CHAPTER 4

ASSIMILATION

With respect to settlement, an important aspect is to trace the extent to which the Indians have integrated within the Malayan society and to explore the interplay of factors such as race relations, economic role and political participation, in order to gauge their position and level of assimilation within the society.

Political Participation

The first level of leadership was provided by the kangany, a labourer who, because of his somewhat higher caste status and/or the initiative he showed in the work place, was entrusted by his employer with the responsibility of recruiting more labourers from his village and its neighbours. To the labourer, the kangany was a visible link between the world he had left behind and the world he had entered. The kangany worked with the labourer and was something of a father figure, leading them through the complexities of plantation labour and estate life. The kangany received a certain commission for each working day of every labourer he had recruited and had other ways of making money from his gang of labourers — through money-lending, organizing chit-funds, and other devious means. He was also utilized by the management to enforce social discipline and conformity. (Arasaratnam, 1993: 5)

Before unions and associations penetrated, some of the elders informally joined together to make up a panchayat. The people had known such political units in the Indian caste and village context out of which they had come. And a unit at least called panchayat (but without a legitimization normally supporting a panchayat's activities in an Indian rural setting) worked well enough. Its purposes were to solve community problems within the community to every extent possible. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 168)
Members of the panchayat's would have had 'clean' caste backgrounds, a traditionally ingrained subservience to the existing authority structure and so on. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 105)

The Indian educated classes, employed as professionals and in various grades of white-collar jobs, and some of the commercial groups were the earliest of the Indian settlers to look upon themselves as permanent residents of Malaya. They were assisted in this by their ability to reproduce elements of their traditional culture in their immediate neighbourhood. They had a settled family life and some of them owned property and thus had put down roots in their country of adoption. These communities of the middle class alternatively began to seek each other out and come together on the basis of an Indian identity in the major cities and towns where they found themselves in large numbers. This gave rise to the first Indian Associations formed in these cities and districts in the first two decades of the twentieth century: Taiping, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Telok Anson, Klang, Penang, Malacca. In these bodies the leadership was taken by wealthy and independent members of the community, such as businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and accountants. Other English-educated Indians, such as teachers, officers, and clerks in government and the private sector and in the plantations, lent support to these bodies. In the first phase of their organization, these bodies mainly provided a social nucleus for the community. Their main functions were the provision of recreational facilities and the celebration of Indian festivals. These bodies deliberately shied away from political activity and professed their loyalty to the British regime. (Arasaratnam 1993: 8)

In fact, loyalty was deliberately cultivated as leadership in these associations became an avenue for preferment by the colonial government in appointments to local government bodies and welfare boards. They cut themselves off from the vast mass of Indian labour in the plantations and voiced, in these early years, little or no awareness of their concerns. They were also cut off from the important developments in nationalist ideology and activity that were occurring in India in that period. Apart from a brief spate of activity caused by the spread of the Gadhr movement among the Sikhs and the
Khilafat movement among the Muslims, nationalist opinion does not seem to have spread among educated Indian groups. (Stenson 1980: 39 – 40)

Right down to the 1930s, the Indian middle class of Malaya grew isolated from the movements and ideologies that were influencing their counterparts in India. This was partly because of the physical difficulty of communications, but also the result of Malayan Government policy. It appears that the Government was wary of any nationalist and liberal propaganda coming from India. It vetted literature and screened visitors coming from India. Even in the large towns and cities, Indians had little or no contact with the educated classes of other communities. (Arasaratnam 1970: 82) All this was aptly expressed by an intelligent Malayan Indian observer when he wrote in 1932 that the general outlook of the average Indian in Malaya was narrow and superficial; he lacked a distant view, was lethargic and apathetic even to his own welfare. (Arasaratnam 1970: 83)

Though such associations were soon formed all over the country, very few of them had any fruitful existence. In fact many declined soon after their birth and died slowly. Others, even such sturdy ones as the Selangor and Singapore Associations, had long periods of lifelessness. This was due partly to apathy and partly to factionalism. It soon became clear that one could catch the eye of the British authorities by activity in these associations and could be nominated to various Boards and Councils. So sometimes rival associations would crop up. When one group would was entrenched in power in an Association for sometime, opposition to it would grow, and the Association would become the scene of unseemly quarrel between two groups. Or sometimes there would be such apathy among members that one or two individuals would have to bear the burnt of the Association’s responsibilities. By the 1930s many of these Associations existed only on paper, and even others had made no strong impact on the community. Those that were alive were just good clubs. (Arasaratnam 1970: 84)

They had not brought about any significant awakening or consciousness in the Indian community. Perhaps the period when they operated was too early for such
developments. This sense of failure was prevalent among perceptive members of the community, and from the early 1930s there were attempts to inquire into and remedy shortcomings. (Arasaratnam 1970: 85)

Middle- and upper-class Indians, working through these largely ineffective Indian Associations, tried to worm their way into the colonial structure. They sought and, with reluctance, were admitted to membership of the various Legislative Councils of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. This scope for wider recognition of the educated Indians and the opportunity to play roles in prestigious and influential forums widened their ambition and persuaded them to broaden their power base. From the late 1920s these middle-class Indians became increasingly articulate in the cause of the submerged mass of Indian labour and put themselves forward as their spokesmen. This meant identifying themselves with labour in terms of an Indian communal identity, in place of the gulf that had been deliberately created so far between labour and the upper classes. Neither the colonial government nor the British plantation interests conceded to these claims. It was patent that the identity of interests between these two groups was paper-thin. The educated had neither the rapport nor the genuine sympathy with the plight of labour to make sustained representation on its behalf. Thus Indian society evolved in the period before World War II in this dual fashion but with one group making half-hearted attempts to cross the barrier with the primary intention of strengthening itself in the struggle for influence in the upper reaches of the colonial establishment. (Arasaratnam 1993: 9)

These developments were paralleled by a belated spread of Indian nationalist sentiment among the Malayan Indian communities in the 1930s. Such sentiments had to be very cautiously expressed because of the alertness of the colonial government to the spread of nationalism and its opposition to the forging of links with nationalist movements in India. They first took the form of attempts to unify the scattered Indian communities of the peninsula and to provide organizational links between splinter groups. The effort began tentatively in 1928 in the form of annual conferences of India Associations. In these annual conferences problems of Indians were discussed and made
the concern of the community as a whole. Especially noteworthy were the first attempts to forge firm links between the middle class and labourers and a feeling by some radical elements among the English-educated that they should strive to champion the cause of labourers, and secure for them a better deal. These were the first signs of the middle class efforts to claim leadership of the labourers, in the same way that the educated classes in India had far years claimed recognition as the natural leaders of the peasantry and working class. These trends received a setback during the depression when the educated Indians were as traumatically affected by retrenchments and unemployment as were the labourers. (Arasaratnam 1993: 9–10)

The Indian Chamber of Commerce was in no way comparable to its Chinese or European counterparts. A Selangor Indian Merchants’ Association existed in name only and has alienated other Indian bodies by its indifference towards Indian problems. The Indian Agent in 1934 appealed to the Nattukottai Chettiers and other merchants to ‘cultivate a national spirit and co-operate with other classes of Indians to raise the status of the Indian community.’ (Report of the Agent of the Government of India, 1934, P 18) His appeals did not produce any tangible results, and today, more than ever before, the Indian trading community stands aloof or even clashes with Indian labour interests. (Mahajani 1960: 120)

In 1937 Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) was formed on a federal basis with membership limited to constituent units of Indian Associations in different parts of Malaya and the four Indian Chambers of Commerce and Merchants’ Associations. The CIAM became a forum for Indian middle class radicalism in the years before the Japanese Occupation. It confronted political issues more directly than any of the Indian Association took definite stands on colonialism, nationalism, and political rights, and championed more forcefully the cause of labour. It concerned itself with the issue of minimum wage of plantation labour which was under threat of reduction by employer interests. The CIAM took up the question with the Government of India and urged to stop assisted emigration to Malaya. The CIAM also concerned itself with abuses that were rampant among the poorer sections of the Indian community. It attempted to
secure reform, by legislation and private effort in the excessive drinking of toddy, legislation of Hindu marriages, and the provision of education. In these matters its success was limited, because of its limited links with the working class and its restricted access to colonial government. (Arasaratnam 1993: 10)

Mahajani points out how since 1925, the Agents of the Government of India had been mentors of the Indians in Malaya. All of them had deplored flaws in the Indian community such as, ‘false notions of independence, a feeling of self-importance, mutual jealousy, want of esprit de corps, and inability to accept leadership’, and urged it to sink petty differences in a central body. With this background of fissility, the formation of the CIAM stands out as a milestone in the history of Indians in Malaya. (Mahajani 1960: 124)

Virginia Thompson states that the CIAM aroused antagonism not only among the British but also among Indians themselves by its aggressive championship of better labour conditions etc. and that it drove a wedge between local-born and immigrant elements. (Thompson and Adloff 1955: 98)

The leadership of the CIAM, from its inception, was held neither by vested interests or by labour leaders proper, but by the middle class. Its founders did not aim to project the Association into a trade union so as to bargain through direct negotiations with employers. Nor did they desire to usher in labour politics. Their objective was to raise the status of the Indian community and for that purpose to come to grips with the problems affecting the majority, viz. labour. Consequently, the CIAM became the mouthpiece of Indian labour. (Mahajani 1960: 125)

Kaur points out how the singularly differentiating mark of the Indian community in Malaya is its prominence in the trade union movement. The earliest form of workers protest was desertion from the place of employment. In the nineteenth century these desertions among Indian workers were a form of protest against economic and social
conditions in the plantations. Desertions were quiet common in the Federated Malayan States until 1915 and created problems for the employers. (Kaur 1998: 96 – 97)

There are recorded instances of disturbances and even of strikes on estates and, more frequently, among urban labourers. It must be admitted that most of these came under the category of internecine social disputes. The labourers were by no means a homogeneous body. Differences among them, combined with the fact that they lived and worked together with more points of contact than they would have had at home, produced social tensions. Caste disputes causing disturbances on estates have already been noted. Then there were ethnic differences: the Tamil and Telugu labour force in an estate would sometimes clash. An unpopular kangany was quiet often the cause of labour disturbances. The kangany were for long the recognised leaders of Indian labour, and also its recognized exploiters. (Arasaratnam 1970: 78)

Arasaratnam points out that wherever Indian labour was employed with Chinese labour, the former acquired some of the industrial militancy of the latter, and they soon started working together in multi-racial organisations. (Arasaratnam 1970: 81)

In Singapore the Indian was more prepared to shed his communal separateness, and work with the Chinese for the betterment of his lot. At the time of the Japanese invasion the image of the Indian labourer all over Malaya had considerably changed. He was now a more self-confident and self-assertive individual. Even his appearance and social habits had changed. The process of modernization had begun, more rapidly among urban workers, less so, yet markedly, among plantation workers. The one weakness was the inability to organize in a disciplined and effective manner. With the wave of industrial unrest in the country after 1937, the Government passed the Trade Union Ordinance in 1940 with a view to promoting the growth of responsible united bodies that could effectively represent the workers. There were a number of Chinese societies that sought to register as trade unions, but there was no corresponding move among Indian workers. (Arasaratnam 1970: 81) The Indian labourer had achieved individual
emancipation but Indian society had not been similarly emancipated. (Arasaratnam 1970: 82)

The ban on emigration served as a penultimate stage before the solstice of the Indian labour problem in Malaya. The turbulent period of 1936 – 1939 had an important aftermath. The chapter of Indian labour nationalism was temporarily closed. But a new colonial nationalism stuck root among Indians in Malaya. A humanitarian struggle, launched to uplift Indian labourers from the debased position of ‘sucked oranges’ to a dignified status of ‘indispensable workers’, was transformed into nebulous nationalism of colonial Indians against colonialist Britain, which happened to the ruling authority in Malaya. In 1938 Nehru’s visit to Malaya evoked resounding enthusiasm among the Indian masses while the English press in Malaya stigmatized him as ‘agitator,’ ‘tactless and ill-mannered’. By 1941, when Malaya stood on the threshold of a cataclysm, a mild dose of nationalist sprit had already been administered to the Indian community. (Mahajani 1960: 128)

