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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
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand**

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2008

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest thanks to:

Dr. Maria Borovnik, my first supervisor, who has provided invaluable advice and encouragement in developing this thesis. You always made me feel positive and good about myself, which made this journey much more meaningful and enjoyable.

Dr. Robyn Andrews, my second supervisor, who gave great insights and professional guidance. I really enjoyed working with you, despite the short length of time. Also, thank you for being so accommodating, especially during the last stages of this thesis.

Dr. K. Prabakaran and Mrs. G. Parimala Devi, my parents, who have always been there for me with love and unwavering support from the beginning, and whose love has sustained me through it all. You both have encouraged me to explore, dream and discover. You are my greatest inspiration and have touched my life in so many wonderful ways and left me a better person because of it.

Dr. Kamalesh Prabakaran, my sister, and Dr. Palany Raj Naicker, my brother-in-law, for assisting me to construct and build networks for my research in Malaysia. Special appreciation goes to my sister, who is an amazing and remarkable person who has inspired me in more than one way, and I wish to thank you for everything. Also, a very special welcome to my nephew, Sangiven Raj Naicker.

Saravanan Prabakaran, my wonderful and incredible brother, who brightens up my days with phone calls. Thank you for your love and encouragement.

Upmeet Singh Sodhi, I cannot thank you enough for the past one and a half years. I am truly grateful for your endless love, support, patience and much needed encouragement.

Dr. Subramanian, my uncle and Mrs. G. Rajeni Mala, my aunt, who went the extra mile in assisting me in making contacts during my fieldwork in Malaysia.

Mr. P. G. Krishnan Naicker, my uncle, who went to great lengths in arranging interviews which provided a wealth of information and wisdom. Thank you for going the extra mile.

Yamuna Subramaniam, my cousin sister, who accommodated me, in more than one way, during my research in Kuala Lumpur. I enjoyed my time with you, especially the dinners, drinks and chats.

Paulina Japardy, Cheelo Kingsley Haanyembe and Tony Manuda, my colleagues, who were my constant support and whose discussions were very much appreciated.

Mr. G. Suthersan, my uncle and Mrs. G. Rajeswari, my aunt, who have been cheering me on from the sidelines.

Hema Subramaniam, my cousin, for the talks, love and care but most of all, for being my friend.

Maggi, Mambo and Maya, for being my best friends. A special thanks to Maya, who has always encouraged me to follow my passion and dreams.

Everyone who participated in the research, without your insights, this thesis would not be whole.

Last but not least, God, for being the almighty that you are.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The starting point for this thesis is the fact that education is seen as a fundamental element for development or modernisation and more importantly as a means towards upward mobility for people. Nelson Mandela (1918–) once said that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”. Freire (1972, pp.125-126) adds to the argument that education has the potential as a powerful weapon to empower people. The fundamental importance of education for development is emphasised in the modernisation and human capital theory. Since education is viewed as being essential for development and advancement, both for individuals and for the nation, the concept of access to education becomes an important issue, especially for ethnic minorities in multi-cultural societies (Tuwor & Sossou, 2007, pp.1-2).

As a Malaysian, so a member of a multi-cultural society myself, I became interested in the educational inequalities in this society. Indo-Malaysians appeared to be unequally represented in tertiary education. I decided therefore to focus on Indo-Malaysians’ access to, and freedom of choice within, education. In doing so I look at the potential reasons why Indo-Malaysians are being confronted with problems regarding access to education. These issues have direct consequences for the advancement and development of the whole Malaysian community. The limitations in the education system for any one community need to be identified in order to be able to improve the situation for the ethnic minority and in turn for wider society.

The central question in this thesis is: **what are the factors that influence the access to, and freedom of choice within, the education system for Indo-Malaysians?** The way in which I approached this study is to focus on development, education and ethnic minorities in plural societies. Since this study is people orientated, qualitative methods were used for research among respondents who are part of the education sector in some way. The data gathered from respondents indicate that the Indian community face various obstacles to gaining a tertiary education in Malaysia. The factors which contribute to this situation were discussed by the respondents and became the focus of the analysis and discussion in this thesis.

Introducing the Theoretical Framework of this Thesis

This thesis will explore the literature on development, education and ethnic minorities and build the theoretical framework to address the research topic. The concept of accessibility has often been seen as the provision of equal opportunities and a means to “establish the citizenship right of certain social groups to attend university” (Kettley, 2007, p.335). Thus these days, policies concerning access are predominantly used by underprivileged groups when they consider rights to attend university (Beattie, 2002, pp.19-21).

Education is viewed as a fundamental element within modernisation theories, and modernists have a prevalent view that education is a core component in developing a nation by promoting productivity and efficiency among individuals. Similarly, the human capital theory, developed in the 1960s, stressed the role of education in economic growth (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002, p.1). Moreover, education was linked with the concept of empowerment in agreement with alternative development frameworks (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p.238). Therefore for all people, being able to secure and be equipped with education is essential.

Education in a multi-cultural society should incorporate the facility to provide equal opportunity within the education system and human rights. Education policies in a plural society have the capacity to function either as a positive part of development and national integration, or to be a contributing factor in conflicts where ethnic groups resent exclusive education policies established by a government (Ukiwo, 2007, p.266). The issue above is particularly relevant in Malaysia as will be discussed shortly.

Issues of ethnic minorities have become of fundamental importance today and numerous studies have been conducted on attitudes towards ethnic minorities because of the increase of migration and growing acknowledgement of religious, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity in societies (Gurr, 1995, p.14). Often, compared to the dominant group in a particular society, the minority group is disadvantaged in certain respects, such as education. In every society, ethnic minorities are treated in a different way from other members and at times, the treatment could be perceived as discriminatory, which could be due to the inaccessibility of the social structure to such minorities (Reitz & Sklar, 1997, p.235). Cummings and Lambert (1997, p.338) noted that newly arriving immigrants face prejudice and discrimination because of increased levels of intolerance among majority groups.

The British education system will be focused on in this thesis because the education system in Malaysia is modelled after the British system. Since the British education system is extremely competitive, in being orientated to the attainment of certificates and other qualifications, the issue of equality of opportunity needs to be paramount to ensure that all students have the same chances within the education system (Kettley, 2007, p.333). Equal opportunities in the education system and human rights are concerns that have been emerging for some time now from the development and implementation of education policies in plural societies. Fair education policies are fundamental in a plural society because otherwise feelings of resentments can be created among its various ethnic groups, which can lead to many undesirable outcomes, both private and public.

This thesis recognises the numerous works on development, education and ethnic minorities. However, there are several gaps, which have been suggested by Kettley (2007, p.343), in regard to the study of participation among ethnic minority groups. While there has been much research in the area of ethnic minorities, there is a need for more extensive study that includes ethnic majorities' participation when discussing issues of ethnic minorities (Kettley, 2007, p.343). By carrying out research which includes members of minority groups as well members of the majority population, I address one aspect of the above criticism. Furthermore, it was noted that there is a need for more extensive study in analysing the nature of minority rights and their implications for society as a whole (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2006, p.527). This study addresses this issue to some extent also.

Research Context and Methods used for this Thesis

Malaysia is a modern day example of a plural society, where the population is diversified ethnically, linguistically, culturally and with respect to religion (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.1). The Malays, who are the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia are categorised as Bumiputera¹, which translates to “sons and daughters of the soil” (Andaya & Andaya, 2001, p.3). The Constitution in Malaysia is based on the principle of special rights for the Malays and clearly distinguishes Malays and non-Malays from one another. The Constitution is a fundamental document which continues to have an influence on state policies (World Trade Organization, 2001, p.2).

¹ The term Bumiputera refers to the Malay community and also the Indigenous people of Malaysia.

Previously a primarily mono-ethnic society, Malaysia was transformed into a multi-ethnic society during British colonisation. With the discovery of tin mines and rubber plantations, labour was especially imported from China and India, via the indentured labour system. Since the independence of Malaysia in 1957, the education system has been used as a means to unify the multi-ethnic nation and to promote economic growth. However, the 1969 ethnic riots demonstrated that the education policies in place failed to promote national integration and unity, which was its main aim. In order to ease the ethnic tension, the Malaysian government developed the New Economic Policy (NEP).

The NEP is a socio-economic policy launched by the Malaysian government in 1971 (Jomo, 2004, p.iii). The affirmative action programme implemented for over three decades, has influenced the education system and ethnic minorities, especially the Indian community in the society. Education is a fundamental aspect of one's advancement and improvement. However, it seems that with the Malay preferential policies in place, ethnic minorities are disadvantaged. The limited access to, and freedom within, education for the Indo-Malaysians is therefore an important development issue and a topic worthy of investigation for its very real and practical importance not only to the Indian community, but to Malaysian society as a whole.

Hence, to achieve the aim and to structure the research, a primary and several secondary questions are investigated. These questions were addressed by undertaking fieldwork in Malaysia in three different cities, over a period of three weeks in June 2007. With the purposes of the research outlined, the research design was conceptualised to suit the context of the research. The research, led to the selection of qualitative methods. Maykut and Morehouse (1994, pp.43-44), emphasise that qualitative research methods "introduce flexibility and understanding to the study of a complex social phenomenon". The combination of approaches used in the enquiry included semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

An interview list with six categories was planned which consisted of lecturers, teachers, students, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), parents of students, and government officials who are, or have been, involved in education in some way. As for the focus group, four respondent categories, three in each group, which included former students from two secondary schools, students currently studying at polytechnics, private or public universities and high achieving students, were intended to be conducted. The ethnic origin of the participants was taken into consideration because it

was important to have a variety, including Malays, Chinese and Indians. This was critical as opinions and experiences of different ethnic groups would enrich the research findings.

Research Aim

The aim in this thesis was to contribute to the identification of factors that influence the access to, and freedom of choice within, the education system of Indo-Malaysians. To achieve the aim and to structure the research, the following questions were asked in this thesis.

- **What are the factors that influence the access to, and freedom of choice within, the education system for Indo-Malaysians?**
- **How does education contribute towards development?**
- **What are the issues surrounding ethnic minorities in multi-cultural societies?**
- **How does the British colonial era influence the current situation of Indo-Malaysians?**
- **To what extent are Indians excluded from the Malaysian education system?**

Significance of the Research

Worldwide, the role of education has become a fundamental right and the importance of education cannot be neglected by any nation. Education has an immense impact on human society, as education is regarded as being a necessity for economic and social development of any nation. In all of these aspects mentioned, the importance of education is interrelated and thus the limitations placed by some on access to education for others need to be identified. The reason is because disregarding access to education will restrict people's upward mobility and contribution to the nation.

Universal organisations such as the United Nations (Tuwor & Sossou, 2007, p.4) and The World Bank (Klees, 2002, p.2) emphasise the importance of education for development. However, education in a multi-cultural society is complex. Policies that are developed and implemented by the government should rightfully cater to all the various ethnic groups but in multi-cultural societies, inability to access education by some ethnic groups indicates that equal opportunities in the education system are

restricted. Worldwide, calls for equality and human rights are common, but in order to achieve both, effective solutions within the society at all levels need to be established.

This research is intended to contribute to the knowledge relating to one ethnic minorities' access to education, with the purpose of providing an overview of potential reasons why Indo-Malaysians are confronted with barriers as regards their access to education. As research involved just a small sample group in Malaysia, the study is in no way intended to be representative of the Indo-Malaysian community as a whole, nor indeed of the other ethnic groups in Malaysia. Instead, the intention in this research is to add to other studies on the issues surrounding ethnic minorities in plural societies. This study, for example, provides a point of comparison with studies of other ethnic minority groups which concentrate on the issues of access to education, especially in multi-cultural societies.

The complexity and sensitivity of Malaysia as a multi-cultural society was emphasised by an occurrence which took place there just after my return from fieldwork. There has recently emerged a movement called the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) – to be discussed in Chapter Six – which was established to devise some solutions for issues concerning Indo-Malaysians. This group held a rally which was not well received by the Malaysian government. If successful in its aims, HINDRAF has implications for Indo-Malaysians access to education and ability to function as equals in the society.

Thesis Outline

The thesis moves from theoretical frameworks and a literature review to contextual information and then to the methodology. The whole thesis is then drawn together in the fieldwork data, analysis chapter, and discussion chapter, where the important arguments that arose are linked to the earlier chapters.

Chapter Two discusses the theoretical framework, which structures the research. The importance of education for development is analysed, followed by a discussion of the establishment of multi-cultural societies, and education in multi-cultural societies. The influences which colonisation had on the education system is then looked at. The history of colonial education policies and effects on the present-day education system of former British colonies are presented. In this chapter also is an examination of the situation for ethnic minorities within a plural society and the issues surrounding these

groups, especially with regard to the importance of access to education, which is further linked to the relevance of the concept of development.

Subsequent to the discussion of the theoretical framework, in **Chapter Three** an overview of the situation in Malaysia is given, with a description of the British colonial era and its effects on ethnic minorities and the current education system. Also, since the focus of the thesis is on the Indian community, a brief overview of the Indian community is included.

In **Chapter Four** the strategy, approaches and methods used to structure the research are outlined. An evaluation of the pre- and post-fieldwork phase is made, beginning with the intentions and objectives in conducting the research, followed by a personal reflection outlining pre-research perceptions. Research methods are then discussed, including the data collections methods and criteria for selecting respondents. Subsequently, the preparations involved prior to conducting the fieldwork in Malaysia are discussed, which include issues of ethical considerations and recruitment of research participants. Next, the experiences from the field will be described and analysed, followed by a discussion of the overall analysis of the methods.

In **Chapter Five** the primary data collected during the interviews and focus group are presented, along with analysis. The data represented opinions of various groups, such as government officials, NGOs, teachers, former students and a lecturer. This chapter includes the opinions expressed by respondents relating to the issues surrounding Indo-Malaysians and their access to tertiary level education. The data obtained are analysed and structured accordingly into themes, which will be used for further reflection on the key research questions outlined in the previous chapter.

In **Chapter Six** an in-depth discussion is presented, linking arguments from the fieldwork data to the background and literature review chapters. The research questions are discussed in this chapter and four main factors that limit the access and freedom of choice of Indo-Malaysians in the education system will be identified. These factors influence the development and advancement of the Indian community.

Next, in **Chapter Seven** the main issues presented in this thesis are summarised and the wider implications of the research findings are considered. The chapter brings together

and discusses the data gathered from the fieldwork, the research aims and the theoretical context, and discusses the potential reasons why ethnic minorities are limited within the education sector.

CHAPTER TWO

DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

Introduction

This chapter will analyse literature on the importance of education for development, and issues surrounding ethnic minorities' access to education in multi-cultural societies. Since the focus of the thesis is education, the chapter begins with an analysis of the concept of "education and development" which is linked to the notion of "empowerment and development" of individuals as well as advancement of a country. Next, the establishment of multi-cultural societies during British colonisation will be briefly analysed. Subsequent to that, education policies in plural societies will be discussed because of their fundamental importance in maintaining a unified and integrated society. The literature to follow will consider research on ethnic minorities, especially in relation to education and development. Issues surrounding ethnic minorities and also factors influencing their educational accessibility will be identified.

Development and Education

"Development" is an elusive and multi-dimensional concept with several meanings. Some of the terms used synonymously with development are "growth, social change, evolution progress, advancement and modernization" (Malchup, 1970, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.50). The concepts of human rights and welfare are also seen synonymously with development, where self-esteem, self-respect and improving entitlement become central concerns (Desai & Potter, 2002, p.2). Harrison (1988, p.2) regards development as a "process of changing a basically traditional society into a modern one" and contends that "development is the same as modernization". From an economic perspective, the term *development* was embraced by the international community to depict Third World nations in terms of their sequence of economic growth (Huq, 1975, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.50).

The idea of development can be traced back to the post-Second World War period. In 1947, President Truman coined the term *development* to refer to “*processes of economic and social progress in colonial and post-colonial states*” (Truman, 1974, as cited in Rist, 2007, p.485). Literature on development in the early post-war era was underpinned by modernisation theory, where Rostow’s explanation was “how low-income countries could improve the living conditions of their populations by following a set of prescriptive policies to encourage economic take off” (Rostow, 1960, as cited in Ish-Shalom, 2006, p.296). According to Rostow (1960, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.56), in order for traditional societies to develop, changes should occur in their economies, values, and social structures.

Education is seen as a fundamental element within modernisation theories and there have been numerous studies, such as those by Inkeles and Smith (1974, as cited in Robertson, Novelli, Dale, Tikly, Dachi & Alphonse, 2007, p.52), which emphasise “the role of education in creating modern individuals”. Harbison and Myers (1964, as cited in Robertson, Novelli, Dale, Tikly, Dachi & Alphonse, 2007, p.52) further suggest that “...education is the key that unlocks the door to modernisation”. Coleman and Azrael (1965, as cited in Robertson, Novelli, Dale, Tikly, Dachi & Alphonse, 2007, p.52) add that “education is seen as fundamental in the development of the necessary technical and cultural skills needed for economic development”. From the extract above, it can be observed that modernisation theorists had a common view that education is a core component in developing a nation by promoting productivity and efficiency among individuals.

Inkeles and Smith (1974, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.54), highlight that “schooling is possibly the most important agent in transforming a society into a modern one” and “in large-scale complex societies no attribute of the person predicts his attitudes, values and behaviour more consistently or more powerfully than the amount of schooling he has received”. Modernists believe that “education is the most powerful factor in bringing about modernity because it develops the individual”, however, Inkeles and Smith (as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.54) argue otherwise. Inkeles and Smith underline that in the development process, the individual is the core because “the modernity of a nation depends on its people and the nation’s economy cannot be highly productive, or its political or administrative institutions very effective, unless the people who work in the economy and staff the institutions have attained some degree of modernity” (Inkeles & Smith, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.54).

In the 1960s, the human capital theory was developed as the role of education in economic growth was recognised. Similar to modernisation theories, but with a different outlook, the core idea of the human capital theory is that “investment in education is a key promoter of economic growth” (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002, p.1). Furthermore, the human capital theorists argue that “economic growth and development should only take place when technology becomes more efficient and when societies utilize human resources in the use of technology” (Agbo, 2005, p.51), meaning that the society should be provided with infrastructures and utilities, such as universities, in order to upgrade skills and knowledge so as to contribute towards economic growth and development.

Also, Theodore Schultz declared that “education was a productive investment and was not merely a form of consumption” (Schultz, 1960, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.51). In Schultz’s book, *Investing in People*, he expressed the argument that:

Education is an investment that produces the quality of the population that can propel the economic development and welfare of a nation. Apart from improving individual choices available to people, education provides the category of labour force required for industrial development and economic growth. The acquired abilities of people are the most important economic resource available to societies. Also, human capital is decisive in improving the welfare of poor people throughout the world (Schultz, 1960, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.51).

Schultz argued that the human capital theory not only emphasises education as a means to development but also stresses the importance of investing in the education sector to gain full advantage from it. The World Bank’s education sector (2007, p.1), which highlights that education is a “powerful equalizer, opening doors to all to lift themselves out of poverty”, utilises the human capital theory, whereby the theory “provides justification for much of the activity of the World Bank in the education sector” (Klees, 2002, p.2). Modernisation and human capital theories contribute ideas towards expansion in the education sectors of developing countries, where post-independent governments are influenced to expand the education system for national development purposes (Agbo, 2005, p.54).

Woolcock and Narayan view education “as a modernizing institution and as a provider of access to the job market, which would provide personal economic success and achievement” (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p.239). The emphasis on human welfare and rights has also been prompted by theoretical developments, where over the years “modernist tradition in development theory has to a degree been overturned by post-modern movement” (Simon, 1999, p.17), which has resulted in alternative and various development theories, influencing development agendas (Radcliffe, 1999, p.84). In accordance with alternative development frameworks, such as bottom-up, participatory and autonomous development, being equipped with an education has been equated with the concept of empowerment (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p.239).

Paulo Freire’s theories have been fundamental in contributing to the concept of education as empowerment (Freire, 1972, pp.125-126). Stacki and Monkman (2003, p.181) argue that the term *empowerment* is an important concept with power at its core but has been “overused and misused in recent decades”. Stacki and Monkman (2003, p.181) further add that “instead of a dominant-subordinate relationship, notions of empowerment are used as ‘power to’ and not ‘power over’”. Similarly, Freire distinguished education as a “central process in a human-centred, transformative process of development which empowers people to realise their potential as individuals and work together to challenge oppression and devise solutions to the problems they face” (Freire, 1972, pp.125-126). From the discussion above, it is apparent that education is a fundamental component for development. Education has been viewed as being valuable for the economic development and welfare of a nation as well as for individual human well-being. Emphasis has also been placed on individual rights to education, which further allows for participation and empowerment (Whitehead, 2007, p. 162). In the following section education in multi-cultural societies will be analysed.

The Establishment of Multi-cultural Societies

The focus is on this context because of its relevance to the situation in Malaysia. Education policies will be discussed in terms of this role in a society that consists of various ethnic groups. Subsequent to that, the outcome of education policies in the society will also be discussed. However, before discussing the issues mentioned above, a brief overview of the establishment of multi-cultural societies will be provided; this will include a section on British colonisation in the region of Southeast Asia. The

phenomenon of plural or multi-cultural societies is observed in many regions. As noted in Southeast Asia, this came about through the process of colonisation, particularly by Britain. Malaysia experienced such colonisation. In discussing multi-cultural societies I draw primarily on J. S. Furnivall's conceptualisation of the plural society. This was later modified by other scholars, such as M. G. Smith (Rex, 2001, p.19).

Furnivall's definition of a plural society is, "a society comprising two or more social orders, which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit" (Furnivall, 1948, as cited in Korff, 2001, p.274). Furnivall further explains that plural societies exist mainly because of economic processes, where the contributing factors are market forces and unrestricted capitalism (Furnivall, 1948, as cited in Korff, 2001, p.274). Furnivall's definition of a plural society corresponds with the scenario that the indentured labourers experienced when they entered a formerly mono-ethnic society as minorities (Rex, 2001, pp.17-19).

M.G. Smith, who modified Furnivall's concept of plural society, elaborates further on Furnivall's ideas. Smith comprehensively stresses the features of the resulting social system, which is segmented and disunited. In addition, he also stresses plural societies' necessity of coercion in order to maintain the society as a national political unit (Rex, 2001, p.19). Smith, who borrowed the terminology from Furnivall, upholds the view that plural societies can be categorised as a "separate form of society" (Abdullah, 1997, p.194). Since plural societies are distinct from other forms of society, for comparative purposes, a unique theory had to be developed, as without it, analysing a plural society would be difficult (Rex, 2001, p.19).

According to Rex (2001, p.17), initially, pluralism was used to *describe* a colonial society, but later pluralism, became an *explanation* for a colonial society. As for the inequalities which were taking place in the colonial societies, anthropologists explained the situation as a consequence of the various different cultures, outlooks and lifestyles that made up the society (Rex, 2001, pp.17-19). The plural theory provides "an apology for social inequalities, portraying them as the inevitable result, not of natural variations as in racial theory, but of cultural differences" (Rex, 2001, pp.17-19). Hence, with the complexity surrounding plural societies, the concept of access to education is an interesting phenomenon. The following section is a discussion of this idea, especially the notion of fair education policies in plural societies.

Issues Surrounding Ethnic Minorities in Multi-cultural Societies

An *ethnic minority* may be defined as “*a group differing from the predominant section of a larger group in one or more characteristics and as a result often subjected to differential treatment and especially discrimination*” (Gleason, 1991, p.392). The characteristics which usually distinguish members of the social group are based on four elements: common origin, distinctive history, collective culture and unique group cohesion (Bookman, 2002, pp.2-4). A minority group in a society does not necessarily indicate a numerical minority (Ramaga, 1992, p.104). For example in South Africa, the numerical minority group dominated and oppressed the numerical majority group (Ramaga, 1992, p.104). It has been suggested that, compared to the dominant group in a particular society, the subordinate group may be disadvantaged in certain aspects, such as social status, education, employment, economic wealth and political authority.

With the increase of migration and growing acknowledgement of religious, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity in societies, the issue of minority rights has become of fundamental importance today (Gurr, 1995, p.14). After the First World War and with the emergence of the new states of Central and Eastern Europe, the issue of minorities' rights entered the international agenda. Kovacs (2003, pp.433-435) argues that, “the ethnic dominance of titular nationals implied the danger of oppression for the new minority groups”. The issue of minorities became a central concern again after the Second World War, where the concern became the basis of the establishment of the United Nations' Declaration of Minority Rights (Thornberry, 1991, p.21).

