

**Black Europeans, the Indian Coolies and Empire:
Colonialisation and Christianized Indians in
Colonial Malaya & Singapore,
c. 1870s - c. 1950s**

By

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Declaration

This thesis is based on my own research. The work of others is acknowledged.



Marc Rerceretnam

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List of Tables:

a. Population of Christians in India, 1881-1951	36
b. Population of Christians in Ceylon, 1881-1946	38
c. Map of Malay states and Straits Settlements, 1786-1941	38a
d. Map of political divisions of Malaya (states and districts), 1957	38b
e. Map Of India (showing political divisions), 1957	38c
f. Indian population in the Roman Catholic (RC) church of Malaya and Straits Settlements, 1922-1952	56
g. Estimated percentage of Indian Roman Catholics to the total Indian population of Malaya and the Straits Settlements, 1922-1947	57
h. Indian population in the Methodist church of the F. M. S. and Straits Settlements, 1891-1921	59
i. Composition of total Indian labour immigration into Malaya, 1844-1941	70
j. Racial/Religious Breakdown of South Indian Hindu/Christian, Chinese and Malay Civil Servants in the Straits Settlement, 1873-1933	78
k. Population of different Indian religious groups permillage (per 1000) in Malaya and Singapore, 1921 and 1931	80
l. Number of individuals and occupations held by Christian South Indians of the civil service in the Straits Settlements, 1873-1946	81
m. Number of Christian South Indians in individual S.S. government departments, 1873-1946	82
n. Number of Christian Indians civil servants/religious denomination in the Straits Settlements, 1873-1946	84
o. Breakdown of Christian Indian communities by Dialects & State employed in the Straits Settlements civil service, 1873-1946	86
p. Number of Christian South Indians in the Straits Settlements government departments by gender, 1873-1946	88
q. Government expenditure on Education in the F. M. S., 1875-1900	141
r. Distribution of Students in Singapore Government and Grant-in-Aid Schools, 1919	144
s. Percentage of Student Enrolments in Mission Schools,	

Singapore 1905-1938	145
t. Caste of Roman Catholic and Protestant Indian Christians in the Madras Presidency, 1871	229
u. Breakdown of Caste groups in the Church of St. Francis Xavier (Roman Catholic), Penang, 1916-1931	235
v. Breakdown of Caste groups in the Church of St. Francis Xavier (Roman Catholic), Penang, 1935-1941	237

Abbreviations:

AMESU	All-Malaya Estate Staff Union
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
CBS	Christian Brothers Schools
CHJ	Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus
CIAM	Central Indian Association of Malaysia
CO 273	The Colonial Office's (London) Straits Settlements original correspondence.
FMS	Federated Malay States
FTU	Federated Trade Union
IIL	Indian Independence League
INA	Indian National Army
KL	Kuala Lumpur
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MEP	Mission Estrangerers de Paris (Paris Foreign Mission)
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MPAJU	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union
MTUC	Malayan Trade Union Council (later renamed Congress)
NAS	National Archives of Singapore
PAP	People's Action Party
SGI (Taiping)	St. George's Institution
SIA	Singapore Indian Association
SJI (S'pore)	St. Joseph's Institution
SJI (K. L.)	St. John's Institution
SS	Straits Settlements
SSAR	Straits Settlements Annual Report
SSBB	Straits Settlements Blue Book
SXI	St. Xavier's Institution
UMNO	United Malay National Organization
UMS	Unfederated Malay States

Glossary of Terms

Brahmin	Sanskrit; member of the highest or priestly caste.
Catechist	assistant to priest or missionary.
Coolie	Chinese; term used to describe any manual labourer
Conductor	supervisor of all estate kanganies.
Confession	Roman Catholic practice of forgiveness of sin.
Kampung	Malay; rural settlement.
Kangani	Tamil; a foreman, supervisory labourer or recruiter.
Kerala	Malayalam; a large South western coastal state in South India.
Kling	Malay; native of Madras or Southern Indian.
Kerani	Malay; clerk.
Kshatriya	Sanskrit; category of second highest caste group, warrior castes.
Merdeka	Malay; freedom or independence.

Padi	Malay; rice.
Pastor	Protestant minister or clergyman with reference to their congregation.
Priest	Ordained Roman Catholic clergyman.
Ramasamy	Tamil; a common name, used as a paternalistic term to describe a South Indian person. Usually used by European estate managers.
Rosary	Roman Catholic pray beads.
Sacrement	Visible sign divinely instituted to confer grace or mercy.
Sam-fu	Traditional attire for Chinese women (side-buttoned blouse and long pants).
Sari	Traditional dress for Indian women.
Sudra	Sanskrit; category of lowest caste group.
Tamilnadu	Tamil; the largest state in South India
Toddy	Tamil; alcoholic drink made from the palmyra tree.
Varna	Sanskrit; colour, shade or class, usually denoting the different levels of the caste heirarchy.

All currency denominations used in this study refers to the Straits Settlement dollar. The Straits dollar was valued at \$60 to 7 British pounds (\$8.5 to 1 pound) in 1906.¹

¹ Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*, (England: Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Co. Ltd., 1908), pp. 138-139.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

List of Tables

Abbreviations

Glossary of Terms

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Black Europeans and the Indian Coolies	2
1.1.1 Christianity in British Malaya and the Straits Settlements	7
1.1.2 Indian labour migration	8
1.1.3 Period of study	9
1.1.4 Aim of the study	10
1.2 Ethnicity and the Race-Class Dimension	14
1.2.1 Ethnicity	15
1.2.2 Class and Race	16
1.2.3 Gender relations	17
1.2.4 Ethnicity and Race	19
1.2.5 Caste	20
1.3 Migration Statistics and the definition of South India and Malaya	21
1.3.1 Definition of Christianity	23
1.3.2 Survey of Chapters	24
1.3.3 Sources	27
1.4 Conclusion	29

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Historical background	30
2.1.1 South Indian influences in the Malay archipelago	30
2.1.2 European interest in the Malay archipelago	31
2.2 Christianity in India	34
2.2.1 The arrival of the Europeans in South India and Ceylon	35
2.3 Precursor to migration: Economic hardship in South India, 1870's - 1950's	38

Chapter 3

TRANSIENCE AND ESTABLISHMENT IN BRITISH MALAYA

3.1 Indian labour migration to the Malay peninsula	42
3.1.1 The establishment of Christianity in the Malay archipelago	43
3.1.2 The establishment of the Roman Catholic church	44
3.1.3 The establishment of an Indian-based Anglican church	49
3.1.4 The establishment of an Indian-based Methodist church	51
3.1.5 Establishment of other Protestant churches	53
3.2 Indian Christian populations in British Malaya	54

3.3 Government policy and Indian immigration	60
3.3.1 Rural communities: Methods of recruitment	61
3.3.2 Urban communities: The Civil Service & South Indian immigration	65
3.3.3 Constructing bureaucracies: Development of the urban 'middle classes'	69
3.3.4 Subordinate populations in the civil service	77
3.4 Conclusion	89

Chapter 4

THEORIES OF CONTAINMENT : CONTROLLING THE EMPIRE AND IMPERIAL ATTITUDES, 1900-1941

4.1 Concepts of racial superiority	92
4.1.1 Political opportunism and the conveniences of racial hierarchies	94
4.1.2 Colonial profitability and the moulding of British public compliance	95
4.1.3 'Scientific' racism	97
4.1.4 British cultural hostilities to non-'Aryan' South India	103
4.1.5 Liberalism and its co-existence with colonialism	105
4.2 James Bryce: Moderate and pragmatic racist	106
4.2.1 Bryce's intellectual legacy to colonial Malaya	109
4.2.2 British racism reinterpreted in Malaya	111
4.3 Conclusion	113

Chapter 5

CONFORMING TO COLONIAL HEGEMONIES, 1900-1941

5.1 Learning subservience: The use of social distance	115
5.1.1 Urban communities: The Benevolent guise of Colonialism	118
5.1.2 Reactions to 'benevolent' colonialism	122
5.1.3 Colonial influences in the construction of Indian Christian names	124
5.1.4 The manufacture of Race: The building blocks of colonial divisions	128
5.1.5 Imperial indoctrination and control	136
5.1.6 Urban schools: The making of the 'Black European'	138
5.1.7 Mission schools and Colonial indoctrination	143
5.1.8 Plantation Schools: Subsistence education	158
5.2 Conclusion	161

Chapter 6

COLLUSION AND RESISTANCE

6.1 Unmasking the Raj: The Malevolent face of Colonialism in the estates	164
6.1.1 Resistance in the estates	169
6.2 The colonial contradictions and implications of being 'Indian'	171
6.3 Subordinate forms of Resistance	177
6.3.1 The 'Poison Pen' letter	178
6.3.2 Feigned Illness	178
6.3.3 Gossip and 'Snitching'	180
6.3.4 Rumour	181
6.3.5 Drunkenness & Hysteria	183
6.3.6 Domestic & Marital disputes	184
6.3.7 Euphemism	185

6.4 The beginnings of the Indian Association Movement	186
6.4.1 The Singapore Indian Association and 'The Indian'	188
6.4.2 British racism and the reinforcement of the traditional 'Aryan' myth	191
6.4.3 'Dravidian Nationalism': Redefining the racial parameters	195
6.5 'The Malaysia Message' and 'Dravidian nationalism', 1902-1926	198
6.5.1 'The Malaysia Message' and the rise of nationalism	201
6.6 The rise of the pre-war trade union movement	208
6.6.1 The Japanese occupation and the Indian Nationalist Army (1942-45)	211
6.6.2 The pacificification of unionism and communal post-war developments	217
6.7 Conclusion	221

Chapter 7

RELATIONSHIPS IN INDIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

7.1 Definition of caste	225
7.1.1 Caste & class: A precursor to emigration	227
7.1.2 Caste groupings and Christian denominations in South India	228
7.1.3 Redefining caste in Malaya and the Straits Settlements	231
7.1.4 Maintaining differences among caste groupings	239
7.1.5 Caste modifications and hierarchy maintenance	241
7.2 The Relationships within the Church	243
7.2.1 The role of the clergy and Church	247
7.2.2 The role of catechist & other support groups	254
7.2.3 Laity within the Church	256
7.2.4 Religious conversion	261
7.2.5 Inter and intra-racial marriages: Interplay of race and gender	263
7.3 Women: Gender roles and relations	268
7.3.1 Indian Christian women in Malaya and the Straits Settlements	273
7.3.2 Expectations of 'femininity'	274
7.3.3 Gender in the estates: Roles in flux	279
7.3.4 Education system	284
7.3.5 Orphanages and homes	285
7.3.6 Match-making and Dowries	290
7.3.7 Marriage and remarriage	293
7.4 Conclusion	295

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 Dividing the Ruled: Accentuating and perpetuating 'Difference'	297
8.1.1 Incorporating old and new prejudices	298
8.1.2 Learning subservience	299
8.1.3 Resistance	302
8.2 Overview	303
Bibliography	306
Appendices	341

Chapter 1

Introduction

You can wear a mask and paint your face,
You can call yourself the human race,
You can wear a collar and a tie,
One thing you can't hide. Is when you're crippled inside.

*John Lennon, 'Crippled Inside',
Imagine (1971)*

Present-day nationalists and political leaders in modern Malaysia and Singapore continue to play on the humiliation experienced by non-European communities under colonialism. Such sentiments still strike a sensitive cord even after almost half a century of self-government and independence. From Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's belief in conspiratorial western attacks on his country economy¹ to Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's proclamations of 'Asian values' and the denigration of western cultures², there appears little doubt in the benefits of dwelling on the real or perceived shortcomings of ex-colonial/western countries. Such sentiments, although often little more than rhetoric, have been reasonably effective in their ability to rouse nationalist feelings. Political elites utilise sentiments for their own social, political or economic advantage - often to stifle external criticism³ or limit competition from areas outside their control.⁴

However this should not be mistakenly viewed as a uniquely post-colonial phenomenon. These ideas can be directly linked to colonialism's fabrication and manipulation of racial, national and gender identities – the result of which can be

¹ 'Malaysian PM blames George Soros for attack on ringgit', The Financial Express, <http://www.expressindia.com/fe/daily/19970727/20855333.html>, 27 July 1997.

² Anders Uhlin, *Asian Values Democracy neither Asian nor Democratic*, (Stockholm: Center for Pacific Asia Studies at Stockholm University, 1999), pp. 3-4.