For the great number of Indians who remained behind under Japanese occupation, there were experiences of a different kind. Malayan Indians were drawn into Japanese designs to utilize Indian anti-British nationalism in its struggle against a British empire in Southeast Asia. After some initial hesitation, Malayan Indian leaders fully participated in the Indian Independence League headed by Subash Chandra Bose and in the Provisional Government of Free India declared in October 1943. Indians volunteered in large numbers as League workers and joined the Indian National Army. They contributed large sums of money and donated gold jewellery for the cause. Though the whole venture ended in abject failure, it left a deep impact on the Indian community and among the English-educated in particular, who had thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the movement. It radicalized this group which had earlier been largely apolitical and deferential towards the colonial power. They now swung to the other extreme of nationalism and anti colonialism attitudes which they carried with them into post-war Malaya. These attitudes governed their actions in post-war Malaya, where the Indian
middle class took prominent leading roles in the anti-imperialist movement. (Arasaratnam 1993: 20)

It gave a sense of mission and purpose to the Indians, an estimation of their own minds that they were making history on behalf of the people of the Indian subcontinent. This feeling of importance was good for their morale, enabling them to build up confidence in themselves. This was very necessary to dispel the sense of futility and aimlessness that had descended over the community in the pre-war years. Here was the opportunity to do something positive. It introduced dynamism into their thinking and action. Though the immediate issue proved sterile, such involvements were bound to have long-term effects. It had a profound effect on the educated class. It brought them out of their timidity and aversion to political activity. There were the spearhead of Malayan participation in the Independence League, and had opportunities for leadership. Large sections of this class had earlier been most reluctant to involve themselves in the struggles of Indian nationalism on the grounds that this was purely Indian affair and no concern of theirs. They now swung to the other extreme of full involvement in Indian nationalism. In the process they imbibed nationalistic ideas which they were to live with for many years. It brought about a readjustment in their attitude to the colonial power when its authority was re-established. The old subservience was gone. (Arasaratnam 1993: 107)

The Japanese-sponsored Indian nationalism movement also had its impact on the working class. The Indian Independence League had branches in the plantations and labourers volunteered for the Indian National Army. The already radicalized Tamil schoolmasters, kangany, and young labour leaders now plunged into nationalist politics and imbibed the anti-Western propaganda that the League leaders, with Japanese connivance, poured out. Anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism were to converge in the labourers political attitudes and leave a permanent effect on them. The period of Japanese Occupation saw an acceleration of the political education of the Labourers Apart from this, the labourers underwent severe physical hardships during this period. Deprived of regular wages, with the welfare support services in the plantations in utter collapse, with
acute shortage of food and essentials, it was a desperate struggle to keep the family alive. Many were conscripted to work in distant projects some of which, like the infamous Siam Railway, took a heavy toll of Indian lives. (Arasaratnam 1993: 20–21)

Lastly, the involvement in the Indian Independence League and National Army, the physical hardships, and the general unsettlement brought about a greater sense of unity in the community. During this period, the various sections of the community buried their linguistic, religious, class and caste differences and faced up to common problems in a united fashion. This unity continued into post—war Malaya and there was a realization that the Indians must function on the political plane as one entity, in defence of their rights and their interests. (Arasaratnam 1993: 21)

In Malaya, the independence movement, particularly as manifested in the Indian National Army and its achievements, fired the imagination of Indians and wrought a tremendous psychological revolution in their minds. Down to the humblest labourer they felt confident of themselves and proud of being Indians. (Sandhu 1969: 300)

In the case of the Indian community, it is true that the vast majority of its members are at the political periphery of the larger-Malaysian society. It is because of this reality that one tends to describe the community as a marginal one. It is not — one should emphasize — a description that fits every member of the community. Class, occupational, and personal ties should in this as in most other similar circumstances, militate against total marginalization. (Muzaffar 1993: 1)

Muzaffar explains how and why poverty and exploitation became permanent features of plantation life. When this state of existence is juxtaposed with the lack of market mobility, one begins to realize why the Indian community as a whole could not have any political clout. For in the colonial-capitalist socio-economic structure, it was only those immigrant elements lodged in the middle and upper echelons who could hope to exercise some influence (with the native Malay population and of course for the British, the situation was different). The limited influence of Indian lawyers, doctors, and
business people at these levels was testimony to this. A look at their backgrounds reveals that many of them had emigrated on their own or were the offspring of those who had come of their own accord in search of a better life. (Muzaffar 1993: 3)

By the late 1930s the CIAM and other Indian groups began agitating for better wages and working conditions. There were intermittent strikes by Indian estate workers. In fact strikes in Selangor became so rampant by the middle of 1941 that an emergency was declared in that state on 16 May. (Muzaffar 1993: 4)

The British acted harshly and brutally to suppress the strikes. Over 300 people were arrested. For large sections of the Indian population, the violent suppression of the Selangor estate labourers was a traumatic experience. It underlined their importance in the face of a ruthless colonial power in a colony where they comprised only a small percentage of the total population. The “small percentage” factor exacerbated the weakness of an economically disadvantaged community. If the Indians had not been a minority, but laden with all these economic woes, mass mobilization and agitation may have produced some impact. The demographic situation then also contributed to the politically marginal status of the community. (Muzaffar 1993: 5)

If political mobilization through cultural unity was not possible within the Indian community, it was also because of certain other psychological impediments. For the Tamil labourers the insidious influence of centuries of caste dominance and dictation had given rise to a psychology which debased and degraded the self. It was a psychology which bred diffidence rather than confidence. The plantation hierarchy only served to reinforce those deeply ingrained feelings of inferiority and helplessness. A supplicant and senile community, though capable of sporadic action prompted by unbearable suffering, cannot, however, be expected to participate in sustained political endeavour aimed at transforming the human condition. That requires certain vision of change supported by an unshakeable faith in the ability of human beings to alter their destinies. (Muzaffar 1993: 6)
While the psychological, like the cultural, demographic, and economic, explanations of Indian political marginality are sufficient in themselves, it is also important to add yet another specifically political dimension to our analysis — that of the lack of citizenship status. After a generation or two, when a substantial number of Indians had become locally domiciled, organizations like the CIAM began to direct their attention to Malayan affairs. There was an increasing desire for citizenship and equal political rights. In 1938 the editor of an Indian journal observed that questions of political status, full rights of citizenship, establishment of a minimum wage not affected by the ups and downs in the rubber market, and amenities for Indian labour, the position of non-labour immigrants and domiciled Indians — these and quite a number of other matters that have to be tackled? (Muzaffar 1993: 6)

The British and the Malay elite, who collaborated with them, as is known, were quite unsympathetic to pleas for citizenship. This was understandable to some extent for it was doubtful if even the local-born Indians in the 1930s had a truly Malayan outlook manifested in perhaps a positive orientation to the Malay language. On the other hand, by denying Indian Malayan citizenship, the legitimacy of their participation in local issues always remained questioned. It contributed to a heightening of that sense of insecurity characteristic of immigrants everywhere. In a nutshell, it made the Indians feel even more marginal. (Muzaffar 1993: 6)

More than anything else, it was the political status of the Malays as the indigenous community with an inalienable right to the land that made them significant to the political process. The British had an obligation to recognize the Malays as a politically important community. If it were not for this, the Malays, who shared a major weakness with the Indian community, would have been in a more vulnerable position. For the Malay community as a whole was economically neglected. There was no Malay middle class during the colonial period. Even demographically, the Malays felt threatened for, from a nation, they had become a mere community among communities. Culturally, however, in spite of diverse state loyalties, both Islam and the Malay language provided the community with a sense of unity. Psychologically, their indigenous position
gave them a feeling of confidence but this was outweighed somewhat by a subservient attitude engendered by the feudal structure of Malay society. (Muzaffar 1993: 7)

All in all, then, the Indian community was not only the most marginal of the three major communities but also the one that had the least chance of getting out of its marginality. It was this baggage from the colonial past that was carried by the community into the post-World War II phase. The end of the war saw an upsurge of Indian political activities, generally in support of India’s fight for independence. Even the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), first conceived in 1946, was intended, inter alia, to support India’s demand for independence. Throughout 1947, the MIC gathered several other political groups in opposing Britain’s tendency to support United Malay National Organization (UNMO) in the constitutional negotiations which ensued when the Malay’s and their rulers successfully rejected the Malayan Union scheme. (Kim 1993: 10)

Formal Indian political protest against the Malayan Union appeared only with the formation of the MIC in August 1946. The MIC opposed the scheme on the grounds that it had been imposed on the country by the British without any prior consultation with the local people. The general opinion amongst the Indian community was that Malaya was a Malay country and should remain so. It followed that the Indians would not accept any constitutional reform that was unacceptable to the Malays. (Ampalavanar 1981: 83)

However the position of the MIC on the constitutional issue was undermined by criticism from local born Indians, who resented the domination of the party by foreign-born Indians, whom they dismissed as birds of passage. The Indo-Malayan Association, claiming to represent Indians born in Malaya, warned the MIC not to interfere in local politics and dismissed the Congress’ comments on the Malayan Union as ‘being very mischievous’. The MIC’s stand was further undermined by class and ethnic divisions within the community. (Ampalavanar 1981: 83)

The nature and extent of Indian participation in formal politics throughout the period under study was determined to a large extent by the changing Malayan political
structure. Immediately after the Occupation the scope of formal politics was limited essentially to advisory councils. The councils were composed almost entirely of the wealthy and English educated, who were noted for their cordial relations with the British administrators. The councils were filled mainly from the upper classes though great care was taken to ensure that all Indian groups – merchants, Hindus, and workers – were represented. However ethnic suspicions within the community were so powerful that not all interests were satisfied. (Ampalavanar 1981: 106)

It is apparent that the Indian representatives on the councils commanded little support throughout the whole community. This militated against the rise of a responsible leadership, acceptable to the authorities and to the Indian community as a whole. However its role as an innovating force was limited by its restricted rapport with the Indian masses and even within the major political groups within the Indian society. (Ampalavanar 1981: 107) Moreover the Indian representative on these councils were occasionally confused as to whether they represented Indian interests or occupational interests. (Ampalavanar 1981: 107)

The representatives were also confronted with the dilemma of reconciling their community’s welfare with British policy, while simultaneously safeguarding their own nominated positions. They could not act as spokesmen for their community whilst that community viewed them with deep suspicion and whilst they owned their position to the colonial regime. This system of representation encouraged the emergence of an Indian elite who shared the conservatism and pro-British loyalties of their counterparts in other communities. This had two consequences. First, the Indian councilors worked with the Malay and Chinese representatives in the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) and the so-called Radical Party of Penang, and thereby helping to bring moderate Indian political opinion into those multi-racial organizations. Second, the Indian councilors sought a base in Indian society. (Ampalavanar 1981: 108)

Indians were not represented in the same way as were other communities on the advisory boards set up by the civilian administration after it again took up the reins of
government in April 1946. The most noteworthy feature of the Malayan Indians’ newfound political consciousness was its orientation toward India, not Malaya. A regrettable consequence of their greater absorption in India’s political struggle was the appearance in Malaya of the religious hatred that plagued the homeland. It was not long after the war ended that Hindu, Muslim, and even Christian Indians began busily organizing themselves into separate bodies for the avowed purpose of safeguarding their own special interests. (Thompson and Adloff 1955: 100)

In part it was to counteract the growing influence of communism among Malayan Indians that the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) was formed in August 1946. But probably a more important influence was Nehru’s visit to Malaya in March 1946, which inspired the local Indians to form a party modeled after that of India’s Congress. A third factor was the need for Indians to take some unified stand in regard to the citizenship proposals that were the burning issue in Malaya throughout 1946. As usual, it was among former IIL members that John Thivy was able to find most of his recruits for the MIC, which from the outset claimed to speak for the entire local-born Indian community. Nehru had flatly told Malaya’s Indians that in the future they must choose between being nationals of India or of Malaya, and that if they claimed the privileges of Malayan citizenship they could not simultaneously claim those of India. At the same time, Nehru opened new and attractive vistas. Although India was not then in a position to defend her children overseas, he added, the time would soon come when her arms would be long enough to protect them. In the meantime, because of Malaya’s cosmopolitan make-up, Indians must co-operate with other sections of the country for the sake of India’s future. (Thompson and Adloff 1955: 100 – 101)

Malayan Indian Congress was an obvious reminder of the Indian National Congress. Indian leaders were not at all ashamed of the Indian connexions. The activities of the Indian Independence League in Malaya had drawn them into the vortex of Indian nationalism. If it was the ambition of the MIC, in the early years of its formation, to occupy in Malayan Indian politics a role comparable to the Indian National Congress, this was far from realization. The MIC was not the only body that claimed the loyalty of the
Indians. There were at least two others, the Malayan Indian Association and the Federation of Indian organisations. Some prominent Indians kept out of the MIC, and it had no following among Indian labourers. In fact, none of the Indian political associations of this time had any impact on plantation or urban labour. They did not concern themselves with labour questions even to the limited extent that the CIAM had. The MIC did not have effective branch organizations in different parts of the country, and it was quite weak in Singapore. It was therefore not surprising that neither the British Government nor the other political parties took the MIC seriously in its first years. (Arasaratnam 1970: 114)

