has influenced the position of the Indian community in Malaysia in a number of ways, which are explored in this thesis. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the complexity of this plural society and its implications for one of its ethnic minority groups, particularly in terms of education. This sector has been examined as education is a fundamental component for socio-economic development and upward social mobility. Malaysia, a classic modern day plural society, has its own complexity in terms of issues of ethnic minorities. The findings of this thesis indicate four main factors limiting the freedom of choice and access to tertiary level education for the Indian community. These factors are the country's education policies, the financial situation of Indo-Malaysians, the attitude and awareness of the students, and the community's values. The findings are significant as it is believed that the advancement of the Indian community in Malaysia is currently obstructed through lack of access to tertiary level education. Before this situation can be improved it needs to be understood.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Boxes

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Introducing the Theoretical Framework of this Thesis	2
Research Context and Methods used for this Thesis	3
Research Aim	5
Significance of the Research	5
Thesis Outline	6
Chapter Two: Development, Education and Ethnic Minorities	9
Introduction	9
Development and Education	9
The Establishment of Multi-cultural Societies	12
Issues Surrounding Ethnic Minorities in Multi-cultural Societies	14
Education in Multi-cultural Societies	18
Ethnic Minorities' Access to Education and Development	20
British Colonialism and Education	22
Colonial School Systems	25
Education and Post-Colonialism	27
Power Relationships	29
Chapter Summary	30
Chapter Three: Malaysia	32
Introduction	32
Overview of Malaysia	32

The British Colonial Era in Malaysia	35
Relationships between the British and Malay Elites	37
Malaysia as a Plural Society	39
A Note on the Indians in Malaysia	40
The National Education System	42
The New Economic Policy	45
Chapter Summary	48
Chapter Four: Research in Malaysia	50
Introduction and Purpose of the Research	50
Research Questions	50
Personal Reflections of the Researcher	51
Research Methods	53
Fieldwork Preparations	54
Selection of Participants	55
Ethical Considerations	55
Experiences from the Field	56
Main Participant Categories and Recruitment	57
Selected Participants	57
The Commencement of the Fieldwork	59
Discussion of Methods	62
Chapter Summary	62
Chapter Five: Views on Indo-Malaysians Access to, and Freedom of Choice within, the Education System	64
Introduction	64
The New Economic Policy	65
Quota and Meritocracy System	66
Political Influence on the Education System	70
Financial Issues	73
The Awareness and Attitude of Students	79
Community Values	83
Chapter Summary	88

Chapter Six: Discussion of Issues that Influence the Education of Indo-Malaysians	91
Introduction	91
Limitations due to the New Economic Policy for Indo-Malaysians	92
Disproportionate Allocation of Seats for Indo-Malaysians at Local Universities	93
The Influence of Politics on Education Policies in Malaysia	95
The Present-day Status of the Indian Community	96
The Financial and Economic Situation of Indo-Malaysians	97
The Political Position and Leadership of Indo-Malaysians	99
The Financially Dependent and Disunited Nature of Indo-Malaysians	101
The Attitude and Awareness of Indian Students towards Education	102
Civil Rights Position of Indo-Malaysians	102
Chapter Summary	104
Chapter Seven: Concluding Discussion	106
Introduction	106
Significance of this Thesis	106
Review of the Thesis	107
Personal Reflections	109
Appendices	111
Appendix One: Information Sheet	111
Appendix Two: Consent Form	113
Appendix Three: Question Guidelines	114
Appendix Four: Interview Excerpt of Mr. M	118
References	119

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Map of Malaysia

LIST OF BOXES

Box A Participant Coding

Box B Perspectives of four former students on the education system