Studies have explored the issue of minorities from various perspectives, such as international law (Thornberry, 1991), human rights (Kamenka & Tay, 1978), history (Chaliand, 1989), political science (Barry, 2001) and sociology (Gurr, 1995). According to Reitz and Sklar (1997, p.235), the concept of minority groups only recently gained prominence, as it was unheard of in pre-1932 United States of America. Usually, the dynamics behind the notion are civil rights and collective rights. Ethnic minorities' treatment could be perceived as discriminatory, which could be due to the inaccessibility of the social structure (Reitz & Sklar, 1997, p.235). There have been numerous studies conducted on the attitudes towards ethnic minorities, such as those by Krueger and Pischke (1997), Cummings and Lambert (1997) and Dustmann and Preston (2001).

Krueger and Pischke (1997, p.182) suggest that high concentrations of minorities may have led to outbreaks of hostility against minorities, often ending in physical violence, and leading to death or severe injuries. Cummings and Lambert (1997, p.338) note that newly arriving immigrants face prejudice and discrimination because of increased levels of intolerance among majority groups. Dustmann and Preston's (2001, p.353) research on the attitude towards ethnic minorities in societies consistently showed the correlation between prejudices towards minorities and social conservatism and vice versa. It can be suggested from the discussion above that ethnic minorities may be disadvantaged in a society which consists of various ethnic groups. This argument is critical for this thesis because in Malaysia, the Indians are ethnic minorities in the society and there are several issues of concern, especially in the education sector.

Madhavan (1985, p.460) makes an argument for non-indigenous ethnic minorities' status in Malaysia being less than the indigenous majority because of colonialism. As will be mentioned later in the chapter, immigrants were brought into the country during the British rule via the indentured labour system to develop the colonial economy, whereby the immigrants consequently became ethnic minorities in a plural society. Hence, as ethnic minorities, these groups will have disparities in terms of access to resources, including education. For instance, Madhavan made the observation that:

Indian migrants toiled in disease-ridden conditions to provide sugar, coffee, tea and other raw materials for the industries of Europe, they also ended up having only a precarious basis as a low status and distrusted minority in the societies they entered, and sometimes with no citizenship at all (Madhavan, 1985, p.460).

From the extract above, labels such as "low status" and "distrusted minorities" attached to immigrants are anticipated to cause ethnic minority issues, in terms of equality of opportunity and human rights to arise in the society. The inequalities, which were taking place in colonial societies, were rationalised as a consequence of the various different cultures, outlooks and lifestyles that made up the society. Pluralism even provides "an apology for social inequalities, portraying them as the inevitable result, not of natural variations as in racial theory, but of cultural differences" (Rex, 2001, pp.17-19).

Generally, ethno-religious minorities are disadvantaged in the sense that they are discouraged from engaging or getting involved in the political arena and mostly they prefer to just have the sense of nationhood (Quadir, MacLean & Shaw, 2001, pp.23-24). Also, ethnic minorities face a challenge in protecting their social political rights, along with the confrontation of complex ideological systems and structural subordination (Mendelsohn & Baxi, 1994, p.2). For instance, in Sri Lanka, the indigenous people, being Sinhalese, chose to apply Sinhala as the official language, which resulted in discontentment among the Tamils as they felt that they were discriminated against (Quadir, MacLean & Shaw, 2001, p.24).

Karlsson (2003, pp.405-409) emphasises the importance of ethnic and cultural identity as a vital political tool for minority groups to claim “for rights and protection in areas such as participation in social and political life, the media, and education”. Minority groups need to be equipped with rights because this enables them to maintain their own distinctive culture and obtain more equal social status in society. On the other hand, opposition to minority rights by the majority group in the society could rise, as supporting minority groups could be perceived as a threat to one’s privileges and power (Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Coenders, 2002, pp.19-22). Harmonising political and ethno-cultural elements is important to create a strong sense of nationalism (Eriksen, 1993, p.99).

Esman (2004, pp.203-205) suggested that different ethnic groups are able to live side by side without any destructive conflict with the help of various forms of assimilation, pluralism, partition, enclave and reconciliation. Inter-ethnic relationship policies are affected by the various forms mentioned earlier in terms of choice and implementation. Policies are shaped and drafted based on values, beliefs and also the consequences of different policies (Esman, 2004, p.206). History has demonstrated that in order to solve ethnic minority problems, assimilation, pluralism, partition, enclave and reconciliation have facilitated the situation. For example, assimilation was carried out in the case of Ceausescus in Romania, pluralism in Canada, particularly in its fragile multi-cultural policies and territorial segregation was applied in various places, such as Switzerland, apartheid Africa, tribal Indian and contemporary Belgium (Esman, 2004, p.206).

The act of accepting ethnic pluralism would mean that all different ethnic identities are accepted. Two channels of legitimising strategies are recognised, and these are through domination and power sharing (Esman, 2004, p.206). Nevertheless, simply

because a particular ethnic group is in power, it will not mean that their community will be equally advantaged or that the other minority groups will be at a disadvantage. However, official detailed and complex ideologies have reinforced the pattern of preference. Within the framework of political authority, there will be an equal distribution of opportunity (Esman, 2004, p.206). Besides, Esman (2004, p.206) argues that there should be awareness and also recognition that there would be an inevitable competition with other cultural groups in terms of status, resources, interests and rights. These various entities mentioned would require all ethnic communities to negotiate and respect one another (Esman, 2004, p.206).

Much of the research suggests that ethnic minorities in societies should be equipped with rights in order to claim “privileges and protection in areas such as participation in social and political life, the media, and education” (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2006, p.528). There is, however, a need for more extensive study in analysing the nature and implications of minority rights. In addition to this, analysis can also be done on the relevance of minority rights in different countries and boundaries or limits of minority rights (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2006, p.544). Kettley (2007, p.333) further adds that there is a need for the discussion of people’s attitudes towards minority rights. Also, existing studies tend to be examinations of the majority group’s views on minority rights while ignoring the perspectives of minority groups. Further research must be focused on the views of minority groups in order to understand inter-ethnic relations and their political implications (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2006, pp.544-545).

From the discussion above, it can be observed that ethnic minorities in plural societies may be confronted with disadvantages. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, education is a fundamental tool for the modernisation or advancement of a nation as well as the individual. However, education in multi-cultural societies is complex because of the nature of such societies, with dominant and subordinate ethnic groups. The discussion of issues surrounding ethnic minorities revealed that ethnic minorities may be limited in terms of accessing resources, such as education. Hence, in the subsequent section ethnic minorities’ access to education in a multi-cultural society will be discussed as the context is the main focus of this thesis.

Education in Multi-cultural Societies

Education in a multi-cultural society is an interesting phenomenon because the government in such societies has the responsibility to develop and implement policies which will cater to all the various ethnic groups. There are two issues which have been emerging from research on education in plural societies: equal opportunity in the education system and human rights. There are several international and national Charters developed by non-governmental organisations and government departments to ensure that equal opportunities are presented for people to obtain education (Tuwor & Sossou, 2007, pp.7-8). Two of these Charters are the Charter Against Discrimination in Education, developed by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the 1960 Convention (UNESCO, 1960, p.4) and Education for All by 2015, which has six internationally-agreed education goals to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults (UNESCO, 2007, p.1).

Education policies in a multi-cultural society have the capability of functioning as a positive part of development and national integration. In societies with various ethnic groups it is the government's responsibility to ensure that the fundamental objective of establishing educational policies is integration and unity in the society. The reason education policies are important for national integration is because they can promote understanding among the various ethnic groups, through education the curriculum. However, education policies can also be a contributing factor towards conflicts within a plural society if ethnic groups resent the education policies established by the government (Ukiwo, 2007, p.266).

Many scholars have argued that education is an essential means towards effective integration. Mohandas Gandhi and Julius Nyerere, for example, held similar views on education and integration (Davis & Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001, pp.2-3). Ode (2002, p.1) elaborates by adding that education is a vital means towards personal and societal mobility, not only for cultural integration but also for socio-economic purposes. In other words, national integration has the capability to play and does play an important role in the national development of a nation (Ode, 2002, pp.1-3). Multi-cultural societies, in particular, engage in integration policies for two main reasons: (1) to prevent disadvantages from occurring in the education system and (2) to uphold the unique identities of ethnic groups in the society (Driessen, 2000, pp.55-56).

The effectiveness of education policies as an integrating tool varies with each multi-cultural society and to illustrate this, the issue of the use of language in societies will be discussed (Rijkschroeff, Dam, Duyvendak, Gruijter, & Pels, 2005, p.418). The concern about the use of a particular language as a medium of instruction is a significant issue among multi-cultural societies. Various studies, such as those by Bertrand, Luttmer, and Mullainathan (2000) and Smock and Bentsi-Enchill (1975) have established that language is an important contributing factor towards social interaction between ethnic groups, which reflects inter-group relations (Amienyi, 2005, p.100). Also, to maintain a feasible and unified multi-cultural society, it is important to establish a national language or languages. This idea is supported by Miller (2001) and Moore and Dunbar (1969), who argue that “language is a primary resource for enacting social identity, displaying membership of social groups and vehicle for transmitting culture” (Amienyi, 2005, p.100).

Hence, it is observable that education policies and language policies are important factors in promoting national integration in multi-cultural societies (Amienyi, 2005, p.100). However, education policies have the potential for being two-edged swords, contributing either towards or against national integration. Remi Clignet, an educational sociologist argued that “education policies can be an agent of social change although not in terms of eradicating traditional ethnic tensions” (Clignet, as cited in Davis & Kalu-Nwiyu, 2001, p.4). This argument by Remi Clignet is based on studies carried out in West African nations such as Cameroon, Ghana and the Ivory Coast (Davis & Kalu-Nwiyu, 2001, p.4).

Davis and Kalu-Nwiyu (2001, p.4) suggested that for education policies to contribute towards national integration, they should be developed to counter educational inequalities among the various ethnic groups within the society. Equal opportunities and human rights are concerns emerging from education in multi-cultural societies. Hence, education policies should reflect and promote interaction between the various ethnic groups. As discussed above, education in a society with various ethnic groups is complex and complicated. Fair education policies in a multi-cultural society are fundamental because without them feelings of resentment can be created among its various ethnic groups. Education is fundamental to all people and therefore provisions to access it should be available for all, equally.

Ethnic Minorities' Access to Education and Development

Education is also fundamental for development according to the modernisation (Inkeles & Smith, 1974, as cited in Robertson, Novelli, Dale, Tikly, Dachi & Alphonse, 2007, p.52) and human capital theory (Agbo, 2005, p.51). Adam Smith (1776), John Stuart Mill (1944) and Alfred Marshall (1920) are of the same opinion that “education is good for growth” (all cited in Gylfason, 2001, p.858). Scholars such as Barro (1997) and Aghion, Caroli, and GarcmHa-Penalosa (1999) further argue that economic growth is stimulated by education, which has a direct impact on people, whereby people’s lives are improved and changed (Gylfason, 2001, p.851). Alfred Marshall (1920, p.176) writes that:

There is no extravagance more prejudicial to growth of national wealth than that wasteful negligence which allows genius that happens to be born of lowly parentage to expend itself in lowly work. No change would conduce so much to a rapid increase of material wealth as an improvement in our schools, and especially those of the middle grades, provided it be combined with an extensive system of scholarships, which will enable the clever son of a working man to rise gradually from school to school till he has the best theoretical and practical education which the age can give (Marshall, 1920, p.176).

In this next section, the concept of equality of opportunity will be discussed in terms of eliminating the differences in the opportunities offered to children of different class, racial and religious background using the example of education opportunities. The British education system is focused on because the education system in Malaysia is modelled after the British system, which will be analysed in the following chapter. Since the British education system is orientated to the attainment of certificates, and other qualifications the issue of equality of opportunity needs to ensure that students have the same chances within the education system (Kettley, 2007, p.333). Lord Swann’s Report is relevant to the discussion because Malaysia, being a multi-cultural society, needs to provide education for the various ethnic groups.

In Britain, Lord Swann’s Report, *Education for All* (1985), was a hallmark as it was termed the boldest and most comprehensive report on the subject of multi-cultural

education (Swann Report, 1985). The report advocated that multi-cultural education must be available for everyone. It also explains that racial prejudice and discrimination affect those who are already socio-economically poor to a greater extent. Furthermore, the report advocates a global perspective in seeking “a good and relevant education for life in the modern world” (Swann Report, 1985, p.1). In the 1960s, minority groups in Britain expressed their concerns regarding their children’s performance in school, which established the foundation of the report. The authors of this report concluded that some of the factors regarding the children’s performances in schools could be linked to the attitudes of teachers and students (Bhatti, 2006, p.137).

Higher education is regarded as fundamental for human capital and economic growth. According to Burke (2002, p.1), within the past 45 years, there have been a large number of studies conducted on participation in the education sector. Some of the areas explored were the experiences of students, decision to attend university and policies which reflect equal opportunities. In Burke’s *Assessing Education: Effectively Widening Participation*, he suggests that “current policies and practices have undermined the commitment to combat the social inequalities that are institutionalised and reproduced within the academic world” (Burke, 2002, p.1). Ahier and Moore (1999, p.515) add that further research should focus on expanding explanatory resources and providing strong evidence for education policy, in a holistic manner.

Initially the concept of accessibility was intended to stimulate reflection upon equal opportunities in England, especially for women entering universities. In addition to that, the concept was further intended to “establish the citizenship right of certain social groups to attend university” (Kettley, 2007, p.335). However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, accessibility was predominantly associated with students from underprivileged backgrounds who were highly accomplished, entering universities. Also, around this time, the concept was expanded to include “citizenship right to attend universities and participation of under-represented groups” (Tullberg, 1998, pp.43-44). According to Beattie (2002, pp.19-21), disadvantaged groups at present are still using the notion of accessibility to reflect the rights to attend university.

Under-representation of underprivileged students has been identified to be caused by factors such as poverty, lack of encouragement from family members, low aspirations, career prospects and the lack of quality of schooling. The issue of under-representation has also been studied by modern-day ethnographers, where factors such as lack of participation, social class, underachieving at school, lack of motivation,

financial difficulties, lack of support from parents financially, and students' attitude towards higher education and experiences related to discourses are suggested (Hutchings & Archer, 2001, p.69).

However, there are several limitations – which have been suggested by Kettley – in regard to the study of participation among ethnic minority groups. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, while there has been much research in the area of ethnic minorities, there is a need for more extensive study that includes ethnic majorities' participation when discussing issues of ethnic minorities. Also, it is Kettley's view that further research must focus on being able to simultaneously analyse a variety of groups, or using comparators, as it is fundamental to comprehend the situation. In addition to that, researchers need to take a more holistic approach in order to reconceptualise the area of study (Kettley, 2007, p.343).

The context discussed above is relevant because this thesis concerns ethnic minorities' access to education and includes research participation by members of the minority ethnic group itself. However, prior to discussing this in the Malaysian context, British colonisation and its contribution to the education system in its colonies will be discussed. The reason this is important is because certain former British colonies have traces of, or are still modelled after, the British education system. This situation has both advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, a general perception of the role of the British in the education system can contribute towards the understanding of the present situation in the education system of a former British colony.

British Colonialism and Education

In this section the colonialism framework will be analysed through an examination of the nature and characteristics of colonial school systems. Education within post-colonialism will then be discussed as post-colonialism is an important phase wherein certain independent colonies restructured and introduced new education plans and policies. Also, several consequences of the implementation of colonial education will be discussed as they are relevant to the thesis in the sense that the legacy of colonial education is, to some extent, still present in former British colonies.

The concept of power relationships resulting from this colonial involvement will be introduced in a later section in this chapter. This issue is significant to the development and implementation of education policies, which consequently have an

influence on ethnic minorities' access to education. The power relationship between the colonial power and elites of the society enabled the elites to map education policies, which created both positive and problematic situations in plural societies.

During British rule, the administration played a significant part in developing the various colonial countries' education systems, as in Malaysia. There are several different opinions of colonial involvement in the development of the education system, ranging from positive to negative. One contributor towards the discussion is J.S. Coleman, who argues that:

One of the major indictments made by critics of Western colonialism has been its alleged neglect of education, both quantitatively in the numbers enrolled in schools and qualitatively in the type of education offered which has been blamed for being inappropriate, being too dominated by colonial culture or because it spoilt the indigenous culture (Coleman, n.d., 1965).

Scholars such as Bray (1993, p.333) have also contributed to the argument on colonisation and its impact on the education system. It should be noted that the arguments made by this scholar are similar to those of Coleman. The two main arguments are (1) the colonial education policies to an extent have caused underdevelopment and (2) the colonial education system was sometimes used as a tool to exploit the people to keep them under subjection (Nnazor, 2005, p.532). To look more closely at these arguments, certain aspects of the colonial education policy need to be scrutinised.

Watson (1982, p.2) argued that throughout most colonies, there was insufficient and uneven school provision. Secondly, a dualistic education policy was in place, which comprised urban colonial schools for the indigenous elites, and vernacular schools for the rural poor. Lastly, there was a lack of initiative to provide education for all and also to offer higher education for the people (Watson, 1982, p.2). Similarly, scholars such as Coleman (1965) and Bray (1993) argued that there were inadequate education institutions in colonised countries during and after the British colonisation. This occurrence in colonial countries could be traced back to the education scenario in Britain itself. It was only in the 1870s that primary education was made compulsory in Britain and only after the Second World War that universal secondary education was made available (Watson, 1982, pp.9-10).

Scholars such as Mayhew (1938) and Furnivall (1948) have suggested that there were four main stages in the evolution of the British colonial education policy. The phases were (1) the control of education mainly by missionaries (2) the government demonstrating more interest by enhancing efforts working with missionaries (3) the revolution of policies instigating the period of change and (4) the rise of state control and management. During colonial rule, the British at some stage, as mentioned earlier, ignored the education sector as priority was given to developing areas such as law and order, defence and economic sectors. This is supported by a general statement that “there was an absence of any clear educational ideas on the government’s part as well as a lack of belief in education” (Whitehead, 2007, p.162).

Missionaries in colonised countries played a part in the evolution of colonial educational policies (Woodberry, 2004, p.40). Missionary schools were mainly supported by the ruling or elite classes of the colonies as they wanted their own children to be equipped with formal education to ensure upward social mobility. This in turn had an adverse impact on other groups, economically and ethnically (Woodberry, 2004, p.37). Missionaries were not the only group actively campaigning to promote education. Other groups such as merchants, traders, philanthropists and humanitarians were promoting education as well. The East India Company was one of the pioneers establishing schools. The first school in Malaysia was opened by Reverend Hutchings, an Anglican Chaplain in 1816, in Penang. In 1854, the East India Company issued a policy statement on education, which pointed out the components of a curriculum. Some of the features were that the curriculum should be taught in English and the vernacular language include European knowledge, and make available education for all (Watson, 2007, p.256).

The establishment of the British Advisory Committee on Education in 1923 in London also contributed towards the evolution of colonial education policies, similar to those of the missionaries. The committee, which later changed its name to Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, consisted of members who had had experiences in both domestic and colonial fronts. In 1925, the Committee presented its first report, which was critical as it was the turning point for colonial education policies as it documented policies for the education system in colonial dependencies (White, 1996, p.13). In addition, the report that the Committee presented also included details on funding, where it mentioned that the “metropolitan is responsible to provide some funds and the rest by colonies through economic resources and revenues” (White, 1996,

p.13). The report consisted also of a range of other issues varying from school supervision to emphasising vernacular education (White, 1996, p.13).

As indicated, colonial education policies evolved and developed from the 1920s and 1930s. Also, it is suggested that the education policies which had been drafted were general to encompass individual needs of each territory as colonies were diversified (Watson, 1982, pp.20-21). During the colonial era, missionaries were the dominant group actively promoting education. Subsequently, the colonial government contributed as well by cooperating with missionary groups. Education systems in colonial states have traces of Western influence and in some instances, such as India, some schools are still based on the British system. However, in order to provide some understanding of the education policies in colonial states, in the following section colonial school systems will be analysed.

Colonial School Systems

Schools based on colonial education policies, which were established in the colonies, were an unfamiliar creation for the people colonised. The reason was that the system generally reflected the thinking of the group which founded the schools and was commonly designed in such a way that it served the needs and interest of some groups and not others (Davis & Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001, pp.4-5). When colonial school systems were introduced and developed, the importance of traditional schools declined. People in the colonial community were starting to be aware of social mobility and the significance of being equipped with a secondary level education and knowledge of the colonial language in order to obtain a well paid job (Watson, 1982, p.28).

Essentially, most colonies have three strands of education, which consist of (1) European schools (2) indigenous education and (3) colonial schools run by the government or missionaries (Munro, 2005, pp.93-94). The first strand mentioned, urban European schools, were usually established for children of colonial civil servants (Munro, 2005, p.94). The second strand had characteristics of a traditional school and was occasionally known for being revolutionary, as control was usually not in the hands of the government (Munro, 2005, p.95). For instance, in South East Asia, Chinese schools are known to propagate anti-European sentiments (Munro, 2005, pp.95-96). The third strand was founded mainly for the community by either the colonial government or missionaries. In addition to that, the most common location was in or near urban

areas. However, there were some missionary schools which could be found in rural areas (Munro, 2005, p.96).

It was common for the majority of people to complete the primary level of education in colonial schools. However, there are exceptions where there were people who went on further to complete the upper primary and lower secondary level. Usually, these levels of education were pursued by, and benefited those, who lived in towns and had access to them. In colonial states, the highest level a student could usually obtain was a secondary level of education. This could be due to the fact that there were no universities in British colonies until the 1930s, except in India and Indo-China. For this reasons the colonial system was criticised (Whitehead, 2007, pp.170-171).

There are three main criticisms directed toward the system. As indicated earlier, higher education was unavailable for the colonised people. Hence, it was concluded that the colonial school system was leading the people nowhere and in addition to that the education provided was inadequate in preparing people to take on responsible roles in society (Whitehead, 2007, p.168). Another criticism was that the colonial school system was available only to a selective group as only a small number of people attended school, so the direct consequence was a low level of literacy. In general, it also can be suggested that in principle and in practice, schools were established for local elites who had the mental ability as well as parents who were affluent and could afford the fees (Whitehead, 2007, pp.164-165).

In addition, some of the responses towards the colonial school system in general vary from “open hostility and opposition to apathy and eager support” (Whitehead, 2005, p.441). One argument against the system was that since women and girls were given the opportunity to obtain an education, the family had to bear the intangible costs of loss of help in the household. In addition to that, a great deal of opposition came from Muslim communities over girls’ education. In places such as India, the elite Muslims in the community took the step of establishing schools and even a university in Aligarh. On the other hand, eager support was shown mainly by tribal chiefs of West Africa, Malay Sultans and Indian princes. These groups embraced European elite education as they saw it as a means towards preserving and sustaining their own elite status (Watson, 1982, p.34).

In some cases, such as in colonial India and Malaysia, children of indigenous ruling elites were privileged as certain schools and places at the secondary level were reserved for them. The less privileged groups viewed education as a tool towards

upward social mobility (Whitehead, 2007, p.168). Therefore, it can be concluded that the colonial school system was received in a variety of ways and had its own advantages and disadvantages, for different groups of people. The colonial school system implemented certain policies, which have been discussed above. Hence, this leads to the discussion of the consequences of colonial education for the people, which will be analysed in the following section.

Education and Post-Colonialism

The establishment of the education system in colonial dependencies was largely due to the British administration and missionaries. These two groups were accountable from the foundation of colonial education policies to their implementation in the colonial school system. People under colonial rule were hardly asked for their own viewpoint in regard to the education sector. Seeing that people were not asked for their opinion in their own country, it was foreseeable that they may react against schools and curricula which were designed and imposed on them by strangers. As anticipated, after the independence of British colonies and the start of nationalist movements, reactions against colonialism and colonial education occurred (Davis & Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001, pp.4-5).

Watson (1982, p.35) suggests four consequences of colonial education. The first consequence was that elites from the indigenous community were educated and trained based on traditional political or economic status rather than on educational aptitude. For example, British schools in India, such as Aitcheson College in Lahore, Lawrence College and Lucknow College exist merely for sons of the nobilities. In 1910, the Malay College of Kuala Kangsar was established solely for the sons of Malay Sultans. The privileges the elites acquired in education resulted in a situation where the elites were detached from the indispensable needs, feelings and aspirations of the local people. Moreover, this group of elites are in that situation because they are trapped between the Western educated and urbanised culture, and traditional indigenous culture (Watson, 1982, p.36).