The Indian community in Malaya in the inter-war years was politically quiescent, and the relatively few occasions when it was aroused to political action were usually in response to initiatives from India rather than to events in Malaya. The sporadic nature of Indian political activity can be explained. First, in this period, the Indians in Malaya were still essentially a transitory community. It was common for Indians of all classes, but particularly the merchants, to return frequently to India for short periods. Inevitably, this continually reinforced the India-orientation of the Malayan Indian community, particularly as the British authorities in Malaya did little to encourage Indians to evolve a local identity. Their frequent visits to India also exposed the community to political movements on the subcontinent. Second, the diverse nature of the Indian community in Malaya, divided along class, caste, and ethnic lines, prevented the development of a cohesive Indian political force in Malaya. Moreover, these divisions ensured that political impulses from the varying regions of India affected only the corresponding ethnic and religious groups in Malaya, and not the Indian community as a whole. (Ampalavanar 1981: 2–3)

During the Japanese occupation a significant proportion of the Indian community had been involved to some degree with the Indian Independence League or its military wing the Indian National Army. Consequently in the immediate post-war period the community was deeply concerned over the actions which the British government would take with ‘collaborators’. Members of the Indian elite were sufficiently tainted by charges
of collaboration to cause them to withdraw from local politics or return to India, confident of their earlier role in the Indian Independence League. (Ampalavanar 1981: 18)

The British authorities were particularly quick to take action against Indian journalists and in December 1945 there were large scale arrest of those journalists who, it was alleged, had disseminated Japanese propaganda. (Ampalavanar 1981: 18- 19) In the same period several Indian merchants were arrested on charges of ‘profiteering’, indulging in trade malpractices, and giving financial support to the league. (Ampalavanar 1981: 19) The voluntary or forced withdrawal of a significant proportion of the Indian political elite from local politics in the immediate post war years left the Indian masses without effective leadership. (Ampalavanar 1981: 19)

In the midst of this turmoil Nehru visited the country in 1946. Nehru was extremely restrained during his visit, though he was given a rousing reception throughout the country by both Indians and non-Indians. At the same time he made subtle attacks on the planters and their exploitation of Indian labour. (Ampalavanar 1981: 21) Nehru’s visit, though arousing tremendous nationalist sentiments, never expressed itself in anti-British propaganda as such, though the District Officer of Kula Langat reported that the visit had led to the wearing of Gandhi caps among the labourers. This caused some concern among the planters who regarded the Gandhi cap as a symbol of subversion. Malayan Indians were simply reminded by Nehru of India’s role in the liberation movements of Asia and reassured, in a somewhat unctuous manner, that ‘India could not forget her sons and daughters overseas. Although India could not defend her children overseas today, the time is soon coming when her arms will be long enough to protect them,’ this gave courage to an Indian community grappling with the problems of low wages, disease and an ambivalent political role in Malayan politics. On a more practical level, Nehru set up an Indian Relief Committee to deal with the repatriation of destitute, and arranged for the dispatch of two Medical Missions from India. (Ampalavanar 1981: 22)
The visit of Nehru to Malaya in 1946 dramatically emphasized the Indian Nationalists Government’s paternal interest in the Malayan Indian community. The strong influence of Indian politics on the Malayan Indian community from 1945 to 1950 can also be seen clearly in the attitudes and policies of the MIC in this period. In these years Nehru and the Indian National Congress maintained a close rapport with the first two presidents of the MIC, Thivy and Budh Singh. (Ampalavanar 1981: 25) Indeed prior to 1950 the MIC sent delegations to the Indian National Congress annual sessions in India and also kept the Congress well informed on developments in Malaya. (Ampalavanar 1981: 26) Close links between MIC and the Indian National Congress caused severe disquiet amongst the other communities in Malaya. (Ampalavanar 1981: 26) During Nehru’s visit to Malay in March 1946, the revival of the CIAM was discussed, and there can be little doubt that the Indian National Congress in Delhi was eager to see this happen. (Ampalavanar 1981: 152)

With regard to the influence of Indian political movements on the Malayan Indian community in the post-war years, particular strands can be discerned. First was the influence of the Indian National Congress, particularly Gandhi and Nehru, which was emulated by the MIC and the Indian elite groups, and to a lesser extent, the Indian working class. Second was Jinnah’s Muslim League which was assiduously followed by the Muslim factions in Penang, Kedah, Singapore, and parts of Selangor. In general, the Indian Muslims were conservative and pro-Malay in their political stance. (Ampalavanar 1981: 206)

The MCP used Indian labour and subversive Indian groups inherited from the time of the Indian National Army, to challenge European authority on the plantations, the wharves, and the railways. Second, the labour movements were led by the labourers themselves and not by members of the Indian elite. Third, the Indian labour movements were more tightly organised in 1947 than in 1948. (Ampalavanar 1981: 54)

In conclusion, the role of Indian Communists in the MCP revolt was limited. Their most important contribution was to mobilize Indian labour on the estates. In this
capacity they succeeded in supplying the guerrillas with food and information as well as bringing work on the states to standstill through strike action. But this was the limit of their contribution to the MCP revolt. The impression remains that even when Indian involvement in the MCP was more pronounced, the Indians remained subordinate to the Chinese in the party. (Ampalavanar 1981: 60)

With the destruction of the left after the 1948 strikes, the moderately significant role of Indian elements and Indian-based organizations in Malayan politics came to a quick end. For as long as there was an ideological bond transcending ethnic boundaries, however superficial it might have been, which provided the framework for inter-ethnic co-operation, it was possible for individuals from minority communities to contribute substantially to the political life of the nation. Besides, the orientation of that ideology towards the poor and disadvantaged endowed legitimacy upon the Indian cause. In a sense it brought the needs and aspirations of the Indian majority to centre stage. If anything, the ideology's other orientation — its radical anti-colonialism — indirectly endorsed the plantation labourer as one of those in the forefront of the struggle since the plantation was the economic bulwark of British imperialism. What all this meant was that the Indians, in the context of the politics of radical nationalism, were at least not on the periphery of the polity. (Muzaffar 1993: 8–9)

If the period 1945–50 had seen the Malayan Indian community most strongly influenced by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League of India, then the period after 1950 witnessed the growing influence of Tamil Nationalism and the Dravidian politics of Madras over the Malayan Indians. This reflected in part the emergence of vigorous Tamil separatism in India itself, as well as of course the Tamil numerical domination of the Malayan Indians. This was reflected in Malaya, principally in the Pan-Malayan Dravidian Federation (PMDF) established in 1932. It is interesting to note that the link between the PMDF and the MCP was a reflection of the political situation in Madras where the Dravida Kalagam often supported Communist candidates in opposition to the Indian National Congress. (Ampalavanar 1981: 33)
Since Independence the Chinese, Indians and others have, for limited political purposes, tended to merge into a single group commonly referred to as the non-Malays. This has come about through the focus of political debate on questions of the 'special rights of the Malays' versus the 'legitimate interests of the other communities', which has given the Chinese and Indians a set of common political interests. Specifically, Indian interest exist, of course — for example, the employment and livelihood of displaced estate workers — but political parties, including the MIC, have been weak instruments of pressing these concerns because of the smallness of the Indian community and its geographic dispersions. (Sondgrass 1980: 23)

Through their preoccupation with the fast-moving affairs in their homelands, the Chinese and the Indians had bungled whatever chance they had for a major political say in post-war Malaya. When they finally decided to opt for Malaya it was too late to obtain anything more than a junior-partner role. (Sondgrass 1980: 42)

Almost by definition, the political potentialities of the Indians in Malaysia are realizable now only in relation to the political allowances other more powerful parties have been willing to give. The coalitions these make up are organised with the Indians as junior partners. Whatever the party advantages the people know, then are defined communally and Indians vote accordingly. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 97)

Voting is a simple process for Indians and a strong proportion of them vote. But almost none of them are actively concerned with political process at the area, state or parliamentary levels. Their party participation is somewhat automatically along the lines of their ethnicity as encouraged by their leadership. Their attitudes towards governments in general are passive, expectant of services, almost never demanding. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 97)

One of the respondents had this to say- "Our people have done so much for this country. They have worked on the railroads and plantations. When they were building railroads in Siam, if 100 would go, maybe two would return. And without the Indians
where would rubber production be in this country? The government should know about these things and do something. If they don’t do something, there is nothing we can do.” Such sentiments are exaggerated, of course. But such views are widely held. It is easy to understand why. The position of the Indians in the country, now as in the past, is a minority one affected very thoroughly by what others have to say. (Wiebe and Marriappan 1978: 97-98)

Race Relations

Stenson in his study points out how the social structure of this colonial ‘plural’ society, with its infinitely complex racial division of labour, was designed to prevent Asian unity and to maximize returns to metropolitan capital. (Stenson 1980: 6) Chinese labour was employed separately from and in competition with Indian labour. Punjabi and Malay police were employed to control the unruly Chinese. The British have often refuted the Asian allegation of divide and rule tactics on the grounds that the peoples of modern Malaya were already divided, but it can hardly be denied that the diverse peoples of modern Malaya were brought together on British initiative in a carefully constructed system of Asian checks and balances. (Stenson 1980: 7)

Towards the Malays, however, the British attitude was quiet different. The British were in Malaya as a result of the treaties they had signed with the Malay Rulers and, therefore, they naturally had their primary responsibility towards the Sultans and their subjects, the Malays. Despite the drastic changes in the racial composition of the population, the British maintained Malaya as a Malay country and accorded the Malays a special position through the law. Large areas of land were designated Malay Reservations where non-Malays were not permitted to own or lease land. Free education was made available to the Malays including religious instruction through the Koran. From amongst the local people only the Malays were appointed to higher government administrative positions thereby further ensuring their political paramountcy in relation to the other Asian people within the country. (Vasil 1980: 14)
In all the British Government had been firm in its insistence that the Malay States formed the country of the Malays and had maintained the position, consciously, subconsciously and unconsciously, by preferential treatment. Its policy had been dictated by a conscientious regard for the binding quality of treaties, a recognition that its economic policies had flooded the country with aliens, and a realization that without protection Malaya would soon cease to be a country of the Malays and would in fact become, what casual observation had mockingly called it, another province of China. (Vasil 1980: 14)

P C Jain has pointed out that patterns of race relations between Indians and Malays were shaped by two interrelated aspects of class relations. The first of these involved antagonistic class relations between the Indian money-lenders and the Malay peasantry and the second involved the intraclass competition between the Indian and Malay fractions of the middle class. The two aspects tended to overlap giving the impression of communal rather than class relations. Jain further states because of the compartmentalized nature of the colonial economy, class and race relations between the Malays and Indians did not develop in the sphere of exchange. (Jain 1989: 108)

In fact the relationship between Malays and Indian Muslims, by the 1920s, had come under the influence of a new development. It was no longer purely social in nature. For a while it appeared that the idea of Pan-Islamism which Indian Muslims began to introduce to the country (in the wake of strong anti-British feelings over Britain's policy towards Turkey at the end of World War I) would evoke widespread response among the Malays. There is evidence to indicate that among some of the Malays there was more than superficial sympathy for the predicament faced by Turkey, still regarded as the Caliphate, after the defeat of Germany. (Kim 1993: 3)

A Muslim missionary, Khwaja Kamaluddin in particular, had a significant following in the country. In 1921 he arrived in the Malay Peninsula. Beginning from Singapore travelled to the north, visiting Kuala Kangsar, Taiping, and Penang. He belonged to an Islamic reformist group known as the Lahore Party. He had earlier
supported the Qadiani Party but subsequently changed his affiliation. He was well received by Indian Muslims and a section of the Malay population. Soon after his visit, an Islamic association known as the Anjuman-i-Islam was founded in Singapore which attracted well-educated Indian Muslims as well as influential Malays. Outside the boundary of Islam however, social relationship between the two groups was superficial. One finds, for example, practically no evidence of inter-ethnic marriage. Voluntary associations existed separately for Malay’s and Indians in every town where they existed. But all ethnic groups participated in several of the recreation clubs formed especially by the English-educated. Also, Malays and Indians played alongside one another in certain games (for example soccer and hockey), especially in inter-state competitions, although communal teams were also common before 1957. (Kim, 1993: 5)

With the rise of the Chinese as the principal middlemen and shopkeepers in Malaya, considerably reduced the scope for any large-scale Indian capital investment. Similarly investment on land on any substantial scale was also limited, owing to a land policy favouring Malay or European ownership. (Sandhu 1969: 44) Opportunities in Malaya for the intellectual and adventurous elements in Indian society were none the more attractive. In the religious field the Gujrati gurus had been superseded by those from the Hadramaut, and the Sayyid now were the ‘most esteemed priests’ of Islam in Malaya. (Sandhu 1969: 44)