³ Press restrictions placed on Time magazine, The Asian Wall Street Journal, The Economist, The International Herald Tribune are typical examples of such action. Francis T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled: Singapore Revisited*, (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), pp. 140-179.

⁴ T. S. Selvan, *Singapore the Ultimate Island: Lee Kuan Yew's Untold Story*, (Melbourne: Freeway Books, 1990), pp. 273, 280-281. Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 56- 62. Alan Chong, *Goh Chok Tong: Singapore's New Premier*, (Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1991), pp. 96-97.

referred to as an 'inferiority complex' on a national level. For example, racial 'identities' were used by colonial authorities to justify arbitrary action and policy. However these supposed identities were never truly challenged even after the departure of colonial governments. Pro-British Asian elites, supplanting their colonial rulers, often found it easier to continue with existing power structures than to alter the misconceptions of their departed colonial masters. Hence racialist social, economic and political policy continue to play an important role in how post-colonial communities rule and perceive themselves. A quote from the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1967 illustrates this perpetuation of colonial Malay (Southeast Asian), Indian (South Asian) and Chinese (East Asian) stereotypes;

Three women were brought to the Singapore General Hospital, each in the same condition and needing a blood transfusion. The first, a Southeast Asian was given the transfusion but died a few hours later. The second, a South Asian was also given a transfusion but died a few days later. The third, an East Asian, was given a transfusion and survived. That is the X factor in development.⁵

Colonialism's paternalistic and domineering nature also helped mould a climate of fear among many subservient non-European communities. Such an environment was favourable in the cultivation of a new tradition of 'self-hatred' or even hate directed at one's own peers and helped facilitate the colonial practice of 'divide and rule'.

Black Europeans and the Indian Coolies

The term 'Black European' was coined by striking estate union workers during the Klang Estate workers strikes of 1941, and derogatively to describe 'Anglophiled' Indian support of anti-union colonial authority.⁶ The term was chosen for use in this

⁵ Michael D. Barr, 'Lee Kuan Yew: Race, Culture and Genes', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 29 (2), 1999, citation from Malaysian academic and political analyst Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, in his letter to Michael Barr dated 4 August 1996. This quote came from a speech made by Lee at the University of Singapore.

⁶ Michael Stenson, *Class, Race & Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case*, (Queensland: University of Queensland, 1980), p. 64. Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 29. Jomo Kwame Sundaram & Patricia Todd, *Trade Unions & the State in Peninsular Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 67. Arokia Dass, *Not Beyond Repair: Reflections of a Malaysian Trade Unionist*, (Hong Kong: Asia Monitor Resource Centre, 1991), p. 30.

thesis because it eloquently conveyed the contradictory and dualistic nature of colonialised Indian Christian society. The Black European stood in stark contrast to their less indoctrinated rural cousins, the poor labourers or 'Coolies' (a common term within Church circles, which appeared to go out of style by the late 1930s).

These conceptions of community and self were manipulated via colonial power-structures. Colonial 'victims' reacted and interacted with the all-powerful British colonialist, but such responses were often not solely a direct reaction to colonialism but a result of the fusion of ideas. The role of indigenous traditions and the acquiring of 'modern' practices also played an important role. Interaction between these opposing elements often brought about a concoction of ideas often unfamiliar to both traditional and modern circles. For example, Partha Chatterjee noted how such anti-colonial 'rejection' was ambivalent in nature; 'rejection of the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards, and rejection of ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity'. This dilemma is referred to as 'Eastern' (colonialised) nationalism. In contrast to colonialisng 'Western' nationalism, 'Eastern' nationalism was a product of colonial difference, which set its brand of the anti-colonial nationalism in motion.⁷

This study will examine motives, some historically inherited, others newly adopted - via structures and cultural forces which opposed or supported the new culture of colonialism. The Christian South Indian communities had specific socio-economic and political experiences which differed, in varying degrees, from other groups in colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements. These differing experiences affected their reaction and perceptions to the new environment of British Malaya and the Straits Settlements. In India, issues relating to religion and lifestyle practices were strongly influenced by indigenous traditions linked to Hinduism, for example, issues relating to caste or relationship dynamics within traditional agricultural-based communities. With migration, these influences dissipated or modified themselves. These issues will be dealt with in Chapter Six examining the changes and modifications to caste issues and gender relations. By and large, caste groupings were redefined in contrast to the

⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought & the Colonial World - A Derivative Discourse*, (London: Zed Books/United Nations University, 1986), p. 2.

traditional social order in South India. Similarly gender roles were altered with the changing economic role played by women in the rural sector.

Assimilation into colonial structures was more akin to a relationship of borrowing and difference.⁸ Life under colonialism was epitomised by the dual faces of repression and coercion. Colonialism used these elements in tandem, consciously excluding some groups while 'accepting' others.⁹

The observation of Christian elements working within Indian communities is particularly interesting. For example, Christianity was often used as social 'sign-post' indicating one's transformation from old-fashioned and 'unprogressive' Hindu traditions to that of 'progressive' and 'modern' colonial Christian society. Colonialism created differences in social, political and economic affiliations - changes assumed necessary by many in the Indian Christian communities. For example, the adoption of Christian or European first names and surnames illustrated an element of 'progressiveness' within colonial society. Pragmatic motives played a part as well. Christian adherents were often given preference over their Hindu counterparts in the workplace by their British masters.¹⁰ This author therefore concludes that influences from political and economic forces were significantly stronger than religious-based ones. This study does not deny Christianity played a significant role in the lives of some in the community, this would be pertinent to people such as priest, missionaries and nuns, who willfully dedicated their lives to their religion. However the vast majority of the Indian Christian communities were not so earnestly committed, and it is to this very large segment of the population that this thesis is about.

There is a growing body of work which examine the dynamics of colonial societies in the Malayan peninsula. Many of these works mainly relate to the wider general Indian communities, most prominently covered by the likes of Kernial Singh Sandhu and Sinnapah Arasaratnam.¹¹ A lot is owed to Sandhu and Arasaratnam's original work, which helped lay the foundation for future work on Indian communities. Therefore for

⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 5.

⁹ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 31.

¹⁰ Interview with Mr. V. A. George (born 1906), Singapore, 27 Jan. 1997.

the purposes of this study, a basic groundwork has been completed for the examination of the different Indian Christian communities. Such communities, while different in religious practice from the much larger Hindu majority, nevertheless remained socially, economically and politically fluid so as not to alienate themselves from the Hindu majority. They were communities that, while professing strong religious affiliations, often in practice subjugated religious affiliations to ethnicity.

Colonial British governments purposefully attempted to redefine and perpetuate differences within and among communities under their rule. In the Malay states and the Straits Settlements, colonial governments systematically exploited existing social, political and economic differences, often magnifying them to serve their own purpose.¹² For example, in order to legitimise British dominance in the Malay states, colonial authorities found it convenient to tie a continued British presence in the archipelago to Malay interests. The British helped create an understanding among Malays, justified by its treaty obligations, that they acted as an important buffer against the immigrant Chinese and to a lesser extent, Indian communities.

However the influence British imperial thought had on these communities cannot be discounted. British commercial and imperialist successes of the nineteenth century primarily went, for most of this period, unchallenged by its other imperialist rivals.¹³ This technological and military supremacy created a perception within British circles of their own racial and cultural superiority. This perception was primarily a cultural construct, which nevertheless had a heavy influence on other aspects of empire and worked with an image construction for shaping cultural consciousness. Major Stewart L. Murray, the author of 'The Peace of the Anglo-Saxon', summarised these sentiments well when he wrote of the 'Celtic, Saxon, Norse, and Norman blood' which made up that of the 'Anglo-Saxon peoples'. According to Murray, these

¹¹ K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of their Immigration and Settlement 1786-1957*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Sinnapah Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

¹² Collin E. R. Abraham, *Divide and Rule: The Roots of Race Relations in Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Institute for Social Analysis, 1997), p. 13. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 7.

¹³ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 51. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, (London: Fontana Press, 1988), pp. 198-199.

'Anglo-Saxons' made up a 'great blood brotherhood of nations, with a great mission in the world and a great part to play in the further evolution of humanity.'¹⁴

These ideas were incorporated into colonial educational systems and social hierarchies. For example, the classroom power-structures were a reconstruction of colonial society. Relationships of 'law and order' were reflected in authoritarian rules and regulations. Strongly delineated social/racial hierarchies mimicked the teacher-student relationship and likewise class and wealth disparities were simplistically attributed to differences in intellectual capabilities. It was through these channels that a subservient colonial mentality was to be fostered in its non-European communities.

... the Tamil school was an instrument of welfare, and also made economic sense on the ground that the immigrant labourer must inculcate the ideas of sanctity of contract and of ordinary honesty to the employers.[sic]¹⁵

The British Indian experience of colonialism differed for the same Indian communities in colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Firstly, most Indians originated from agricultural societies where little to no contact with British officialdom was ever made. However in Malaya, contact with the British was far more direct, whether in rural or urban settings. Therefore British Malayan colonialism had a much stronger influence on communities than in India. The ways in which persons perceived themselves in Malaya and Straits Settlements was much more affected by British influences via the education, media, socio-political and economic socialisation, or work experiences.

British colonialism constructed a special economic relationship between itself and these communities. This relationship restructured entire economies, drawing these colonised and subservient labour-based communities into a complex relationship with British colonial capital. Ania Loomba describes this development as 'a flow of human natural resources between colonised and colonial countries'. This worked in

¹⁴ Paul Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 25.

¹⁵ Keith Watson, 'Rulers and ruled: Racial perceptions, curriculum and schooling in colonial Malaya and Singapore', in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *The Imperial Curriculum*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 163.

a complimentary relationship with cheap labour and raw materials being transported to manufacture goods for metropolitan consumption.¹⁶

Traditional Marxist definitions of colonialism mainly emphasise the importance of capital and its relation to the class structure. However this dualistic analysis overlooks the intricacies of class, ethnicity, religion, educational background, gender and caste, and only addresses part of the circumstances. This largely ignored the subtleties of socio-political alienation, much of which were government initiatives and therefore artificially induced. These ensuing complexities complicated the experiences of both Hindu Indian and Indian Christian labour in Malaya and the Straits Settlements.

Christianity in British Malaya and the Straits Settlements

This study will be primarily concentrating on three Church groups; the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist Churches. It will also make occasional references to the small Syrian Indian Church. This is an indigenous Church originating from the south-western Indian state of Kerala. However the group only made up a tiny proportion of the Indian Christian population. The Syrian Christian Churches were not evangelical, affiliation was and is decided by ethnicity. Their adherents were therefore limited to a small community of Malayali Indians, most of whom arrived after the second and third decades of the twentieth century.¹⁷

Christianity came to the Malay archipelago with the Portuguese conquests of the sultanate of Malacca in 1511. Protestantism was introduced with the conquest by the Dutch in 1641. However, unlike the Portugueses' evangelical stance, the Dutch paid more attention to matters commercial. Little attempt was made at converting local people. Newly established Dutch Protestant Churches catered only for Dutch communities of the day.¹⁸

The early entry of the Roman Catholic evangelicism into the Malay archipelago resulted in a numerical ascendancy among Christian groups in the area. Protestant Churches, in contrast, appeared more keen on new opportunities in China in

¹⁶ Loomba, 1998, p. 3.

¹⁷ Sandhu, 1969, p. 123.

comparison to the Malay archipelago.¹⁹ With the onset of British interests in the region, new Christian mission initiatives begin to take hold, especially the mid-nineteenth century. For example the Anglican Church only began its missionary arm in Singapore after 1857.²⁰ Activities remained confined to the island of Singapore, and no similar initiatives were made in other parts of the Malay archipelago. As a result of this disinterest, the Anglican Church only held a low profile among non-European communities in the Straits Settlements, let alone the Malay states prior to the 1870s. Missionary activity of the Methodist Church in Malaya and the Straits Settlements began on the initiative of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America in the mid-1880s.²¹ The Church had been active in India for at least three decades prior to their arrival in Singapore.²² This initiative soon extended to other major urban centres, but remained small in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church.

Indian labour migration

Migrating Indian labour to Malaya and the Straits Settlements was almost exclusively South Indian. This was due to the fact that the Indian government refused to allow the sanctioning of indentured emigration from any other part of India, other than that of the province of Madras. As a result most workers arrived from the districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madras and to a lesser extent Salem and Coimbatore.²³ These districts coincidentally had sizable Christian populations. The main source of Christian Indians came from the districts of Trichinopoly, Tanjore and Tirunelveli.