The second consequence of colonial education, as suggested by Watson (1982, p.36), was the creation of the bureaucratic machinery. The secondary level in the colonial education system served as the main purpose of creating and training clerks, administrators and teachers to serve the colonial government. When the rulers left, these

group of people who had been educated under the colonial education system continued to run the government, to the extent of planning the country's economy, and later on they moved into the political arena because they were amongst the best educated, which set them apart from the masses. Moreover, similar to their European counterparts, they equipped themselves with power, position and prestige (Chafer, 2007, pp.441-442).

Thirdly, according to Watson (1982, p.37), colonial education, especially in multi-cultural societies, had two consequences – either integration or resentment in the community. Since multi-cultural societies are composed of various ethnic groups, the British anticipated that with the colonial education system and curriculum, a sense of nationalism could be instilled into the students. However, on the other hand, colonial schools dismissed the use of indigenous languages and instead stressed European superiority, which led to the local nationalist leaders reacting against the colonial curriculum and insisting on using indigenous languages, such as Swahili, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia and Hindi, in respective countries (Stockwell, 1998, pp.337-338). This point is important for the third part of the chapter and will be discussed in detail hereafter.

Fourthly, the high value placed on education during the colonial era had led to another consequence, which is observable in many postcolonial countries. During the British administration, local people from the community viewed education as a means towards upward social mobility and also as an instrument for social change. Moreover, because of the various ethnic groups within the society, education was also perceived to bring the different ethnic and linguistic groups together. When countries were newly independent leaders who took over the British rule were confident and anticipated that education would play its role in the socio-economic development of the country as well. Moreover, most of the developing countries simply extended the provisions which the colonial government had initially established (Zachernuk, 1998, pp.487-488).

These arguments have explained that there are several consequences derived from a colonial education system. The legacy of colonisation in the education sector still continues in the present time. It can be said that former colonial countries have several similarities. Issues which were brought up ranged from uneven development of schools, inaccessibility to education, and language issues. These issues have led to policies being restructured by the dominant groups in societies and these structures developed shortly after the independence of countries still influence the education sector. One of the fundamental reasons dominant groups were able to develop and

restructure policies was because of the relationships established between the British rule and elites of the society, where authority was bestowed upon the elites. In the next section there will be a discussion of the reasons why these relationships were established and their outcome in a plural society.

Power Relationships

In general, the present-day concept of power sharing can be traced back to colonial times, where it can be correlated with the concept of power relationships between the British and elites of colonial societies. Discussion of this context is relevant for this thesis as it relates to the situation in Malaysia. It will become apparent in this section that both power relationships and power sharing were proposed due to the need to keep all parties happy, which involved the British colonial rule, elites and the minorities. As power relationships were established for various reasons between the British and local elites, these will be analysed in detail later. Also, the consequence of the relationships with ethnic minority groups will be discussed.

Arend Lijphart, a Dutch political scientist, advocated in the late 1960s the concept of consociational democracy, which is linked to power-sharing and democracy to maintain social equality in plural societies (Bogaards, 2006, p.119). Power sharing, which is a contemporary idea, was instigated between the elites and minority groups in multi-cultural societies to present equal opportunities within a political authority framework. Moreover, power sharing among various ethnic groups would require negotiation and, most importantly, respect, which is critical in maintaining a harmonious postcolonial multi-cultural society (Esman, 2004, p.206).

Given that the concepts of power relationships and power sharing are relevant to this chapter, the example of Mauritius will be analysed because, similarly to Malaysia, both countries were colonised by the British, where power relationships were established between the British and elites of the local society. Later, in Chapter Three, this concept will be applied to Malaysia.

Mauritius is an island with approximately one million people, with a diverse population of Indo-Mauritian, Creole, Sino-Mauritian and Franco-Mauritian (Lange, 2003, p.397). The early indication of the establishment of power relationships between the local elites and the British could be observed when colonial rule was dependent on the local people to occupy government positions. During colonial rule, statistics showed

that the indigenous community held approximately 93% of state positions, where 65% held mid-to high-level positions in 1932 and 85% by 1960 (Lange, 2003, p.404). Inevitably, subordinate groups felt marginalised and began to challenge the elites (Lange, 2003, p.408). From the statistics above, it is suggested that the relationship established between the British and indigenous elites was, and still is, an advantage to the elites because this made it possible for them to influence relationships, which could vary socially, politically, and economically. Hence, the impact of the influence on state relations is mostly felt by minority groups, which will also become apparent in the illustration of Malaysia, in the next chapter.

It was fundamental for the colonial rulers to preserve harmony with minimum disruptions for economic reasons. Also, with the British being in unfamiliar surroundings, they needed the indigenous people to fill traditional and religious roles. Hence, it is noticeable that very early in the relationship, the British and local elites established a power relationship because of these unique circumstances. As mentioned earlier, with the case of Mauritius, a significant outcome of holding power was the ability to have control over the development of policy (Lange, 2003, p.408).

In this thesis, particularly in Chapter Three, the control over policy making in the education sector by colonisers and local elites as well as its impact on minority groups, will be discussed in the section on the ethnic minority's access to education. Colonialism affected not only the economy of countries but also the development of the education sector. The British introduced their education structures and policies to the countries colonised. After the British left, local elites restructured the system in various ways. In Malaysia, the changes had an adverse impact on minority groups, where they felt that they had been denied equal opportunities. Concluding from the arguments made, it is likely that links between colonialism and the development of the education sector still exist, particularly in the context of a plural society.

Chapter Summary

Education is important for social mobility and socio-economic development. The literature showed that people equipped with education are more empowered than those who are not, hence their capability to move upwards in the society. Also, education is important for the development of a country because with an educated labour force, there is more potential for socio-economic development. Education

policies in multi-cultural societies are particularly important because they can produce either resentment or integration among the people.

It is observable that British colonialism played a significant part in the education system of a number of developing countries, where there were positive and negative outcomes because colonial rulers had other priorities such as developing the colonial economy rather than the education sector, which was viewed to be less significant. Colonial education policies reflect a Western influence and still today, many former colonies model their education systems after the British system. Hence, with the colonial education policies established in colonies, colonial schools systems have emerged.

With the development of colonial school systems, the literature showed that colonial schools were usually reserved for the elites of the society. The main outcomes derived were indigenous elites being better educated with preference in education being given to them. Hence, the postcolonial situation reflected the consequences of colonial education. Shortly after independence from the British, it was not uncommon for elites from colonial societies to restructure and develop their own education policies. This, in turn, had an impact on ethnic minorities as the elites and the colonial governments had the power to structure the society, for instance, the economy and education. At times this led to ethnic minorities facing prejudices as their status in society was lower compared to the majority group.

Ethnic minorities in plural societies are confronted with various issues, in particular that of accessibility to the education system. Accessibility was to reflect equal opportunities among the various ethnic groups within the society. Education is important for many reasons, mainly for social mobility and economic development. Many factors influence the accessibility of ethnic minorities to education. To provide context for the situation in Malaysia, the following chapter gives an overview of the situation there, focussing on some of the issues which have been analysed in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

MALAYSIA

Introduction

This chapter presents a general overview of Malaysia and subsequently the discussion in this country is discussed in the context of British colonisation. The British colonial era is focused on because of its impact on Malaysia. The two main aspects that will be discussed are the introduction of the indentured labour system and the establishment of relationships between the British and Malay elites, where both aspects have contributed towards the present-day scenario in the society generally and in the education sector in particular.

Malaysia evolved from a primarily mono-ethnic society to a multi-cultural society because of British colonisation, mainly the indentured labour system. Hence, with various ethnic groups present in the society, issues surrounding dominant and subordinate groups are bound to occur. Since the focus of the thesis is on the Indian community, an overview will be provided in order to give some understanding of the development of the Indian community from the British colonisation to the present day. However, a brief discussion of the Chinese community in Malaysia will also be analysed for the purposes of comparison, since the Chinese are also ethnic minorities in Malaysia, introduced via the indentured labour system.

A brief overview and analysis of Malaysia's national education system will then be provided as it is a core component of the thesis. Next, some significant policies, especially the New Economic Policy and its outcome for the Indian community will be discussed.

Overview of Malaysia

Malaysia, consisting of thirteen peninsula states and three federal territories, is part of Southeast Asia. The South China Sea separates the country into the Malay Peninsula and Borneo, which are located in the West and East, respectively. The geographic position of Malaysia, located along the Straits of Melaka and the South China Sea gives it economic and strategic importance (The world factbook, 2007, p.3).

The Straits of Melaka form one of the most important shipping lanes in the world, often compared to the Suez Canal (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2007, p.3).



Figure 1: Map of Malaysia (Hanafi, Arshad & Yahaya, 1995, p.1).

The Straits of Melaka's magnitude was such that it functioned as a passageway between the Indian and Pacific Ocean, thereby linking three of the most populous nations in the world: India, Indonesia and China. As a result, Melaka was not only a flourishing trading centre but it was also a fertile ground for spreading the Islamic religion around the Malay Archipelago. In addition to that, because of their political stability and economic importance, the Straits of Melaka was a major attraction for traders from China, India, Burma and Arabic countries (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2007, p.3). The following overview is of the population of Malaysia.

The population of Malaysia is approximately 25 million, according to a July 2007 estimate (The world factbook, 2007, p.3). In Malaysia, the population is diversified ethnically, linguistically, culturally and as regards religion. The ethnic groups in Malaysia consist of 50.4% Malays, 23.7% Chinese, 11% Indigenous people, 7.8% of other ethnicity and 7% Indians (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.2). The Malays, who are the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia, are categorised as Bumiputera,

which translates to “sons and daughters of the soil”. The official language and religion in Malaysia are Bahasa Malaysia and Islam, respectively, which are common among the Malays and important distinguishing factors from the non-Malays (Andaya & Andaya, 2001, p.3).

The second largest ethnic group within the Malaysian population is the Chinese. The Chinese community has various religions such as Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity as well as different languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.3). The indigenous people, who are also known as the *Orang Asli* which literally means *original people* or *aboriginals*, form the third largest ethnic group in Malaysia. Most of the indigenous people reside in Sabah and Sarawak, which are located in the East of Malaysia and practise traditional religions. There are, however, some indigenous groups who have converted to Christianity and the Islamic faith, similarly to the Malays (Andaya & Andaya, 2001, pp.3-4).

The fourth largest ethnic group in Malaysia consists of Europeans, U.S. Americans, Australians, Eurasians, Thais, Armenians and people of mixed ancestry. The fifth largest ethnic group is made up of Indians. Among the Indians, the South Indian Tamils constitute the largest group, followed by the Malayalees, Telegus, Punjabis, Bengalis, Gujuratis and Sindhis. Similarly to the Chinese community, the language and religion varies between the groups within the Indian community (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2007, p.1). Since the Indian community is focused upon in this thesis, a more in-depth overview of this community will be discussed further on. Next will be an overview of the government and political parties in Malaysia.

The government system in Malaysia is based upon the concept of Parliamentary Democracy with a constitutional monarchy in place, whereby His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong² is the Supreme Head of the country. Although the role is largely ceremonial, the king’s consent is needed to appoint cabinet ministers. Under the Federal Constitution, separation of power is observed by the government administration in Malaysia in order to put into practice the Parliamentary Democracy system. Since Malaysia’s independence from the British in 1957, there have been five Prime Ministers in office. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad served the country from 1981 to 2003 and was the longest serving premier (BBC, 2006, p.1).

² Yang di-Pertuan Agong is the paramount leader or King in Malaysia.

The present Prime Minister is Dato Seri Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi (BBC, 2006, p.1). There are numerous political parties in Malaysia and the principal party among them is the Alliance, a coalition of communally based parties. The Alliance, under the banner of Barisan Nasional (BN), is the current ruling party and is made up of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). On the other hand, some of the examples of the main opposition parties in Malaysia are the Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) and People's Justice Party (PJP) (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.4).

The World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series in 2004 rated Malaysia's political stability at 0.38. The points are measured on a scale of -2.5 to 2.5, where the higher score indicated good governance (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.4). Hence, Malaysia can be identified as being moderate politically, with stable governance (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, pp.4-5). The ethnic groups are equally represented by the various existing political parties. One of the many reasons political parties exist is because these parties are responsible for supporting and guiding their own communities to advance themselves in various aspects, such as in the education and economic sector (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.5).

Malaysia possesses one of the most vibrant economies in Southeast Asia. The two main factors contributing to Malaysian economic success are political stability and rapid industrialisation. The economy in Malaysia was primarily based on agriculture and mineral export and is presently evolving into a multisector economy (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.6). According to a 2006 estimate, Malaysia achieved a 5.9% growth in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures the percentage of real growth (The world factbook, 2007, p.1). The ensuing section contains a discussion of the British colonial era and its outcome in Malaysia.

The British Colonial Era in Malaysia

Malaya, as it was formerly known, was colonised by the British from 1874 to 1957 (Shah, 2007, p.216), which is an important aspect for this thesis because Indians were brought into the country via the indentured labour system during the British colonial era. With the discovery of tin and vast growth in rubber plantations, there was a demand for labour in the British colonial economy. The British recognised that the

labour requirement would be unable to be completely filled by the Malay population because it was too small in number and scattered. Therefore, through assisted emigration, the British imported labour, especially from China and India, to operate the mining economy and colonial capitalist plantations (Andaya & Andaya, 2001, pp.96-97).

This form of labour recruitment was known as the *indentured labour system*, and evolved as a consequence of the development in the colonial economic sector, the demand for labour increased, thus requiring the colonial power to obtain a labour force from other regions (Grossman & Iyigun, 1997, pp.483-484). Almost two million Asians, predominantly from China and India, were involved in the migration to colonies administered by the British Empire, through their dispersal to different parts of the world (Guterl & Skwiot, 2005, p.40) via the indentured contract system at around the 19th and early 20th century (Northup, 2003, p.4).

Through this system, an individual would work for a certain employer for the period between three to five years in return for wages and means of access such as assistance with travel and accommodation. Primarily, the Indian labourers, who migrated to Malaysia, were from the region of Tamil Nadu in India. This occurrence has resulted in certain homogeneity within the Malaysian Indians, whereby almost 80% of the Indians in Malaysia are Tamil speakers, approximately 10% are Malayalam and Telugu speakers and the remaining 10% originate from the Northern part of India, mainly from the state of Punjab (Sandhu, 2006, pp.151-153).

In addition to that, in the early 19th century as will be discussed further later, many Indians also migrated to Malaysia voluntarily in search of a better life in various respects, such as economically, politically and socially. This group of migrants were better educated and equipped with professional skills. Despite the fact that many Indians still considered India as their motherland, there were others who stayed on to make Malaysia their new home. It is interesting to note that in the course of Malaysia attaining Independence in 1957, approximately one million Indians were settled in Malaysia, calling it home. In their own right, the majority of the settled Indians were given the status of Malaysian citizens (Sandhu, 2006, pp.160-162).

The Chinese community's labourers were primarily from the Southeast provinces such as Guangdong, Fujian and Guangxi. Similarly to the Indian scenario, there was a certain homogeneity within the Malaysian Chinese, whereby there were five major groups of people: Teochiew, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka and Hainanese. Many

Chinese came through the indentured labour system voluntarily but others were forced. The Chinese labour force, once arriving in Malaysia, was sent mainly to tin mines and agricultural estates. The fundamental reason for the majority of the Chinese to migrate to Malaysia was to get away from the poverty in China (McKeown, 2004, p.158).

With labourers from China and India entering the country, an ethnically diverse society began to emerge following the establishment of the British in Malaysia. Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that the evolution of Malaysia as a plural society was brought about with the immigration of people into the country and as an outcome of British colonisation. Another outcome from the British colonial era was in the aspect of power relationships between the British and the elites of the society, which is relevant and fundamental for the context of this research.

Relationships between the British and Malay Elites

There are three factors that have contributed towards the establishment of an exclusive relationship between the Malay elites and the British. One factor is that colonised nations were occupied by British colonial rulers who had no understanding or awareness of the cultures and values of the society which they governed. Therefore, the British chose to maintain the roles of indigenous people, which they had performed before being colonised (Shome, 2002, pp.37-40).

The concept of protection was the second contributing factor towards the establishment of power relationships between the British and Malay elites. Since Malaysia had been primarily mono-ethnic, the British colonial power had to be cautious bringing in immigrants through the indentured labour system into the society. Thus, the British founded the concept of protection for two reasons, which were to ensure there is minimum disruption caused by immigrants and to uphold their colonial precedence, which was in the interests of the Malays (Weiss, 2005, p.63).

An example of the British maintaining the interest of Malays can be observed with the establishment of the minimum interference policy, which allowed substantial numbers of Malays to hold on to their traditional roles as “tillers of the soil and catchers of fish” (Smith, 2006, p.124). The reason the British decided to maintain the traditional Malay ruling class in their government was because of symbolic value, which was a deliberate measure to satisfy the Malay masses. Furthermore, with the signing of the Treaty of Pangkor in 1874, between the British government and several Malay chiefs, a

special relationship was formed based on conditions which were agreed upon by both parties (Hamid, 2007, p.373).

One of the conditions stated in the Treaty of Pangkor was that “the chiefs agree to accept British advice and administration on affairs of the state, except in matters pertaining to Muslim religion and Malay customs, which came under the jurisdiction of the Sultan” (Weiss, 2005, pp.64-65). In addition, the British were known as advisers and assistant advisers, which eventually presented them with opportunities to shape Malaysia mainly in terms of economy, administration and education. Weiss (2005, pp.64-65) argues that the ultimate purpose of the British in bestowing authority upon the elites was to make them contented and ensure that their position in the society was not being challenged with the arrival of immigrants. It was important for economic reasons for the colonial rulers to preserve harmony with minimum disruptions (Weiss, 2005, pp.64-65).

The power relationship formed between the British and Malays was based in a historical context. The most prominent event to shape the characteristics of the Malay society, prior to the arrival of the British, was the founding of the state of Malacca by Prince Parameswara from Sumatra around 1397 (Lopez, 2001, p.3). The establishment of the social hierarchy by Prince Parameswara included “components of a royal aristocracy, which comprised the Sultan, his family and his court, a class of local leaders composed of districts chiefs, village headmen and a peasant class” (Lopez, 2001, p.7). The fundamental social hierarchy of the Malays was disrupted to some extent with the newly introduced British administration system (Lopez, 2001, pp.7-9).

Hence, it can be derived from the literature that since colonial times, the British and Malays have established a power relationship through a particular set of circumstances. The British did not completely eliminate traditional roles because they were aware that they would need the full cooperation of the elites. Also, in order to maintain harmony for economic and political reasons, the British assisted by providing the Malay elites with certain privileges. The special relationship denotes that there is significant harmony and shared authority between the British and Malay elites, for instance to suggest new policies or plans. In addition, it would mean that to a certain extent, the ethnic minorities would be impacted upon. The next section contains a discussion of issues surrounding Malaysia as a plural society.

Malaysia as a Plural Society

Malaysia is claimed to be a “classic case of the plural society” by both political and social historians (Nagata, 2005, p.107). The social order in Malaysia corresponds with Furnivall’s definition of a plural society, where the Malays and non-Malays were primarily concentrated in different areas without much intermingling (Nagata, 2005, pp.106-107). The Malay community were “notably in the two rice-bowl areas of Kedah and Kelantan and in other rice growing areas in the west coast states such as Perak and on the east coast” (Yeoh, 2006, p.234). In contrast, the non-Malays were predominantly in urban areas such as Penang, Malacca, Johor, Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan, which were all mainly port cities (Yeoh, 2006, p.234).

Batunmalai (1988, p.2) argued that, “Malaysia is also described as on one hand a veritable melting pot and on the other a collage of water tight compartments”. This could be due to the fact that the various ethnic groups hardly interacted during the British colonial rule, which consequently created a feeling of alienation among the immigrants. In addition, the British and Malay rulers never attempted to resolve any hostile situation in terms of growing resentment of Malays towards immigrants, which was due to the fact that the “nature of their professions and the different localities of their residence minimised the chances of one ethnic group interacting with another or others” (Abdullah, 1997, p.192). The situation was further aggravated by the different economic positions of the Malay and Chinese communities, which subsequently affected the politics of the country as well (Lanti, 2004, p.73).

In the early years of independence, while Malays were mainly rice growers in the rural areas, the Chinese dominated the commercial sector based in the urban areas, and most of the Indians, largely Tamils, were rubber plantation labourers. According to DeBernardi (2004, p.20), “although many Chinese came as contract labourers, their contracts were for short terms and typically they were free to undertake other moneymaking ventures after working for one year”. The entrepreneurial skills of the Chinese community since colonial times led to their present-day advanced economic status. Hence, in order to counteract the non-Malays’ dominant position in the economic and commercial arena, the Malays felt that it was imperative to hold top positions in the administration and government sector of the country. An example illustrating Malay influence and dominance can be found in the Constitution of Malaysia, which came into force in 1957 (Lanti, 2004, p.73).

The Constitution, which is based on the principle of special rights for the Malays, also clearly distinguishes Malays and non-Malays from one another (Lanti, 2004, p.73). The agreement made by the country's founding fathers in the Constitution is referred to as the “social contract”. According to Cheah (2002, p.36), the social contract is typically taken to mean a quid pro quo agreement that provides the non-Malay and other non-indigenous peoples of Malaysia mostly – including the Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians – with citizenship in return for their granting special privileges to the Malays and indigenous people of Malaysia. The Constitution does not explicitly refer to a “social contract” in terms of citizenship rights and privileges and no act of law or document has ever fully set out the social contract's terms (Cheah, 2002, pp.36-37). Anecdotally, however, there is the sense that this is the understanding. Following from this is the further understanding that any attempt to disrupt the system of “special privileges” may threaten citizenship rights.

The Constitution is a fundamental document because its components continue to have an influence on state policies (World Trade Organization, 2001, p.2). Article 153 of the Malaysian Constitution clearly outlines the “special rights” for Malays in education, business and public service (Haque, 2003, pp.244-245). These rights, which have become a part of Malaysia’s culture and nationhood, are safeguarded by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. It was these special rights for the Malays which caused discontentment and increasing tension among the non-Malays which led to racial riots on the 13th of May, 1969 (Haque, 2003, pp.244-245).

The racial riots, in which almost 200 people were killed, was a major incident; parliament had to be suspended and a state of emergency had to be declared. This incident motivated the elites of the society to initiate ways of addressing the socio-economic gap problem among the ethnic groups in society. Several different measures were initiated, but the New Economic Policy (NEP), which was introduced in 1971 and implemented up to 1990, was the most significant measure introduced to address the situation (Haque, 2003, pp.244-245). Prior to analysing the NEP and its impact on the Indians in Malaysia in particular, the Tamil community will be discussed.

A Note on the Indians in Malaysia

The arrival of Indians in Malaysia is not a recent phenomenon, as records suggest that Indians have been migrating to Malaysia since the pre-Christian era, mainly

for trade and commerce. However, large-scale migration to Malaya took place only around 1874, which coincided with British colonial rule. Satyanarayana (2002, pp.92-93) points out the important differences between the early 19th century and the late 19th century Indian migrants who came to Malaya. As Sandhu (1969, p.20) illustrates, “the earlier wave of Indians represented a powerful and respected commercial, economic and political force whereas the Indians who came after the arrival of the British were large numbers of cheap, docile Indian labour to work the plantation and the government projects”.

There are three main reasons which prompted the Indians to migrate to India: authorisation by the Indian government to migrate, to escape harsh socio-economic conditions and for political reasons, whereby South Indian Tamils were preferred to counter the growing number of Chinese in Malaysia, whom the Malays considered too devious (Santhiram, 1999, p.33). The South Indian Tamils were mainly the “unlettered labourer coming to the country to work for a pittance on some plantation or government project” (Sandhu, 1969, p.20). According to Santhiram (1999, p.33), as a result, the Indian community “formed a poor landless rural class, fixed in status by the terms of their employment, education and total earnings”.

Despite independence from British colonial rule, the position of the Indians has not changed much. Muzaffar (2006, p.151) sums up the conditions of Indians in the post independence era:

The socio-economic position of the Indian seems to have deteriorated relative to his other ethnic peers... (He) is neither a political nor economic power within the Malaysian polity. Politically, he is a tolerant minority; economically weak, often harassed and exploited by free enterprise.