The interesting point to note here is that up to 1932, since the coming of the British, the relations between the Malays and the immigrant non-Malays had remained cordial; there was no special basis for rivalry. There was no occasion for the two to confront each other. The Malays had either lived in their kampongs, cut off from the non-Malays, or had occupied privileged positions in the indigenous and British administrations where, at the time, there was no question of a challenge to their special position by the non-Malays. The non-Malays had lived in the urban centres and estates generally away from the Malays and engaged in activities, primarily in pursuit of wealth, which were looked down upon by the Malays and were left to be followed by the non-Malays. But this tranquil situation began changing in the thirties as a result of the
controversy over the decentralization question. This was the first time that a definite basis for inter-communal rivalry had been introduced. (Vasil 1980: 16)

The question of equal opportunities for employment was bound up with the bigger issue of political and civil status that now became increasingly the concern of Indian educated classes, as it was of their Chinese counterparts. As more of their number decided to settle in the country, had children who were born there, and had cut off all contacts with their country of origin, they began to reflect on their future prospects. What did the country hold in store for them and their decedents? Did their children have an established status in their country of adoption? These questions had been immediately provoked by the decentralization proposals and consequent administrative changes. (Arasaratnam 1970: 88)

They were underlined more starkly by the brutal facts of the Depression. Soon after the decentralization proposals were announced, the Imperial Government sent Sir Samuel Wilson, the Colonial Under-Secretary, to visit Malaya and discuss these proposals with various interests there. By 1931, the Indian and the Chinese elite had awakened to various implications of the British administrative policies. During Sir Samuel Wilson’s visit to Malaya, Veerasamy led a deputation of Indian and Chinese leaders to express their apprehensions about possible repercussions on the position of Asian non-Malays as a result of progressive delegation of power to Malays and their Sultans. Neither the Indians nor the Chinese at that time envisaged any move towards self-government. Nor did they demand any. The burning question from their viewpoint was the status and rights of the domiciled non-Malays in Malaya. (Mahajani 1960: 131 – 132)

In his report Sir Samuel Wilson took note of the fears of the Chinese and the Indians resulting from (1) the cry of ‘Malaya for the Malays’ in previous years (2) preferential treatment to Malays in services (3) greater use of Malay Land Reservation Enactments. Some of them also objected to the principle of preference to Malaysian immigrants over other Asian immigrants. Wilson enunciated the British policy: ‘Non-
Malays domiciled in Malaya are loyal. So it has been the policy of the Government to accord full recognition to their status as British subjects (in the colony) and British protected persons (in Malay States).’ He added, ‘Subject to the policy of preferential employment of qualified Malays in the Government services and the reservation of sufficient lands for Malay needs, I take the view that persons born in the Malay states of non-Malay parents should be treated in those states in exactly the same way as persons born in the colony of non Malay parents and should have the same professional and business opportunities as European British subjects. Wilson did not touch on the question of nationality or opportunities in the government civil services for domiciled non-Malay Asians. The Indian agent and Indian public opinion severely criticized Wilson’s report for not clarifying the British policy on political representation. (Mahajani 1960: 132)

Indians in the FMS took little part in the long-drawn out controversy, but a few bodies and some individuals presented memoranda to Sir Samuel Wilson. What the Indians feared was the promotion of a subtle pro-Malay policy under the guise of decentralization. In order to allay the fears of the non-Malay Asiatic communities, Sir Samuel Wilson wrote in the following terms –

‘The non-Malays who have made Malaya the country of their adoption, from a loyal section of community and it has been the policy of the Government to accord full recognition to their status as British subjects (in the case of those born in the colony) and British protected persons (in the case of those born in Malay States) (Aiyer 1938: 80). ‘No one will deny the important part that the non-Malays who made Malaya their home have played in its development, and the share they are destined to take in helping its future progress, and I think that for this reason alone they are entitled to an assurance that their interests will not be allowed to suffer as the result of effect being given to a policy decentralization. Moreover, subject to the policy of preferential employment of qualified Malays in the Government Services, and the reservation of sufficient lands for Malay States of non-Malay parents (although only British protected persons) should be treated in those States in exactly the same way as persons born in the Colony of non-Malay
parents (who are British subjects) and should have the same professional and business opportunities as European British subjects' (Aiyer 1938: 80 – 81)

Indian opinion has, however, felt uneasy over the policy which makes distinction between the Malays and the non-Malay races. The Indians have generally kept away from the controversies relating to decentralization because to them it mattered little if the Chief Secretary slowly disappeared or was violently strangled. But what does matter – this aspect of the question has so far been improperly appreciated – is their position in the new order whose objective under the name of decentralization is in the direction of building up of a parochial Malay nationalism eventually resulting in the keeping out of the other races who have made Malaya their home. The Indians do not want any political favours, but the question of importance is whether they will be assimilated in the existing structure without discrimination or distinction. (Aiyer 1938: 84)

In the Straits Settlements, leading Indians in conjunction with the Straits Chinese British Association had formed a cultural society which often debated political questions. They jointly pressed the Straits Settlements Government to open a few services in the Malayan Civil Services to domiciled Asians. In August 1932, the Malayan Civil Service was partially opened to Indians and Chinese who were admitted as district officers, magistrates and in the legal services. (Mahajani 1960: 132 – 133) In 1936, Veerasamy urged that the British law of Jus Soli should be applied to the Malay states and that all persons born in Malaya should be considered as subjects of the Rulers. His plea fell on deaf ears. (Mahajani 1960: 133)

But the British could not force changes in the traditional constitutional practices of the Malayan Sultanates. The High Commissioner ended the argument with the reply: ‘I could not support the proposal for the appointment of non-Malays to posts in the Federation. I know of no country...that appoints a foreigner, i.e. a native not of the race of the country or a non-Englishman, to an administrative post’. It must have come as a surprise to many who had no ties with India to be referred to as foreigners in a country which was the only one they had been brought up to know. (Arasaratnam 1970: 91)
Before World War 2, the British policy never seemed to recognize that the non-Malays, domiciled in Malaya, could also have an interest and a stake in her destiny. (Mahajani 1960: 134). The Indians and the Chinese were never granted the status of subjects of the rulers. It must be noted that during this controversy, on no occasion did any Malay explicitly oppose the extension of political and civil rights to Asians and non-Malays. And never did any Malay give vent to vehement resentment against Chinese or Indians. (Mahajani 1960: 135). Sir George Maxwell, in fact states that ‘the policy of keeping non-Malayans out of the administration owes its inception to British officials and not to the Rulers’. (Mahajani 1960: 135 ff)

The door to the Malayan Civil Service is barred and bolted to the Asiatics. Those Malays who are admitted into its ranks as a mark of favour and not as a matter of right, are not allowed to rise over class III grade. The other races are too quick witted and moreover they are ineligible to hold posts in a Malay state. So others should carry on the burden which cannot be transferred to any other than the nominated beneficiary. The presence of Indians has been dismissed in a most cavalier fashion in all constitutional reforms. Indian interests were affected by the changes made in the constitution of the State and Federal Councils. The State Councils lacked an element of reality and vitality before the Decentralization Scheme came into force. (Aiyer 1938: 92)

The Malayan Civil Service, the upper echelon of the Malayan administration, remained reserved for Europeans and, subsequently, Malays only until after World War II. This meant that no matter how qualified an Indian might be he could not attain anything better than a subordinate post. In the business firms, too, he could hope for little more than an assistantship (Sandhu 1969: 44). Lawyers and such like appear to have found difficulty in acquiring registration to practice, while opportunities for gaining political influence too were severely limited. (Sandhu 1969: 44)

Opportunities for gaining political influence too were severely limited. There was no political enfranchisement in Malaya until after the Japanese occupation; there were only legislative councils consisting of official and nominated members. Unlike the
Chinese and Malays, Indians were excluded, through what appears to have been little more than a discriminatory race policy, even from these bodies until the 1920s, when an Indian was first nominated. Even then, too, the government gave the impression of taking away from one hand what it had given away from the other. As Indian intellectuals in Malaya began to interest themselves actively, especially after World War I, with the nationalist cause in India, the problem of Indian labour in Malaya became involved with the whole question of the political and economic status of the Indian community in Malaya. As this problem began to attract the attention of public opinion both in India and Malaya, the Malayan government, apparently growing apprehensive lest the politically conscious Indians inspire some feeling amongst the local peoples, especially the Indian labourers, thereby disturbing the status quo, began to submit the Indian intelligentsia to the closest scrutiny. Partly, it appears, for this purpose a governmental political organization, the Special Branch, was created in 1919 and two Indians from the Indian police force were seconded to it as supernumerary officers. One of the functions of this organization was to keep a ‘local suspect list’ of subversive Indians—that is Indians who evinced an interest in such matters as conditions of labour or political questions in general—and harass them if necessary. These ‘suspects’ were mostly professional people. Most of the membership of the Central Indian Association of Malaya, for example, is believed to have at one time or the other appeared on the list. Perhaps even more drastic steps were taken to prevent, as far as possible, the entry into Malaya, henceforth, of Indians capable of leadership or political agitation. (Sandhu 1969: 45)

To sum up, there was little in economic opportunity or governmental policy to encourage any large-scale immigration of Indian big business or professional elites into pre-war Malaya. In fact, if anything, there was in the case of the latter, at least, an actual discouragement, certainly from the beginning of the 1920s. On the other hand, immigration of Indian labour was not only welcomed but openly solicited. This posture of the Malayan government was not unique but reflected a general attitude of British colonial government towards the whole question of Indian immigration. They welcomed, or were prepared to tolerate, as the case may be, Indians as a labouring or a subordinate
class, but not as that which might one day conceivably compete with European interests, or, perhaps even more important, upset or undermine the Raj. (Sandhu 1969: 45)

In Malaya, although not a declared policy, this bias or discrimination nevertheless appears to have been frequently practiced surreptitiously, if not openly. This attitude of the Malayan government coupled with the political and economic changes in India largely explains the lack of any substantial numbers of big business, highly qualified professional and other such classes in the stream of modern Indian migration to the country. (Sandhu 1969: 46)

There is a sort of duality of jurisdiction owing to lack of racial uniformity among the subjects of the Rulers. The Indians are expected to show some kind of allegiance to the Controller of Labour and the Chinese to the Protectorate of Chinese both of which are pan-Malayan establishments with jurisdiction extending throughout the peninsula. (Aiyer 1938: 85) The exclusion of Indians – in all the superior services is complete. In the clerical services the foothold of the Indian is very slippery. The share of the other communities will decrease by the ‘Malayanization’ policy. On the whole the position of the Indians is precarious. (Aiyer 1938: 65)

It is the policy of the Malayan administrators in the Federation and the Unfederated States of Jahore and Kedah where there is more alien immigrant labour, to adopt measures to shelter the Malays from the rising tide of the alien population and to protect them from alien surge. It is considered to be highly undesirable to bring the Malays into contact with these races and a settled group of Chinese and Indians in proximity to the Malays would bring about changes in the rural areas the consequences of which no one can foresee. The Malay reservation areas are bulwarks against the swarming races of India and China. The policy underlying the Malay reservation is hidden from the public and is quietly conducted with minimum of publicity and maximum of secrecy so as not to arouse the suspicion of the Chinese or the Indians or to invite any protest due to deliberate discrimination. Any real scheme of land settlement in
Malaya for immigrant Indians is bound to be shattered on the rock of this policy for the reservation of lands for the Malays only. (Aiyer 1938: 44 – 45)

Indian labour is disorganized unlike the Chinese. An Indian labour is paid a half to one third of what a Chinese labourer gets. With better organisation, the Chinese labourer avoids cutthroat competition, shows sincerity in work, and sticks to his contract term. (Sastry 1947: 82). An Indian labourer is accused of having a low working capacity, and of being insincere in his work. On that plea he is paid the least and exploited the most. (Sastry 1947: 47) Design of ethnic division was maintained by the use of political and economic instruments, resulting in labour segmentation along racial and occupational lines. (Kaur 1998: 73)

Several explanations have been put forward to explain colonial labour policy. First, the British administration deliberately chose to adopt the segmentation of labour along racial lines. This allowed the authorities to play off one racial group against another and enabled them to break monopoly control of labour supply by any one group. More importantly, it made sense not to allow any one group (especially the Chinese) increase its numerical strength and thus pose a potential threat to the stability of the colonial state. (Kaur 1998: 79)