Specific statistics on the religious breakdown of the Indian communities were never kept by British colonial administration.²⁴ Even parish population statistics, maintained by the different Churches, were often sporadic. For example figures for the Roman Catholic Church, although it had existed (apart from Portuguese Malacca) since

¹⁸ Bobby E. K. Sng, *In His Good Time: The story of the Church in Singapore 1819-1978* (Singapore: Graduates' Christian Fellowship, 1980), pp. 22, 24.

¹⁹ Sng, 1980, pp. 25, 35. Ackerman & Lee, 1988, p. 29. Loh, 1963, p. 5.

²⁰ Loh, 1963, p. 2.

²¹ There were some small Methodist Church groups already stationed in Singapore prior to 1885.

²² Sng, 1980, p. 95.

²³ Sandhu, 1969, p. 82. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 15. J. R. Daniel, *Indian Christians in Peninsular Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Tamil Annual Conference, 1992), p. 47.

²⁴ Sandhu, 1969, p. 233.

1782,²⁵ are only available from 1922.²⁶ Figures prior to this period are available, but due to their non-specificity of the ethnicity, were not suitable for this study. The Methodist Church statistics began in 1891, around the time of its establishment, and run to 1921.²⁷ Figures on the Anglican Church are unavailable because the records were destroyed in a flood in 1971.

Period of study

The period under study begins after the 1870s. It was from the start of this decade when communities became large enough to justify the establishment of missionary groups and the construction of Church buildings.²⁸ This decade also saw an official British presence in the Malay peninsula apart from Penang, Malacca and Singapore. Governmental census figures relating to the remainder of the peninsula were thus available only after this period. This study will therefore cover eight decades up to the 1950s, predating the granting of independence to Malaysia. No strong demarcation in time periods is made in this study. Evidence for this study did not demand this move. Ideas and attitudes in the Indian Christian community remained largely unchanged, especially among its educated middle-classes - therefore there was little need for differences to be made over specific time periods. Only significant events like that of the Japanese occupation between 1941 and 1945, appear to have changed attitudes towards colonialism.

Indian Christian communities appropriated Western constructions of being 'Indian'. This produced a discourse marked by combinations of Western constructs of India and Indians, with Indian constructs of the West – constructs which were reinterpreted by these subaltern communities. The contradictions of colonial rule helped develop a strong element of self-hatred and denial that contributed to an intense level of confusion for many in the community. While aware and proud of their own cultural

²⁵ Nicholas (M.E.P.), 1996, p. 3.

²⁶ *Administration and Education Returns, 1922-1952*, Bishop of Malacca. Statistics were kept before 1922, but specific figures (indicating ethnicity of each parish) have been lost or misplaced over the years. The following information was found by chance in a disused ex-parish residence in a northern Malaysian state.

²⁷ *Malaysia Mission Annual Meeting*, (annual reports) between 1891-1912, (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House). Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo and Mr. Joseph John, 21 November 1996, Singapore.

²⁸ Churches had been established well before this period, mainly for expatriate European patronage or to service established Christian communities such as that of the Roman Catholics of Melaka.

backgrounds,²⁹ many were constantly reminded via colonial structures how they were 'inferior' in some way.³⁰

The colonial British government deliberately redefined or perpetuated differences within communities under its rule. Social, political and economic dynamics of groups were taken into account when decisions on labour (rural and urban) recruitment were decided on. Under these circumstances colonial authorities used such 'differences' to their advantage, keeping subaltern groups from stratifying according to class.³¹ Stenson notes, 'the interest of the Malay aristocrat administrator [sic] elite were identified with those of the British, in opposition to the Chinese towkays. Chinese labour was employed separately from and in competition with Indian labour. Punjabi and Malay police were employed to control the unruly Chinese'.³² Consequently under colonialism, we find many occupations dominated by specific ethnic/sub-ethnic or even caste groupings. The study of specific groupings in colonial Malaya contributes to a better understanding of the workings of colonialism, particularly from the 'grass roots' level.

Aim of the study

The study has several aims. Firstly, it would like to address how the Indian Christian communities adapted to colonialism. It will look at how the new social, economic and political parameters, as advocated by British colonialism, aided in creating a new colonial 'mentality'. What were the incentives or disincentives to do so? The study will examine the socio-economic and political changes and show how these changes were linked to the way the communities perceived themselves. The study will also locate and identify different social, economic and political elements and explain why some were seen as desirable while others were not. There was a preference shown

²⁹ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Interview with Mr. V. David, (born 1932), Petaling Jaya, 27 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. B. Norman Nathan (born 1940), Petaling Jaya, 22 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. R. Raja Krishnan, *The Jaffna Tamils in Prewar Malaya: The Myth of the Return*, in *Sixth International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies*, (Petaling Jaya: Thirumagal Printers, 1987), p. 251.

³⁰ This 'inferiority complex' was common among all Asian communities. Myrna Braga-Blake and Ann Ebert-Oehlers relate similar sentiments with regards to the Eurasian community in Singapore - a tendency to highlight bad points while ignoring the good. Myrna Braga-Blake & Ann Ebert-Oehlers, *Eurasians in Singapore: Memories and Hopes*, Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 23.

³¹ Michael Stenson, *Class, Race & Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case* (Queensland: University of Queensland, 1980), pp. 2-3.

³² Stenson, 1980, p. 7.

towards an English-language education, not only by the Indian Christian communities but by all communities alike. For example in 1877, a representative of the Eurasian community in Singapore noted how, 'a sound knowledge of the English language is a matter of great importance'.³³

Secondly, the study will examine other domestic circumstances that influenced and may have modified attitudes and practices in the new colonial environment. Was colonialism fully responsible for creating the perceptions these communities had of themselves? Were these used by colonial authorities as part of their ideology in emphasising (for example) the inferiority of the Malay race in economic roles when compared to the Chinese and Indians so as to facilitate immigration to resource the tin and rubber industries as cheap labour? Consequently, did this attitude fit into the dynamics of the Indian Christian communities?

To date, there have been few studies which examine official government colonial ideological recognition of the 'differences' between the 'rich' and the 'poor' segments within the Indian (or Indian Christian) communities. Under colonialism, did the non-recognition of 'difference' help create a dilemma of 'identity' for the communities in question? Was this particularly of concern to those from urban backgrounds, who saw themselves as more 'progressive' to their poorer rural counterparts? How were these discrepancies in economic status and social orientation explained by the Indian Christian communities? Why did these differences exist? Was this encouraged by colonial authorities?

In addition, how did this assumed component of capitalist 'progressiveness' tie in with economic and social development and political stability? What consequences did this assumption have for colonial society? Where did these assumptions come from, and how were they inculcated into the collective psyche of the Indian Christian

³³ 'Untitled letter of complaint from the Catholic Eurasian community at the inadequacy of the teaching of the English language at St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore', 21 July 1877. De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya. Interview with Mr. Robert (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. This was also aided by the Roman Catholic Church's refusal to officially allow any Roman Catholic child to study in any other non-Catholic (especially Protestant) educational establishment. 'Untitled letter from Mr. S. Colandasamy (Labour Office Penang) to Rt. Rev. Devals, Bishop of Malacca', Singapore dated 17 Jan. 1941. 'Untitled answers to the Legislative Council by Bro. Lothaire, principal of St. Joseph's Institution [Singapore]', undated: probably 1880s, file D201, doc. i. De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya. C. Bazell, 1984 [1921], p. 453. D. F. Cooke, 1966, p. 33.

communities? Did these assumptions influence the view of how the 'traditional' or rural sector was inferior to the 'modern' capitalist sector?

By the early twentieth century, rivalries between the competing objectives of capitalism and communism strongly influenced social, economic and political developments. Capitalism by the latter half of the nineteenth century, already synonymous with British colonialism, utilised issues of race and culture to rationalize discrepancies in social, economic and political developments in society. However, Marxist ideology contradicted capitalism by pointing to class as a decisive factor in this equation. The rise in popularity of the Marxist 'class' analysis led many within the British colonial establishments³⁴ to reformulate and de-emphasise issues of class, stressing sectarian issues of race and culture instead.

Either the weaker race dies out before the stronger, or it is absorbed into the stronger, the latter remaining practically unaffected, or the two become commingled into something different from what either was before, or, finally, the two continue to dwell together unmixed, each preserving a character of its own.³⁵

Therefore by replacing the concept of class with that of race and culture, it could be argued that the British were attempting to shift the political agenda to their advantage. They did this by separating common Indian (or non-European) community interest and redirecting hostilities toward the socially, economically and politically less fortunate. The study will also look at the propagation of a new colonial racial hierarchy, loosely based on European socio-biological ideas. These ideas heralded the superiority of the so-called European 'Aryan' races and linked this race to the qualities of leadership and initiative. This justified European colonialism's claim to rule – propagating the idea of white superiority over black and brown races.

³⁴ Viscount James Bryce, *Modern Democracies, Vol. II*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 549. For a deeper study of Bryce's attitude to Communism see: J. Bryce, vol. II, 1921, p. 642-656.

³⁵ Rich, 1986, p. 22 citing J. Bryce, *The Relations of Advanced and the Backward Races of Mankind*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1902), p. 9.

Lastly, this study will use the political analysis advocated by the 'Subalternist' group of social historians,³⁶ to analyse and assess the reactions of the communities under study. The overwhelming majority of the communities under study fell under the realm of the 'subaltern' (i.e. rural labourers, urban workers, clerical labour and to a limited degree, the petty bourgeoisie.)³⁷ And unlike colonial and indigenous elites, 'subaltern' groups often challenged the hegemony of the colonial power structure in ways which were quite significant but often 'silent'. For example, many consciously or unconsciously utilised subordinate forms of resistance i.e. the 'poison pen' letter, feigned illness, gossip and 'snitching', rumour, drunkenness and hysteria, domestic and marital disputes and euphemism.

Mobilization in 'subaltern' circles tended to be horizontal as opposed to vertical within elite groups. The elites relied on colonial adaptations of colonial institutions, whereas 'subalternists' maintained strong links with traditional organisations of territoriality, kinship or class affinities. The elites acted cautiously while the subalterns were more spontaneous.³⁸

However it is important to note variances in ideas among these 'subalternist' groupings. Elite and subaltern spheres were not 'hermetically sealed' and often overlapped. For example there were attempts by more 'advanced' elements in subaltern groups or indigenous elites to incorporate and integrate subalternist groups.³⁹ This sentiment was relatively common among some urban Indian associations around the 1920s and 1930s. For example, this sentiment was acted out in a series of articles over complaints by outraged Indians about the 'misrepresentation' of India in a 1935 documentary film, 'India Speaks'.⁴⁰ This unease was also well

³⁶ R. Guha & G. C. Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 37-43.

³⁷ Guha & Spivak, 1988, p. 41.

³⁸ Guha & Spivak, 1988, pp. 40-41.

³⁹ Guha & Spivak, 1988, p. 42.

⁴⁰ "India & the League of Nations: Combating Anti-Indian Propaganda", in *The Indian*, no. 14, Kuala Lumpur, 28 Mar. 1936, p. 3. "India systematically slandered: Some details of 'India Speaks'", in *The Indian*, no. 12, Kuala Lumpur, 24 Mar. 1936, p. 15. Similar complaints were made about 'Clive of India' and 'The Lives of a Bengal Lancer'. "India full of beasts & snakes: What Englishmen at home think", in *The Indian*, no. 3, Kuala Lumpur, 11 Jan. 1936.

illustrated when the Singapore Indian Association opened its doors to allow labourer estate worker membership in 1936. They closed it again in 1937.⁴¹

This study will try to analyse the reactions of the communities involved, taking into account how reactions to powerful colonial forces may have altered. This study has also been influenced by the analytical approach of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's book *Montaillou: Cathars & Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324*,⁴² which observed and analysed how and why 'subaltern' communities reacted the way they did under authority. Ladurie used surviving judicial records, carefully constructing a map of social, political and economic life. Unfortunately such extensive records are not available for the purposes of this study. In place of this, the study has utilised Church marriage and baptism records, which often list occupational and caste details. The collation of such information gives an insight into the dynamics of the communities under study. For example, the information was able to help determine if caste status influenced social alliances – usually indicated by marriage. It could also help to determine the economic status of a parish/community through the identification of occupations or the if a gender-based power structure existed. Other sources were also used, such as personal and governmental correspondence, which aid understanding the dynamics of relations in colonial society.