The social historical aspect of the community is a core contributing factor in the problems which it now faces. Some of the factors are: firstly, there is a large social division between the labour, professional and business classes, secondly, the socio-economic status of the community is not as healthy as in 1991, the ownership equity³ was less than 2% and thirdly, almost half the Indian population are estate bound (Santhiram, 1999, p.34). Nair (2003, pp.192-193) maintains that even presently, the

³ Ownership equity is the remaining interest in all assets after all liabilities are paid.

“Indians are the most economically and socially marginalized minority in the peninsula, next to migrant workers and rural communities of Sabah and Sarawak”.

Loh (2003, p.223) upholds that as an ethnic collective, the Indians lag behind the Malays and Chinese economically, educationally, politically and socially. Pereira (2001, pp.1-2) further elaborates on Nair’s (2003, p.192), Loh’s (2003, p.223) and Santhiram’s (1999, p.34) comments, pointing out that:

Indians, who form only 7% of the population, make up 41% of beggars, rank lowest in national elementary examinations, account for 63% of those arrested under the Emergency Ordinance for violent crimes, and fail to qualify in sufficient numbers to take advantage of all the university places set aside for them.

Despite the backwardness of the Indian community, there is considerable progress, where individuals have become successful doctors, lawyers and academics. Nevertheless, the Indian community in the new millennium is still not up to par with the other ethnic groups, as *The Economist* (2003, p.1) points out that the Malaysian Indians own less than 2% of the national wealth, and *Far Eastern Economic Review* (2000, p.1) reveals that the “Malaysian Indians are at the bottom of the country’s social and economic scale”.

As mentioned earlier, almost half of the Indian migrants were placed in estates and only a minority were successful at improving their future. Education is without a doubt one of the means of advancing and improving oneself. Hence, it is important to have an understanding of the national education system of Malaysia, its policies and structures. In addition, within the national education system, the New Economic Policy will be discussed in terms of its impact on the education system and on ethnic minorities.

The National Education System

Malaysia’s national education philosophy (Ministry of Education, 2005, p.1) emphasises the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical development of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner. The education system is designed to produce citizens equipped with knowledge and moral values, who will influence the harmony and betterment of the society as a whole (Quek, 2007, pp.184-185). The aim is made apparent in, for example, the Ministry of Education’s (MoE) mission to “develop

a world-class quality education system which will realise the full potential of the individual and fulfil the aspiration of the Malaysian nation” (Ministry of Education, 2005, p.2). Within the mission, there are four objectives: (1) to fabricate not only dedicated but also united citizens of Malaysia, (2) to generate individuals who possess a sense of vision, (3) to create individuals capable of fulfilling the country’s needs and (4) to be able to provide an education opportunity for all Malaysian citizens (Ministry of Education, 2005, p.3).

The national education system in Malaysia has four stages: preschool, primary, secondary and post-secondary education. Most children begin preschool at the age of four to six, and attend for two years. Subsequently, primary education, which can be obtained from national and national-type⁴ schools proceed for the next five to seven years. Secondary education is divided into lower and upper secondary levels. There are four different types of lower secondary schools: academic, technical, religious, and vocational schools. Upper secondary or Form six education, which extends for two years, is provided to individuals who have completed their lower secondary education (National Education System, 2005, p.9).

Historically, at the upper secondary stage non-Malay students did not appear to be presented with equal opportunities as the Malaysian government provided a pre-university programme, known as the matriculation programme tailored specially for Malay students. At this point in time non-Malays were required to either enrol for the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (a two year pre-university programme) or go to a private institution to do a pre-university programme. The aim in the one-year matriculation programme, founded in 1998, was to prepare students for their first year of university studies. However, only recently the government has accepted a small number of non-Malay enrolments into the matriculation programme. The reason for accepting non-Malays could be to decrease animosity among the non-Malays, who are aware that the matriculation programme exists to cater for Malay students (Lee, 2004, p.228). Besides government schools, there are residential, special education and sports schools. Students who have completed these stages of the education system qualify to enter either government or private universities.

It is, however, fundamental to comprehend these initial educational stages as they provide the foundation for tertiary education. The Ministry of Higher Education

⁴ National-type schools in Malaysia refer to Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools.

(MoHE), established in 2004, is responsible for the tertiary education stage. There are about 20 government sponsored universities, and numerous privately owned institutions which are not the responsibility of the Malaysian government. The MoHE's objectives are:

To increase the cohort of individuals aged 17 to 23 years of age with access to higher education to 40%, for all forms of conventional and non-conventional higher education and to make available funding facilities for potential and qualified students to gain access to higher education (Ministry of Education, 2005, p.3).

In order to provide an understanding of the national education system in depth, the education policies will be examined. The present education policies in Malaysia are based on two core documents: The Razak Report (1956) and the Rahman Talib Report (1960) (Yahaya, 2003, p.12). The Razak report had two main recommendations: (1) to make Malay the national language of the country and (2) to introduce a common content syllabus irrespective of the medium of instruction. Both recommendations were expected to familiarise the national school system with a Malaysian outlook, as it was fundamental to achieving national unity (Foo & Richards, 2004, pp.230-231). As for the Rahman Talib Report, some of the recommendations were: "free primary and universal education and Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction" (Foo & Richards, 2004, p.231).

Asmah (1987, p.65), a pre-eminent Malaysian socio-linguist, explains that the decision to make a national language official was made for ethnic and nationalistic reasons. The author further elaborates that:

To the Malays and the Bumiputera people, that the choice fell on Malay was the most natural thing. It is the language of the soil. Of all the Bumiputeras or indigenous languages, Malay is the most advanced in terms of its function as a language of administration, high culture, literary knowledge and religion.

The implementation of a common language policy in 1961 caused resentment among the non-Malays, mainly among the Chinese community. The United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia or 'Dongjiaozong' was the main body demanding that the language of instruction remain Chinese at all levels of education.

They were successful in having their demands met and even today the Chinese community has resisted the government's attempt to replace Chinese with Malay as the medium of instruction in Chinese schools (Lee, 2000, p.13). Means (1970, p.208) commented on the reaction of the Indian community as, "just tagging along without any vigour shown by the other two parties". This could be due to the fact, Means (1970, p.208) argues, that the Indian community is a considerably smaller minority group.

Since the independence of Malaysia in 1957, the education system has been used as a means to unify the multi-ethnic nation and to promote economic growth. As mentioned earlier, the Razak Report and the Rahman Talib Report have influenced the current national education system and its policies. However, the 1969 ethnic riots seem to indicate the fact that the education policies to promote national integration and unity, had failed. The Malaysian government, however, suggested that disparities in wealth and status were the main contributing factors towards the riots (Kamogawa, 2003, p.548).

In order to ease the ethnic tension, the Malaysian government developed a New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971, which will be analysed below. It will be observed from the literature that the Malay community had significant influence in the creation of the NEP, which could be the outcome of the special relationship which was fostered by the British colonial rulers and Malay elites. Further on in this chapter the NEP and its impact on the education system and the Indian community will be discussed. Within the context of the NEP and the education system, the focus will be on the tertiary level as the objective in the thesis is to analyse the availability of opportunities for Indians at this level.

The New Economic Policy

The New Economic Policy (NEP), which was introduced in 1971 is regarded as a measure taken by the Malaysian government to counter ethnic tension within the society. The NEP had two main purposes: "to eradicate poverty regardless of race" and "to restructure the society to eliminate the identification of race with economic function", which resulted in a significant change in the regime (Jomo, 2004, p.iii). Theoretically, the NEP was established to create conditions to promote national unity, in order to reduce inter-ethnic resentment caused by socio-economic disparities.

However, in practice, the NEP was perceived as positive discrimination policies and pro-Malay (Jomo, 2004, p.iii).

The First Outline Perspective Plan (OPP1), which commenced in 1971 and was in effect until 1990, was linked with the NEP. The core objective of the OPP1 was to lower the rate of poverty from 49% to 16% by 1990 (Haque, 2003, p.248). The NEP's role in restructuring the target was by raising the Malay community's share of ownership equity from 1.5% in 1969 to 30% by 1990 (Haque, 2003, p.248). By 1990, according to data produced by the government, the Malay community's share of corporate stock ownership stood at 18% (Haque, 2003, p.248). However, to a great extent, the measurement of the NEP's achievement has been subject to dispute because of the lack of transparency on socio-economic data, which was reasoned to be sensitive (Hassan, 2004, pp.67-69).

From 1991 to 2000, the NEP was ostensibly replaced by the National Development Policy (NDP) under the Second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP2) and from 2001 to 2010 by the National Vision Policy (NVP), which is linked to the Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) (Rajenthiran, 2002, pp.6-7). However, there are general opinions which suggest that the NEP still dominates inter-ethnic economic policies, especially in terms of wealth redistribution and "restructuring" targets. Policies from the NEP, NDP and NVP are fundamental because these policies are capable of influencing corporate wealth ownership as well as other areas, notably education and employment opportunities (Jomo, 2004, p.iii).

The New Economic Policy (NEP) has influenced the education system to a great extent because education was a core element in the affirmative policies introduced as it was perceived as an agent for upward social mobility (Santhiram, 1999, p.46). Some of the policies within the NEP suggested "sharp limitation on educational opportunities for non-Malays and preference in scholarships and college admissions for Malays" (Freedman, 2001, p.418). Furthermore, the education policies introduced under the NEP correlated with socio-economic conditions of the society. One of the aims of the NEP was to balance enrolment rates of the various ethnic groups in educational institutions. However, the outcome demonstrated that the enrolment of Malay students in local government universities increased progressively compared to the other ethnic groups (Kamogawa, 2003, p.548).

Within the education system, affirmative policies for all the Malays are in position to reduce "inter-ethnic differences in educational attainment", which in turn is

according to Loo (2000, p.123) a contradiction because compared to other countries, affirmative policies in Malaysia often refer to 'preferential policies' for Malays (Loo, 2000, p.123). The educational needs of other ethnic groups are taken into consideration by the government but it is often understood as being a political move in order for society to comprehend the government's dominance within the state's political machinery and processes (Loo, 2000, p.124).

The Majid Ismail Report is another policy published in 1971 that concerned the education system, similarly to the NEP (Freedman, 2001, p.430). The Majid Ismail Report recommended that university admissions be based on racial quotas rather than merit (Abraham, 1999, p.2), which resulted in non-Malay students being denied a place in local government universities. They would, therefore, have to opt to either go overseas or enrol in a private institution, both at a high cost (Lee, 1997, p.27). Hence, with inequalities within the education system, inter-ethnic conflict and tension resulted. Moreover, from the scenario depicted above, it is evident that education policies in Malaysia are entwined in power, especially under the authority of Malays, the dominant ethnic group in the society (Joseph, 2006, p.60).

Despite the fact that the NEP also has an influence on businesses and employment opportunities, the primary concern of non-Malays remains the education sector as this is seen as a fundamental aspect in determining their life in the future (Jomo, 2004, p.15). With the continuation of the implementation of the NEP and the Majid Ismail Report, controversies over limited quotas for non-Malays in public university admissions still continue in the present. Malaysia, being a former colony of the British, has its past, especially during the British colonial rule as a contributing factor towards the current situation in the education system. As discussed earlier, the power relationship between the British and Malay elites has seen the outcome of "Malays not only possessing symbolic but also concrete power to influence decision making on policies" (Gill, 2005, pp.244-245).

The authority the Malays acquired after independence is obvious in that it was used as an "instrumental role rather than an autonomous role in expanding the interests and privileges of Malays" (Haque, 2003, p.245). The NEP has been implemented for generations and its impacts on the education system and ethnic minorities are apparent. The Chinese and Indians are unable to make an outright objection because the Malays retaliate by bringing up the issue of citizenship, as the Chinese and Indians entered Malaysia during the British colonial rule as indentured labourers (Gill, 2005, pp.246-

247). Even at present, despite being citizens legally in Malaysia, the Chinese and Indians are termed “second class citizens” because of being non-indigenous to the nation (Martinez, 2004, p.35).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter an overview of Malaysia and an understanding of the society and the issues faced by it are provided. Malaysia was colonised by the British in 1874 and this contributed towards the evolution of a multi-cultural society in Malaysia by introducing the indentured labour system, marking the arrival of the Chinese and Indians into the society. The arrival of the British also marked the establishment of a special relationship with the Malay elites in the society, which gave the Malays certain authority. The authority maintained by the Malay community is still found in present-day policies, which influence education policies.

One prominent issue during British colonisation and after gaining independence was the intense competition among the Malays and the immigrant community, especially the Chinese, in the economic sphere. This situation⁵ caused resentment and further alienation, which subsequently affected the political situation of the country. The Malays solved the problem by amending the Constitution, which protects their rights, privileges and position in the society. This further aggravated the situation and in 1969 racial riots took place. The riots were significant events and became a core factor in the development of the New Economic Policy, which has an extensive impact on ethnic minorities.

A focus in this chapter was the Indian community. The reasons Indians migrated to Malaysia varied, for example, to escape poverty and because of politics. During colonialism, the Indians entered Malaysia as labourers to work in rubber plantations, which is a fundamental contributing factor to their current position in society. As Santhiram (1999, p.33) noted, as a result of the Indian community’s working as estate workers, they “formed a poor landless rural class, fixed in status by the terms of their employment, education and total earnings”. The Indian community is marginalised economically, educationally, politically and socially to the present day (Loh, 2003, p.223).

⁵ This situation according to Lanti (2004, p.73) was due to the more advanced economic position of the Chinese compared to the Malays in the society.

Furthermore, referring to the analysis of the national education system, it can be argued that the government has implemented affirmative or preferential policies for the Malay community. One example which supports this argument is the establishment of the especially tailored matriculation programme for Malay students. The current education situation emerged mainly as a result of implementing recommendations from the Razak and Rahman Talib Report, with the aim of developing an education system with a Malaysian outlook. The education policies in place have failed to promote national integration and unity, as the 1969 racial riots demonstrated.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was developed as a solution to counter the ethnic tension which proceeded to increase in the society. It is noticeable that the NEP had significant Malay authority as the policies reflected preferential policies towards the Malay community. The NEP, whose authors perceived education as a means towards upward social mobility, had a great extent of influence on ethnic minorities and their access to tertiary education. The Majid Ismail report was an important document as it introduced the quota system for university admissions. The NEP and the Majid Ismail Reports with the implementation of the quota system, caused inequalities, conflict and tension among the ethnic minorities.

The New Economic Policy and the Majid Ismail report have been in effect since 1971 and some version of it is still in force today. Joseph (2006, p.60) argued that the situation in the education system is so because education policies are entwined in power. Ethnic minorities are incapable of voicing their opinions because the Malays bring up the issue of citizenship, where they argue that Malays are indigenous to the society. Hence, today, the ethnic minorities in Malaysia feel like “second class citizens” and are still confronted by discrimination in the education system.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA

Introduction and Purpose of the Research

In this methodology chapter the research methods including fieldwork preparation, experiences and accomplishments are described and evaluated. The purpose of this fieldwork was to explore the main research question, which was to identify the factors influencing Indo-Malaysians' access to tertiary level education at local government universities. Also, several other secondary research questions are included for the same purpose. Since education is an important tool for upward social mobility and development of the nation it was critical to embark on the research questions to obtain a glimpse of potential reasons that influence the Indo-Malaysians' access to education. As the characteristics of a researcher may introduce bias into the research, a personal reflection on, and discussion of, the researcher is included.

In addition, the research methods are analysed. The qualitative methods are explained with the focus on what methods were used and the reasons for choosing those methods. A brief analysis of fieldwork experiences will be conducted, followed by a discussion of the research participants, which will include how participants were selected and recruited. Also, the coding of participants upon completion of the fieldwork will be discussed as all the respondents chose to remain anonymous because of the sensitive nature of the research. Finally, an overall analysis of the methods utilised during the fieldwork will be conducted, including the extent to which the issue of pre-fieldwork perceptions may have influenced the research.

Research Questions

The main and focal research question for this thesis is:

- **What are the factors that influence the access to, and freedom of choice within, the education system for Indo-Malaysians?**

The further underlying questions leading to understanding the significance and context of the above are:

- How does education contribute towards development?
- What are the issues surrounding ethnic minorities in multi-cultural societies?
- How does the British colonial era influence the current situation of Indo-Malaysians?
- To what extent are Indians excluded from the Malaysian education system?

Personal Reflections of the Researcher

The research idea came from two sources. Firstly, as a post-graduate student enrolled in Development Studies, I was exposed to various development issues, which enabled theoretical aspects to be related to the practice of development in reality. One such issue was that of ethnic minorities and education, which led me to a greater appreciation of the problems faced by minority groups in various societies. This strengthened my personal belief that everyone should be able to enjoy his or her basic right to education regardless of race, creed or colour. Hence, throughout the post-graduate courses, ideas relating to ethnic minorities and education were acquired and further used to develop ideas for this thesis.

A second source of motivation that led to this research idea was through discussion with friends of various ethnic origins about their experiences within the Malaysian education system. Since 2001, discussion among friends led to the revelation that, in contrast to Malay students, Indian and Chinese students received different treatment especially those who wanted to enrol in local government universities and, in particular, in courses of their choice. Over the past six years, I have been involved in discussions of these issues and, most importantly, on how to overcome the disadvantages faced by some people in the education system. It was acknowledged that the situation could not be easily changed because the issues surrounding it are embedded in history and politics, which makes it complex and sensitive.

Nevertheless, I asked myself, as a Malaysian citizen, how can minority groups over generations be denied an equal opportunity to education? I was interested in what had caused the situation and wondered why there seems to be no realistic solutions to the problems faced in the education system?

Hence, by conducting this research which concerns Indo-Malaysians within the Malaysian education system, my background as a researcher was clearly going to be an integral part of the dynamics of the research. Hammell (2000, p.63) states that the

“position of the researcher will affect the research relationship and the nature of the data collected”. I am a fourth generation Indian who was born and raised in Malaysia. I obtained my primary and lower secondary education at a local government institution. After completing Form Five (at age 17), I enrolled in a private institution to do a South Australian Matriculation Programme⁶. Upon completion, I applied to study a Bachelor’s of International Studies in Palmerston North, New Zealand, which took three years and after graduating, moved on to Massey University to do a Master’s degree in Development Studies.

It can be observed from my educational background that I was not exposed much to the Malaysian education system at tertiary and graduate level. What I have, then, because of my ethnicity as a Malaysian Indian is a real concern for the situation of the Indian community in the local education system at tertiary level. I believe that education is a fundamental means towards a better future, and that it is a basic human right to be able to access education. My perspective as a researcher, my beliefs about research, the methodologies I choose, and the questions I ask, have been built on my prior knowledge, experience, and environment. Hence, there is an element of bias as a person and researcher and what I must deal with within my research is how to control this bias so that it does not interfere with the data in a way that corrupts or invalidates it.

Another element of bias which could influence the research concerns the participants involved in the research. A number of highly regarded officials were introduced to me with the assistance of family members who are well connected and networked. However, I also selected a few participants randomly to reduce the element of bias. During the fieldwork, all the highly regarded officials were open to the topic of discussion, which contributed significantly to the research. Another issue which, I thought, would have impacted upon the research, was the nature of the topic. I thought that non-Indians might be defensive in their discussion of it. However, to my surprise the majority of the respondents were open and I was very pleased with the responses from the participants.

⁶ The South Australian Matriculation (SAM) programme is a pre-university programme which takes one year to complete. It is the equivalent of the government’s matriculation programme which at the time was available for Malays only.

Research Methods

In the study I applied qualitative research methods. Maykut and Morehouse (1994, pp.43-44), emphasise that qualitative research is intended to “discover what can be learned about social phenomena and the outcome is not a generalization of results but a deeper understanding of experience from the perspectives of participants selected for the study”. This resonated with the way I was conceptualising the research, so it reinforced my belief that they were appropriate for the context and objective of the research. The data collection methods used were semi-structured interviews and focus group(s). The reasons for preferring these methods of data collection are discussed below.

According to Wisker (2001, p.168), semi-structured and open-ended interviews “manage to address both the need for comparable responses – that is, there are the same questions being asked for each interviewee – and the need for the interview to be developed by the conversation between interviewer and interviewee”. Besides, with such interaction and momentum between both parties, the outcome of the interviews are more likely to be rich and rewarding (Wisker, 2001, p.168). Qualitative research methods were also used with the expectation of collecting experiences, perceptions and opinions of various people, such as government officials, and former students, in relation to the Malaysian education system.

The objective in the interviews was to gain information and perceptions from various groups on Indo-Malaysian students’ access to tertiary education in Malaysia. For semi-structured and open-ended interviews, several set questions were prepared, while allocating space for divergence and then returning to the set catalogue of questions. Before the interviews were conducted, a brief outline of the topic was provided to the participants. The reason this step was taken was to ensure that participants were comfortable with discussing this topic before commencing the discussion. Most participants kept on track while answering the questions directed at them. However, those who became side-tracked were gently led back to the topic under discussion. The majority of the interview participants discussed the subject with comprehensive and lengthy responses. In contrast, there were a few who provided brief answers, hence more questions were asked to prompt them to provide more information. The majority of the interviews were tape-recorded to ensure that precise expressions from the discussion were acquired and so that a “conversation-like” exchange could

occur without the need to slow down while I took notes, or risked forgetting parts of the conversation. This person expressed a preference not to be tape-recorded.

The other data collection method used in this research was focus groups. A focus group allows for a group of people, who have had the same experience in a certain situation, to be interviewed simultaneously whilst gaining their perceptions and experiences. Moreover, focus groups allow for extensive discussions, as broad topics are developed by the researcher (Kumar, 2005, p.124). Therefore, for these reasons, as part of the research, this method of data collection was utilised. Despite only being able to conduct one focus group, (which consisted of three former students), a great deal of significant information was gathered during this session. The discussion in this focus group was also tape-recorded. It was an interesting approach to collecting data as the opinions and experiences of three people were gathered at one time. Also, within this focus group, many ideas were exchanged when questions were asked by me. All three participants were able to provide useful information for the research despite constant disturbance from the children, as will be discussed shortly.

Fieldwork Preparations

Prior to leaving for the field, fieldwork documents needed to be prepared and contacts established. The materials which needed to be prepared included ethics committee applications, applications for funding, a methodology plan, information sheets (Appendix One), consent forms (Appendix Two), confidentiality forms, and question guidelines (Appendix Three). The second process was the establishment of contacts which was initially accomplished mainly via e-mails. Establishing contacts prior to fieldwork was important because it provided some certainty and assurance of the people who would be potential participants.

Preparation prior to departure to the field is essential because of the limited time frame of just four weeks of fieldwork. Also, proper planning is crucial to ensure that a researcher obtains the utmost benefit from the fieldwork. However, it was kept in mind that even with proper preparation and planning, unforeseen disruptions could occur. Hence, a researcher needs to be prepared and be flexible to adjust to the situation. A participant who was not on the original list, for example, can be interviewed if the researcher feels that a contribution can be made by that person.

Selection of Participants

Initially, for the interviews six respondent categories were listed, which included lecturers in universities, teachers in secondary schools, NGOs involved with education issues, students, government officials in positions dealing with the education sector and parents of students. There were 18 participants, three from each ethnic group to be interviewed in an attempt to eliminate ethnic bias from the research. As for the focus groups, four respondent categories, with three in each group – which included former students from two secondary schools, students currently studying at polytechnics, private or public universities, and high achieving students – were intended to be included.

It was decided, prior to and in the field, that the selected respondents should be involved in education in some way. The reason was that these people will have some knowledge of access to education in Malaysia. People who have no involvement with the education system were not included in the research. Also, while planning such a list, the ethnic origin of the participants was taken into consideration in order to include Malays, Chinese and Indians. This was critical as opinions and experiences of different ethnic groups would enrich the research findings.

The pre-fieldwork recruitment method was mainly through details such as employment position in institutions, which was available through the internet. Once participants were identified as fitting the criteria for involvement in the research, an e-mail invitation which included an introduction to the research and researcher were sent to each person. However, recruitment from New Zealand was not as successful as hoped because the majority of potential participants did not respond to e-mails. Despite the disappointing outcome of this recruitment method, a list of potential participants was prepared including details such as phone numbers and addresses so that upon my arrival in Malaysia, the potential participants could be contacted immediately.

Ethical Considerations

An internal ethics peer review, required by the Development Studies programme was conducted in an informal meeting with supervisors and one independent staff member of the School of People, Environment and Planning. During the meeting, several ethical issues were discussed, these included: recruitment and access to participants, obtaining informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, potential harm

to participants, researcher and the university, handling information, security and privacy of information, use of information, promising access to information, conflict of roles, use of research assistant(s) and cultural and gender concerns. A low risk notification was then submitted to, and approved by, the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC).