It has been remarked that while the Chinese came to Malaya to make a fortune, the South Indian labourer came to earn a wage. British labour policy thus engendered and institutionalized the ethnic division of labour until the late 1960’s and ensured that Indian plantation labour was kept firmly in its place. (Kaur 1998: 80)

The wages paid to the Indians have varied with the commodity and the nature of work, but generally they have been less than those paid to their Chinese co-workers. (National Archives of India: Emigration Proceedings, 1939, file no. 48-7/39-0s) This willingness of the Indian to accept lower wages was in fact his major attraction as a labourer in the first instance, at least where planting interests were concerned. This was fully appreciated by the general planting community which, with the exception of some
individual planters who frequently spoke out and worked for better treatment of Indian labourers, took the necessary steps to ensure that Ramasamy never lost his virtue as a cheap and docile labourer. To this end, through such powerful media as their own Planters' Association of Malaya, the Rubber Growers' Association of London, their representatives in the Indian Immigration Committee and the Malayan legislature, a sympathetic Malayan government and a largely European-dominated press, they generally prevented wages from rising higher than they wished. Until the 1940s they also prevented the rise of effective trade unions or other movements claiming to represent estate labourers. (Sandhu 1969: 259)

The Indian in Malaya to-day is discriminated against on every side. His status is... far below that of other communities in the country. The public services are closed to him; under cover of protecting native interests arable land is denied to him; in the professions his existence is barely tolerated... Even the Malaya-born Indian, who does not know India, is treated as an alien in the land of his birth. To permit emigration of Indians to a country where they are treated with such little consideration seems consistent neither with the self-respect of India, nor with the best interests of prospective emigrants... (The Hindu, Madras, 6.3.1937)

Because British administration had been established in India before British capital penetrated the Malay states, the British owners of plantations were predisposed to rely on Indian rather than Chinese labour. The Indians were British subjects and they were better known to the British than the Chinese whose propensity for forming secret societies, moreover, marked them as the most turbulent element among the local population. As British and European capital became more and more involved in plantation agriculture — coffee in the late nineteenth century and rubber by the first decade of the twentieth century — Indian labourers were brought into the peninsula increasing rapidity and in greater numbers.' Malay contact with the new class of Indians was, insofar as it is possible to ascertain, minimal. The two groups were physically separated for two main reasons. Firstly, the estates were located outside the more populous Malay settlements, which were mostly situated along the banks of the rivers. Secondly, there was a
conspicuous absence of Malays in the plantations probably because they found no incentive in switching from their freer mode of existence to one which was highly regimented. In the urban areas (towns which developed mainly after the establishment of British administration), all three ethnic groups — Malays, Chinese, and Indians — were present. The settlement pattern in every town was basically similar. Each ethnic group tended to congregate at a particular position of the town. (Kim 1993: 2) In other words, apart from the broad pattern observable for the whole country as a whole — the Chinese in towns, the Malays in rural areas, and the Indians in the estates.

Imperial policy dictates that Malays alone are the sons of the soil. All others are guests or intruders as they may be. In 1891, there were only 231,551 Malays in the FMS or less than the population of its large estates today. There is a tendency in recent times to increase the Malay proportion of the population by encouraging the Malays of Indonesia to immigrate to British Malaya. By a process of absorption, assimilation, and naturalization it is hoped to maintain a Malay race which may not be submerged and overlaid by the rapidly increasing Chinese population. (Aiyer 1938: 9)

In the field of general services, the British had always followed so-called ‘pro-Malayan policies’ under which the Indians and the Chinese were totally excluded from the Malayan Civil Services. Although the Malays were not on a par with their British counterparts in terms of power and salary, they had the emotional satisfaction of having a special Malay Civil Service. (Mahajani 1960: 290)

Indian community in Malaya is more ‘insular’ than that in Burma. In Malaya, the bulk of the Indian population is concentrated in the pockets of rubber estates, clustered into separate coolie-lines. There has been little social contact between them and rural Malays, which greatly minimized the possibility of friction. Each rubber estate served as a miniature but cramped, Indian village where the Indian workers had their own temples and a semblance of a primary school. (Mahajani 1960: 117)
Older labourers vividly recall experiences they had when they first arrived. They talk of isolation, confusions and very severe hardships in the living and working conditions they knew. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 24)

The major ethnic groups of are residentially segregated and there are differences in many of their facilities. They are also separate in many other ways. Religiously, first, the Muslims follow one religious calendar, the Hindus another. Perspectives of area wide religious celebrations, observance of life-cycle ceremonies, patterns of approaching defined deities and conceptions of the world also differ.

Then too, while Islam is being pushed with a certain missionary kind of vigour in modern Malaysia, many Indians have gathered defensively behind the bulwarks they know, including Hinduism. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 52). Religious kinds of differences also tie in with dietary preferences and savings interests. Dietary differences influence pattern of inter-dining and entertainment. Savings preferences focus the interests of at least some Indians on the possibility of a trip to India or a major expenditure during a festival period; they focus the interests of many Malays on the possibility of a pilgrimage to Mecca. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 53)

The news the Indians and the Malays obtain often come out of vernacular newspapers with coverage directed toward the particular interest of particular groups. The Malays get their news primarily from the Utusan Melayu, Utusan Malaysia, the Indians from the Tamil Nesan, Tamil Malar or Tamil Murasu (all Tamil Papers) (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 53) The Indians and Malays tend to belong to different formal and voluntary associations. Savings and lottery associations are membered almost exclusively by people from a particular ethnic group alone. So too are memberships of gangs. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 54)

The people have different perspectives of what their occupational and citizenship prospects will be in the long run, differing prospects for the elderly, differing preferences for films; the Indians always order Tamil films when their turns in selection for the local
showings occur while the Malays, though they generally prefer Malay films, sometimes also order Hindi films...because they are cheaper, more accessible and, also enjoyable and so on. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 54)

The relevant attitudes of the people reflect and reinforce the ethnic separations that occur in reality. On the one hand, they reveal a certain suspicion and guardedness in reference to the members of other ethnic categories. On the other, attitudes towards ethnic groups are generally expressed in stereotype form, allowing relatively little room for an appreciation of the individual differences that occur within ethnic categories. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 56)

Suspicions and indications of separateness are by no means uncommon. Insularity of the various groups are such that they lead to stereotyping by ethnicity. The members of each of the groups are socialised largely within the boundaries ethnically defined and whatever the character of the frequent and relatively routine associations most of the people have with the members of other ethnic groups, almost all their more intimate experiences occur intra-ethnically. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 58). Almost always, Malays and Indians form kuttus (kitty) among their own kind only. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 120)

In reference to the Malays, Indian relationships are more easy-going. A Pudthukuchi Malay once proudly said, “I am a son of the soil (bumiputra). Chinese and Indians must apply for citizenship, mine comes naturally. They need licenses, I don’t.” and so it is in a sense. But the Indians find the rural Malays more understandable than they do the more urban Chinese and the Indians have become much more closely involved with Malays on the estate than they have ever become involved with any large number of Chinese. (Wiebe and Marriappen 1978: 59)

The names of the people identify them as Malays (Muslims), Hindus (Indians) or Chinese. The people can easily be distinguished in terms of their certain features. The Indians, Chinese and Malays come out of different cubicles in history, their stories in
Malaysia have been very different and their ethnic identifications remain very clear. The diversities are wide and the possible areas of conflict are numerous indeed. One of the respondents likened the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians to two durians and a cucumber, respectively. His reasoning was that the Indians (represented by the vulnerable cucumber) were caught between the far more powerful Malays and the Chinese (each represented by a durian, the thick-skinned and prickly-skinned fruit), potentially damaged both in an individual approach to either as well as in any confrontation between the two. (Wiebe and Marriappan 1978: 60)

The pre-eminent position of the Malays was guaranteed by the constitution itself. The retention of the Malayan Sultanate; the acceptance of Islam as the state religion, the Constitutional provision safeguarding the special position of the Malays, provision that Malay will be the national and official language – all bear testimony to the domination of the Malays in the political life of Malaya. (Suryanarayan 2002: 72)

The Malays were always protected by a so-called pro-Malay policy of the colonial authorities. Before Second World War non-Malays were never admitted into either Malayan Administrative Services, manned by the British, or the Malay Civil Service, especially created for Malays. Nor did Indians and Ceylonese in subordinate government services predominate for a long time. After 1914 and particularly after the Depression, a large number of them were retrenched. (Mahajani 1960: 117)

In 1937 in the Federated Malay States General Clerical Services, Indians were 10 per cent of the cadre, 24 per cent in Posts and Telegraphs Department, 18 per cent in Railways and 18 per cent in certain selected posts with the range of salaries between $\text{(M)}$ 250 – 800 per month. (The Report of the Agent of Government of India, 1937, P 17)

On the political side, the Malays never sensed a ‘loss of independence’ before the war. They were loyal and devoted subjects of the Sultans who were ‘sovereign’ heads of their own states. A stigma of national subjugation never stung the Malays into ‘driving
out the intruders'. For these reasons, there has never been a direct collision between Malays and Indian communities or interests. Consequently, the pre-war Malay attitude towards Indians in general may be appropriately styled as one of indifference and only in a few cases, of contempt. (Mahajani 1960: 118)

In 1939 – 1940, the form of Malay resentment, profusely tinged with envy, against the Chinese and the Indian immigrants, who were better economically and educationally. The overwhelming majority of the Indian community no doubt lived apart in the estates and hardly collided with Malay interests. But the Malay intellectuals were beginning to focus attention on the urban non-Malays. During this initial phase, the element of colonial nationalism was conspicuous by its absence. Its place was however filled by insatiable Malay demands from the British authorities for more and more privileges and greater facilities for Malay education and their participation in diplomatic missions and for a growing Malay role in administration. (Mahajani 1960: 281)

The Malayan leaders during the War had no antagonism towards the Indian National Army. A conspicuous absence of a single rioting incident between the Malays and the Indians or among Chinese and Indians and the absence of any communist revenge-raids on Indian ‘collaborators’ and vice a versa furnish another testimony to a feeling of harmony between the two communities and the Indians. (Mahajani 1960: 167)

With the Japanese occupation, a new era dawned upon Malayan politics, ringing in three differently-oriented nationalist thoughts. As regard as the subsequent racial acrimony, it was not a deliberate creation of the Japanese. During the British rule, the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians were never really on fraternal terms. Each community had been seeking for itself greater rights and privileges. The Japanese neither instigated Malays to hate Chinese nor did they seduce Indians into the INA and the IIL. What happened after the Japanese occupation was that racial feeling, shrouded under British hegemony, had been laid bare. During the tussles of political pressure groups soon after British re-occupation, racial consciousness was bound to rust into communal tension. (Mahajani 1960: 167)
In Malaya, however, one of the most significant legacies of the Occupation was its effects on inter-ethnic relations. While perpetuating the pro-Malay policy of the British, the Japanese regarded the Chinese with intense suspicion because of their loyalty to the anti-Japanese movement at home. During the occupation the festering ethnic tensions of the prewar years were exacerbated by economic competition as groups and individuals struggled to provide for themselves and their families in the face of unemployment, food shortages, poverty, poor health and general uncertainty. (Babara Waston and Leonard Andaya 2001: 258)

In general, Indians were not treated as well as the Malays during the Occupation, and many of those who had served in the British army or police force were imprisoned. But although hundreds of Indian estate workers were forcibly conscripted for Japanese projects like the infamous Death Railway in Siam, they were never brutalized in the same way as the Chinese. The comparatively mild treatment accorded the Indians was doubtless attributable to the strength of the anti-colonial movement in India itself, and the fact that the Japanese used Indian nationalism as a means of obtaining Malayan Indian cooperation. (Babara Waston and Leonard Andaya 2001: 260)

Often Malay nationalist opinion fluctuated between exclusive insularity and willing cooperation with the Indian and the Chinese. Very often too, the formulation and expression of Malay nationalist demands were coupled with unsavoury remarks about other minorities. Undoubtedly these twin tenets of Malay nationalism reflected a simultaneous opposition to the British and the ‘immigrant’ minorities. (Mahajani 1960: 282) Since 1946, however, with Malay nationalism bouncing off with all its might, various Malay reactions to the community have come to the fore. The foremost problem has been of immigration. The Malays, to whatever political party they may belong, regard themselves as the ‘sons of the soil’, whose legitimate claims to economic advancement were virtually nullified by the immigrant, enterprising communities. Their answer to the Indian and Chinese immigration is uniform, viz., it must be drastically curtailed before the Malays are submerged. (Mahajani 1960: 118 – 119)
Indians and Chinese do not dispute the Malay claim as ‘sons of the soils’ in a general sense. They admit that whereas, theoretically, they have a mother country to fall back upon, the Malays have only one country. They, moreover, concede that prior to British penetration, Malays were the natives of the peninsula and since the Malay Sultans made treaties with the British it is logical that the sovereignty should be returned to them. (Mahajani 1960: 119)