This information is supported by information gathered from oral interviews, usually first hand or reliable second-hand accounts. Interviews were usually conducted in an informal manner. To necessitate getting as much information as possible, interviewees were encouraged to relate their individual or family histories. Specific areas were then identified for further probing. The dualistic nature of Indian Christian society (rural and urban) is reflected in the selected cross-section of interviewees, as discussed in the latter half of this chapter.

Ethnicity and the Race-Class Dimension

The issues of ethnicity, race and class must be evaluated in its relationship to the 'means of production'. The analysis uses a social structural perspective, so that

⁴¹ Stenson, 1980, p. 58.

⁴² Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (translated by Barbara Bray), *Montaillou: Cathars & Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324*, (London: Scolar Press, 1978).

internal differences within ethnic groupings can be examined not only on an individual level but also within the general structure of society. Taking this into account, the issues of ethnicity, race and social class cannot be analysed as separate entities. Although the issues of race and ethnicity have been identified as a constructed consciousness, it is still a fact that successive colonial governments successfully inculcated these ideas into the very fabric of Malayan society. A multiplicity of relationships exists determined by dominance and subordination, and all are linked to a political, economic and ideological structure.

Another area of concern in this study relates to the way the communities saw themselves, rather than that of the accepted ideological behavioural concepts put forward by the colonial government. Therefore this study must be sensitive to what and how the subject groups considered to be meaningful categories for descriptions of themselves - rather than imposing colonial definitions. This is of paramount importance in relation to the Indian Christian communities because colonial governments did not delineate the different religious, ethnic or class differences in many of their classifications and statistics. For example, with general Indian statistics, no demarkation was made with regards to religious or sub-ethnic grouping.⁴³ Consequently within the Indian Christian communities, there were delineations between the different Church denominations, but no sub-ethnic categories, and no caste or class delineators.⁴⁴

Ethnicity

The concept of ethnicity is to be understood in this study primarily in relation to the division of labour. Intra-ethnic differences were often ignored by colonial authorities despite internal differentiations. Abraham notes how 'Ethnicity ... takes on additional significance when it becomes clear that the best chance an ethnic group has of changing the system is when it behaves as a group.'⁴⁵

An observation made by Judith Nagata relates to the absence of social class perceptions in Malaysia as a whole, 'a striking feature of most situations where

⁴³ Delineations were made between North and South Indian only.

⁴⁴ Charles Hirschman, "The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An analysis of Census Classifications" in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46 (3), (1987): p. 568.

⁴⁵ Abraham, 1997, p. 244.

individuals exploit others of the same ethnic group or where there is a marked superordinate-subordinate distinction, is the rarity with which it is perceived as a class phenomenon. Rarely is it viewed or generalised as a product of a basic social inequality or different set of life chances within the group.⁴⁶ Intra-ethnic exploitation was admittedly a problem in the 1920s and 1930s. Several articles in the contemporary Indian-based press alluded to the problem.⁴⁷ This ignorance of class perceptions could be attributed to the colonial practise of division of labour along ethnic lines.

Class and Race

Any endeavour to analyse the issues of class and race within a colonial Malayan context must recognise the theoretical significance of how ethnicity was purposefully equated with social, economic and political status.

Unlike circumstances in other colonial dominions such as Australia or the African states, where stratification divided society into primarily two camps - white and non-white, in colonial Malaya racial stratification was in effect superimposed on class structures. As noted earlier, there was a purposeful attempt on the part of colonial authorities to highlight an ideology of racial superiority. This emphasis on racial ideology over that of class was used as a means to control a labour force.⁴⁸

With regards to the Indian labour migration and colonial investment capital, colonial ideology corresponded/adapted to the complexity of the 'means of production'.⁴⁹ The more complicated the means of production, the greater the need to refine the ideology behind social and economic control. For example, in the estate environment, where methods of control were straightforward, there was little need to employ complicated social, economic and political safeguards to ensure control. Estate power structures were strongly outlined. Hierarchies and power structures were simple and straightforward. However constructions of power in urban/middle-class environments was another matter altogether. Although hierarchies did exist, they were not as clear as in

⁴⁶ Judith Nagata, *Malaysian Mosaic: Perspectives from a poly-ethnic society*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 3.

⁴⁷ T. G. Thomas, B. A., *Some of Our Needs*, in *The Indian*, Apr. 1925, pp. 6-7. M. J. D'Cruz, *Indian Associations and the Coolies*, *The Indian*, Aug. 1925, pp. 94-5.

⁴⁸ Abraham, 1997, p. 244.

the estates. A more complex model was needed to maintain a status quo conducive to colonialism. In addition to rural-urban differences, the issue of education came into play. Acquisition of an English-language education was important. This enabled a person to acquire a well-paying government desk job. Therefore, were there differences in the constructions of power structures in urban, 'middle-class' employment? And if so, how was it different from that experienced by Indian Christians in the rural plantation settings? Consequently, what were the socio-economic or political paradigms that operated within the communities? Were there variations, for example, in the rural and urban arenas? How was the concept of 'western' education subsumed into this? A delineation on urban and rural areas will be made, analysing their occupational relationship to the means of production and the corresponding ideology of control in that sector.

Another important influence in relation to the class-race theory pertains to how social groups or classes were formed and perpetuated. Social mobility was heavily reliant on 'the degree to which mobility closure exists in relation to any specified form of market capacity', and that there were three types of market capacity; 'ownership of property in the means of production, possession of education or technical qualifications, and possession of manual labour power.'⁵⁰ For example, the English-educated, middle-classes were dominated by mainly Ceylonese Tamils and Malayalis. These groups were largely not property owning classes, nor did they directly possess the 'means of production'. Their power came mainly from their possession of education and technical qualifications. In contrast, estate labour possessed manual labour power. These communities were dominated by Tamils from the Indian mainland.

Gender relations

The interaction of women in a male dominated environment will also be examined in this study. Issues relating to women were viewed ambivalently by colonial patriarchal society. They were tolerated as sexual objects in Indian Christian society, and to cite the obvious, a necessary component in domesticity, marriage and the reproductive process. However to 'pigeon-hole' women as objects of oppression places them again within the limited confines of a male-defined framework. Despite the level of

⁴⁹ Abraham, 1997, p. 245.

⁵⁰ Abraham, 1997, p. 247.

women's subjugation in colonial society, they were not reduced to absolute subservience. Women often got their own back in the intimacy of the home, family and the power that came with age and seniority. Consequently this study will examine this aspect as an ongoing history of how women adapted themselves to operate in a male-defined environment.⁵¹

Gender relations also varied greatly according to the physical constraints set by the rigid structures of colonialism. For example, conditions experienced in the rural plantation sector were different from that in urban households. If the responsibilities of the average urban housewife were dominated by unpaid domestic duties, her estate counterpart was often given the added task of taking on paid employment. However many of these working estate women also found themselves in a unique situation. Sex related activity was rife in plantations, and this was exacerbated by heavy imbalance between the number of males to females - men greatly outnumbered women.⁵² Marital status and access to sexual contact became highly prized commodity for most men. Women, who up to that point held little influence in the male-dominated estate structures, found new leverage from which to challenge the status quo. Examples of older women marrying men, often ten years their junior, did occur on a quite regular basis. This was not apparent in the urban communities.⁵³ In addition by changing loyalty from one male to another, it was often possible to improve one's own standing.

In addition to this, the dynamics of race hierarchies were also played out through gender relations. Dynamics in racial relations determined the level of racial and gender mix – evident mainly in inter-cultural or inter-racial marriages at the time. Hence racial relations prevalent in Malaya and the Straits Settlements also dictated certain hypergamic (male over female) features of inter-racial gender relationships. In addition, the rise in popularity of the eugenicist movement in the early twentieth century played an important role in the identification of the responsibilities of

⁵¹ James F. Warren, 'Prostitution in Singapore Society and the Karayuki-san', in P. J. Rimmer & L. M. Allen (ed.), *The Underside of Malaysian History: Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), p. 166.

⁵² Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 67. 'Indian Labour: XIV - How to Increase Efficiency', in *The Indian Pioneer*, vol. 3, no. 12, Kuala Lumpur, 29 Mar. 1929, p. 2. *Straits Settlements Annual Report 1935*, Singapore, pp. 802-4.

⁵³ *Marriages 2 Apr. 1923 – 12 Sept. 1936, Marriages 14 Sept. 1936 – 12 Feb. 1949*, St. Anthony's Church, Kuala Lumpur.

'motherhood' and reproduction.⁵⁴ These eugenicist ideas, also reinforced the perception of Asian 'cultural' inferiority in comparison to 'European' culture, and repeatedly blamed local populations for their own poor standing.

Ethnicity and Race

The Indian Christian communities could be termed 'ethnically plural'. They comprised of a series of ethnic groups of reasonably fluid membership (depending on the time scale) within a larger political unit. Differentiations were apparent within the pluralistic structure depending on the combination of political, linguistic, origin and religious denominational factors.

The related issues of ethnicity and race within the Indian Christian communities were not, by themselves, as pronounced as when compared with the Malay, Chinese or European communities. Physical differences were not as apparent between the different ethnic groupings in the communities concerned. The majority of Indian Christians and Indians in general, being from South India and of 'Dravidian' linguistic stock. If there were any delineations, they would be related to that of caste stereotypes; the lower one's caste status the 'darker' one was, being an approximate example. This point of 'fairness' of skin pigmentation could be also related to the colonial ideology attached to the superiority of the 'fair' European races. However with the entry of colonial induced racial ideology (scientific racism), along with a pursuit of delineation of ethnicity according to socio-political and economic status, a modified hierarchy of ethnic division was created. These issues are addressed in Chapters Three and Four.

Within these communities, colonial labour recruitment policies were in fact determined by calculated selection of different ethnic groups to weaken the bargaining power of any one group over another. By this method, one ethnic group was purposefully 'played off' against the other by the colonial governments and its agents. Thus generally we find the upper echelons of some areas of colonial administration were allocated primarily to Ceylonese Tamils. Lower paid positions were filled by Tamils from India. Similarly in the plantation setting, Malayalis (from the state of

⁵⁴ Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', in Ann Laura Stoler & F. Cooper (ed.), *Tensions in Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 90-92.

Kerala, south-west India) were used almost exclusively as privileged clerical staff while plantation labour was almost exclusively Indian Tamil.

Alternatively, religious differences were used in a similar way - this is despite the fact that such policy was not articulated by the colonial government. Interviews have uncovered a strong degree of preferential treatment shown by colonial authorities to their Indian Christian underlings as opposed to Hindus.⁵⁵ Hence by the first half of the twentieth century, sentiments expressed in popular literature began to exhibit an apparent gulf between Hindu Indian and Christian Indian communities.⁵⁶ In conclusion, the colonialist made the issue of race and ethnicity a socio-economic reality which superceded kin and ethnic ties.

Caste

There have been numerous studies on the issue of caste. However most have dealt with the issue from that of the wider Hindu Indian community in Malaysia.⁵⁷ In the Indian Christian context, caste has been a 'taboo' subject. While its public practice was castigated as being 'unchristian', most if not all Indian Christians found it hard to disassociate themselves from this age-old allegiance. For example, despite the anti-caste stance of most Protestant Churches, we still find many of these congregations were often caste specific. In the Catholic Church, parish records identified caste groups right up to the Japanese Occupation.⁵⁸ Consequently, within many Indian Christian communities there developed a strong degree of ambivalence towards the issue of caste and Christianity. In private it was acknowledged and 'practised' particularly in areas relating to marriage. However within the more public sphere of the Church, and especially under the scrutiny of the clergy, it was supposedly ignored. This disposition modified caste structures to a degree. Many caste groups, particularly

⁵⁵ Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 24 January 1997. Interview with Mr. Kathiah, (born 1930s), Kuala Lumpur, October 1997.

⁵⁶ Sababathy Venugopal, *Early Malaysian Tamil Novel, 1910-1960*, (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya M.A. thesis, 1988).