Before leaving for Malaysia five different information sheets for each group and two different consent forms, one for interview participants and the other for the focus group, were printed out. In the field, prior to an interview or focus group, a short introduction to the research was conveyed to the participants. Subsequent to that, the information sheet and consent forms were handed over to the participant(s) to read and sign. The information sheet provided participants with details on the study, its purpose and an explanation of the participants' rights. Two of these rights were the right to withdraw from the interview at any time during participation, and the right to refuse to answer any, or all, of the research questions.

Experiences from the Field

Before I left New Zealand to do my fieldwork in Malaysia both supervisors, Dr Maria Borovnik and Dr Robyn Andrews, constantly reminded me to be prepared for the unexpected. This sound advice was useful during the fieldwork as several unforeseen issues arose, which required immediate action on my part. Despite that, the fieldwork was accomplished within the set time frame, 9th to 29th of June 2007. The three main cities where the fieldwork took place are Kuala Lumpur, Perak and Penang. McQueen and Knussen (1999, p.20), emphasise that "a fundamental part of any study is a thorough knowledge of the area in which the research is to be carried out and a familiarity with other research on the same or related topics". The cities, Kuala Lumpur, Perak and Penang were chosen because of my knowledge of the cities and also because the participants were from these cities.

When I arrived in Malaysia on the 9th of June, it took me four days to adjust to the time and climate difference, as Malaysia is four hours behind New Zealand and Malaysia was so hot and humid. However, during these initial four days, I talked to various people who led me to potential interview and focus group participants through their contacts. These people in turn led me to others. This snowballing approach was valuable in establishing contacts with people who were willing to participate in the

research. Hence, already after four days, my list of participants, who had all been part of the Malaysian education system at some stage, was complete and confirmed.

Main Participant Categories and Recruitment

The recruitment method entailed approaching respondents using several different means as discussed, ranging from acquiring details from the Internet, recommendations from individuals and by applying the snowball approach. The final selection was made when participants agreed to be involved in the research. Respondents were made aware that participation was voluntary. I was aware that as a result of participation, some participants – such as government officials – may feel some discomfort because they would be required to express their opinions and experiences regarding the education sector in which they work.

In the end the five respondent categories I worked with included a lecturer in a tertiary university, teachers in secondary schools, NGOs involved with education issues, government officials in positions dealing with the education sector, and former students. The respondent category I had intended to use, which included parents of students, was excluded mainly because of time constraints. At the end, there were 15 participants, three Malays and six Indians and six Chinese interviewed. This mix was selected in order to minimise research bias. As for the focus group, the initial plan was to have four groups, with each group consisting of six people. However, at the end, one focus group of three people from each ethnic group was interviewed. The reason the other proposed focus groups were not used was because it was particularly difficult to bring together students simultaneously.

Selected Participants

The following describes the list of key respondents, the categories and recruitment method of lecturer(s), teachers, NGOs, government officials and students.

Lecturer(s): One Chinese lecturer from a local government university was selected and interviewed based on his area of specialisation, which was education for ethnic minorities. The lecturer contributed to the study by providing information based on his experiences of students' attitude and access to tertiary education. Also, the lecturer

discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the education system as well as what changes could be made to improve the system.

Teachers: Six secondary school teachers, two from each ethnic group, were recruited through the recommendation of a personal contact. The teachers had a vast amount of experience in national and vernacular schools and a good understanding of the education system. Also, the teachers contributed by discussing the school system, in particular the transition period from higher secondary to tertiary level. Besides, the teachers contributed greatly when discussing education policies as well as students' attitudes towards, and awareness of education issues.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): Two Chinese and two Indian officials were interviewed for the study. The officials were recruited by browsing the internet for NGOs in Malaysia, who were either had been involved in education or were presently part of the education sector. The NGO workers provided opinions and experiences based on research conducted independently on the education sector. Furthermore, the four officials discussed in depth the current education policies developed by the Malaysian government.

Government Officials: One Malay and two Indian government officials, who had extensive experience in the education sector, were recruited by utilising the snowballing approach. The officials contributed greatly to the study by providing information on the processes and stages of developing policies for the education sector. Also, the officials were able to provide statistics and reports developed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education.

Students: Initially there were three former students, one from each ethnic group, who were interviewed. Later on, one former Chinese student from Malaysia was interviewed in New Zealand. The four students, three from national schools and one from a Chinese vernacular school, were recruited through a recommendation of a personal contact. The former students provided very useful input on their experiences in the education environment as a wide range of topics were discussed in depth. The topics ranged from the current education policies in place, socio-economic setbacks, attitudes and awareness of students concerning education and issues surrounding the Chinese and Indian communities.

The Commencement of the Fieldwork

The fieldwork commenced with a visit to the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), where a hurdle was confronted. The librarian mentioned that in order to use the MoHE's library, an official application was required to be submitted to obtain permission. Nevertheless, the librarian reconsidered and allowed me to make the most of the library after I had explained that I was unaware of the requirement and had presented an information sheet to her. From this experience, an awareness of the need to comply with official requirements and obtain official authorisation ensured that other respondents were double checked beforehand in order to avoid a similar situation.

Interviews with participants proved to be a challenge mainly because of my lack of experience, especially at the questioning stage. I came to realise that it was important that leading questions were avoided as these could create a preconceived notion among the participants. It took a couple of interviews to improve the style of presenting the questions. Another challenge was the question guidelines, which needed to be revised constantly as new perspectives on the research were considered from the wealth of information gathered from each of the participants.

On the other hand, the focus group tended to progress haphazardly, mainly because of the venue at which the discussion took place, a kindergarten. Three former students, who were working either full or part time at the kindergarten, did provide useful information, despite the fact that the focus group did not work out as initially anticipated. The constant disturbance from the noise and children needing the attention of the focus group participants disrupted the flow of the discussion. However, the focus group allowed for broad discussion as the topic was open, yet stayed close to the question guideline (Kumar, 2005, p.124).

The other hurdle during the fieldwork concerns the issue of my preconceived ideas. The nature of the research topic and objective increases the potential for the research to be biased. Hence, even before leaving to do the fieldwork, this issue was discussed and it was decided that interview participants should be from various different ethnic groups. Therefore, during the planning stage it was critical to secure participants who are not only from a certain ethnic background but whose knowledge and experience were also relevant for the research. Each participant contributed valuable information ranging from background to in-depth issues.

Also, different opinions and experiences were gained from the fifteen interviews conducted, which consisted of top level officials to educated members of the grassroots of society. This was particularly interesting because each one of them had his or her own perspective on the issue. In addition to that, many issues which related to the subject were discussed and these provided a range of information to analyse. Overall, the outcome of the interviews was satisfying as participants showed their full support and enthusiasm. In addition, invaluable knowledge and experience were obtained by carrying out the fieldwork. More importantly, the material gathered from both the focus group and interviews was not only relevant but seemed reliable in that many of the participants made the same comments on various issues. I was, therefore, more comfortable about drawing some conclusions.

Nearly all the interviews were audiotaped, except one, which required notes to be taken down. After concluding the interviews, nearly all the participants expressed their interest in the research conducted. All participants said they were more than pleased to have contributed to the research. After each interview, on the same day, notes would be taken in addition to the interview material. A journal was kept for this purpose and it was valuable because details such as the expressions, comfort (or otherwise), of the interviewee and so forth were recorded. Data obtained from the fieldwork was transcribed and analysed once I returned to New Zealand. Participants did not opt to receive a copy of their transcribed interview immediately. However, several participants requested that a copy of the transcription be sent to them if they have been quoted to ensure the accuracy of their reported input. In addition to that, several requests were made by participants to have a look at the end results of the research, which I will arrange.

Upon returning from the fieldwork, the information obtained from participants were handled confidentially and securely. Since all participants requested anonymity their names and workplaces had to be coded. The selected choice of coding was based on alphabets, such as Ms. A, Ms. B, Mr. D and so forth. The reason for such coding was to keep it simple and to maintain coherence. As for the workplaces, the actual names were eliminated and instead the sector in which the institution was involved was used, such as a Chinese school and a research and social economic think-tank. Box A presents a list of participants which have been coded.

Box A: Participant Coding

Code	Position	Ethnic Origin
Ms. A	Former Student Part-time Kindergarten Teacher	Indian
Ms. B	Former Student Kindergarten Teacher	Chinese
Ms. C	Former Student Part-time Kindergarten Teacher	Malay
Mr. D	Teacher	Malay
Ms. E	Teacher	Malay
Ms. F	Teacher	Chinese
Ms. G	Teacher	Chinese
Ms. H	Teacher	Indian
Ms. I	Teacher	Indian
Mr. J	Lecturer at a local university	Chinese
Mr. K	Member of an Indian social welfare movement	Indian
Mr. L	Executive Director of a think- tank	Chinese
Mr. M	Member of a Tamil-based organisation	Indian
Mr. N	Marketing & Admissions Executive	Chinese
Mr. O	Businessman & former Government Official	Indian
Mr. P	Lecturer & former Government Official	Malay
Mr. Q	Government Official	Indian
Ms. R	Former Student	Chinese

Discussion of Methods

The semi-structured interviews and focus group had varying levels of success. The experience from the fieldwork revealed that both interviews and the focus group produced extensive and detailed information with respondents fully engaging in the discussion. Respondents were selected based on their association with the education sector and their ethnic origin. The interviews for the 18 respondents were based on a standardised question guideline. However, several questions were tailored to the interviewees' expertise and experience, which captured interesting, rich and rewarding material for the research.

Both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group respondents were informed of their rights as participants to withdraw from the interview at any time during participation, and the right to refuse to answer any, or all, of the research questions. However, no one declined involvement or declined to answer a particular question. The information gained from the respondents presented an overview of the situation of ethnic minorities within the Malaysian education system. In particular, the contribution from respondents provided some ideas about the Indian community with regard to their access to, and freedom of choice within, tertiary level education in local government universities.

The results were structured based on the ideas from respondents. There were four main factors identified that limited the access and freedom of choice of ethnic minorities to education, which corresponded to those noted in Chapter Two. The results gathered from the fieldwork contributed to the research by providing an indication of the potential reasons that disadvantage the ethnic minorities in the education sector. The identification of some of the reasons increases the likelihood that the problems could be addressed in the near future to enable the Indian community to advance and develop appropriately, along with the other ethnic groups.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter on research methods the pre- and post-fieldwork phases essential to exploring the purpose of the research, which was to identify the factors that influence Indo-Malaysians access to tertiary level education at local government universities was described. Qualitative research methods, in particular semi-structured and open-ended

interviews and a focus group, were employed for data collection purposes. The chosen data collection methods proved to be successful because data collected from the fieldwork identified potential reasons that influence Indo-Malaysians' access to tertiary level education in local government universities. The perceptions identified will be discussed in the next chapter.

Acknowledgement of any potential bias that could influence the research was another reason why the chosen data collection method was used. The two potential areas of bias that were identified are: my Indian ethnic origin and the selection of participants involved in the research. Firstly, the concern of the research, which is on Indo-Malaysians, could be influenced by my pre-fieldwork understandings. Secondly, several top officials were introduced to me by people close to me, which could have biased the process of selecting respondents. It was, therefore, important to have a variety of respondents of various ethnic origins to reduce ethnic bias in the research.

Preparation prior to the fieldwork was important because of the limited time allocated to conduct the research. Before going into the field, the research questions were determined based on the context of the fieldwork situation and framework of the research. Also, required fieldwork documents and a potential list of participants were prepared and the ethics procedure was completed.

From the fieldwork, there were three participants involved in the focus group and 15 interviewees from five different categories: a former student, teachers, a lecturer, NGOs and government officials. Respondents involved in the fieldwork were recruited by obtaining details from the Internet, recommendations from individuals, and by applying the snowballing approach. The data obtained from the fieldwork were analysed once I had returned to New Zealand. The data were coded, using pseudonyms to protect the identity of respondents as they had requested. I turn now to the data collected.

CHAPTER FIVE

VIEWS ON INDO-MALAYSIANS ACCESS TO, AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE WITHIN, THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Introduction

The central focus of this research is identification of the factors which influence the Indian community's access to tertiary education in Malaysian universities. Through the data collected four factors were identified. The New Economic Policy (NEP) will be referred to again as it is one important factor. In relation to that, the usage of the ethnic quota and/or meritocracy framework and its outcome in the education system will be discussed with reference to the views of the respondents in this research. Issues pertaining to finance form the second factor found to limit the access to, and freedom of choice of the Indians in, the education system. Financial factors can set back students and have consequences for their access to higher education. Furthermore, the political influence on obtaining financial assistance and the relation of this to the NEP also need to be examined.

The third factor, awareness⁷ and the attitude of students, is also identified as limiting factor. Two aspects of awareness are explored, followed by recommendations to cultivate more positive awareness among students. Comparison between past and present students will illustrate the current observable attitude of students and how this affects opportunities to gain higher education. An issue which relates to Indo-Malaysians as an ethnic minority is the fourth factor identified. The Indian community's cultural background will be put in perspective by comparing them with the more successful Chinese community, another ethnic minority.

These factors were identified through analysis of the contributions of a focus group (consisting of three former students) and the interviews. Particular excerpts will be analysed including substantial quotations from Mr. M, an Indian member of a Tamil-

⁷ The phrase awareness was used by respondents in terms of the importance of education. The phrase will be used throughout the thesis to be consistent with respondents' language.

based organisation, who feels passionately about Indians' access to education. Since all participants requested anonymity their names and workplaces were coded and the participant coding list can be referred to in page 61.

The New Economic Policy

When participants were asked what factors influenced the Indian community's access to tertiary education, the most common response concerned the socio-economic policy currently in place, in particular the New Economic Policy (NEP). The intention behind this question was to establish opinions of respondents in order to comprehend the situation of Indians, as an ethnic minority in relation to their access to tertiary education. The NEP formulated by the Malaysian government since the 1970s for national development purposes, formed the benchmark for future policies. The NEP has been discussed in depth in Chapter Three. Briefly, the NEP, implemented from 1971-1990 has since ostensibly been replaced by the National Development Policy (NDP), 1991-2000 and subsequently by the National Vision Policy (NVP), 2001-2010 (Jomo, 2004, p.5). The NEP, NDP and NVP are fundamental in influencing policies, which affect "corporate wealth ownership as well as other areas, notably education and employment opportunities" (Jomo, 2004, p.5).

The effect of the NEP was a strong theme mentioned by participants. The main problem, which was mentioned by seven out of thirteen participants, was the implementation of the NEP, which brought about the ethnic quota system, where seats are allocated for Malays at universities (Brown, 2007, p.321). Three respondents cited the quota allocation for Malays and non-Malays in public universities, which were between 60%-70% and 30%-40% respectively, and meant that both groups, Indians and Chinese had to compete within an allocation of less than 40% – although the Malays form 50.5% of the population, the Chinese 23.7% and the Indians 7% (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.7). The problem is that other ethnic minority groups also use the same 40% allocated quota that is given for the Chinese and Indians – these other groups access to education is not discussed in the chapter. As a result, from the perception of respondents, the unequal distribution of seats affects the opportunities of the Indian community to gain higher education.

Twelve out of eighteen participants provided their opinions on NEP, followed by their personal experiences in order to support their argument. Most of the

respondents were initially reluctant to talk about this because of the sensitive nature of the issue, but ultimately responded to the questions directed to them. Some initial reactions were “I cannot be so open here” or “there is a lot of unhappiness” and many, especially teachers, tended to speak in a soft voice. Others were cynical and the rest quite vocal in their opinions on the problems students face in gaining entrance to local universities. On the other hand, there were also participants of the opinion that in terms of the NEP, students faced no problems related to the quota system as the meritocracy system was in place. One other person was either unsure or reluctant to answer.

Mr. Q, an Indian government official, mentioned that the NEP had been extended to achieve the targeted 30% equity quota of the economy for the Malays, but he believed that the target had already been achieved. An example he used to illustrate this was in the department in which he works. There were hardly any Chinese or Indian – just four of them out of a few hundred. Mr. Q explained that this lack of ethnic mix was found in most of the public service departments in Malaysia. When asked how the NEP affects the education sector, he replied, “priorities are given to Malays, and the Chinese and Indians lose out”, mainly because of the quota system in place. From the foregoing, it can be observed that the NEP and quota system are perceived to have an adverse impact on Indians, which will be analysed in detail based on respondents’ views on the quota system. Several participants suggested that the meritocracy system is in place, this will also be discussed in the following section.

Quota and Meritocracy System

The quota system is based on a limited number of seats allocated in universities for each ethnic group in Malaysia. However, whether or not the quota system is an official policy remains unclear because there are no publically accessible written documents on it. In contrast to this, the meritocracy system requires grade achievements to be able to enrol in educational institutions. Some of the respondents explained their belief that the quota system was not exercised at lower and upper secondary levels with the exception of Form 5 and Form 6. For students who have completed Form 5 and wish to enrol in Form 6, the meritocracy system is used to confirm their eligibility, in terms of grade achievements.

However, when it comes to decision making about the entrance to local universities, indications are that the quota system is applied. Most participants

expressed dismay because two different systems, the quota and meritocracy system are applied at the same time, which they feel demonstrates the controlling nature of the government so Malays can have more places, not only in universities, but elsewhere. Most respondents explained that it was “common knowledge” that the Chinese and Indian communities faced limitations in the education system. There was one main issue, which was brought up in regard to ethnic minorities’ access to education in Malaysia. Mr. D, a teacher of Malay origin, simply concluded that non-Malays “just had to work harder” because of the education policies in place, which made it difficult for Indian and Chinese students to enter local universities.

This opinion was further supported by Mr. Q, an Indian government official, who pointed out that ethnic minorities had to struggle to be accepted into a local university. It was his opinion that the reason Chinese and Indian students found it difficult to obtain a seat in local universities was because of the quota system. Mr. Q further mentioned that smart students were given a place, but the average and below average needed to look at different avenues, such as private or overseas universities. The problem that we can see here is that parents, who are able to financially, will be able to send their children to private or overseas universities – but many parents who are unable to do this will not be able to give their children these options. Thus, students in this situation will find their future compromised first through being excluded by a quota system, then by lack of family finances. So their chances of obtaining further education are severely limited.

Another difficulty is the allocation of students into certain courses. According to Mr. O, an Indian businessman and former government official, at times students were given the courses they applied for, but there were also times when courses were randomly allocated to those who had not applied for them. For example, Ms. R, a former Chinese student, mentioned that when she applied for a chemical engineering course, the university declined her first choice and she was given an agriculture course. She further explained that the university did not provide reasons for declining her application. When Mr. K, a prominent member of an Indian social welfare movement, was asked a similar question on accessibility, he refused to answer the question and quickly diverted to a different topic, indicating perhaps he had certain problems with the education policies affecting the admission of Indians to higher education.

It was interesting to note that several participants had had similar experiences with the education system. One of the experiences related was that of Ms. G, a teacher

of Chinese ethnicity, who has two children doing Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM), a pre-university examination. Ms. G explained that she became conscious of what was really taking place by talking to her children and their friends. She found that Malays after Form 5 had a good chance of being sponsored by the government to go overseas. In this context, however, good results did not mean a string of 'As'. Whereas the situation for ethnic minorities' was that even if one did get a string of 'As', it would still be difficult to gain high quality employment or a chance to go overseas because of the competition caused by the existence of the quota system. Hence, Ms. G was of the viewpoint that there was a lot of disparity. Respondents were of the opinion that the quota system had been employed and expressed their dissatisfaction, as they found that the system was unfair and chances of higher education were very slim for ethnic minorities.

Another experience was relayed by a teacher talking about some of her former students. She revealed that both her Chinese and Indian students who had three 'As' and one 'B' in STPM (a pre-university examination) were given a science cognitive course, which was not of their choice, and that her Malay student who had four 'Cs' gained entrance into pharmacy. Mr. D, a teacher of Malay origin, said that:

I had four 'As' in my Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)⁸ and my Chinese friend got eight 'As'. His parents had to work extremely hard to save money to send him to a private university and I got into a government university.

Mr. D expressed shame that he lived through a quota system where Malays were given preferential treatment. Most participants reasoned that the situation was an outcome of politics and historical events, in particular, during the pre- and post-independence periods of Malaysia. Only one respondent, Mr. D, said he thought there was an actual document that the founding fathers drafted after the gaining of independence. The document, as discussed in Chapter Three, was called the "Social Contract" and stated that non-Malays had to accept the fact that the Malays were special, with privileged access and, in return, the Malays will let non-Malays live in this country (Cheah, 2002, pp.36-37).

It can be observed from the foregoing that the majority of the participants were of the opinion that the New Economic Policy (NEP), which is widely believed to have

⁸ Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) is a national examination taken by all Form 5 students.

introduced the ethnic quota system, is still in place within the education system. Personal experiences, which were related by respondents in order to support their opinions, indicated that the NEP and quota system affect the access and freedom of choice of ethnic minorities in the education sector. However, not all respondents felt that this was the case.

Twelve out of eighteen respondents stated that the quota system is in place within the education sector. Five participants affirmed that the meritocracy system was implemented, which meant that equal opportunities were available for all ethnicities in the Malaysian education system. Interestingly, two respondents, both teachers, were reluctant to elaborate on their opinions. A third respondent, Mr. P, a Malay lecturer and former government official, further elaborated that the standard of students gaining admission into universities was very high and those who have been granted admission were suitably qualified, whether they went through Form 5, diploma, matriculation or Form 6, the students were good.

Another participant, Mr. L, a Chinese Director of a think-tank, neither agreed nor disagreed when asked to comment on whether the meritocracy system was in place. The reason given by Mr. L was that during the term of former Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir, the education policies were moving towards meritocracy, which would mean that students were given a place in the university based on demonstrated ability or merit. However, there were arguments supporting the idea that the government was using two systems for entering universities, one was the meritocracy system and second was the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA)⁹ also known as (Council of Trust for the Bumiputera). Mr. L suggested that in order to be equal to all, the government should utilise a one-system entry into tertiary education.

Mr. O, an Indian businessman and former government official, on the other hand, expressed uncertainty and specified two contrasting opinions. Initially, he pointed out that university entrance is based on meritocracy, with open competition. Then, he pointed also out that “in the past people claimed there are possibilities that the special quota system is being used”. Then he reverted and expressed the opinion that when minority groups raise the issue of not getting enough places in the university, the government’s answer would be that such groups were ‘not up to the mark’ or had not

⁹ MARA or the Council of Trust for the Indigenous People’s objective is to encourage, guide, train and assist the Bumiputera to participate actively in commercial and industrial activities towards creating a Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community. No minority groups had access to this institution.

achieved the level required. Hence, he concluded, if those were the reasons given by the government, the meritocracy system seemed to be in place.

Mr. Q, an Indian government official, explained in this context that the reason for such uncertainty as to whether these policies were being practised or not, could be due to the fact that there were no written documents on these policies, especially the quota system. However, these issues were, in Mr. Q's opinion, discussed at the Cabinet level and Cabinet documents were not released to the public, which meant that only the Cabinet ministers would know. In his own department, statistics based on each ethnic group's achievement in examinations were not shown publicly as this had the potential to become a political issue. Furthermore, according to Mr. Q, because of the sensitive nature of politics, which benefited the Malays, important statistics like these were put out of sight.

It is observable from the responses that the perceptions are that within the Malaysian education system policies have an immense influence on the education system; that they limit the access and freedom of choice of the Indians. The examples given by respondents suggested that Malaysians have no access to written education policies. It was believed that this is because of their political implications. Also, it seems that whether or not the quota system is in place is unclear because there are no accessible written documents on it. The discussion of the quota and meritocracy system by respondents above led to the discussion of the influence politics has on the education system, in particular on education policies.

Political Influence on the Education System

All respondents were of the opinion that politics have an important influence on, and role in, determining education policies. The example given by most of the respondents was of the school syllabi, which seems to constantly change even before being fully implemented, and it was said by all the respondents that these changes occurred for political reasons. The Ministry did not have any fixed plans, often changing the language of the curricula between English and Malay, and at present the curricula is in English. Ms. H, a teacher of Indian ethnicity, mentioned that the government should stick to a plan because the constant change had a negative effect on students, where some might find it difficult to cope with changes.