They, however, hasten to add that the Malays too, are an important race, by and large, for an appreciable element of the Javanese – Sumatrans has flowed into the present Malay population. The non-Malays claim, that these people modify the validity of the Malay people’s claim as ‘sons of the soil’ (Mahajani 1960: 119). Malay masses are fast becoming conscious of their ‘special position’ as the proto-inhabitants of Malaya. They particularly contrast their exclusive loyalty to Malaya with the divided sentiments of the Chinese and the Indians, whom they dub as ‘alien immigrants’ (Mahajani 1960: 282)

The unprecedented rise of the novel formula of ‘Malays the masters’ synchronized with the twilight of the British rule. As a result, the British who were in a state of withdrawal, did not feel the direct impact of this outcry, except in the way of incessant demands for expeditious Malayanization of services. On the other hand, with the achievement of independence, the piquancy of the colonial nationalism which hitherto somewhat tethered mutual communalistic denunciations has been diluted by the Malay obsession with ‘semi-alien immigrants’. Thus, the Indians and the Chinese bear the burnt of the current Malay cry of ‘Malays the masters and the rulers’, which impinges directly against their claims and demands for a status in independent Malaya. (Mahajani 1960: 283)

As Mahajani points out, the Malay claim as the rulers and masters of Malaya does not stem from a confidence felt by a majority but is an off shoot of a basic fear and inferiority complex. Malay nationalism is not a nationalism of a minority which itself is in the need of constitutional safeguards and extensive guarantees to keep it in power. (Mahajani 1960: 284) The Malays recognised vaguely the ‘legitimate interests’ of the
non-Malay minorities but insisted upon incorporating in the constitution elaborate, neatly defined safeguards in numerous spheres to ensure that in Free Malaya, the 'Masters' will not be outclassed and outdone. On the eve of independence the Malays had assumed a role of a minority fearful of the dominance of the majority, appealing to the colonial power for guaranteeing constitutional safeguards before the transfer of power to the majority. The explanation for this singular dichotomy in Malay psychology lies in the plural society of Malaya which makes the Malays or for that matter, any community, a minority in relation to the other two. Memoranda submitted to the Reid Commission by numerous associations echo the same tune in appealing for safeguards for their own community. Malaya has been witnessing an interplay of minority nationalism. (Mahajani 1960: 285)

**Assimilation**

Freedman in his analysis explains how Malaya was and remains a culturally plural society. He explains paradoxically, from a purely structural point of view, its plural nature is more marked today than ever before. Nationalism and political independence in their early phases have tended to define, on a pan-Malayan basis, ethnic blocs which in the former times were merely categories. Then the social map of Malaya was, so to speak, made up of a kaleidoscope of small culturally defined units rearranging themselves in accordance with local conditions. The Malays did not interact with the Chinese and the Indians. But as Malays, Chinese and Indians come to be realized as structural entities on a nation-wide scale, they can have total relations with one another. (Freedman 1960: 167) As the Chinese and Indian population were not encouraged to settle, there was a further outflow of Chinese and Indian savings. (Stenson 1980: 5)

The religion of the Malays, Islam, sets a strong barrier to inter-marriage among the various ethnic groups. Non-Malay men and women desiring to marry Malays first have to accept conversion to the Islamic faith. A lot of the cultural and social life of the various ethnic groups, excluding the English-educated among them, since the days of British rule has been organised around individual ethnic groups; they rarely meet, except
in a superficial way, in a common socio-cultural setting. The British made no special efforts to bring the various groups together; in fact, their policies had the effect of keeping them apart and not develop any substantial mutual understanding and appreciation. (Vasil, 1980: 3,4,5)

Rajesh Rai points out how the term *Zillah* held a strong resonance for Hindustani migrants. Ram Janam Mishra, a third generation Singaporean Indian, recounts: My father used to make me memorise what was the *Zillah* we came from, this was must. If we didn’t know then I would get helluva scolding because he would be ashamed. And this used to be a test case, the elders would ask us, which is your post office, which is your *Zillah*. Because it showed to them that we had not forgotten our roots. (Rai, 2004: 6)

Significant differences in the value-orientations of the immigrants and local-born generations give rise to different types of political activity. The nature of the commitment of the young men and the old men to the estate social system differs. The commitment of the youth is marked by a cultural contradiction. While the Malay-born young men believe they have larger stakes in the social system of the estate – the only home they have known – yet the particularistic Indian (Tamil) cultural movement exercises a strong pull on their imagination. The mediating variable between these contrary pulls is, the estate society which is neither industrial nor rural. For an immigrant population, the estate social system provides openings of only partial adaptation to the national currents. (Jain 1970: 424)

Jain explains how ethnically and culturally, if not structurally, Malay is a plural society. British colonial rule over Malaya resulted in the creation of a loosely integrated society, within a common political and economic framework, comprising of plurality of social groups based on a number of ascriptive criteria, and maintaining differential social separation from one another. For purpose of descriptive classification, and in terms of prevailing stereotypes, the major categories can be distinguished by race. Thus we have the Malay, Chinese, Indian (including Ceylonese and Pakistani), and European ethnic categories in Malaya. (Jain 1970: 425 – 426)
If one is to analyze the major economic and political institutions of the Malayan society as a whole, it is doubtful if the various ethnic categories would emerge as structural blocks. In other words, Malays, Chinese, Indians and Europeans do not participate, except in certain specific contexts, as discrete social groups in the economic and political processes in Malaya today. Each ethnic category, with the possible exception of Europeans (who do not undertake labouring occupation) pursues the whole range of occupations and there are ethnically mixed political parties and other voluntary associations. Certainly there is still social separation among the major ethnic categories, a feature that validates limited use of the term plural society for Malaya. (Jain 1970: 426)

Indian labourers and nonlabourers alike looked to India as their homeland and were not inclined to champion Malayan nationalism. Of course, in common with other orders of the plural society, Indians were also denied access to political power in Malaya under a colonial regime. Political activity among Indians in Malaya was thus divided by cleavages of economic interest, language, religion, and other community affiliations which the immigrants brought with them from India. (Jain 1970: 427)

With respect to the characterization of Indian community in Malaya what emerges is that there were few unifying forces that might have welded the Indian ethnic category into a structural block. Alliances were formed on the basis of narrower criteria than that of race. There is also evidence that the upper class of Indian merchants and traders had ties with Malays and Chinese that cut across ethnic boundaries. (Jain 1970: 428)

Tamil labourers on estate were thus effectively cut off from other sections of the Indian ethnic category. On the other hand, they occupied the lowest layer of the closed system of social stratification of the rubber estate. Denied leadership in political organizations outside the estate and sheltered by the protective system set up by planters and the government, the Indian estate labourers accepted their fate as a rural proletariat. Little wonder therefore, that there was no movement at any stage among them for upward economic mobility through change of occupation. The estate community existed as a colonial enclave within the larger society. Pax Britanica provided the common frame of
political domination for the labourers civic existence in both the Indian village and the Malayan estate. The overall political authority was the same and the estate labourers did not have to choose between Indian and Malayan loyalties. Geographical proximity and unrestricted migration to and from India obviated the need to define themselves as Malayans even further. (Jain 1970: 428)

Malayanization in the new nation is most manifest in matters of language and education, but in other areas the government has acted with caution and moderation. Except through persuasive media, the government does not impose national integration on the various strands of the Malayan population. Two features of this freedom have contributed to keep the loyalties of Indian labourers on rubber estates uncommitted to Malaya: first, the lack of a compulsory Malayan citizenship and, second, the lack of restrictions on the remittance of earnings to India. Thus, within the changed political structure, Indian labourers on estates are able to retain the old attitudes and attachments. (Jain 1970: 429)

Suryanarayan points out that pious and well meaning statement – ‘integrate and identify with the hopes and aspirations of the indigenous population’ – repeated like a mantra by important leaders have in no way contributed to the improvement of the status of the Indian Overseas nor the image of India among them. (Suryanarayan 1982: 34)

The communal tensions in Malaysia are mainly due to Sino-Malay rivalry and the role of the Indians is only peripheral. These tensions are the direct consequence of the pluralistic character of the Malaysian society and the cultural segregation of the three races. The British government made no efforts to integrate the Chinese and the Indians with the indigenous Malays and each continues to follow its own religion, language, customs and habits. (Suryanarayan 1982: 35)

Prof Rubert Emerson put it succinctly on the eve of Malay’s independence, the peoples of Malaya, ‘have in common essentially only the fact that they live in the same country’. The prospects of assimilation are very bleak because of religious differences.
All Malays are Muslims and they discourage inter-religious marriages. Further the Chinese and the Indians are deeply attached to their distinct religious and cultural traditions. The Indians therefore would continue to retain their separate identity in the foreseeable future. (Suryanarayan 1982: 35 - 36)

Nearly 50 per cent of the Indian community has lived in virtual isolation in the plantations, while a good number of others eke out their living on the fringes of urban areas. This has affected the manner and extent of their involvement in the economic development of the country. (Suryanarayan 1982: 36)

The Indian leaders, whether from the Malaysian Indian Congress, the opposition parties or the trade unions have failed in an important respect, that is, persuading the Indians to identify themselves completely with Malaysia by taking up Malaysian citizenship. The citizenship laws which were first introduced in 1948 were liberalized in 1952 and 1957. In 1957, when the Federation of Malaya became independent, the government conceded the principle of jus soli as a result of which all those born in Malaya on or after the day of independence became citizens. For citizenship by registration, the residential qualification was five out of the preceding seven years; they were also expected to possess an elementary knowledge of Malay language. (Suryanarayan 1982: 36)

Indian workers at rubber plantations in Western Malaysia, are able to maintain close ties with their villages of origin in South India. They are therefore not necessarily proletarians in perpetuity, for their favourite form of capital investment is in land in India. There is continual movement back and forth between India and Malaysia, and some married couples divide their citizenship so as to maintain a sure foothold in both countries. Despite the comparative poverty of rural India, many of the older labourers still regard it as their true home, to which they hope to return permanently. On the other hand, most of the young people who have lived all their lives in Malaya are less attracted to India, and yet are not at all eager to explore the possibilities of Malaysia outside the protective and familiar environment of the plantation. (Jain 1970: ix)
The ethnic considerations which weigh so heavy in Malaysian life are also evident in historiography, as each community seeks to make its voice heard in the nation’s history and as individuals choose lines of enquiry in keeping with their own ethnic backgrounds. (Babara and Leonard Andaya 2001: 257)

The attempt to incorporate migrant groups into a larger society is another recognizable theme in the history of Malaysia. Commonalities did not exist between Malays, Chinese and Indians, who differed physically, culturally and frequently in religious belief. Nonetheless, the process of incorporation was successful in early times mainly because the newcomers arrived in small numbers and elected to adapt to their new environment. For example, the Baba and Jawi Peranakan groups arose through marriages between local women and Chinese or Indian men. Both communities readily accepted Malay authority and played an important role as cultural brokers between immigrants and local societies. (Babara and Leonard Andaya 2001: 342)

Indian Muslims in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were able to foster close ties with the Malays, especially in the Straits Settlements where the Indian Muslims by virtue of their important role in the economy of the settlements, tended to occupy a position of influence. Assimilation, therefore was a sufficiently common phenomenon. Such assimilated Indians became known as Jawi Peranakan. By the early decades of the twentieth century, the Jawi Peranakan had emerged as important leaders of the Malay Muslim community. For example, they produced the first Malay newspaper in the country, aptly called Jawi Peranakan. This newspaper, first published in Singapore in 1878, took up the cudgels in defence of the Malays when the Straits Chinese Romanized Malay periodical — the Bintang Timer — in 1894 criticized the Malays for their ennui and lack of initiative. Several members of the Jawi Peranakan community, in later years, made concerted efforts to reform Malay society; they focused their attention on the practice of Islam among the Malays which they considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings as found in the Quran and Hadith. (Kim 1993: 3)
The process of masok Melayu, assimilation into the Malay community through conversion and marriage, appears to have taken place from the very early times and continues to this day. However, since the establishment of Islam and the abolition of slavery in Malaya in the fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries, respectively, intermarriage between Indians and Malays has been confined almost entirely to Indian Muslim males and Malay females, as Islamic and other social taboos formed serious barriers for other Indians, especially Hindus and Sikhs. With regard to the intermarriage between Indian Muslims and Malays, it is true that this gave rise to a mixed Indo-Malay community, Jawi Pekan, which since the end of the nineteenth century was enumerated as Malay for all practical purposes. However, the number of Indian immigrants involved in this process has been very small in terms of the total Indian population of Malaya. The number of Indians assimilated into other population groups such as the Chinese and Eurasians is even smaller. In short, assimilation leading to enumeration in a community other than Indian can account for only a very tiny percentage of the Indian migrants in Malaya. (Sandhu 1969: 167 - 168)