⁵⁷ A. Mani, *Caste among Singapore Hindus*, in *Commentary*, vol.1 (2/3), (Nov. 1975-Feb. 1976), Singapore. Rajakrishnan Ramaswamy, *The role of caste in the migration of Indian Tamils to Malaya*, in *Sarjana*, vol. 1 (1), (Dec. 1981). R. Rajoo, "Caste, ethnicity, class and national unity: the dilemma of the Indians", in Husin Ali, S. (ed.) *Kaum, kelas dan pembangunan (Ethnicity, class and development)*, (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sain Sosial Malaysia, 1984). V. Selvaratnam, *Caste, Class & Conformity: Changes & continuity in norms & values among South Indians in the plantation frontier of peninsula Malaysia*, in *The Eastern Anthropologist*, vol. 38 (4), (Oct.-Dec., 1985).

⁵⁸ Various records from the Church of St. Francis Xavier (Penang).

those from the upper echelons, began to 'fuse' with time, and therefore by the second half of the twentieth century many specific caste groups were intermarrying.⁵⁹ In spite of British colonialism's accentuation of social, political and economic divisions within the communities, the importance of caste appeared to decrease from generation to generation. This could be attributed to the 'taboo' status of castes within Christian circles. This was further weakened with the enroachment of capitalistic trends, often in contradiction to colonialist objectives, which de-emphasised traditional kinship ties and replaced them with new economic ones.

The issue of caste, though important, can however only be evaluated in relation to ethnicity and class issues. Aspects of caste and its historical relationship with the different Churches will be discussed in Chapter Seven. It will evaluate the ethical ambivalence between caste, Christianity and capitalism, and how their coexistence modified the communities' understanding of caste hierarchies. Perceptions relating to caste, as with racial stereotypes, helped identify individuals or communities. Even though the issue of caste was relevant to the social, economic and political structure of the primarily agriculturalist Indian landscape, its relevance to the capitalist landscape of colonial Malaya was negligible. It was inevitable that caste based parameters would dissipate with the communities' assimilation into the Malayan community. The declining emphasis on caste was very clearly illustrated by many interviewees' lack of knowledge in relation to their own level of caste.

Migration Statistics and the definition of South India and Malaya

Before an in-depth study of the colonial Malayan South Indian communities can proceed, precise parameters of the Indian region and its inhabitants have to be drawn. The areas from which Malayan South Indian migrants originated from are Tamilnadu, Kerala, Mysore, and Andhra Pradesh. South Indian (general) migration was dominated by Tamils (85.2 per cent) from Tamilnadu, followed by Malayalis (6.4 per cent) from Kerala, Telugus (6.8 per cent), Carnarese and Ceylonese Tamils (both amounting to approx. 0.8 per cent).⁶⁰ Daniel also specifies the primary areas from which most Christians originated from; the State of Madras and the districts of Tanjore,

⁵⁹ This was strongly illustrated in marriage records from various Churches. Also see Rajakrishnan, Ramaswamy, *Caste consciousness among Indian Tamils in Malaysia*, (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Press, 1984), pp. 14-16.

Tirunelveli and Tiruchirapalli. Malayali Christians mainly came from the Malabar.⁶¹ However, as Daniel notes there are practically no immigration records specific to Christian Indians (Sandhu does shed some light on the numbers, stating that 80 per cent of *Indian* migrants arriving were Hindu and the rest principally being Muslims and Christians).⁶² In the absence of immigration records for the Indian Christian communities, statistics of denominational sizes of each Indian Church throughout the Malayan peninsula will be utilized to assess their numbers. The timescale of these figures vary. For example, available Catholic Church statistics, only date back to 1922, whereas the Methodist Church figures predate this.

This definition is important because of real or perceived cultural, political and ethnic differences between 'South' and 'North' India.⁶³ Burton Stein gives an excellent summary of these differences and deduces that the border between the two spheres runs along the River Godavari along Andhra Pradesh.⁶⁴ South India is dominated by what is referred to as 'Dravidian' languages e.g. Tamil and Malayalam. The migration process had adverse effects on mainly two elements of traditional South Indian 'culture'. Issues relating to caste hierarchies and the position of women were altered quite dramatically, mainly due to the working dynamics of colonialism in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. For example, caste was largely seen as 'a small and named group of persons characterised by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system'.⁶⁵

Similarly, the position of women, which was strongly tied in with caste practices, altered with these changing circumstances. Traditionally in India, some caste groups, though generally patriarchal (male dominated) often followed practises which allowed their female adherents varying degrees of freedom. For example, inheritance and

⁶⁰ J. Rabindra Daniel, 1992, p. 69. K. S. Sandhu, 1969, p. 159.

⁶¹ J. Rabindra Daniel, 1992, p. 56.

⁶² K. S. Sandhu, 1969, p. 167.

⁶³ These differences came to the fore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of growing indigenous nationalist trends in India. This was added to by the prevalence of racial and linguistic theories, expounded by the British during this period. This will be discussed in chapter 5.

⁶⁴ Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 10-15.

succession among the Nayar (Nair) caste groups of the Malabar were matrilineal. Nayar women were allowed a strong degree of sexual freedom, within a recognised social framework. They also enjoyed an element of autonomy outside that of their 'husbands' authority. This order began to change in the onslaught of patrilineal-based British colonialism influences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶⁶ On the other hand the Shanar/Nadars caste groups were patrilineal (inheritance following male lines). However to the south of Quilon (Travancore), Ezhavas practised a half matrilineal, half patrilineal system.⁶⁷ Such traditional practices, though influential, were changed and modified as a result of contact with male dominated colonial cultures and capitalist trends. This will be examined in detail in Chapter Six.

The vast majority of Indian or Indian Christian immigration was directed towards the Malayan peninsula. There appears to be little difference between Indians in Singapore island or mainland Malaya. There has always been a fluidity of travel between the two areas, especially within the large Indian component working in the railway system. Although there are differences between the communities, mainly relating to population size of sub-ethnic/language groupings, class and religion (considered in Chapters Two, Four, Five and Six) geographical differentiation between the communities in either Singapore island or mainland Malaya will not be made.

Definition of Christianity

The concepts of Christianity and religiosity played a limited role in daily life. While many interviewees professed eternal devotion to their religious faith, contradictions in practice were always near at hand - as the old saying goes, 'To err is human, to forgive divine'.

For the purposes of this study, a person referring to themselves as 'Christian' and generally adhering to basic Christian thought (operating within a recognised 'Christian' community or structure and compliance to the hierarchies of the Church be it local or international) was categorised as being so by contemporaries. The

⁶⁵ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses & Kings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 459

⁶⁶ C. J. Fuller, *The Nayars Today*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 5-6, 75-80, 146, 149.

⁶⁷ R. Ramasamy, *Sojourners to Citizens: Sri Lankan Tamils in Malaysia, 1885-1965*, (Kuala Lumpur: R. Ramasamy, 1988), pp. 12-13.

intricacies of Christian faith, identity and worship were seldom discussed let alone understood by the majority of the Indian Christian population. One interviewee even noted how responsibilities of religion were mainly overseen by women folk. Most men were satisfied to remain in the background.⁶⁸ If religious issues were seriously discussed, it was usually within the rather exclusive confines of urban-based Church circles. Even then, such discussion was under the ideological control of the local parish priest/pastor, who undoubtedly made sure no parishioner strayed too far from dogma of the Church.

Degree of religiosity is difficult to quantify. There is no doubt that many in the communities were genuinely religious and regarded themselves as such. However this should also be seen within the context of how people coped with 'ups and downs' evident in everyday life. Social, economic and political circumstances played a strong role in how many made sense of the world. Colonial relationships, and its contradictions, undoubtedly influenced this outlook. While not directly professing to support British colonialism, (with the exception of the Anglicans) Church hierarchies indirectly affirmed its legitimacy to an extent. As in stratified colonial society, Churches too had their own hierarchical structures; God was king, and the priest or pastor was 'His' executive.

Survey of Chapters

Chapter One covers the historical background of the Malay archipelago, its early Indian influences and the beginning of European interest in the region from the sixteenth century. The chapter also examines the arrival of Europeans and the status of Christianity and religious conversion in South India and Ceylon. Lastly the chapter examines the economic conditions which was the impetus for migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter Two examines Indian Christian migration and the different methods of recruitment. It also outlines circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and other smaller Churches in colonial Malaya and Singapore in the nineteenth century. It will also attempt to tackle the difficult question of population size and determine the occupational areas where they may have

⁶⁸ Interview with Mr. James Sebastian (born 1933), Jan. 1999, Sydney.

predominated. The chapter will also examine individual case-studies of migration to the Malay archipelago and how colonial government policy influenced this.

Chapter Three analyses the conditions in Britain with regards to issues of identity (and race) and the perceived need to consolidate a social, political and economic agenda. It will examine how such ideas, loosely based on 'scientific' concepts were used in conjunction with colonialism and how these notions often justified the position of Britain as paramount ruler. The notion of the superior 'Aryanism' was also used to discriminate against the Dravidian-speaking (non-Aryan) populations of South India. This relationship between 'Aryanism' and British colonial-based racism is an original argument put forward for the first time by this author. This inadvertently stirred up old traditional geographical and caste-based rivalries. In addition, the chapter will also examine the contribution of Victorian legalist, Viscount James Bryce to the political development of colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlement. This section will argue that Bryce's views were adopted by colonial administrators when formulating policy.

Chapter Four continues the above analysis, but with a difference - it looks at how ideas of supremacy and inferiority were used to maintain a distance and subjugate the non-British/non-European inhabitants of Malaya and the Straits Settlements. More importantly this section will also examine the political practice of 'divide and rule'. How, on the pretense of racial 'differences', 'benevolent' colonial authorities were able to divide communities along racial, class and gender lines - primarily to negate the possibility of colonised communities challenging the colonial hegemony. Hence the issue of racism was rarely far from the surface of colonial communities. This is especially true of multiracial/cultural societies that feel the need to advance racial tolerance as part of official ideology. In spite of this, promoting racial tolerance did not suggest the promotion of racial indifference. Colonialism's 'multiracialism', for instance, encouraged a high consciousness of one's race even while it insisted on tolerance. This chapter will also examine how policies contributed to the social mores of Indian Christian society via the choice and construction of Indian Christian names. It will also look at how imperial indoctrination was imposed through the different education systems.

Chapter Five examines the different types of resistance to the colonial hegemony. Such challenges varied widely, and were often determined by variations in social, political or economic analysis of colonialism. Such 'analysis' varied. For example, within some Churches, an anti-colonial stance was justified on the basis of inequality and perception of the self-serving nature of British colonialism. In other circles there were a strong belief in the 'civilising' nature of British colonialism and the natural 'superiority' of the Britisher/European.

Consequently we find a variety of 'resistance' ranging from the apolitical, disempowered and often emotive reactions of gossip, rumour, drunkenness and hysteria to the more direct actions of political agitation. Direct challenges to colonialism and its power-structures will also be examined in this chapter, such as early examples of estate-based agitation for fairer working conditions and the later growth of the trade union and populist movements from the 1930s to the 1950s. This section will also examine the political use of nationalism, particularly 'Dravidianism', to challenge the basis of British hegemony.

Chapter Six looks at a variety issues. The dynamics of caste in Malaya and the Straits Settlements are examined - illustrating how caste relationships were modified to function in the new social, economic and political landscape. In addition, this chapter will examine the variety of kinship and gender ties which played a part in the formation of a social web within the Indian Christian communities. It will also show how relationships within these communities were not always directly a product of British colonialism but modified to fit a workable social, economic and political mould within a colonial context. This section will explore the stark differences between urban centres (large towns and cities) and the rural rubber estate communities. How expectations in the more affluent urban areas reinforced paternalism and patriarchal power structures, and how low wages and poverty often played a role in the ironic 'empowerment' of many estate women.

Sources

The only in-depth study of Indian Christian communities in peninsula Malaysia is by J. Rabindra Daniel (1992).⁶⁹ It is primarily contemporary, with little emphasis on the colonial period. Mentioned earlier, this study also relies heavily on the prominent work of both Kernial Singh Sandhu and Sinnapah Arasaratnam. There is also a mass of work on Christianity in India and other associated subjects and emanate mainly from Geoffrey Oddie, Partha Chatterjee, Ania Loomba, N. K. Arooran, Susan Bayly, D. Kumar, D. Forrester, Sundararaj Manickam, Dick Kooiman, Lionel Caplan, Robert Hardgrave, Dharma Kumar and Henriette Bugge. These prominent authors cover areas, too large to be described here, and helped lay out the groundwork for this study and give a good basis on which to base an analysis of the situation in colonial Malaya. Much of the work is detailed and encompasses issues like caste, British perceptions of race, Christianity, religious conversion and social mobility. To date studies on communities in colonial Malaya mainly pertain to the more prominent Malay and Chinese communities. Studies of Indians refer mainly to the Hindu Indian community.