Mr. D, another teacher of Malay origin, pointed out that “politics is an important element in determining education policies and it is usually done at the expense of others”. Mr. D believed that in Malaysia everything was politics, from education to business and job opportunities. In addition, Ms. G, a teacher of Chinese origin, stated that because the influence of politics on the education policies had been exercised at the expense of students, Malaysia’s education system was 20 years behind compared to other countries. Furthermore, all respondents believed that the government should develop policies with equal weight for all and attempt to move away from having too much political influence on policies. Respondents who stressed that the quota system is in place hoped that the policies will change, but many were pessimistic about the possibility of any changes occurring in the near future.

In a similar view to the opinions above, Ms. R, a former Chinese student, mentioned that based on her experience in the education system, the policies in place reflected bias. She further argued this point by giving an example of her passport that is issued under Malaysian and not Chinese ethnicity. She questions that the Malaysian government is helping Bumiputeras and not the other ethnic groups in Malaysia, even though the government proclaimed all its citizens as Malaysians. Ms. R believes that equal opportunity should be present for government sponsored education in Malaysia.

In addition, Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation, expressed the view that the government should set policies in the best interests of students and not in the best interests of politics. He felt that he was a ‘free man’ and therefore free to avail himself of the privileges and facilities in his own country. He further expressed his opinions, which are given at length below, affirming equal opportunity and rights for Indians as Malay citizens.

The duties of all the citizens are the same, whether you are a Malay, Chinese or Indian. For example, if Indonesia and Malaysia goes to war tomorrow, all able-bodied young men must join the armed forces and be willing to die for this country. When it comes to my life or to die to pay income tax, there is no quota because we are citizens. However, when it comes to my rights, to schools or jobs, there is a quota? I am demanding an answer for that, why there is no quota to die, but when it comes to enjoying my rights, there is? Accepting our rights for equal opportunities and every

moment being vigilant and expressing our rights is a fundamental must. I am not an ethnic minority but an equal citizen and I refuse for a moment, in fact I claim, I have the right to become Prime Minister. If I make it or not it is another matter – but I must have the right because I have the duty to die.

Sadly, people from the Indian community are unaware of their rights but, having said that, many of the younger generation are beginning to realise things are not all right, and of course there are stumbling blocks with our own leaders as they say we have everything. Even Samy Vellu¹⁰ recently wrote in a Tamil-based magazine, “porethrinde yamanthindum” meaning “was patient and got cheated” for the last 50 years. As an example, there are many students with 10 or 13 ‘As’ and they still do not get a scholarship to further their studies. In another issue, over 100,000 Indians applied for various jobs in the police force, only 130 applications were selected, so I wrote in a magazine that the remaining 129,000 people will become Bentong Kalis¹¹, causing a direct increase to social problems. When people are hungry, they can do anything and I would say “Do not take these people for granted!”

(Personal opinions of Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation, Fieldwork Interview, June 2007).

Mr. M’s opinion, from the interview excerpt, is that the quota system should not be implemented as it limits the opportunities of Indians. Mr. M also pointed out that the unawareness of civil rights worsens the situation as the Indian community are not be able to enjoy and demand their rights and privileges. The phrase ‘porethrinde yamanthindum’, which translates to “was patient and got cheated”, depicts the neglectful attitude of the Indian community, where they do not question societal affairs, which involve them and consequently have an adverse impact on the community. Drawing on Mr. M’s opinions, it could be assumed that by accepting each others’ rights,

¹⁰ Samy Vellu is the longest serving President of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and also the Works Minister of Malaysia.

¹¹ Benton Kali was implicated in 17 murders and terrorised the capital through violence, extortion and heroin smuggling.

access to all benefits and freedom of choice would be available for all, in the education sector.

Mr. L, a Chinese Director of a think tank, voiced his opinion on education policies:

What people should be talking about is moving forward and improving the system. At the end of the day, they should be talking about the efficiency of the education system, something to analyse. For example, if students go through the process, will they come out as useful human beings or useful Malaysians who can contribute in many ways? They do not have to be doctors or lawyers. The context should be looked at technically and not racially or politically. It should come down to whether it is a good system or not, and does it prepare students for world challenges.

Hence, overall, a strong theme from the interviews was that the right of entry to education for the Indians in Malaysia is influenced by the socio-economic policy in place, primarily the New Economic Policy. Referring to the New Economic Policy framework, respondents stated that the quota system at the tertiary level prevented ethnic minorities from having an equal opportunity to further their studies, whereby ethnic minorities have limited access and freedom of choice. However, several participants were of the opinion that the meritocracy system was actually in place, so there were equal education opportunities for all. Overall, most respondents agreed that politics and the way policies were implemented are important factors in influencing the policies made in the education sector and these had direct consequences for students. In the following section financial issues, which was another major factor mentioned by participants in influencing education opportunities of Indo-Malaysians, will be analysed.

Financial Issues

Socio-economic or financial problems were categorised by participants as one of the most significant factors that could potentially prevent or delay students' obtaining a tertiary education. One interesting aspect was raised by two respondents, who stated that the number of children in the family could also be an issue when it comes to

financing children's education. For primary and secondary schools, an annual fee¹² which includes extracurricular activities, books, uniforms, and transport has to be paid. Therefore, having five children in schools could prove to be financially difficult for already struggling parents. Examination fees were no longer included at the time of interview as from 2007 the government abolished these fees. Lower financial requirements of schools could bring relief to some parents. For tertiary education, a fee is needed to be paid annually by students, which includes the course, examinations, books and other fees.

Limited places that students have in the university were also a factor mentioned by respondents. Some students may make the grade average points requirement, but they will not be provided with an opportunity to enrol in a local university due to the limited places available to them. This requirement relates to the education policies in Malaysia, which were discussed in the previous section. Since the education policies in Malaysia, according to respondents, include the quota system, students who make the grade requirement are given a place in the local university and students who do not make the grade are not given the opportunity to enrol since there are limited numbers of seats available for each ethnic group.

Most of the respondents stated that in terms of monetary assistance for students, there was a lack of funding the form of loans and scholarships. Despite the various avenues providing scholarships and loans, obtaining them proved to be difficult for students who desired to further their studies. The experience of Ms. R, a former student, illustrated the difficulty in obtaining a loan to further her studies at a private institution after being declined a place at a local university. As mentioned earlier, the availability of monetary assistance was a component by which to measure the opportunities available for Indo-Malaysians for education.

Monetary assistance was a necessity for those who were financially incapable of funding themselves for their education. According to Ms. F, a Chinese secondary school teacher, assistance was provided for students based on their family background and financial capabilities. One approach by schools is that of handing out "pocket money" on a monthly basis. The other approach was providing funds and scholarships to students who performed well academically. Schools rely heavily on Parent Teacher

¹² The annual fees range from around RM200 to RM300, which is equivalent to NZ78 and NZ118, respectively.

Associations (PTA) to stay afloat and also on non-profit societies such as the Buddhist and Rotary Associations.

Ms. H, who is a teacher of Indian ethnicity, was involved in two programmes, one of which provides free tuition and another which “adopts” children, “where I buy them what they need by taking out my own money”. According to Ms. H, her four years of experience was constructive and valuable for those children, in terms of cultivating self-esteem, providing advice on various matters and teaching them on a one-to-one basis. This in turn created a better opportunity to do well in secondary school and gave a better chance in entering a local university.

Some respondents, however, expressed their view that there were limited avenues available for students who needed assistance from the government. One approach they acknowledged was the support the government provided to students by conducting the Skim Pinjaman Buku Teks (SPBT) or Text Book Assistance Program. This scheme allows students to borrow the text books for the whole year instead of buying them at a costly price. Other than that example, teachers were unsure whether the government provided other funds for schools.

Ms. H, pointed out that the head of a school can collect funds based on their own initiatives. Being in various different types of schools, Ms. H compared the initiative and attitude as being different between her former Tamil and present Chinese school head. Since vernacular schools are not fully funded by the government, it was a necessity to reach out to different avenues to collect funds in order to maintain a school and keep it afloat unless funding is available through personal donations by individuals or communities. From Ms. H’s experience, the head of her former Tamil school never took the initiative to collect funds from outside, despite the lack of available funds. In comparison, her present Chinese school head was constantly taking initiatives to reach out and collect funds for the school. Ms. H further pointed out that the difference in initiatives could be due to the attitudes of the heads of schools and their approaches.

The different funding regulation for vernacular and national schools was also considered significant. According to Mr. D, a Malay teacher, vernacular schools have only a certain amount of money available that they receive at the initial part of each year. The reason behind this was, in Mr. D’s opinion, possibly because the government does not promote vernacular schools, because there were no policies established to do so and this usually brought about difficulties between vernacular and national school supporters. With such funding differences in place, the students from these schools, in

Mr. D's opinion, face financial shortcomings in various aspects, such as facilities and proper infrastructure.

The interview excerpt below further illustrates the issues faced by vernacular schools, in particular Tamil schools in Malaysia. As can be seen, Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation, briefly mentions the objectives of the organisation and its focus on Tamil schools. In particular, the condition of the Tamil schools' infrastructure and its reasons for being in that state are expressed. Also, the aspect of government policies, especially the Razak Report discussed in Chapter Three, which laid the foundation for education policies for modern Malaysia, is mentioned in the interview where it is linked as a factor to the present condition of Tamil vernacular schools.

The Tamil-based organisation looks into the position and plight of Tamil schools predominantly instead of the general community because Tamil schools are in a pathetic state. In 1957, we had 888 schools but today we have 523 schools as estates have been closed down, land is acquired for development, and people driven to the outskirts of the town. The schools were not replaced once demolished or abandoned as it is government policy not to build and maintain Tamil schools and hence the decrease in the number of schools and the chances are many more will disappear. We should demand as a right to have it done the way it ought to be done. The other problem is that some Tamil schools are government aided and most of them are partially aided because the Tamil schools are on private land. We are now demanding that for all schools, national and vernacular, it is the duty of the government to provide education, building and maintaining schools, as stated in the Constitution, instead of doing it the other way. All the excuses given reflect the unwillingness of the government to do it because they want vernacular schools to be closed down. It can be summarised in two words 'ultimate objective', which was used in the Razak report.

(Personal opinions of Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation, Fieldwork Interview, June 2007).

This interview excerpt explains that Tamil schools in Malaysia are facing significant problems, mainly due to the government's education policy. Mr. M explains that in a society with multi-ethnic groups, the 'ultimate objective' in the Razak report, which requires Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction for all schools, should not be in education policies as it does not display multi-culturalism and tolerance. Also, Mr. M points out, as children who attend these schools are equal citizens of Malaysia, the government should be entirely responsible in providing and promoting vernacular schools, similar to national schools to achieve its goal of equality. Since the majority of Indian children attend Tamil schools, the condition and issues faced by the Tamil schools could prevent these children from obtaining a proper education foundation. Therefore, it is essential that assistance is provided to these schools in order for students to pursue a higher education.

Assistance for students wanting to pursue a tertiary education after Form 5 or 6 has a different scenario altogether. All respondents identified different avenues such as Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam (JPA) or Public Service Department scholarships, Maju Institute of Educational Development (MIED) funds and Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional Malaysia (PTPTN) loans. Other possibilities are from banks, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and political parties such as the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia. Despite the list of avenues, many respondents, who have applied to these avenues for assistance, experienced difficulty in obtaining financial assistance as they had been turned down for undisclosed reasons.

Many respondents expressed the opinion that the majority of loans and scholarships are given to Malay students and that the chances of non-Malays obtaining scholarships or loans are slim to none. Furthermore, one of the reasons given by respondents for the inability of ethnic minorities, especially the Indian community, to pursue their education was the difficulty of obtaining financial aid. Mr. Q, an Indian government official, voiced his opinion of Indian students applying for assistance from the Maju Institute of Educational Development (MIED), which is the educational arm of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), by explaining his view of how MIED operates. According to him, the chances of getting aid from MIED were rather difficult as priority was given to MIC members.

According to Mr. Q, MIED provides funds for students wanting to go to a local university. This was usually not a large amount of money, approximately RM3000 to

RM 4000, equivalent to NZ1182 to NZ1576, respectively, to cover university fees. The problem, however, arises when it comes to private universities or going overseas. Usually a large scholarship is difficult to obtain unless close connections have been established with the MIC president, who controls the funds. Added to these circumstances, another criterion of having a successful application is based on how close to politicians and active a person is in politics, which eventually determines the decision made.

Mr. Q, an Indian government official, found it interesting that people who were active in politics and had established good relationships were usually also economically well off. He felt that people who were financially struggling had no time to prioritise politics. Mr. Q went on to say that it was a big problem faced by the Malaysian Indian community since parents were busy working to earn money and it was unfair to hold on to such a prerequisite that decided the success of the application. This group of people were stuck between politics and day-to-day financial struggle. Parents had a difficult choice to make, since no one else would assist their children and these parents would need to depend on other people to help. Thus, these parents had to be members of a cooperative or political party to be more successful with their application. From the foregoing, it seems likely that political affairs are carried out at the expense of people, whereby equal opportunity and rights are denied. This led to the discussion of the South Indian Labour Fund (SILF).

The SILF was initiated prior to Independence by the British who started the fund for the estate workers, in case they needed the money to go back to India. However, because of disputes between the National Union Workers Plantation (NUWP) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), the Malaysian government seized the money. Mr. Q said that Datuk Seri Samy Vellu, the President of MIC, assured people that the government would use the money to build an institute in Bukit Mertajam, solely for Indians. Those from estates would especially be given a chance to get basic training, but in reality, almost 95% of enrolled students are Malays. Prior to that decision, the NGOs suggested that the Indian community leaders use the funds to develop 500 Tamil schools, but they did not. This occurrence may give some insights into the Indian community in its various attributes, which will be analysed later.

When discussing the availability of assistance for Indian students, the issue of the SILF was brought up by Mr. Q and several other respondents. Despite the fact that the SILF does not relate directly to the question of what are the factors that influence the

access to education of Indians, it does relate to several issues such as funds rightfully belonging to Indians taken over by other parties, and the attitude of Indians willingly surrendering their rights. According to Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation, the SILF, if it existed today, could be a promising avenue for Indian students to obtain assistance, without difficulty or involvement of politics. In the following section the awareness and attitude of students is analysed; these were mentioned by respondents as factors which influenced the admission to education of Indo-Malaysians.

The Awareness and Attitude of Students

Having discussed external factors, such as the education policies and monetary aspects, respondents were then asked what internal factors influenced the access of Indians to tertiary education in government universities. Respondents, mainly teachers, of Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic origin pointed out that the lack of awareness was an important factor that could potentially set students back from attaining a tertiary education. In this section, awareness in terms of the importance of education and the attitude of students and teachers will be discussed. Also, the contrast between the attitudes of Chinese and Indian students will be discussed in the issues of ethnic minorities section. Based on the responses given by six teachers, it could be observed that although students were aware of the importance of education, most teachers were of the opinion that the attitude of students did not reflect that. In addition, students also reflected upon the attitude of teachers and this will be discussed below.

Ms. G, a teacher of Chinese origin, commented that Malaysians in general were unaware of the different avenues they could use to obtain an education. An approach taken, mainly by teachers but also by tertiary institutions, to create awareness among students of the different prospects available for them once they finished secondary school, was providing advice. Ms. G, together with other teachers, felt that it was part of a teacher's role to guide and advise students as well as raise awareness of their opportunities after leaving school by guiding them in Forms 4 and 5. Despite it not being compulsory, teachers took an initiative to guide students when interest and enthusiasm were demonstrated. The school counsellors also organised talks and seminars in regard to education opportunities and job prospects.

Education fairs were also considered as beneficial and were conducted by inviting relevant institutions and agencies. According to the respondents, these fairs

were usually held every year, and all students, especially from Form 3 to Form 5 were invited to attend. Ms. G was of the opinion that these sorts of activities should be carried out more often and on a larger scale because many students were still unaware of the different courses and avenues of study. There was a possibility that this uncertainty occurred because the society did not expose the students to other opportunities. Therefore, awareness was, in Ms. G's point of view, an important factor which could assist when applying for higher education.

As mentioned earlier, the attitude of students was another aspect that was pointed out in terms of factors that could hinder students from acquiring tertiary education. Among the teachers, a few mentioned that some students were willing to learn and pay attention to their education. However, teachers also felt that there were students who had negative attitudes. Most teachers explained these matters by comparing the attitude of students in the past and present. According to them, current students seemed lazy, lacked motivation and had a lack of respect for teachers and their teaching in classes.

Mr. D, a Malay teacher, explained that there is a change in attitude – asserting that the context is “not about respect but fear”. During his time, students feared teachers because parents did not know their rights. Mr. D said that teachers carrying canes in the past was acceptable, but now this was not the case since parents were more educated and they knew their rights as well as their children's and what teachers were allowed or not allowed to do. Now, he explains that “there is no fear, when there is no fear, teachers have to find other ways to obtain respect”. Another opinion was ventured by Ms. F, a Chinese teacher, when she stated:

In the past, school teaching was important but now tuition is more important. Also, in the past, students tried to do their best without tuition, hence learn from the teachers – but nowadays students' mind-sets are on private tuition and they think they do not have to listen to teachers.

Another aspect concerning students' attitude which was identified was that students at present “could not care less” according to Mr. Q, an Indian government official, because after Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR), a lower secondary assessment examination, students entered Form 4 without restrictions. If students failed PMR in the 1950s, they could not enter into Form 4. It was unanimous that students

lacked good attitude in various aspects. All teachers mentioned that they had students scoring 'As', and yet the students could not extend help to others as they are not encouraged to be helpful. In that sense, many teachers were of the opinion that the education system had failed.

The attitude of teachers is also worth mentioning because this will show the contribution made in classes to students. Most teachers spoken to went for teaching based on their ambition and the rest joined teaching because it was the only choice for them at that time. For example, Mr. D, a teacher of Malay origin, briefly explained that after secondary school, he was going through courses to take at university and chose an English course for two reasons: his SPM results allowed him to join Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) only, and additionally the course allowed him to go to the United Kingdom.

The teachers, on average had more than two decades of experience and they said that teachers being trained these days, lack dedication. Some of the contributing reasons for people to become teachers were because of the fixed salary and job security. The choice made, therefore, was more for economic reasons and less for dedication to the job. Ms. G, a Chinese teacher, was of the opinion that some teachers who graduated from teacher training colleges were instilled with the "tidak apa" attitude, which translates to the "could not care less" attitude. This sort of attitude from teachers would impact negatively on their students and it would then be possible that the students will not be provided with an appropriate education.

The case study below summarises views of four former students regarding their experiences while studying at secondary school level. Some of the issues, which will be discussed, vary from applying for loans and scholarships, general perceptions of the education system and their attitude as well as those of their peers with regard to awareness of the importance of being equipped with a tertiary qualification. It can be observed in this case study that some of the issues discussed by the four former students have already been mentioned in previous sections by other respondents. Subsequent to this case study, the different attributes among the Chinese and Indian community will be discussed.

Box B: Perspectives of four former students on the education system

Three former students, Ms. A, an Indian, Ms. B, of Chinese origin and Ms. C, of Malay ethnicity, who were involved in this focus group, are all kindergarten teachers. Later, one former Chinese student, Ms. R was interviewed individually in New Zealand. All four students have completed their secondary schooling, three from national schools and one from a Chinese vernacular school. Each person had different experiences with the education system and reasons for choosing their tertiary education paths. Ms. A and Ms. R, after completing their SPM, were left with two options to do a course of their liking, and this was either to go through a private institution, which was their chosen option, or to do STPM, for another two years. The downside of this choice was that upon completion they were not guaranteed for places in the course of their choice. Ms. B also chose a private institution for reasons of time, as the duration for STMP was two years. Ms. C felt that she was fortunate as she was given a place in a local university and had graduated successfully.

Ms. A and Ms. B mentioned that financing their studies was an issue because it was expensive to study privately compared to study at a local university. Unlike Ms. B and Ms. C, who were successful in obtaining loans, Ms. A and Ms. R were turned down by various sources, who did not provide constructive reasons. Hence, both had to collect funds from family and friends in order to pursue their education. Both Ms. A and Ms. B were of the opinion that the education system was a good – system but when it came to tertiary education, several disadvantages were pinpointed. One of the shortcomings was that there were limited seats at universities, which meant not all students could be accommodated. Ms. A, Ms. B and Ms. R added that universities claim to practise an open system but then again being Indian and Chinese, there were only slim chances to gain entrance to a local university. Hence, there was a need to look at other options, such as private colleges, where they had to pay privately. All four former secondary students were aware of the importance of education and portrayed a positive attitude towards it. In addition, each asserted that being equipped with university education would lead not only to a better job with good pay but also to a decent lifestyle.

Source: Fieldwork Focus Group, June 2007 & Interview in New Zealand, August 2007

Ms. A, Ms. B and Ms. R experienced shortcomings in the education system, especially in gaining entrance to local universities and applying for financial assistance. All three former students had to enrol in private universities as the two-year pre-university course, STMP, was not their preference. Ms. A and Ms. R had to struggle financially as no assistance was made available to them. On the other hand, Ms. C, of Malay origin, after completing SPM, a national examination, was accepted into a local university. The experiences illustrated that ethnic minorities have limited access to the education system because of their reduced chances of gaining entrance into a local university.

Community Values

Among the factors that hindered students from attaining a tertiary education, it was suggested by respondents that there are differences between the success of Indian and Chinese communities. Despite the fact that both communities are minority groups in Malaysia, a widely held opinion among the respondents is that the Chinese community overall is generally more successful compared to the Indian community. The features of these communities will be looked into in terms of economic aspects, political aspects, leadership role models, societal attributes and attitudes of students. These will then be linked to the questions that respondents were asked about how these factors deter students from getting an education. These five factors are connected with one another.

The majority of the respondents indicated that the main strength of the Chinese community remained in the economic sector. Mr. Q, an Indian government official, pointed out that most of the Chinese were involved in major business, where they dominated the import-export market. For that reason, the Chinese had control over some portions of the economy and were in a position to demand and exert power. Mr. Q further added that while almost half of the Indians were previously estate labourers, it had been only recently that people from the estates are moving to urban areas. There were also people from the Indian community who were involved in the business sector, by owning textiles and other type of shops but on a small scale.

The interview example provides material for an analysis to be made of the Chinese, Indian and Malay community in economic terms and regarding funding. Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation points out also that there are issues of expressing individual rights and the importance of education for the Indian community,

with regard to knowing individual rights. Furthermore, he gave examples of leaders who had led with excellence and how this could become a role model for the Indian community.

Indians have the drive to do business but we do not have the means – unlike the Chinese who have the means because they are economically advanced and strong. Indians do not have that sort of economic market to stand up. The Indian community is not dependent. Tell me what was given to them? They were made to appear like that. There are people applying for loans and small business licences but they are not getting them. The government is not being racist but limiting citizen suffrage. In our Constitution, but not even in the African Constitution, apartheid is enshrined. So what do you expect? The Constitution provides so much of discrimination.

We as Malaysians should stand up and assert our rights. The funding the Indian community gets to uplift the society is very minimal to nothing. For namesake they call it subsidy, for example, temple subsidy, building subsidy and education subsidy. I do not believe in subsidies. I believe in my rights, hence give allocations. I am a man paying tax and the government should pay it back to me. I do not want the government's charity. This is what we must educate our people about: their rights. You have a duty to die, when there is a duty to die, there is a corresponding right. The educated ones must not compromise.

(Personal opinions of Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation, Fieldwork Interview, June 2007).

When Mr. M says “when there is a duty to die, there is a corresponding right”, he firmly suggests that as individuals, each one of us is entitled to the freedom of choice and privileges. On the contrary, he explains that Malaysia as a democratic nation limits citizen suffrage through its national policies and Constitution, which as a result, limits the participation of the Indians to be involved in various aspects, from the economic

spectrum to the education sector. Nevertheless, Mr. M, also voices the opinion that Indians face more limitations in the society than the Chinese, who possess economic strength, which subsequently allows the Chinese community to further advance themselves in various aspects.

As stated by thirteen out of eighteen respondents, the economic strength of the Chinese has enabled them to be politically strong as well. The respondents were of the view that the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) is a strong party and capable of using bargaining power. This is regarded as different from the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), which is under the influence of leaders of Malay origin, who restrict the amount of freedom and decision making. An example was given by Mr. O, an Indian businessman and former government official, who pointed out that platforms used by the Chinese to express problems and find solutions are more constructive compared to the Tamil community. A particular private platform most respondents referred to was 'Dongjiaozong' or the United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia, an established influential body, which will be discussed in detail later.