The situation was radically changed by the policies of the colonial government, which resulted in such large and self-sufficient migrant communities that the older pattern of absorption into local society now only rarely occurred. In addition, the vast majority of Chinese and Indian immigrants lived in areas that were governed by the British or by individuals associated with Britain. In colonial societies so efficiently compartmentalized, the Chinese and Indians understandably regarded Malays and other indigenous groups as standing basically in the same relation as themselves to the colonial authority. Each was assigned a role, which was performed according to British prescriptions. The latter carried on the charade of sharing rule, but the migrant societies did not distinguish between legalities and actualities. For them it was the British who were the true rulers of the lands in which they resided. (Babara and Leonard Andaya 2001: 342)

The symbols of ‘Malaysian identity’ are viewed by the majority of the non-Malay Malaysians as exclusive to the Malays and outside the periphery of the non-Malays. The
Chinese and the Indians (with the exception of some Indian-Muslims) are all non-Muslims, and hence religion separates them. The Indians and the Chinese take pride in the rich cultural heritage of their countries of origin and are reluctant to accept the ‘Malay’ cultural base, which creates a sense of alienation among the non-Malays. (Datar 1983: 22)

According to Datar there are two differing perceptions on what constitutes a Malayan identity. The former starts from the premise that the Malays are Bumiputras, the sons of the soil, and therefore Malay culture must form basis of the Malaysian identity. The symbols of this identity are the acceptance of Islam as the state religion; upholding of the position of the Malay ruler; the acceptance of Bhasa Melayu as the national language, and the acceptance of the ‘special position’ of the Malays in Malaysia. Religion has been and is an important rallying point for the Malays. It has also kept the Malays and the non-Malays identities distinct. The Malays swamped by the migrants, clung to their Malay-Muslim identity. A number of mosques and surasus (places of worship) have been built. Since independence many religious schools have been opened; there is state supported Islamic college, and Islamic departments and faculties in universities. (Datar 1983: 22)

The Japanese occupation of Malaya highlighted the differing aspirations, needs and roles of the Malays, Chinese and the Indians. (Datar 1983: 8). The period of Japanese Occupation was a very important stage in the further development of the unique nature of the Malayan political system. The presence of alien forces could have united the Malays, Chinese and the Indians but instead it pulled them further apart. The racial clashes created resentment on both sides. (Datar 1983: 9)

On 25 April 1944, the Malay Students Society in Great Britain submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of State for the colonies. ‘We fear that the fear of the Malays being lost in their own country amongst alien immigrants of different races, creeds and cultural backgrounds is quiet legitimate. If the fear is allowed to develop into desperation, it will inevitably lead to future troubles’ (Datar 1983: 9)
The evolution of Malaya as an independent nation in 1957 and its subsequent development and growth, had been based, not on the eradication of racial differences, but on their acceptance – Malays were the bumiputras, and non-Malays because of ethnic and religious differences could not fall into this category. (Datar 1983: 23)

The pattern of settlement of the immigrant population further separated the Malays and the non-Malays. The non-Malays particularly the Chinese, settled primarily, in the urban areas of West Malaya in the West Coast of Johore, Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Penang, Perak and Selangor. The Malays, predominantly engaged in agricultural activities were concentrated in the east coast states of Perlis, Pahang, Kelantan and Trengganu. Ethnic differences between the Malays, Chinese and Indians were therefore re-enforced by differing patterns of residence, occupation, language, religion and association. (Datar 1983: 5)

In 1957 when Malaya achieved independence, it had become a plural society par excellence. The character of the plural society in Malaya, and the vast number of the immigrants that had come to reside in Malaya, had a great influence on the slow growth of a movement in Malaya working towards independence. The early Chinese and Indian immigrants did not regard Malaya as their homeland, and had no sense of identification with the Malays. The Malays, afraid of the economic power of the non-Malays, were apprehensive that independence might strengthen and solidify the power of the non-Malays and hence their early political activity was concentrated on defining the Malay position and identity in the first half of the twentieth century. (Datar 1983: 6)

A striking feature of the Malayan society was the voluntary cultural segregation – while the Malays lived in a cultural milieu that institutionally continued in a local context, there was no effort made by the colonial authorities to orientate the increasing number of immigrant races towards local institutions. For the most part, the immigrant races were administered independently and led an independent existence. (Sondgrass 1980: 45)
Malays, Chinese and Indians have differed in many ways: language, religion, customs and physical features. These differences continue virtually unabated today. Only in very special circumstances have individuals moved from one group to another. And while there are senses in which the groups have been drawn closer together by political, economic and social change, there are also senses in which they have been driven further apart. The vast majority of Malaysians today have uppermost in their consciousness their identity as Malays, Chinese or Indians. The internal homogeneity of the Malay, Chinese and Indian cultural groups is more debatable than their distinctiveness. Each group has its class divisions and each is to some extent composed of identifiable cultural sub-groups. (Sondgrass 1980: 22)

Although ethnic groups such as the Malays, Chinese and Indians of Malaysia have considerable internal coherence, especially if a common external threat is present, they are not socially and politically homogenous. (Sondgrass 1980: 282) In any individual case these communities may be identifiable by their separate races, religions, tribes, languages or customs. Whatever the objective basis of the distinction, however, the important point is that each group encompasses individuals who feel a strong sense of similarity to each other and differentness from members of other groups. This makes the communities major facts of political and economic life in all those countries where the plural society exists. The relationship of cultural pluralism to economic inequality in a post colonial era has not been closely examined. (Sondgrass 1980: 5)

Members of each ethnic group which makes up Malaysian society have in their own minds a definite idea of what it means to be a Malay, Chinese or Indian. This kind of self-identification appears to transcend social class distinctions. Self-identification in ethnic terms is not visibly weakening, nor is it common for an individual to cross the line from one group to another – although this does occasionally happen in certain limited kinds of cases. (Sondgrass 1980: 11)

Moorhead in his study points out since the average length of stay of the Indians was three years, Indians, like the Chinese, showed a strong attachment to the mother
country which their too-brief stay in Malaya could not loosen. (Moorhead 1963: 189 -190) Though many of these came to love the country of adoption, the Indians have shown themselves as unassimilable as the Chinese. Amongst them, moreover, it was possible to discern two groups – the ‘Malay-born Indians’ comprising the merchants, money-lenders, lawyers, clerks, etc., and the ignorant still unsettled labourers. Attempts were made to form a community sense among the Indians of Malaya. (Moorhead 1963: 190)

Malaya before the Second World War may be described not unfairly as a ‘melting pot’. Could these three races with their different cultures, different languages, different standards of education and values, and their own internal differences find a bond of union in a common loyalty to Malaya, which in the case of Chinese and Indians was an adopted one. (Moorhead 1963: 190) Before the last War most of the labourers returned to India after a brief stay in Malaya. Since then more have tended to stay as permanent residents. It has been said, however, that ‘the Malayan Indians, like the Indians in Africa, are not associated with a strong Indian culture and must be studied as an element of urban and commercial society. (Moorhead 1963: 223) Though comparatively small in numbers, the Indians have exercised considerable influence in politics and trade union organisation, both in the Federation of Malaysia and Singapore. As they become more ‘Malayanised’ it is to be expected that the influence of this very articulate minority will increase in these directions. (Moorhead 1963: 223)

Aiyer further points out how the denial of Malayan nationality is accompanied by another distinction which, though seemingly innocent and even rational on the surface, will undoubtedly result in creating a cleavage within the immigrant groups. This is the differentiation between the local-born and the foreign-born. If the local-born Indians are really placed on a par with all other local-born races including the Malays and recognised as possessing a common Malayan nationality or citizenship and treated in actual practice as such, then it can be said with justice that there is a genuine attempt to protect the economic and political interests of the locally naturalized people against the invasion of outsiders. No attempt has been made to win over even this class of Indians. It is only when some Indians think loudly in the public regarding their future that inspired
The creation of a permanent reservoir of alien immigrant labour creates and raises political problems of importance for the Malayan administrations, who, for obvious reasons, are unwilling to commit themselves to the permanent presence of a large number of Indians. The question is resurrected now and then, when the flow of immigration is threatened, and is buried again when the crises passes over. (Aiyer 1938: 37)

The Indian movement has hitherto followed a course without raising any serious trouble to the administration. In the earlier days the unhealthy nature of the country was a deterrent for anyone to stay longer than he wished, provided he survived. The general characteristics of contract labour wherein men are unaccompanied by their families do not favour a permanent settlement. The South Indian labourer has formed no definite attachment to the new country and there are no inducements offered to him in Malaya to forget his home. The only prospect he sees after he has given the labour of a life time is to die in the estate labour lines. Like the true sons of the soil, many prefer to return to their own home. Malaya too has no use for these 'sucked oranges'. (Aiyer 1938: 22)

In 1920, the General Labour Committee appointed by the Planter’s Association made the following report: ‘So far as the Committee are aware, the Indian labourer does not evince much disposition to settle in the country as a cultivator on his own account. The Committee however believe there is plenty of land in the Peninsula which could be
given out to Indians on easy terms; but inducements for them to settle on the land are not great' (Aiyer 1938: 38)

The general question of colonization was never seriously pursued. Some years later the question was shelved. It was subsequently decided that there was something inherently wrong in the Tamil character in becoming a settler and it was best to leave them to roam about the country in their own way if they elected to stay permanently in Malaya. The haunting spectre of the stoppage of assisted or unassisted emigration from India is a perpetual nightmare to the Malayan employer and he could not remain quiescent. He turned away from the question of land settlement and began to explore the possibilities of having settlements on estate lands. (Aiyer 1938: 39)

'Settlement on estate land' was only a grandiloquent term for the provision of small vegetable plots which are really subsistence plots meant to ward off from the door in times of distress or slump. The labourer is supposed to fall back upon it when his employer is unwilling to pay him sufficient wages. The labourer becomes 'domiciled' on the estate thus create no problem for the State. Like the rubber trees, the factory and 'coolie' lines, he is part and parcel of the rubber company. If the Company goes into liquidation, the labourer goes home. His domicile terminates. No repatriation is called for in bad times for he will somehow exist. The idea was not to let him go home. Because then it would be difficult to get him back. The essence of all this was that the labourer should remain forever under the control of the estate under sufferance and on good behaviour. His home is his 'coolie' line and his land for which he has no title is the garden plot. The degradation of the South Indian agriculturalist could go no further. (Aiyer 1938: 40)

As Malay during this period was largely 'a glorified commercial undertaking' rather than a State, the non-Malay immigrants were considered by the British only as traders, artisans, and labourers essential for the benefit of Western trade and capitalist interests. The British followed the practice that so long as the non-Malays did not cause any threat to the British authority and interests and did not interfere in the affairs of the
bumiputra they were to be left alone to earn their livelihood; the British saw no special responsibility towards them. They had come to Malaya to earn a living and had done far better than in the countries they had come from) and there was no question of the British having to worry about their political status, rights and obligations. (Vasil 1980: 12)

Although non-Malay Asians could in some states be naturalized by application, and could also secure passports as British protected persons, they could have no such citizenship status in the country. This suited the non-Malays splendidly as it gave them maximum freedom to lead their lives without interference, according to the values and ways they had brought with them. As time passed, the British administration did feel constrained to intervene in the affairs of the non-Malays but only to protect them against some of the social evils that had emerged in their social system as they operated away from their original setting. (Vasil 1980: 12-13)

The idea of settling labourers on land and making them part-time agriculturalists had been in the air for some years before anything was done in that direction. Its advantages were, clear both to those who had the interests of labour at heart and to the planters. But government policy showed no signs of moving towards this, constrained as it was by the necessity to alienate all possible land for plantation agriculture and by the sensitive issue of land reserved for Malays. However, there was clearly a need to cater for an increasing number of labourers who were destitute, too old to go back to India, or who chose not to. The first effort was made by the St. Joseph Mission, when it started a land settlement for destitute Indians in an area covering 283 hectares in Bagan Serai, Perak. In some estates labourers cultivated vegetable gardens in small plots with or without the permission of the management to supplement their food and income. The advantage of making more systematic provisions of this type and its favourable impact on the health of the labourers made both government and employers look on them with approval. In 1927 the labour code was amended requiring every employer to set aside a minimum of 0.025 of a hectare of estate land for the use of each labourer with dependants living on the estate. The land had to be cleared at the employer’s expense and on it the labourer could grow food crops or graze cattle. It was not immediately implemented on all estates but
began important in the years of the depression when there was insufficient work for the estate labour force. (Arasaratnam 1993: 7)