Historical research into colonial Malaya and Singapore largely remains a political history – the study of indigenous states and colonial government.⁷⁰ In turn there is a lack of social histories which relate to other important elements in colonial society. Apart from a handful of works,⁷¹ much of the locally-written work to date has been largely politically superficial, and often more indicative of the draconian governmental control in modern Singapore and Malaysia.

Government archives in Malaysia and Singapore contain extensive sources of information. However pivotal material was mainly found in local Churches, which made possible the difficult task of piecing together the complicated amalgam of contradicting ideas which made up the social mosaic of these communities.

Emmanuel Ladurie's study of 'Montaillou' helped provide direction in reconstructing

⁶⁹ Daniel, 1992.

⁷⁰ Lenore Manderson, 'Race, Colonial Mentality and Public Health in Early Twentieth Century Malaya' in P. Rimmer & L. M. Allen (ed.), *The Underside of Malaysian History: Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers...*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991), p. 193.

⁷¹ S. Siddique & N. P. Shotam (1982), James Warren (1986), Lai Ah Eng (1986), Ong Aihwa (1987), Peter Rimmer (1990), Amarjit Kaur (1990), J. Norman Parmer (1990), P. Rimmer & L. M. Allen (1991).

these communities from disparate pieces of information, not originally meant to be interpreted the way they were for this study.

In the absence of literary evidence, this study has relied heavily on personal interviews – mainly from first hand or reliable second-hand accounts. Selection criteria for interviewees for this project were specific. A person had firstly to be a member of, or have extensive first-hand knowledge of, the communities under study. A total of 41 personal interviews were completed, the majority of which lasted around 45 to 70 minutes each. Criterion for interviewees were as follows. Firstly they had a first hand (or at least a reliable second-hand) account of the Indian Christian experiences before 1957. Secondly, all interviewees had to be either practising or non-practising Christians. Due to the duality of Indian Christian communities, being either rural based or urban administrative labour, I tried to get a good cross-section of both communities. This was especially hard from the point of the rural based interviewees. Many rural based interviewees were unwilling to relate the horrendous conditions which they worked under, often due to shyness, preferring to gloss over most of the facts. From this category I managed to get 11 persons on audio tape.

The backgrounds of interviewees varied. Some came to Malaya and the Straits Settlements voluntarily, others under duress. For example, Mr. V. A. George left his native state of Kerala for Malaya in 1925. A cousin from Klang had encouraged his family to send him. He began teaching at the 'Jubilee School' in 1926. According to Mr. George, his family did not have much choice in the matter. He notes how, 'Kerala was a Nayar (caste) dominant society and the (government jobs) posts were only given to Nayars or Hindus, and Christians had to wait.' Mr. George now lives in Singapore with his wife and children.

Michael Manuel was forced to leave his home state of Salem around 1905. Michael, upon the death of both his parents, lost his inheritance to an uncle. Not having proper means to support himself, he was recruited to work in a tea plantation in Ceylon. However while in Ceylon he sustained an injury, and with the help of a friend managed to arrange for medical attention in Penang. In Penang he came under the care of a local Roman Catholic orphanage and converted to Christianity at the age of nine.

He later worked as a yard foreman at the Prai Railway Station in Province Wellesley (now known as Butterworth). Mr. Manuel died in Petaling Jaya, Selangor in 1987.⁷²

An example of a rural-based plantation worker is conveyed in an account given by Mr. Jaganaden. Mr. Jaganaden and his parents worked and lived in a rubber plantation in the state of Malacca. However he realised the absence of opportunities in such a stifling environment, and attempted to get into a local shopkeeping venture set up by some acquaintances of his. Initially reluctant to accept their offer, Mr. Jaganaden agreed to work for a full year without pay. He did so successfully, and was paid \$25 a month. This compared badly with the \$50 to \$65 that could be made if working in a rubber plantation. However for him, the sacrifices were obviously worth it, being aware of the strangle-hold the estate had, and going to great lengths to break away from its cycle of poverty. Mr. Jaganaden today owns and runs his own 'provision shop' business in Merlimau, Melaka.⁷³

Conclusion

This study hopes to help build a comprehensive view of colonialised Indian Christian reactions to colonialism - reactions strongly determined by both traditional and recently acquired 'modern' practices under colonialism. In addition, the interplay between these two often contradictory elements, often precipitated a hybridity of ideas alien to both traditional and modern circles. The precise study of the Christian element within the Indian communities is particularly interesting from this point of view. Christianity, in addition to being solely a spiritual experience, was also used as a social 'sign-post' to indicate one's assimilation into 'progressive' and 'modern' colonial society. This observation does not ignore the existence of a sizable 'modern' and 'progressive' Hindu element as well, but plans to show how colonialism had created differences in social, economic and political affiliations which was deemed necessary on the part of the Christian communities.

⁷² Interview with Mrs. Josphine Dawson nee Manuel, (born 1931), 3 Mar. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.

⁷³ Interview with Mr. Jaganaden, (born 1935), Melaka (Merlimau), 28 Oct. 1997.

Chapter 2

Background and Context

The previous introductory chapter illustrated how British colonial influences had a direct effect on Indian Christian communities. However British influence in the Malay region did not show itself till late in the eighteenth century. The archipelago has a much older and diversified history, with influences from west and east Asia and including Europe. This chapter will attempt to provide a basic background for this research topic. It should briefly examine the early history and political development of the Malayan archipelago up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. It will look at the establishment of Christianity, the early development of Christian communities in South India and conditions that encouraged migration to the Malay archipelago.

Historical background

Malaya is situated in the bottom half of a narrow peninsula of land that protrudes out of the Southeast Asian landmass towards the present-day Indonesia. Historically Malaya has played a prominent role due to its proximity to its more famous neighbours, India to the west and China to its east. The Straits of Malacca and the Straits of Singapore occupy important positions for shipping between Indian and the eastern Pacific-rim ports. This convergence brought about its recognition as a strategic point in international shipping and trade. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to recognise this in the sixteenth century. The British did so again, this time with the acquisition of Singapore, in the early nineteenth century.

South Indian Influences in the Malay archipelago

Influences from India, particularly from the southern half of the Indian sub-continent, were important in the Malayan socio-political landscape from the beginning of the Christian era. South Indian kingdoms were accustomed to a widespread maritime trade. Literature refers to docks, harbours, customs offices and lighthouses. In the Chola kingdoms, small coastal ships, some built of single logs, and larger ones for

long distance travel used for trips to places like the Malay peninsula were built.⁷⁴

These larger ships, according to contemporary sources, supposedly held between three to seven hundred passengers. If these reports are accurate, the propensity for trade was obvious, and although the Malay archipelago would not have been a major market, as opposed to the larger west Asian, European and Chinese markets, a line of contact was open between the two regions.

With Indian maritime trade, Indianized kingdoms began to proliferate in the region from the early centuries of the Christian era. Some of these kingdoms were either semi-independent states or under the jurisdiction of another Indianized state outside Malaya (often in neighbouring Sumatra). For the next millennium the fortunes of these kingdoms fluctuated. Periodic threats from other Indianized states, such as Siam to its north or the Malaccan sultanate, plagued many of these city-states. By the fifteenth century the focus shifted toward the Straits of Malacca with the rise of the Sultanate there.⁷⁵

European interest in the Malay archipelago

By the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Malacca developed from a small trading post to a major emporium for merchandise in the region. Its strategic economic and political position attracted the attention of the Portuguese, who subsequently occupied it from 1511, as part of a strategy to monopolise the spice trade.⁷⁶ By 1641 the Dutch, with the help of the Johore Sultanate, laid siege and eventually took possession of Malacca. The Dutch held the port city till August 1795. During the Napoleonic wars, the British took control of Malacca from 1795 to 1818. In 1824, under the auspices of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty, Malacca was handed over to the British in exchange for other territories.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ R. Thapar, *A History of India, Volume 1*, (Harmondsworth: Pelican Press, 1966), p. 113.

Contemporary (Pliny the Elders, *Natural History*) sources tell of larger ships at seventy-five tons while other sources give bigger estimates. However D. G. E. Hall discounted many similar reports used by Radhakumud Mookerji's book, *Indian Shipping: A History of Seabourne Trade and Maritime Activity of the Indians from the Earliest Times*, published in 1912, as being 'flights of fancy'. D. G. E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 16.

⁷⁵ K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 2

⁷⁶ Of the original 1400 strong Portuguese force in 1511, 600 were 'Malabars or native soldiers' (presumably Malayali Christians). C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore, Volume 1*, (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1902), p. 20. B. Sng, *In His Good Time: the story of the Church in Singapore, 1819-1978*, (Singapore: Graduate's Christian Fellowship, 1980), p. 22.

⁷⁷ Sandhu, 1969, p. 4, Buckley, 1902, p. 21, Hall, 1964, p. 479.

The consolidation of British control of the peninsula was gradual, and more comprehensive in some states than others. The British acquired Penang (1786), Singapore (1819) and Malacca (1824), collectively called the Straits Settlements.⁷⁸ British interest in the Malay peninsula remained generally confined to the Straits Settlements for several decades. However by the middle of the nineteenth century there was a growing international market for tin, of which Perak, Selangor and parts of Negri Sembilan had extremely rich deposits. However the wealth generated from this trade also created commercial rivalries between many of the Malay chiefs who controlled these tin rich areas. By 1872 the scale of tin production had developed so largely that in Larut (Perak) alone, there were approximately 20,000 to 25,000 miners (mostly Chinese arrivals on the encouragement of the Malay chiefs) living in the region.⁷⁹ In addition to Larut, there were mines in other areas of Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong. Even the present-day capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, had its origins as a tin mining town.

With the growing profits brought about by production and trade in tin, competition developed over the control of this lucrative business. Malay chiefs were able to buy arms in the hope of taking control of larger tracts of tin rich areas. In the state of Perak, this situation was complicated by a Malay succession dispute. In other areas such as Larut and Kuala Lumpur, hostilities broke out between rival Chinese secret societies, which by that time had become an important force in the balance of power between feuding Malay sultans. Consequently conflicts threatened to escalate to civil war when various coalitions of Malay and Chinese interests were involved.⁸⁰ These developments brought about a sharp decline in tin production and by the 1860s, British and Straits Settlement Chinese commercial interests began lobbying the colonial office to help end the strife.⁸¹

The Colonial Office in London was initially reluctant to take action. However by September 1873 the Secretary of State for Colonies, Lord Kimberley, instructed the

⁷⁸ This included Province Wellesley, fronting Penang on mainland Kedah, in 1800. Sandhu, 1969, p. 5.

⁷⁹ J. G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 5.

⁸⁰ V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 103. J. Nagata, *Malaysian Mosaic*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 17.

then Governor Sir Andrew Clarke to report on circumstances facing British business interests with regards to the disturbances. The ensuing report changed British colonial strategy in Malaya from non-interventionist mercantile capital to that of interventionist and labour intensive investment capital.

By 1874, to neutralise rivalries in the region, Clarke negotiated the Pangkor Treaty which helped settle the disputes in question. In addition to this, a proviso was made with the Sultan of the state of Perak agreeing to receive a British 'Resident', 'whose advice must be asked and acted upon in all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom'⁸². Through the 'Resident' system, the British indirectly governed each Malay state where such a system was set up. This control was alluded to when the second resident to Perak, Hugh Low, was instructed by the Governor that 'the fiction that the Residents are merely advisers must be kept up'.⁸³

In accordance with the 1874 agreement, the states of Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong and later Pahang with the remainder of Negri Sembilan were incorporated into a single federation. By 1896 Kuala Lumpur had been chosen as its federal capital. In 1909 Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu and in 1914 Johore, were collectively amalgamated into the Unfederated states. Like their Federated counterparts, they too were each provided with a Resident. This collection of Federated and Unfederated states remained under British sovereignty until British defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1942. With the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945, the amalgamated Malayan Union was introduced which aimed to streamline government and administration.⁸⁴ It also granted equal citizenship and economic rights to all the domiciled races. These conditions found strong opposition with Malay nationalist groups. The Malayan Union was dropped and the Federation of Malaya was adopted in its place, which guaranteed Malay supremacy in matters pertaining to land ownership, civil service employment and political franchise. The newly independent Federation of Malaya was officially inaugurated in 1957.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Butcher, 1979, p. 6.