The political aspect of both communities was closely linked to the concept of leadership role models. As mentioned above, the strength of the Chinese political parties reflects good leadership role models. Within the Indian community, two leadership role models were acknowledged. The first is the President of MIC, Datuk Seri Samy Vellu, an Indian, who is recognised by respondents to contribute to the community – but on the other hand, respondents felt discontent with certain issues. The education bureau of MIC was also stated by participants as doing an unsatisfactory job because the community is left in the dark as there is insufficient communication between the MIC and the people.

Associations like the Sri Murugan Centre (SMC), a centre established for social and cultural advancement of Malaysian Indians, were viewed by several respondents as reflecting excellent leadership role models. Ms. H, an Indian teacher, explained that places like SMC not only guide students but create awareness and confidence in Indian students. In addition, one of the many activities conducted by SMC was the setting up of help desks after SPM results are out in various centres. Those positioned at the help desk assisted students to fill in forms, access the Internet and inform them about the various courses and universities. These sorts of activities were regarded by Ms. H as positive contributions to not only students but also parents.

Mr. M further discussed leadership role models, which can be referred to in Appendix Four. Mr. M explained that it is a common human attitude to exploit. Nevertheless, good leaders are fundamental for any community to assist and guide people to improve and uplift themselves. Mr. M further mentioned that the Indian community lack good leadership because at present the Indians are the most marginalised group, economically, educationally and socially. Also, ignorance in asserting individual rights could play a part in the current situation the Indian community confronts. Freedom fighters such as Bhagat Singh, have fought for freedom and rights. For this reason, to maintain the spirit, it is necessary to appreciate one's rights. In the next part the issues that surround ethnic minorities will further be discussed.

Mr. O said that the unity among the community and also their independence are affected by economic stability. One example, which was often pointed out by respondents was on the issue of vernacular schools. For example, Mr. O, illustrated that unity could be achieved by cherishing one's native language. He illustrated this point by mentioning that:

If you look at the Indians, to educate their own children in Tamil is not that important – but for the Chinese, it's very important: From the Minister to the office boy, they send their children to Chinese schools because they want to make sure they learn the Chinese language and culture. The Chinese, almost 98%, are going for Chinese education but 50% of people from our community claim that Tamil education is not necessary, which makes the case of foundation itself unstable and not strong like the Chinese.

As Mr. O explained, the Indian community is depicted as disunited on the issue of vernacular schools and this is unlike the Chinese community. According to Mr. L, a Chinese Director of a think tank, this provides a comparison between the Chinese and Indian communities. Mr. L mentioned that the Chinese community presented a united front, in regard to vernacular schools. He explained that until today, Chinese vernacular schools are using Chinese as the medium of instruction, therefore still holding strong to their position as the Chinese schools were reluctant to implement government policies as they believed that once the Chinese language is not emphasised, it might slowly die off, which would directly affect their culture and religion. On the contrary, according to

Mr. L, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) president was the first leader to agree with the government to employ English for teaching Science and Mathematics in Tamil schools. This clearly showed that for such an important issue, which related to the mother tongue and culture, the Indian community, were divided, putting up a disunited front.

Several respondents were of the opinion that the Indian community was dependent on others. As mentioned earlier, this dependency was linked to the British colonial era, where it was said that because of the British sentiment instilled within the community, change was difficult, where the British created a community, which was reliant on others. One example was given by Ms. H, an Indian teacher, who argues that Indian students depend on outside funds by receiving scholarships and not having enough private resources, therefore a student may have to stop schooling because of financial drawbacks, if no assistance via scholarships is available. On the contrary, several respondents were of the opinion that most Chinese do not depend on these funds as Chinese Associations are privately and adequately funded and if anyone else offered to help, it would mean that it is additional. These sorts of differences indicate the one community being financially needy and the other independent because of access, or lack of access, to financial means.

The contrast between the attitude of Indians and Chinese in regard to their education was analysed to observe attitudes that hindered students from taking up education opportunities. It was unanimous among respondents that the attitude of students varied *despite* ethnic origins. However, based on the perceptions of respondents, Chinese and Indian students showed positive attitudes towards their education by working hard and doing their best. Nonetheless, the opinion of Ms. F, a Chinese teacher, was that “the Chinese students want to excel and not settle with just any given grades and because of their upbringing, Chinese children are constantly pushed to work hard”. Several respondents related the attitude of students with the current education policies in place. The concern was that Indian students may perhaps be uninspired and pessimistic because of the constant competition among the Chinese for a place in universities and for finding good jobs. The interview excerpt below further illustrates the attitude of Indian students.

The attitude of the majority of Indian students reflects the time in which they live, where they tend to just go along as they are not

being guided. The Indian community in particular seem to have a slack mentality. They are not born to be like that, but they have been led not to question or face up to anybody. If they are given proper guidance, they will be a different lot and there is no doubt in that. Educated people must help people to understand their rights and assist them to stand up and demand their rights, which we lack. Take, for example, the way Samy Vellu has gone up, his background did not stop him from becoming what he is now. That kind of life story can be an example. Everyone is equal. You have to give them an opportunity, with some kind of support and means to pursue, which must come from the society and I am sure our people will be second to none. That is what people must realise, you do not give up your rights nor do you rob others.

(Personal opinions of Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation, Fieldwork Interview, June 2007).

From Mr. M's and different respondents' remarks on the different attributes of the Chinese and Indian communities, it can be observed that these may possibly be a factor that hinder students from getting an education. From the interview excerpt and throughout the chapter, equality among one another has been constantly emphasised, so that people, regardless of ethnicity are presented with equal opportunities to pursue various desired means and also have unlimited access and freedom of choice. Fundamentally, according to Mr. M, people ought to bear in mind that "they should not give up their rights nor rob others of theirs".

Chapter Summary

The central focus of this research was to understand the access and freedom of choice of Indo-Malaysians to tertiary education in local government universities. There were four factors that could be identified as influencing the right of entry of Indo-Malaysians: the socio-economic policy in place, the availability of finance, and the awareness and attitude of students, as well as the community's values.

In terms of the socio-economic policy in place, the New Economic Policy (NEP), which is credited with having brought about the ethnic quota system, had been

identified as a “policy of accommodation”, which also reflects the present political system. For example, 30%-40% of seats are allocated for non-Malays at universities, which means that Indians, Chinese, and other ethnic minority groups have to compete within an allocation of less than 40%. The unequal distribution of seats affects the opportunities of Indo-Malaysians to gain higher education.

Financial problems are the second factor which influences the entrance of Indians to higher education. This monetary aspect has a correlation with the NEP as the quota system with its limited number of seats means that students who do not secure places in local government universities must enrol in private universities, which are expensive in comparison to local universities. Therefore, financial assistance is a necessity for those who are financially incapable of funding their tertiary education. Despite the extensive list of avenues available for assistance, it was indicated by several respondents that obtaining financial assistance is difficult.

The third factor that has been identified is linked to the awareness and attitude of students. In terms of the attitude of students, it was unanimous that the attitudes vary despite ethnic origins. However, according to respondents, Chinese and Indian students show positive attitudes towards their education. Nevertheless, one concern expressed was that Indian students may be uninspired and pessimistic because of the constant competition among the Chinese for a place in universities and for finding good jobs – this also relates to the New Economic Policy and the ethnic quota system.

The community’s values were the fourth factor that influences the chances of obtaining a tertiary education. Despite the fact that both of these communities are minority groups in Malaysia, according to the majority of the respondents, the Chinese community overall are generally more successful than the Indian community. The majority of the respondents indicated that the Indians lag behind the Chinese economically, politically, and socially, which consequently influences the Indian community’s access to tertiary education.

Lastly, material from one focus group and several interview excerpts were included, which provided experiences and opinions of respondents in an in-depth manner. From the focus group, one of the key arguments put forward was that there were limitations, in terms of access and freedom of choice, to enter a local government university for ethnic minorities, especially the Chinese and Indians. Two limitations expressed were: inadequate number of seats and the fact that local universities do not practise an open system. Both limitations suggest that the ethnic quota system is

exercised and not the meritocracy system. Students feel that as Malaysians, rights to equal opportunities should be present.

From the interview excerpts, one of the main arguments expressed was in relation to the limitations of the government, which instigated limited citizen suffrage with the implementation of affirmative policies for Malays. A core approach suggested to deal with the limitation was to become aware of civil rights and express them vigilantly. Another argument suggested was that the status of the Indian community could be equivalent to the Chinese community if opportunities, means to pursue, and some support were present, economically, politically, socially and educationally. Also, good leaders were core elements required to improve the status of the Indian community. Ultimately, the interview excerpts emphasised that “everyone is equal and that people must realise that they need not give up their own rights, nor do you rob others of theirs”.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF ISSUES THAT INFLUENCE THE EDUCATION OF INDO-MALAYSIANS

Introduction

In the previous chapters the topic was introduced within a wider context and the data collection methods used during the fieldwork in Malaysia was outlined. The interview data represent opinions of various groups, such as a lecturer, government officials, NGOs, teachers and former students. This chapter includes a critical and in-depth discussion, linking arguments from Chapter Five to Chapter Three and Chapter Two. The research question outlined in the introduction chapter is returned to more explicitly in this discussion chapter.

The main and focal research question for this thesis is:

- **What are the factors that influence the access to, and freedom of choice within, the education system for Indo-Malaysians?**

The further underlying questions leading to understanding the significance and context of the above are:

- How does education contribute towards development?
- What are the issues surrounding ethnic minorities in multi-cultural societies?
- How does the British colonial era influence the current situation of Indo-Malaysians?
- To what extent are Indians excluded from the Malaysian education system?

As discussed in Chapter Five, there were four factors identified: the affect of the New Economic Policy (NEP), financial situation of the Indian community, the awareness and the attitude of students, and the community's values. These factors, which have been described in Chapter Five, are interrelated with one another. Hence, the four factors will be discussed as two main issues: (1) limitations due to the New

Economic Policy for Indo-Malaysians and (2) the present-day status of the Indian community.

Based on the majority of respondents, the four factors identified above have been suggested to influence the development and advancement of the Indian community. Firstly, the NEP is analysed as it was perceived by majority of respondents as limiting the Indo-Malaysians from obtaining a tertiary education. Next, the quota system will be discussed as it was indicated by participants that Indo-Malaysians are presented with a disproportionate allocation of seats within local universities. Subsequently, the influence of politics on education policies in Malaysia will be analysed as it was a widely held opinion among participants that impacts are faced by the Indian community. Following that, the present-day status of the Indian community will be discussed in terms of their financial and economic situation, political position and leadership, financially dependent and disunited nature, attitude and awareness of Indian students towards education and civil rights position of Indo-Malaysians.

Limitations due to the New Economic Policy for Indo-Malaysians

The NEP was a strong theme from the fieldwork identified as limiting the access and freedom of choice of Indians with regard to higher education. In Chapter Three, the era of British colonisation in Malaysia was linked to the establishment of the power relationships between the British and Malay elites. The authority power acquired by Malay elites allowed them to develop and implement the NEP, which consequently influenced the education system (Weiss, 2005, p.63). As an outcome of the authority power of Malays, it seems to point to the possibility that Indo-Malaysians were refused equal opportunities with Malays and, as a result, they experience inequalities which seem to effect them in a number of ways.

Esman (2004, p.206) mentioned that even though a particular ethnic group held authoritative power, this did not signify that their community was equally advantaged or that the other minority ethnic groups were disadvantaged. However, “official detailed and complex ideologies had reinforced the evident pattern of preference” (Esman, 2004, p.206). Moreover, it is the case in Malaysia, as respondents have indicated, that the power held by the Malays influenced the inaccessibility of tertiary level education, for Indians, especially with the implementation of the NEP.

Theoretically, the NEP was established to create conditions to promote national unity, in order to reduce inter-ethnic resentment caused by socio-economic disparities. However, based on the perceptions of respondents, the NEP was identified as a positive discrimination policy and pro-Malay. Rajenthiran (2002, pp.6-7) pointed out that the NEP had apparently been replaced by the National Development Policy (NDP) and from 2001 to 2010 by the National Vision Policy (NVP). However, there were general opinions expressed by respondents from the fieldwork that suggested that the NEP still dominated inter-ethnic economic policies, especially in terms of wealth redistribution and “restructuring” targets. The introduction of the new structures and policies can be linked to a large extent to the adverse impact Indians confront, in terms of unequal opportunities in various spheres.

The NEP has influenced the education system to a great extent. Santhiram (1999, p.46) has emphasised that education was a core element in the affirmative policies introduced as it was perceived as an agent for upward social mobility. In a multi-cultural society, it is a challenge to provide education as it is the responsibility of the government to develop and implement policies which would cater for *all* the ethnic groups within the society. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) in Malaysia had an outline of objectives, which suggested that tertiary education would be offered for all (Ministry of Education, 2005, p.3). These objectives, however, based on respondents’ perceptions, failed to be achieved by the government with the implementation of the quota system, introduced under the New Economic Policy.

Disproportionate Allocation of Seats for Indo-Malaysians at Local Universities

Kamogawa (2003, p.548) observed that one of the aims of the NEP was to balance enrolment rates of the various ethnic groups in educational institutions. This aim of the NEP clearly was not a part of the objectives outlined by the MoHE in Malaysia. A widely held opinion among respondents was that the enrolment of Malay students in local universities increased disproportionately compared to the other ethnic groups, which indicated that the government developed a policy which discouraged enrolment of the ethnic minority groups. The educational needs of other ethnic groups were considered sporadically by the government, but this was often referred to as a “political move” in order to demonstrate the government’s dominance within the state’s political machinery and processes (Loo, 2000, p.124).

In Chapter Two, the literature identified that there was a need for fair education policies in multi-cultural societies, in order to avoid resentment among the various ethnic groups. Respondents were unanimous that there was a great deal of controversy and tension, especially on the subject of access to, and freedom of choice within, higher education. The Majid Ismail Report, which recommended that university admissions be based on racial quotas rather than merit (Abraham, 1999, p.2), resulted in non-Malay students having a reduced number of places in local government universities. According to Mr. Q, an Indian government official, this meant that Indian students who were not accepted into a local university had to opt either to be enrolled in a private institution or go overseas, both at a high cost. Since, almost half of the Indians were economically fragile (as outlined in Chapter Five), this meant that their access to, and freedom of choice within, tertiary education would be limited.

Respondents further suggested that the quota system, thought to be introduced under the NEP is the paramount factor that limits Indians from obtaining a tertiary level education. Brown (2007, p.321) had indicated that the quota system was exercised in local universities, where more than 60% of seats were allocated for the Malays, who form 50.4% of the population (Economists Intelligence Unit, 2007, p.2). The unequal distribution of seats among Malays and non-Malays means that Indian students will have limited freedom of choice and access with regard to higher education, which eventually will compromise their future. Furthermore, since the Malaysian education system that was modelled after British education is extremely competitive, being orientated to the attainment of certificates for which not all can qualify, Kettley (2007, p.333) emphasised that equality of opportunity needs to be ensured so that students had the same chances within the education system.

However, within the transition phase from Form 5 or Form 6 to tertiary level education in a local government university, students are confronted with inequality of opportunity. Respondents emphasised that eligibility for a place in a local university depended on the quota system. On the other hand, students who had completed Form 5 and who wished to enrol in Form 6 were in a position where admission was based on the meritocracy system to confirm their eligibility. The two systems that were used to confirm the eligibility of students indicated to respondents in this study the controlling nature of the government. As outlined in Chapter Five the implementation of pro-Malay policies signified that Indians were likely to be politically limited, which also means that their bargaining power and decision making in the political sphere were restricted.

The Influence of Politics on Education Policies in Malaysia

As outlined in Chapter Five, the influence of politics is apparent as an important element that determines education policies which benefit some at the expense of others. Joseph (2006, p.60) had stressed that education policies in Malaysia were entwined in power, especially under the authority of Malays, who are the dominant ethnic group in the society. Former students illustrated a scenario within the education system that observed the controlling nature of the Malaysian government. The experiences of these non-Malay students indicated that they were denied entry into courses for which they had applied without any explanation being given. The political influence on education meant that, to a large extent, the current position of Indians was further negatively influenced, which consequently would limit their access to, and freedom of choice within, education.

Burke (2002, p.1) emphasised that there was a unanimous belief that “current policies and practices had undermined the commitment to combat social inequalities”. In plural societies, two fundamental issues which emerged from education policies were the concern for equal opportunities in the education system and human rights (Tuwor & Sossou, 2007, p.7). Tuwor and Sossou (2007, pp.7-8) also believed that there were several Charters that had been developed to ensure equal opportunities were presented for people to obtain an education. As Malaysian citizens, a widely held opinion among respondents was that equal opportunities should be presented for government-sponsored education. Furthermore, policies should be developed with equal weight for all, where political influence on education should be distanced so that policies are developed in the best interest of all students.

Additionally, education policies geared towards equal opportunity can lead to integration among the ethnic groups. Davis and Kalu-Nwivu (2001, pp.2-3) emphasised the role of education in advancement and national integration. Driessen (2000, pp.55-56) and Rijkschroeff, Dam, Duyvendak, Gruijter & Pels (2005, p.418) stressed the point that integration policies in plural societies were engaged to resist disadvantages from occurring in the education system and to uphold the unique identities of ethnic groups in the society. Conversely, the NEP introduced into the education system exposed the fact that education inequalities existed among the various ethnic groups, which caused heightened resentment among them.

Based on the majority of respondents, controversies over ethnic quotas in public university admissions still continue to the present day. Malaysia, being a former colony of the British, has its past – especially during the British colonial rule – as a contributing factor towards the current situation in the education system. As discussed earlier, the power relationship between the British and Malay elites had seen the outcome of “Malays not only possessing symbolic but also concrete power to influence decision-making on policies” (Gill, 2005, pp.244-245).

As for the authority which Malays acquired after independence it is obvious that it was used in an “instrumental role rather than an autonomous role in expanding the interests and privileges of Malays” (Haque, 2003, p.245). The NEP had been implemented for decades and its impact on the education system and ethnic minorities was apparent. The Chinese and Indians were unable to make an outright objection because Malays retaliated by bringing up the issue of citizenship (as outlined in Chapter Three), as the Chinese and Indians entered Malaysia during the British colonial rule as indentured labourers (Gill, 2005, p.246). The problems in the education system are likely to be prolonged. Rabindranath Tagore¹³ once said, “The problem is not how to wipe out all differences, but how to unite with all differences intact”. Similarly, Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation expressed the truth that “people must realise that you do not give up your rights nor do you rob others”.

The limitations and disadvantages faced by Indo-Malaysians in the education system will be discussed further in the subsequent section. A brief discussion of the position of the Indian community during the era of British colonisation will be analysed to provide some understanding of the representation of the Indian community and the outcomes of this period for them. This aspect is relevant to the research because the status of Indo-Malaysians during British colonisation could be linked to their present-day status in the Malaysian society, which, based on the replies to questions by the majority of respondents, is a factor that influences their access to education.

The Present-day Status of the Indian Community

In Chapter Three, the era of British colonial rule in Malaysia was identified as a factor that influenced the present-day oppressed situation of the Indian community. The

¹³ Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a Bengali poet from Indian who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.

British were seem to contribute to the situation for three main reasons. Firstly, the introduction of the indentured labour system employed Indians as estate labourers, which led to their inferior position in society. Secondly, the Indians entered society as ethnic minorities, which meant that they were disadvantaged in various aspects. Thirdly, the power relationships between the British and Malay elites caused drawbacks for the Indians in different areas.

In Chapter Three, it was noted that the Indian community from the estates were exploited, lived in miserable conditions and received poor wages, which deprived them of economic power and political strength (Santhiram, 1999, p.33). These factors could be linked to the limited opportunities and social consciousness of estate labourers, which made upward mobility difficult for them, even in present-day society. As Loh (2003, p.223) has emphasised, the position of Indians has not changed much after independence from the British, which is consistent with the data gathered from the fieldwork.

This is important because the present-day status of the Indian community is one of the factors identified by respondents which limits their access to education. As outlined in Chapter Three, Loh (2003, p.223), Pereira (2001, p.1), Nair (2003, p.192) and Santhiram (1999, p.34) uphold that as an ethnic collective, the Indians lag behind the Malays and Chinese economically, educationally, politically and socially. Thus, the features of the present-day Indian community will be analysed based on financial issues, the awareness and the attitude of students, and community values, which will include economic and political aspects, leadership role models and societal attributes. Some of the themes which are correlated will be discussed simultaneously.

The Financial and Economic Situation of Indo-Malaysians

The fieldwork data indicates that the fragile economic standing of many Indo-Malaysians influences their access to tertiary education. The findings from the fieldwork agree with those in the literature (as outlined in Chapter Three). The majority of the respondents indicated that the main strength of the Chinese community remained in the economic sector unlike the Indian community. Mr. M pointed out that the Indians have the drive to do business but do not have the means and economic market to stand up.

Muzaffar (2006, p.151) and Nair (2003, pp.192-193) write that the economic status of the Indians remained the same after independence from the British. A contributing factor towards the present-day economic status of Indo-Malaysians could be linked to the community's social historical aspect, where almost half of the Indian migrants who were brought into Malaysia via the indentured labour system were placed in estates and only a minority of them were successful at improving their future. This failure to improve economically can be observed in the national wealth report where, The Economist (2003, p.1) points out that Indians own less than 2% of the national wealth.

Furthermore, the Far Eastern Economic Review (2000, p.1), indicates that the Indians, who form 7% of the population, are ranked at the bottom of the country's economic scale, which can be linked to the less than 2% national wealth owned by Indo-Malaysians as noted above. The general socio-economic profile of the Indian community indicated by the Far Eastern Economic Review (2000, p.1) and The Economist (2003, p.1) shows that almost half of the Indo-Malaysians are in poverty or financially stretched. This predicament means many parents are financially incapable of sending their children overseas or to private universities, if a place in a local government university were to be declined.

The Swann Report (1985, p.1) mentions that education must be available for all, acknowledges that racial prejudice and discrimination affect those who are already socio-economically poor to a greater extent. Mr. Q, an Indian government official, suggests that this is so because parents who are financially incapable find their children's future compromised as avenues to gain a higher education are inaccessible. Furthermore, financially underprivileged students who are accepted into a local university are confronted with the difficulty of obtaining assistance, which influences their opportunity to obtain a higher education. Ms. A, a former Indian student, indicated that scholarships and loans seemed difficult to obtain as she has been turned down for undisclosed reasons when applying for financial assistance.

It is obvious that those who are struggling financially, who comprise almost half of the Indian population, according to The Economist (2003, p.1), have a greater possibility of not being equipped with a higher education. Hence, it appears that access to higher education is linked to a large extent to the economic standing of individuals (as outlined in Chapters Two and Three). One of the reasons given by respondents for the inability of ethnic minorities, especially the Indian community, to pursue their

education was the difficulty in obtaining financial aid. Many respondents expressed the opinion that the majority of loans and scholarships are given to Malay students and that the chances of non-Malays obtaining scholarships or loans are slim to none. Following from this limited access to education indicate that the Indian community may be unable to develop and advance themselves. In addition, being economically weak signifies that the Indians are in no position to make demands and exert power politically (as outlined in Chapter Five), which will be discussed next.

The Political Position and Leadership of Indo-Malaysians

The political status of the present-day Indian community is another factor identified as limiting their access to, and freedom of choice within, the education system (as outlined in Chapter Five). Quadir, MacLean and Shaw (2001, pp.23-24) stated that, in general, ethno-religious minorities were disadvantaged in the sense that they were discouraged from engaging or getting involved in the political arena. Ramaga (1992, p.104) added that in plural societies, it is a familiar situation where minority groups are disadvantaged politically and subjected to one or several kinds of discrimination, such as political exclusion. The findings from the fieldwork are in agreement with the literature and seem to indicate that the Indian community has a restricted amount of freedom and decision-making power in the political arena. The limitations confronted politically by the Indians could be because of the ethnic majority group in Malaysia, who are politically dominant in society and who would have an interest in maintaining their favourable position.

The discouragement pointed out by Quadir, MacLean and Shaw (2001, pp.23-24) is the case in Malaysia as the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) face limited political participation within the wider society (as outlined in Chapter Five). Mr. M suggested that as a consequence of the MIC having been under the influence of Malay leaders for more than 20 years, the political position of Indians had been adversely influenced. Mr. O, an Indian businessman and former government official, further noted that being under the authority of Malay leaders, the Indians had limited autonomy and decision-making power, which had directly affected the constructiveness of platforms used by the Indian community to express concerns and find solutions to various issues, for instance, on education matters.