Schemes to settle Indian labourers on the land and make them part-time agriculturalist were talked of for a long time before they actually got going. Indian critics of labour emigration were among the first to advocate that such migration should be coupled with schemes of systematic land colonization. Planters had spoken about such schemes as a step towards the establishment of a permanent domiciled labour force. They wanted the Government to initiate colonization schemes on State land. But nothing could be done as long as the prevailing attitude was that Indian labourers in Malaya were birds of passage. (Arasaratnam 1970: 72 – 73)

There were other more concrete problems. The Government did not want to alienate any land for this purpose because all available land in Western Malaya was being taken up by plantation agriculture. There was also the tricky issue of Malay Reservation Land, which had enormously expanded since the Act of 1913. The one major attempt at Indian land settlement in pre-Depression period was started by some Catholic missionaries in 1884. This was at Bagan Serai in Perak State, where the early immigrants had worked. It began as a settlement for destitute Indians by the St. Joseph Mission. It was an area of 700 acres, and each family was given five acres as private property to plant paddy. The owners built their own houses, and paddy was their main crop. When they were free they would go to work in the neighbouring estates to supplement their income. The organizational nucleus provided by the mission ensured the successful continuance of this scheme. (Arasaratnam 1970: 73)

In older estates, such as in the Province Wellesely region, Indian labourers established contact with the traditional agricultural economy of neighbouring villages, and hired out their labour in the paddy fields. Estate labourers attempted some vegetable garden cultivation and cattle rearing wherever land was available. Such interests came to them naturally as they had been agriculturalist or agricultural labourers in their home villages. The estates frowned on such activity because of the sanitation problems caused
by stagnant water and ill-kept cattle pens. The regulation of 1927 that one-sixteenth of an acre should be set aside on an estate for each labourer with a dependent family somewhat accelerated the trend towards an agricultural side-occupation for the labourer. But like many labour laws this was not strictly observed. (Arasaratnam 1970: 73)

Estates pleaded insufficiency of land, and when they did give land it was so far away from the labourer's home that he had no incentive to go to so much trouble to cultivate. If he did take the land, he was reluctant to put anything into it because of the insecurity of his tenure, and because he did not want to tie himself down to employment in a particular estate. (Arasaratnam 1970: 74)

In all these ventures of land settlement, the State stood aside and gave indirect assistance. It expected the initiative to come from the planters or labourers. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the differences in the Indian and Chinese response to land settlement. This is sometimes dismissed with facile explanation that the Indians lacked enterprise and initiative, which the Chinese possessed in abundance. While it is not possible to confirm or deny such impressionistic assessments of entire communities, it may be pointed out that there were some external factors that may have produced these results. The life of the Indians was controlled and governed by the estate authorities, who for a long time would not part with any land on their estates for agriculture. The Chinese had a freer organisation and an uncontrolled life, and could, if they were so disposed, establish squatter settlements. To get land through official channels was a tedious process, for which the Indian was not educationally equipped. (Arasaratnam 1970: 76)

The penghulu (headman), who was the man on the spot and through whom the actual process of a land claim had to go, was liable to be most discouraging and uncooperative, given the Malay attitude to immigrant communities. For this reason the Indian member of the Federal Council asked for the appointment of a land colonization officer with these specific duties. This was never done. The feeling among Indians was
that the Government was merely paying lip-service to the idea of colonization because of the immediate needs caused by the Depression. (Arasaratnam 1970: 77)

The Depression and its impact on the plantation economy and on the demand for labour in that sector contributed more than anything else to orient the attitudes of labour to their environment. Unemployment and under-employment in the estates drastically curtailed the incomes of the labourers and reduced them to poverty and near starvation. In this situation, while many accepted offers of repatriation, many others chose to remain and they began to look for other means of subsistence. Both the government and plantation owners saw advantages in providing workers with land so that they could earn a living by their labour till the industry came out of the Depression. The 1927 provision for land on estates was now vigorously followed and labourers were provided with allotments. Some estates went further, leasing out land to their labourers and assisting with expertise in crops and stock breeding. Some co-operative land schemes arose during these years to cater to the needs of unemployed labourers. While not many of these lasted long, one at Sungei Chua in Negri Sembilan continued to flourish for many years. The entire experience had the effect or shifting the labourer from his dependence on the wage economy of the plantation towards reconsideration of his future in an alien environment and to taking major decisions for his future well-being. (Arasaratnam 1993: 8)

One important dimension of that marginality which has to be considered now is of course its political marginalization. To be more precise, political marginalization is merely being considered in a more specific sense since the cultural and economic aspects of marginalization also contribute to political marginalization. A certain degree of political marginalization there has always been arising from the perennial bumiputra—non-bumiputra dichotomy. It has already been noted in another context that by regarding Indians (and other non-Malays) as non-bumiputra, a certain barrier is created, a barrier that discourages involvement, that dissuades commitment to the life of the land. If ethnic differentiation was a problem for local-born Indians in the early 1930s, the problem has certainly mounted in the last fifty years. It is the sort of dichotomy which makes many
Indians feel, rightly or wrongly, that they are second-class citizens in the country in which they were born. (Muzaffar 1993: 18)

Arasaratnam explains among minority communities in South-east Asia, Indians have been a difficult community to integrate. Wherever they have gone, they have maintained themselves aloof for decades, though never experiencing difficulties in their relations with other communities. Also noteworthy is the persistence of their attachment to their mother country, and the fascinating ways in which this shows itself. They follow closely domestic Indian events, political and other, express their reactions vocally and expect to be heard. This makes their loyalty suspect in those countries where national attitudes and identity are just beginning to develop. (Arasaratnam 1970: 196)

Yet in an analysis of Indian attitudes in contemporary Malaysia and Singapore, it would be an error to talk of them collectively and assume that a single set of Indian attitudes can be identified. One thing that can be said with confidence is that the Indian orientation has disappeared among a vast majority of these people. It persists only among the most elderly Indians, and this too in the form of nostalgia for the village and town of their birth, and an emotional attachment to close relatives in the family whom they have left behind. Neither of these factors operates in the great majority of locally-born Indians. Even those who have close relatives in India have probably never seen them and the ties are not felt. There is now hardly any attempt to repatriate to India by those who have lived here long and have qualified for citizenship. This is partly on account of the relative prosperity Malaysia enjoys and the economic hardships that India has encountered in the past few years. These economic realities kill any nostalgia even among the older people. Indians as a community were most vocal in their loyalty to Malaysia when it was threatened by Indonesia in 1964. (Arasaratnam 1970: 196)

Though the physical yearning for, and political orientation to India has ceased, the tendency to look to India for their cultural and religious inspiration continues. This is described by those both within the Indian community and outside it who would interpret this as continuing evidence of an Indian orientation. Such critics are banging their heads
against a solid wall, because at present a solid core of the community desires to retain its
traditional religious and cultural roots. Thus it is unable to fertilize in Malaysian soil in
the absence of a sound and original tradition of creativity in Indian religion and culture.
What is available in this country is generally but a pale imitation of the original and
people will not always be satisfied with this. This is true of all aspects of culture.
Whenever top-ranking artists, public speakers of repute, or known religious expositors
from India tour the country they draw vast crowds wherever they go. People pay large
sums of money to be able to appreciate what they offer, showing an abiding and
fundamental interest in the higher culture of India. Critics who pride themselves on their
Malaysian orientation point an accusing finger at these people, as if it was self-evidently
an act disloyal to the country. (Arasaratnam 1970: 197)

There is another new trend that has now begun and is increasingly becoming
popular, particularly among that section of the intelligentsia that has moved upwards
from lower social origins. By no means westernized like those drawn from the middle
and upper classes, they feel that Indians in Malaysia must retain aspects of their
traditional culture and thereby make a contribution to the country’s cultural life. Yet they
feel that Indian culture could be reinterpreted in the light of its local environment, and not
absorbed wholesale from its homeland. The task of reinterpretation will not be made easy
if Indians continue to import the transmitters of culture from India. Even at the cost of a
decline in standards of achievement, which they readily admit would follow for some,
they feel that this naturalization of Indian culture should be consciously promoted.
(Arasaratnam 1970: 197)

One sees this movement afoot in the fine arts, in literature, and even in religion.
This intelligentsia, which is bilingual, knowledgeable in both English and Tamil, is in a
good position to bring this about. It is a challenging conception and reminds us of the
indigenization of Indian culture in South-east Asia in the first millennium AD.
(Arasaratnam 1970: 198)
If this is successfully brought about, and Indian cultural traditions are firmly and creatively planted on Malaysian soil, it would help greatly in the integration of the Indian community. It would make them less suspect to other communities, who need no longer be worried at Indians turning their eyes towards India. In fact it would be in the interests of indigenous nationalists, rightfully jealous of the extra-territorial ties of nationals, to hasten such a process. It would be beneficial to Indians themselves, who would be in harmony with their environment. It would give an outlet for creative self-expression, and foster a mature outlook. Above all, it would serve to bridge the gulf between classes. Tamil being the common Indian language of expression, if recognised as the language of creative art it could bring the educated elite and the masses closer and help the former to educate the latter. At the moment, no seepage of ideas takes place downwards within the community. The English educated stand aloof, leaving the masses to look to India for the sources of their cultural enjoyment. (Arasaratnam 1970: 198)

The entire industry of rubber production is largely defined without reference to ethnic considerations. In general, tappers are assigned to tasks according to considerations of merit and they are censored or dismissed from such assignments according to how well they do what is expected of them. Similarly, a tappers pay is determined by how much latex he gathers and Kangais are responsible for the work done by all the labourers under them, regardless of ethnicity. (Wiebe and S. Marriappan 1978: 55)

The formidable Consumer Association of Penang (CAP), which spearheaded the consumer rights movement in Malaysia and Southeast Asia more generally, and has in many ways something of a model to the burgeoning movement, furnishes a good demonstration of Malaysian multiculturalism at work. Its monthly newsletter, with wide circulation in Malaysia, is published not only in Bahasa Melayu, the official language, but also in Chinese, Tamil and English, which retain official language status in neighbouring Singapore, once a part of the Malay Federation. (Lal 2006: 3764). On the other hand, Malay’s have developed a love for Hindi movies. They find the more Caucasian-looking Hindi film stars extremely good looking. Hindi movie stars are also
said to act more naturally. Hindi songs acquired immense popularity from the 1950s when the brother and sister team of Razak Majid and Zainab Majid sang Hindi songs with Malay lyrics. (Kim 1993: 14)

Thus also, most play groups in the secondary schools the children attend are ethnically described, Malays and Indians almost never travel together on shopping trips and fraternization in toddy drinking and card playing is more often considered a fraternization in deviance than anything else. Meanwhile, the more universalistically describable features of the industrial context have so far little influenced the ways in which the Malays and the Indians locally interact with each other. The people go to work. They return to socially and culturally distinct patterns of life. (Wiebe and S. Marriappen 1978: 56)

To use Furnivall’s words, however, it is clear in numerous ways that the peoples of the different ethnic communities ‘mix’ but do not ‘combine’. They speak different languages, are stereotypically identified with different civilizations in the minds of others, often wear different clothing, prepare for different festivals, live in different lines areas, send their children to different schools, watch programmes on different television sets, in general spend their leisure times separately, save what little they can with different long-range purposes in mind. They also name their children differently are almost always easily distinguishable in terms of their features, belong to different political parties, name their Gods differently, differentially pay their dues to unions, view their prospects both on the estate and in the country differently, approach different spokesmen ethnically defined, marry almost exclusively amongst themselves, travel to other places separately, internally organize themselves along different lines, competitively define differently the pros and cons of their own cultural systems and come out of different and in the past often competing cubicles of civilization. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the identifications of various communities are ethnically distinct from the sociological point of view. (Wiebe and S. Marriappen 1978: 182)
Given these circumstances, if 'integration' or assimilation of the various communities is unlikely in the foreseeable future, there are indications that functionally important structural and other linkages among the communities already make and will increasingly make mutual ‘accommodations’ possible, even essential. (Wiebe and S. Marriappan 1978: 183)

**Important works refered**

* National Archives of India: Emigration Proceedings, 1939, file no. 48-7/39-0s

* Aiyer, Neelakandha K A (1938), *Indian Problems in Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur: The Indian Office, FMS.