⁸² Butcher, 1979, p. 6.

⁸³ Butcher, 1979, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Singapore was left out of this Union. It was given the status as a Crown Colony. Butcher, 1979, p. 9.

⁸⁵ Sandhu, 1979, p. 6.

Christianity in India

Christianity in India can be traced to the first century of the Christian era. The Syrian Christian Church of Travancore believe that their religious order was founded by St. Thomas in the first century A.D.⁸⁶ According to this account, the apostle Thomas arrived in 52 A.D. to preach to the Jews of Malabar but with time began preaching to the locals as well.⁸⁷ From this came what is believed to be the beginnings of India's first indigenous Christian community, the forerunners of the present-day Syrian Christian community of the state of Kerala.⁸⁸ However exclusivity within this new community was paramount. Thomas had supposedly converted high caste groups within the communities. They in turn were reluctant to preach, convert and therefore assimilate their new religious belief outside their caste group. This exclusivity was continued with migration to the Malayan archipelago in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Apart from the legends relating to the spread of Christianity by Thomas, there were many other reasons which facilitated the dissemination of foreign ideas predating the onslaught of European imperialism by over a millennium. India, especially early South Indian kingdoms, had commercial links with the west and especially Rome.⁸⁹ Commercial trade with the west had appeared strongly developed by the first century AD, as a result of the discovery of new eastern sea routes by Hippalus. It was found that monsoonal trade winds could assist ships attempting to sail across the Arabian Sea. This laid open the entire west coast of the Indian subcontinent.⁹⁰ This exposure to outside influences is another plausible explanation for the introduction of Christianity, probably through contemporary contact with Christian traders.

Literature pertaining to the existence of non-Syrian Christian communities does exist. A series of accounts taken from Malayalam documents of the third century A.D. tells of an episode where Vellalar caste (farmer/landowner caste) Christian families, escaping persecution, joined a local Syrian Christian Church in the Malabar. A second

⁸⁶ St. Thomas, ('Doubting Thomas') one of the twelve biblical apostles of Jesus Christ.

⁸⁷ There are numerous accounts of St. Thomas and the establishment of Christianity in India. See L. W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956).

⁸⁸ Daniel, 1992, p. 18.

⁸⁹ Thapar, 1966, pp. 112, 114-5, 118, Daniel, 1992, p. 18.

⁹⁰ Daniel, 1992, p. 19. According to Daniel (citing Stephen Neil, 1972, p. 17), if Thomas was in Egypt, there was 'nothing to prevent him from taking a ship and transporting himself to India.'

version of possibly the same account tells of 72 Vellalar families fleeing from Chola persecution in Puhar and seeking refuge in Quilon. Yet another account tells of 64 Vellalar traders and their families fleeing persecution with the apostle Thomas, from Mylapore near Madras, to Tirunvankot.⁹¹

Christian influences in the Indian subcontinent remained primarily marginal inspite of its early exposure particularly to the south western kingdoms of India. It would take more than a millennium before Christian influences would be felt again, this time in a much more direct and discernible fashion.

The arrival of the Europeans in South India and Ceylon

The period in which Christian influences was to make itself felt again, this time on a larger scale, did not arrive until after the first of the European maritime powers, the Portuguese, set up trading posts in South India in the sixteenth century. However by the close of the eighteenth century, Portuguese Roman Catholicism which had thrived so well during its initial heyday in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, began to experience an evangelical lull. This was attributed to the decline of Portuguese influence and its ensuing displacement - notably by the Protestant British. There was a power struggle between Rome and Portugal over official Roman Catholic patronage, which went on for most of the nineteenth century. Portuguese refusal to yield its Indian episcopate in affect kept out other countries from taking up where it had left off.⁹²

The majority of India's Christian population resided in the southern half of the sub-continent. This was facilitated by the southern coast's historical exposure to foreign maritime contact which inadvertently included some traders from Christian backgrounds.⁹³ By the close of the eighteenth century the scenario for western powers was set. The Portuguese had their chief port at Goa in the south-west and the French had Pondicherry in the south-east. The Dutch intermittently held Chinsura in the north (near Calcutta), the Danes had small stations in Tranquebar in the south and

⁹¹ Brown, 1956, pp. 77-8. Stephens, 1986, p. 205.

⁹² K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. 6, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1940-45), pp. 72-4.

⁹³ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 71.

Serampore in the north and finally the British were stationed in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.⁹⁴

The Roman Catholic Churches' early entry into the field of evangelisation in the Indian subcontinent helped give it a dominant foothold in comparison with other Christian denominations, especially in the southern half of the continent. By 1700 the estimated Roman Catholic population in India was around two million. A century later in 1800, this number had dropped to between 475,000 to 1.2 million only.⁹⁵ However by the nineteenth century there was a sizable turnaround in the numbers of Christian conversions. Statistics from the 'Catholic Directory of India 1913' accorded 2,233,546 people to the Catholic Church in India alone. Of these, 296,148 were in the Portuguese territories, 25,918 in the French territories and 364,660 belonged to the Syrian Christian Churches.⁹⁶ The sudden growth in the nineteenth century as compared to the eighteenth century is striking. Figures from the 'Catholic Directory of India' noted; 1,017,969 in 1861, 1,131,672 in 1871, 1,389,306 in 1881, 1,625,943 in 1891 and 1,860,876 in 1901.⁹⁷ By 1911, the number of Catholics in India was 2,223,546 and Protestants just under one million.⁹⁸ Kenneth Scott Latourette put the Roman Catholic population of South India at 5 per cent in 1914.⁹⁹

Table 1
Population of Christians in India (1881-1951)

Year	Population	% of total pop.	% increase/decrease
1881	1,862,634	0.73	-
1891	2,284,380	0.79	+22.6
1901	2,923,241	0.99	+27.9
1911	3,876,203	1.24	+32.6
1921	4,754,000	1.5	+22.6

⁹⁴ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 66.

⁹⁵ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 73. These figures take into account populations existing in the North as well. The number of Europeans or Anglo-Indian Christians included in this number is not indicated, although it would be miniscule.

⁹⁶ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 98. The overall population of 2.2m includes North India. Approximately 100,000 were European and Anglo-Indian.

⁹⁷ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 98. These figures include North India.

⁹⁸ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 194. The majority of Christians being mostly from South India.

1931	6,296,763	1.79	+32.5
1951	8,392,038	2.35	-

Figures not fully provided for years 1881 and 1951

Source: G. A. Oddie (ed.), S. Arasaratnam, *The Christians of Ceylon & Nationalist Politics*, in *Religion in South Asia*, pp. 190-2.

In Ceylon, the Christian missionary movement were active on the island from 1543¹⁰⁰ with the arrival of Franciscan monks.¹⁰¹ By the early sixteenth century, Portuguese Franciscan missionaries had claimed to have converted approximately 52,000 people in Ceylon.¹⁰² Despite the fact that Christianity had a much later start in Ceylon, approximately four hundred and fifty to five hundred years, by the end of the eighteenth century it had taken a much stronger foothold there than in mainland India. This was attributable firstly to the fact that European colonial control of Ceylon was much more encompassing than in India.¹⁰³ Similarly Jesuits in 1644 claimed 32,000 under their charge with an additional 5,000 on the island of Manar (on the north-eastern coast of the Ceylon). By time of the Dutch takeover¹⁰⁴, the populations of Galle, Negombo and Jaffna regions were predominantly Christian.¹⁰⁵

With the defeat and supplanting of the Portuguese, the new Dutch colonialists actively tried to replace Roman Catholicism with Reformed Dutch Protestantism. Catholic priests were expelled and many Catholic Churches were converted to Protestant ones. Public and private gatherings or meeting of Catholics were made illegal.¹⁰⁶ According to K. S. Latourette, Dutch attempts to replace Roman Catholicism were largely unsuccessful. He attributed its steadfastness to the continuous support of clergy from outside Ceylon. On the other hand, Dutch Protestantism was propagated by a much

⁹⁹ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 287. Also see p. 307.

¹⁰⁰ K. S. Latourette claims that the first Franciscan, Vincente, arrived with the Portuguese in 1505. Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 3, p. 285.

¹⁰¹ S. Arasaratnam 'The Christians of Ceylon and Nationalist Politics', in G. A. Oddie (ed.), *Religion in South Asia*, (London.: Curzon Press, 1977), p. 163.

¹⁰² Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 3, p. 288-9.

¹⁰³ Whereas political control of India did not become powerful till the latter half of the eighteenth century, similarly control was already in place from the sixteenth century in Ceylon.

¹⁰⁴ It was only after several decades ending in 1658, that the Dutch succeeded in expelling the Portuguese from Ceylon.

¹⁰⁵ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 3, p. 288-9.

¹⁰⁶ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 3, p. 289-90.

smaller missionary force and any reverse in numbers in relation to the Catholic population was not forthcoming.¹⁰⁷ By the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Protestantism was on the decline with Catholicism on an upswing. As shown in the table 2, the Christian element in the Ceylonese population was much higher than that in mainland India, nudging 10 percent at times. It is also noteworthy that Christianity predominated among Tamil-speaking communities, at 16.5 percent.¹⁰⁸

Table 2
Population of Christians in Ceylon, 1881-1946

Year	Population	% of total population
1881	268,000	9.7
1891	302,100	10.1
1901	349,200	9.8
1911	409,100	10.0
1921	443,400	9.8
1946	603,235	9.1

Source: G. A. Oddie (ed.), S. Arasaratnam, *The Christians of Ceylon & Nationalist Politics*, in *Religion in South Asia*, p. 194.

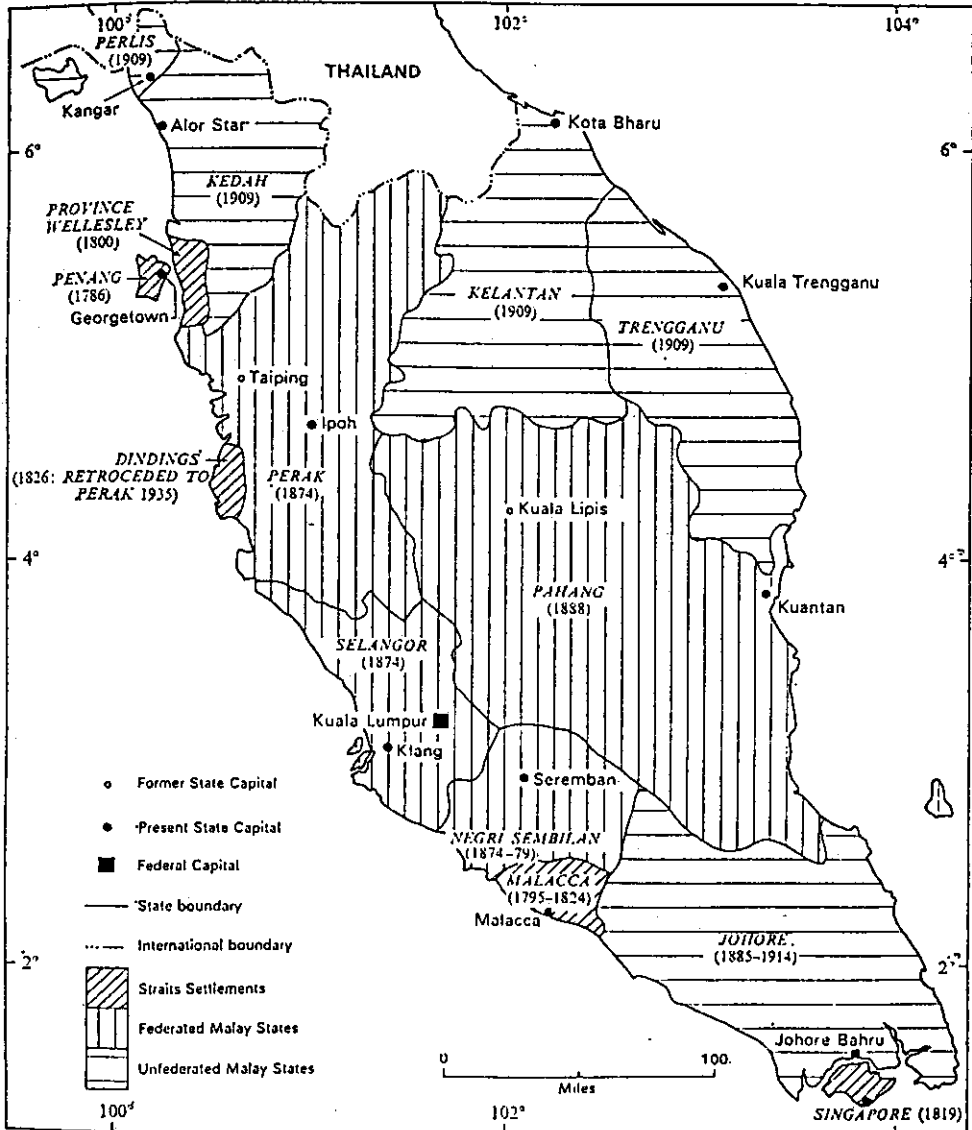
Precursor to migration: Economic hardship in South India

British control of the Indian subcontinent was complete by the middle of the nineteenth century. This meant that Indian interests came under the control of the British colonial government. India effectively became an economic vassal state of Britain. Part of this process saw the conversion of the Indian economy from that of an exporter of manufactured goods to a supplier of raw materials and an importer of British-made goods. Even native Indian enterprises, which threatened British business interest, were restrained and handicapped by restrictive legislation.¹⁰⁹ For example shipping, still a significant local industry in the early nineteenth century, was

¹⁰⁷ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 3, p. 291-2.