The political status of the present-day Indian community is correlated with leadership, which was another factor identified that limits the access of Indo-Malaysians to higher education (as outlined in Chapter Five). According to The Economists Intelligence Unit (2007, p.5), political parties were established to provide support and guidance and to represent people in the society (as outlined in Chapter Three). However, within the Indian community, the leadership is generally reputed to be exploitative¹⁴. Respondents such as Mr. M suggested that it was a common situation among Indian leaders to discuss issues at length, but hardly any serious measures were taken to uplift and improve the situation, which indicated their exploitative attitude.

According to thirteen respondents from the fieldwork, the Indians being politically excluded and lacking in good leadership means that their bargaining power is limited so they have a restricted amount of freedom and involvement within the decision-making process. These restrictions confronted by Indian politicians and leaders are observable during the implementation of the pro-Malay policies or NEP, which suggest that Indian political leaders had limited political participation. A widely held opinion among the respondents is that for generations, Indians have been limited in terms of access and freedom of choice in education since the Indian community had no say under the influence of the politically dominant Malays.

Furthermore, Mr. O indicated that the politically vulnerable status of the Indians means that it is impossible for them to take constructive measures to resolve problems faced in the education sector (as outlined in Chapter Five). A comparison was made by respondents mentioning that the Chinese, who were also faced with limited access to education with the implementation of the NEP, were more likely than Indo-Malaysians to obtain a higher education. This could be attributable to the generally more advanced positions of the Chinese, economically and politically (as outlined in Chapter Three). According to Mr. Q, an Indian government official, the Chinese, who dominate the economic sphere, are in a position to demand and exert power, politically, which implies that the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) is capable of using bargaining power and also of employing platforms to express problems, and find solutions constructively (as outlined in Chapter Five). These political and economic features can

¹⁴ The phrase exploitative was used by respondents in explaining the attitude of leadership role models. The phrase will be used throughout the thesis to be consistent with respondents' language.

be linked to the societal attributes of the Indians, which will be discussed next, as the arguments are correlated.

The Financially Dependent and Disunited Nature of Indo-Malaysians

Mendelsohn and Baxi (1994, p.2) indicated that ethnic minorities are confronted with complex ideological systems and structural subordination, which can be linked to the outcome of British colonisation and indigenous authority, respectively. The findings from the fieldwork, which identified the community values of the Indians as a factor limiting their access to the education system, were in agreement with those in the literature. The Indo-Malaysians' financially dependent and disunited nature, especially in the education sector, can be linked to their economic instability and limited political power. As outlined in Chapter Five, due to the fragile economic status of Indians, almost half are dependent on financial assistance – such as scholarships and loans – to further their studies. This need for constant assistance indicates the dependent nature of the Indian community, which can be linked to its political aspect.

Mr. O explained that the disunited nature of the Indians was apparent during the decision-making process which concerned Tamil vernacular schools. As outlined in Chapter Five, the policy instigated by the government required Tamil vernacular schools to teach Mathematics and Science in Bahasa Melayu, instead of the Tamil language, the mother tongue of Tamil students. Mr. L, a Chinese Director of a think tank, explained that the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) was the first to implement the policy, despite the fact that approximately 80% of Indians are enrolled in Tamil schools. The decision prompted by Indian politicians indicates that the Indians were unable to unite and achieve a unanimous decision on such an important cultural and language issue. Means (1970, p.208) commented on the reaction of the Indian community as, “just tagging along without any vigour”, which could have resulted from their limited economic and political status in society.

In contrast, according to Mr. L, the Chinese, who were ordered by the government to do the same for Chinese vernacular schools, presented a united front. Lee (2000, p.13) has suggested that ‘Dongjiaozong’ or the United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia was the main body that insisted that the language of instruction remain in Chinese at all levels of education. Hence, at present, Chinese schools are still using the Chinese language as the medium of instruction. The adamant

attitude of the Chinese is attributed to their strong economic and political status as well as their bargaining power (as outlined in Chapter Five). Quadir, MacLean and Shaw (2001, p.24) indicated that minority groups were capable of pursuing their own ambitions, instead of seeking the government's assistance or approval, which was precisely what was done by the Chinese community.

The Attitude and Awareness of Indian Students towards Education

The attitude and awareness of Indian students were other factors that had influenced their freedom of choice and access to tertiary education. The literature review chapter did not address these issues explicitly but did so implicitly. As outlined in Chapter Five, respondents mentioned that, overall, Indian students showed positive attitudes towards their education by working hard and doing their best. On the other hand, there were some students who were uninspired and pessimistic about their education because of the constant competition with the Chinese for places in local universities as the quota allocated for Malays and non-Malays in public universities (Brown, 2007, p.321) were between 60%-70% and 30%-40% respectively, which meant that Indians, Chinese, and other ethnic minorities had to compete within an allocation of less than 40%.

On the other hand, Pereira (2001, pp.1-2) pointed out that Indian students failed to qualify in sufficient numbers to take advantage of all the university places set aside for them. This issue, which arose after the researcher's return from the fieldwork, seems to correlate with the social historical aspect of Indo-Malaysians. According to Mr. Q, almost half of the Indians were previously estate labourers and it had been only recently that people from the estates were moving to urban areas. Furthermore, this could be correlated to the present-day status of the Indian community, in terms of financial issues and community values, which include economic and political aspects, leadership role models and societal attributes. These features of the current status of the Indian community can be linked to their position on civil rights, which will be discussed next.

Civil Rights Position of Indo-Malaysians

Verkuyten and Yildiz (2006, p.544) argued that ethnic minorities in societies should be equipped with rights in order to claim privileges and protection in areas such as participation in social and political life, the media, and education. However, a

widely-held opinion among the respondents was that the Indian community was insufficiently equipped with civil rights (as outlined in Chapter Five), which led to their present-day low status in society and consequently limited their access to education. This perception may be linked to the Constitution and the pro-Malay preferential policies observed in Malaysia (Cheah, 2002, pp.36-37), which, according to Mr. M instigated limited citizen suffrage in Malaysia.

Lanti (2004, p.73) mentioned that the Constitution of Malaysia represented Malay influence and dominance; for example, Article 153 of the Malaysian Constitution emphasised “special rights” for Malays in education, business and the public service, which had become a part of Malaysia’s culture and nationhood (Haque, 2003, pp.244-245). Mr. M emphasised that the idea of rights and freedom of Indo-Malaysians was to some extent restricted by the dominant ethnic group because of the Constitution and preferential policies. However, on the other hand, Mr. M also stressed that many Indians were unaware of their civil liberties. The South Indian Labour Fund (SILF) was an example given by several respondents which demonstrated that the Indians willingly surrendered their rights as the SILF has been discarded.

It is a widely held opinion among respondents that the Indians need to be made aware of their rights to maintain their own distinctive culture and obtain more equal social status in various aspects of society. Within the aspect of the Indo-Malaysians position on civil rights, there has been development as, towards the end of the research, an interesting and relevant movement emerged in Malaysia. The recent establishment of the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) signified that Indians in Malaysia were finally going to demand their rights and freedom. HINDRAF is a coalition of 30 Hindu non-governmental organisations committed to the preservation of the Hindu community rights and heritage in secular Malaysia. The organisation, acting on behalf of Malaysian Indians, filed a case against the British government that brought Indians as indentured laborers into Malaysia, exploited them for 150 years and thereafter failed to protect the minority Indian rights in the Federal Constitution when independence was granted (HINDRAF, pp.1-2, 2008).

On the 25th of November, 2007, HINDRAF conducted a peaceful rally to end the suffering and marginalisation of Indians. Although it was a peaceful assembly, the Malaysian government arrested several members of the organisation and prominent lawyers on charges of sedition. In addition, five people were detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA). The action of the government in detaining these

people showed that the minorities were unable either to participate politically or demand that their right to civil liberties and freedom should be acknowledged and accepted. The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) were powerless, as mentioned earlier, the MIC were under the influence of Malay leaders for more than 20 years, which has influenced the political position of the Indians (HINDRAF, p.2, 2008).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided some insights in order to increase understanding of the problems faced by Indo-Malaysians within the Malaysian education system, especially at tertiary level, linking the literature review chapters, background chapter and the data obtained from the fieldwork. It was suggested that the Indians had limited access to, and freedom of choice within, education. The position of the Indians and the NEP were the fundamental factors that have contributed to the problematic situation within the education system.

The Indian community at present are shown to be economically, politically, socially and educationally behind the Malays and Chinese. The present situation of the Indian community arose at least in part as a result of the era of British colonisation. The origin of Indians as estate labourers and ethnic minorities led to the lowered position of Indians in society, which endures to the present day. In addition, the NEP further marginalised the Indians, in terms of position in society, which further limited their access to education.

Another result of the era of British colonisation was the establishment of a special affiliation between the British and Malay elites of society. This power relationship enabled the Malays to be equipped with authority, which consequently allowed them to restructure and develop policies. It is apparent that the education system in Malaysia was influenced by the British. Hence, once Malaysia gained independence, the Malay elites restructured and introduced new policies that had a Malaysian outlook, although they are based on British models.

Education in a multi-cultural Malaysia is important for integration and unity since this society comprises various ethnic groups. However, the 1969 riots indicated that the education policies were not integrating them. Around the same time, the economic disparity between the Malays and Chinese was observed, where the Chinese were economically dominant. Hence, ethnic tensions were heightened because of the

economic disparity and the education policies in place, which led to the racial riots in 1969.

The NEP affected the education system and therefore upward social mobility. Hence, the NEP, which included pro-Malay preferential policies, affected the Indian community within the society adversely. Indians, in their underprivileged situation within the society, were further disadvantaged with the implementation of the quota system, which was thought to have been introduced under the NEP. The disadvantages faced in the education sector by Indians limit their access to higher education. Additionally, it was noted that ultimately, the NEP did not present equal opportunities for all and denied the rights and freedom of Indians to obtain an education by means of which this group could develop and advance.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the contributions of this thesis to theories of development and education examining the experiences of one minority group, the Indo-Malaysians. Subsequently, the next section will review and revisit the research context and methods and present the main conclusions of the research together with personal reflection on the thesis.

Significance of this Thesis

This research contributed to issues within development because it concerns the advancement and development in this case of a particular group, the Indo-Malaysians. Development theory, such as modernisation and human capital theory, corresponds appropriately with the research as education is seen as fundamental towards development. As Harrison (1988, p.2) and Malchup (as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.50) have argued, development is critical to ensure “growth, social change, human rights and welfare, and modernization” and education is perceived to be a fundamental factor for development. Education is also stressed as the most powerful factor in bringing about modernity because it develops the individual (Inkeles & Smith, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.54).

In accordance with present-day development frameworks such as bottom-up, participatory and autonomous development, Woolcock and Narayan (2000, p.238) equated education with the concept of empowerment. Hence, good access to education means that people are enabled and equipped to be “empowered to realise their potential as individuals and work(ed) to challenge oppression and devised solutions to the problems they face(d)” (Freire, 1972, pp.125-126). Respondents within this fieldwork had similar opinions to Freire regarding the notion of empowerment, and further stressed that in Malaysia, the concept of access to education would indicate that equal opportunities were present for all, which is vital for national integration.

In a multi-cultural society like Malaysia, education is a crucial component in working towards national integration. Ukiwo (2007, p.266) has mentioned that education policies in multi-cultural societies have the capability to function positively towards development and national integration. The reason why education policies are important for national integration is because they promote understanding among the various ethnic groups through the education curriculum. However, on the other hand, education policies can also contribute towards conflicts within a plural society if ethnic groups resent the education policies established by the government (Ukiwo, 2007, p.266). Scenario first observed in the 1969 riots. The NEP was then brought in, in an attempt to rectify the situation. Based on the fieldwork the NEP did not achieve this aim but later exacerbated the situation.

In Chapter Five, the data gathered from the fieldwork indicated that there were limitations and disadvantages for Indo-Malaysians within the Malaysian education system, which conflicted with and contradicted the development framework that concentrates on issues such as growth, modernisation, participation, empowerment, national integration and human rights. Education was observed as “the most powerful factor in developing an individual” (Inkeles & Smith, 1974, as cited in Agbo, 2005, p.54), and being equipped with an education has the potential of “opening doors to lift individuals out of poverty” (Klees, 2002, p.2). Therefore, Indo-Malaysians who are confronted with limited access to, and freedom of choice within, education system are restricted in advancing and developing themselves.

Review of the Thesis

Kofi Annan (United Nations Children’s Fund, 1999, p.1), the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations, stated that “education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development”. The study explored access to, tertiary level education in local government universities for Indo-Malaysians. The context of the research was significant because access to education is an important issue as it impacts on the Indian community’s development and advancement. The limitations needed to be identified to be able to find ways to improve the situation of the Indian community in Malaysia.

Chapter Two on development, education and ethnic minorities is constructive for understanding the issues surrounding ethnic minorities in multi-cultural societies.

The theoretical framework discussed in the chapter indicates reasons for the current situation of ethnic minorities within plural societies, in particular the Indian community in Malaysia. These suggested factors were potentially relevant to explaining the limitations with which Indo-Malaysians are confronted within the education sector. Furthermore, the theoretical framework highlighted the importance of understanding how colonialism to a very large extent influenced a society.

The fieldwork in Malaysia contributed a vast amount of information on the issues surrounding ethnic minorities. The data gathered from respondents showed that the Indian community had limited access to tertiary level education in Malaysia, due to four main factors. Furthermore, potential reasons indicated that these limitations have a direct consequence for the advancement of the community and contribution to the nation. The next section will review and revisit the research context and methodology and present the main conclusions of the research together with personal reflection on the thesis.

Malaysia is a multi-cultural society, with an ethnic majority and ethnic minorities, which consequently incorporates certain issues surrounding ethnic minorities. Several factors have contributed to the issues confronted by Indo-Malaysians in the education system. The Indian community, forming 7% of the population, at present are shown to be the “most economically, politically, educationally and socially marginalized minority in the peninsula, next to migrant workers and rural communities of Sabah and Sarawak” (Nair, 2003, p.192). Hence, the unenviable position that the Indians hold within the society is seen an issue that needs priority as it is a significant issue concerning their development and advancement. This thesis aimed to contribute to the identification of factors that influence the access to, and freedom of choice within, the Indian community in regard to tertiary education in Malaysia.

The research questions outlined were suitable for the context of the research because the questions, which were put forward, achieved the aim of the research. The four major factors that were identified were the country’s education policies, the financial situation of Indo-Malaysians, the attitude and awareness of the students, and the community’s values. These factors correlated with the issue on rights and equality of opportunities as well as social inclusion and empowerment. Another advantage of the research questions was that they were straightforward and comprehensible for respondents, who varied from top level officials to educated members of the grassroots of society.

The research questions were addressed during the fieldwork in Malaysia, which took place in three different cities, Kuala Lumpur, Perak and Pulau Pinang (Penang) over a period of three weeks in June 2007. The use of qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews and focus group was the best option for exploring the research topic of ethnic minorities and their access to tertiary level education. A total of 18 respondents, 15 involved in interviews and 3 in the focus group were covered by the research. The interview list had five categories, namely lecturers, teachers, students, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and government officials who were either involved in education, or were part of the education sector. The ethnic origins of the participants were taken into consideration to avoid personal bias because of the nature of the research topic and objective.

The qualitative methods allowed the research to be focused yet simultaneously open to accommodate discussion. Additionally, the semi-structured interviews and focus group were deemed to be appropriate, mainly because of their informal approach. Most of the respondents were comfortable and responded better to an informal rather than a formal discussion. Despite the informality during the interviews and focus group, a detailed set of question guidelines was worked on throughout the discussions to maintain the focus of the research context. Although the guidelines provided an outline for the discussion, if respondents raised an important issue, this was explored and further discussed.

The information gained from the respondents presented an overview of the situation of Indo-Malaysians within the education system. In particular, the contribution from respondents provided some ideas on issues confronted by the Indian community in the education sector. There were four main factors identified that limited the access to, and freedom of choice within, education for the Indian community, correspondingly related to Chapter Two and Chapter Three, which in turn answered the research questions outlined. The results gathered from the field work contributed to the research by providing a glimpse of the potential reasons that disadvantage the Indo-Malaysians in the education sector.

Personal Reflections

As a member of the minority community myself I was aware to some extent of how the NEP was viewed by other Indo-Malaysians. It was only by carrying out this

research, however, that I came to appreciate the complexity of the situation. The other factors which the respondents suggested were limiting Indo-Malaysians success in achieving tertiary education are not so widely discussed in Malaysia and certainly I was not aware of their impact. It is obvious that a number of factors are at play simultaneously and different approaches to remedying them will be required. This research has, therefore, been personally as well as academically enlightened.

Positive anti-discriminatory policies must be worked out for the Indians. There must be both a short-term and long-term strategies to change the structures that oppress the Indian community. The Malaysian government must support the strategies, to present a more positive outlook to resolve the situation that the Indians face. Additionally, the Indian community has to take the initiative in wanting to improve their overall well-being and future. The establishment of the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) in Malaysia, despite its being not well received by the Malaysian government, indicates optimism and hope for the Indian community as the movement will be able to provide some solutions to the problems faced by the Indian community. Also, the 2008 national election in Malaysia is an event to look forward to, as the results will indicate if people want change, especially among the Indian community as a result of the emergence of the HINDRAF. As Mahatma Gandhi once said – and as they are now beginning to realise and take on board – “be the change you want to see in the world”.

APPENDICES

Appendix One: Information Sheet

My name is Gaayathri Prabakaran and I am in Malaysia to do fieldwork for my thesis for a Masters of Philosophy qualification in Development Studies. I am a student of Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Thank you for your interest in the research project: **‘Indo-Malaysians within the Education System in Malaysia’**. The objective of this study is to analyse students’ access to obtaining an education. Interviews encompassing other government departments and focus groups will be conducted.

If you wish to take part in this research, you will be asked to sign a consent form, on which you can also choose to have your name and position acknowledged in this research. The informal interview will take approximately one hour and with your permission I would like to record the interview.

If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question
- Withdraw from the study at any time during participation
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- Ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview

Data obtained will be analyzed and used for my MPhil thesis and other academic publications. All data will be stored securely in a safe place. To protect your privacy I will ensure that the data is transcribed only by myself. Where required names will be changed and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. All recorded interviews will be kept safely by Massey University and will be erased after a period of five years. The thesis will be accessible through the Massey University library.

Thank you very much for your participation!

For your convenience, contact details are provided below.

Researcher	Supervisor	Supervisor
Gaayathri Prabakaran 89c Cook Street Palmerston North New Zealand	Dr Maria Borovnik Lecturer, Development Studies School of People, Environment & Planning Massey University Private Bag 11222 Palmerston North New Zealand	Dr Robyn Andrews Lecturer, Social Anthropology School of People, Environment & Planning Massey University Private Bag 11222 Palmerston North New Zealand
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This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone +64 6 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz

Appendix Two: Consent Form

Indo-Malaysians within the Malaysian Education System

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

- I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:		Date:	
Full Name - printed			

Appendix Three: Question Guidelines

Parents

- Demographic questions (age, ethnic background, occupation...)
- Opinion on: Education system (accessibility)
 - : Advantages and disadvantages of the system
 - : Strategies to improve the system
 - : Changes, which liked to be seen within the system
 - : Assistance and information available
 - : Correlation between education and development
 - : Factors allowing/hindering students from obtaining an education
 - : Being in a multi-cultural society
- Experience with the education system
- Children(s) education experience/process/status

NGO personnel's

- Demographic questions (age, ethnic background, position...)
- Opinion on: Education system (accessibility)
 - : Advantages and disadvantages of the system
 - : Strategies to improve the system
 - : Changes, which liked to be seen within the system
 - : Assistance and information available
 - : Correlation between education and development
 - : Factors allowing/hindering students from obtaining an education
 - : Education policies in place
 - : Government's credibility
 - : Being in a multi-cultural society
- NGOs : Contribution to the education system and students
 - : Role in the education system

Government personnel's

- Demographic questions (age, ethnic background, position...)
- Opinion on: Education system (accessibility)
 - : Advantages of the system

- : Strategies to improve the system
- : Changes, which liked to be seen within the system
- : Assistance and information available
- : Correlation between education and development
- : Factors allowing/hindering students from obtaining an education
- : Education policies in place
- : Being in a multi-cultural society
- Government's : Contribution to the education system and students
 - : Role in the education system
- Schools: Explanation on the different types of schools
 - : Condition (infrastructure, resources, performance, accessibility...)

Lecturers

- Demographic questions (age, ethnic background, position...)
- Opinion on: Education system (accessibility)
 - : Advantages and disadvantages of the system
 - : Strategies to improve the system
 - : Changes, which liked to be seen within the system
 - : Assistance and information available (private/public)
 - : Correlation between education and development
 - : Factors allowing/hindering students from obtaining an education
 - : Education policies in place
 - : Being in a multi-cultural society
- Institution's : Contribution to the education system
 - : Role in the education system
 - : Assistance provided to students
 - : Process of accepting/rejecting students
 - : Policy (quota system)
- Students: Attitude in the institution and about their education
 - : Background of students (family, economic standing, rural-urban area...)
 - : Courses preferred by ethnic groups

Teachers

- Demographic questions (age, ethnic background, position...)
- Opinion on: Education system (accessibility)
 - : Advantages and disadvantages of the system
 - : Strategies to improve the system
 - : Changes, which liked to be seen within the system
 - : Assistance and information available (private/public)
 - : Correlation between education and development
 - : Factors allowing/hindering students from obtaining an education
 - : Education policies in place
 - : Being in a multi-cultural society
- Institution's
 - : Contribution to the education system
 - : Role in the education system
 - : Assistance provided to students
 - : Process of accepting/rejecting students
 - : Policy (quota system)
- Students: Attitude in the institution and about their education
 - : Background of students (family, economic standing, rural-urban area...)
 - : Courses/streams preferred by ethnic groups

Students

- Demographic questions (age, education status, family background...)
- Opinion on : Education system/ Malaysia schools
 - : The roles/ performance of the government in the education system
 - : Accessibility of obtaining an education
 - : Factors allowing/hindering students from getting an education
 - : Attitude students have on their studies
 - : Importance of being equipped with an education
 - : The correlation between education and development
 - : Education policy in place (happy, disagree, changes...)
- Experience in : The enrollment process in secondary and tertiary level
 - : The education system
 - : Applying to tertiary level universities (courses applied for...)

: Trying to obtain funding to further studies

- Availability of: Assistance (funding by private or government...)
: Information (courses available, job prospects...)
- Personal aspirations (career, economically...)

Appendix Four: Interview Excerpt of Mr. M

The leadership role in the Indian community is very exploitative, where leaders do not care about ordinary Indians and within political parties, they talk all the time about fighting for their people but hardly any serious measures are seen to uplift and improve the situations. Look what the Bumiputeras have, affirmative action from education to jobs. All sorts of things are provided and we as Malaysians do not get that kind of treatment from the government. This sort of attitude is not only by Indians but it is a general human attitude to exploit. For example, Mahatma Gandhi, do we have any leaders like him? I feel proud that I lived in the generation he was leading. I shed tears when I read this story, where Gandhi mentioned to a boy that he will not wear a shirt until the 330 million Indians who do not have shirts, wear a shirt. For me that is a hallmark of leadership and no wonder Einstein said that Gandhi is the greatest political genius at the time. Look how Jawaharlal Nehru led, Nelson Mandela, the kind of leader he was, Abdul Kalam, the President of India, the genuine man he is. Lee Kuan Yew, within one generation he has turned Singapore into world class and Mohamed Eunos, with the microcredit system in Bangladesh. I do not think I can name anyone else. What are our leaders doing? Samy Vellu is a hardworking man but he can do a hell of a lot better. Somehow he must have lost his bearing, I do not know. Indians are getting nothing as he sang the glory of Tun Mahathir for 20 years. Look at the South Indian Labour Fund, dead and gone. It is another scenario where Indians willingly surrendered their rights. I consider myself a third-class citizen. I had opportunities to migrate to Australia, London and Canada, but I refuse to leave this country. Even in my own country I am a bloody third class, how about in other countries? Of course in terms of rights, it is better off, but you will never be a part of the system. This idea on rights must go down to people, where people must accept it as my rights. I am indebted for my freedom today. I would not be sitting here if it were not for people like Bhagat Singh. Of course we do not have to go to that stage as times have changed, but the spirit must be maintained at all times. You slack for a minute, and you will be enslaved by someone else.

(Personal opinions of Mr. M, a member of a Tamil-based organisation, Fieldwork Interview, June 2007).

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