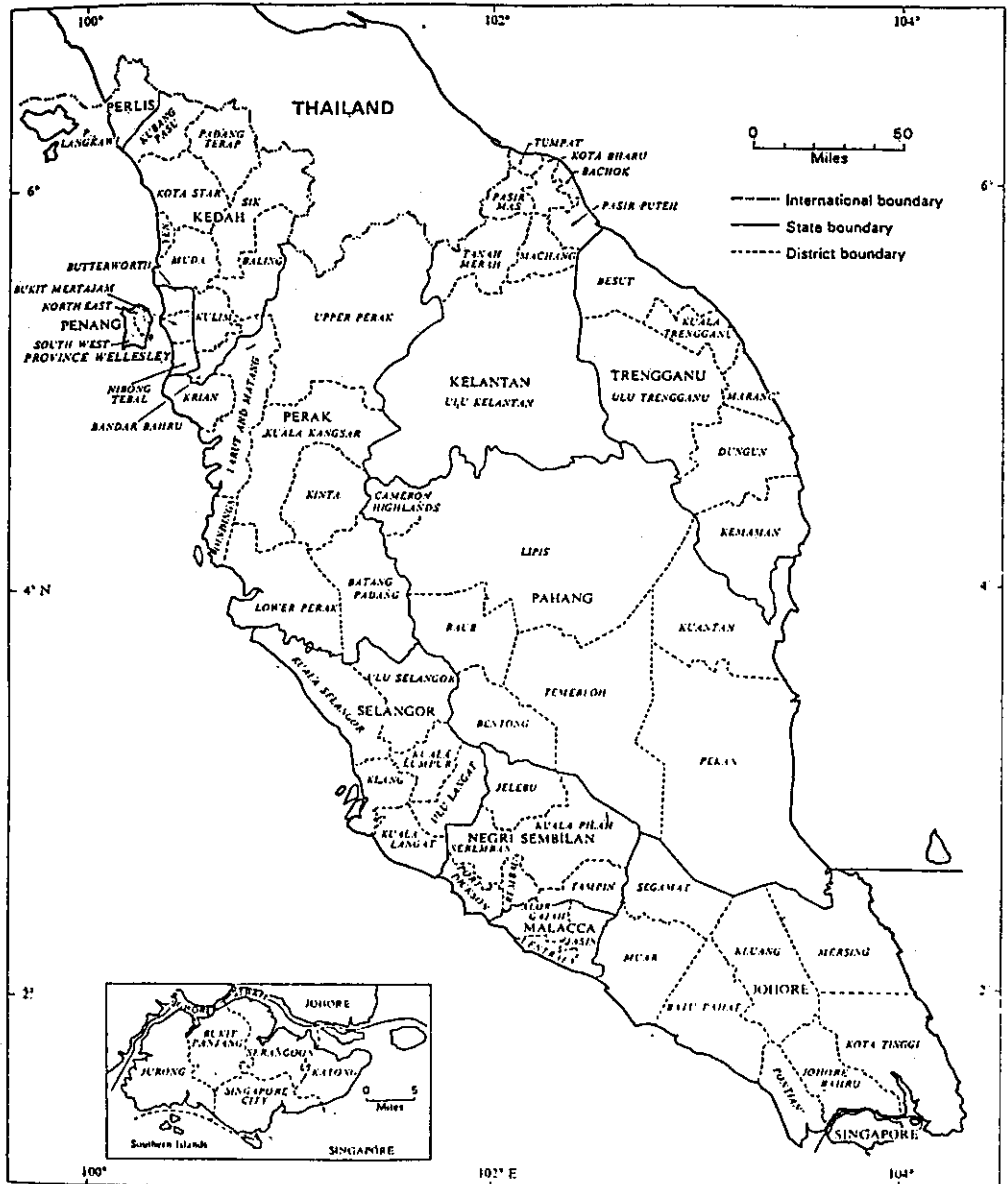
¹⁰⁸ Arasaratnam, 1977, p. 167. Singhalese-speakers amounted to 8 per cent of their community.

¹⁰⁹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 32.



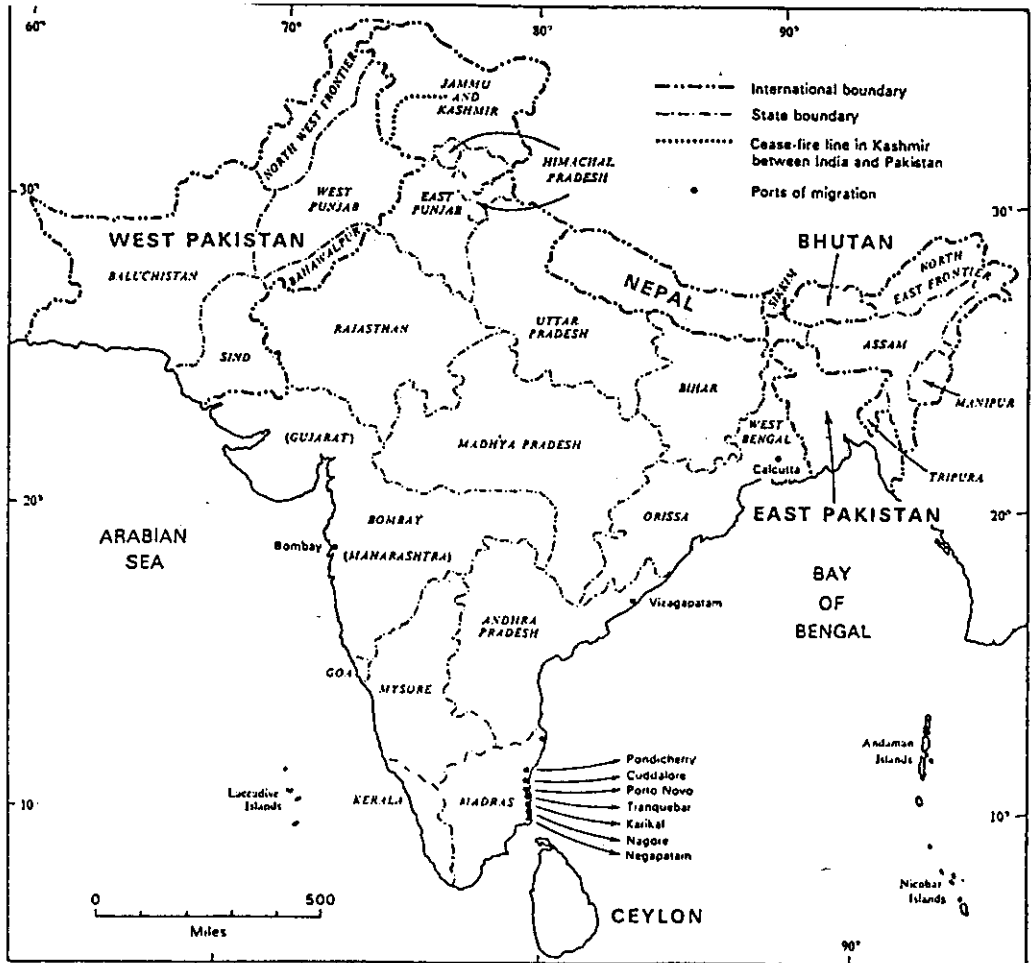
Map of Malay States & Straits Settlement, 1786-1941.

Source: K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya 1786-1957*, p. 5.



Map of political divisions of Malaya (states & districts), 1957

Source: K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya 1786-1957*, p. 7.



Source: K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya 1786-1957*, p. 16 .

suppressed by restrictive tariffs. Indian ships were disallowed from entering English waters, under threat of forfeiture from 1814. Even in India, shipping in the Madras Presidency was hampered by the imposition of a fifteen per cent import duty. In comparison, British owned ships were only expected to pay a seven and a half per cent import duty.¹¹⁰ Such tactics restricted the development of the Indian shipping industry. It was therefore not surprising to note how by 1840 native Indian shipping businesses were reduced to obscurity. This had a flow on affect on the status of the Indian commercial classes, who had by this time lost their traditional sources of investment and income. This even had a flow on effect on the 'intelligentsia'. The decline of native Indian enterprises and businesses resulted in a reduction of occupational opportunities. Furthermore this curbing of indigenous industry, contributed to the decline of smaller associated businesses. Potters, millers, shoemakers and spinners lost their traditional means of livelihood.¹¹¹

In response to circumstances, the old business classes began to shy away from the field of enterprise and investment. Many chose to invest their money in government stocks and especially land. Prior to British rule, land possessed little monetary value in India. However by the middle of the nineteenth century the concept of 'landlordism', based on the British model, became increasingly popular among the disenfranchised Indian business classes. The colonial government did not hinder the concept of land acquisition.¹¹² With these new concepts of land ownership and private property, land became a useful route for accumulating wealth for many a landlord and moneylender. Ordinary farmers found it easy to borrow cash in order to keep up with everyday requirements. As many farmers were drawn into the new colonial cash economy, many began to feel the heavy financial burden of taxation – which needed to be paid for in cash. Most farms were subsistence-based and therefore had little chance of generating an income. Moneylenders charged an average interest rate of between 9 and 300 per cent, often using the farmer's land as collateral or security. Many small farmers, unable to keep up with the payments, were forced off their land. Sometimes a debtor was allowed to stay on the farm, but only as a tenant. This became the norm in many parts of India as more and more land passed into the hands of the new land

¹¹⁰ Sandhu, 1969, p. 33.

¹¹¹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 36.

¹¹² Sandhu, 1969, p. 34.

owning classes. Under these circumstances, many 'tenant' farmers found themselves at the 'beck and call' of their landlords. Many landlords demanded between 40 to 80 per cent of their farm produce. Any resistance was met with eviction.¹¹³

In South India, by the latter half of the nineteenth century, as many as 40 per cent of the agricultural population was estimated to be malnourished and badly housed.¹¹⁴ Accordingly times of famine were followed by epidemics. For example, in Madras in 1921, farm labourers accounted for approximately 20 percent of the rural population. Most of these farm labourers were made up of the Untouchable or Adi-Dravidas caste. In 1891 it was estimated that there were 500,000 to 1,000,000 of these caste members. By 1921 this number had jumped to over 3,000,000.¹¹⁵ Many found themselves in debt to their higher caste landlords, who often manipulated the existing economic relationship to their own benefit. Many labourers remained in constant debt and thus in servitude for life. A debt could be passed on through the generations, and when a farm was sold, many a farming family was 'sold' with it. The situation for farm labourers in parts of Malabar, the districts of Chingleput, Tinnevely, South Arcot, Trichinopoly and Tanjore was supposed to be worse. In these regions, a minority of high caste landowners made sweeping claims on all land - including villages, and even hut sites. The ordinary, lower caste farm labourer had little chance of acquiring land.¹¹⁶

The situation for wage labourers was no better. Money wages were very low and workers suffered from a rising cost of living. When available, employment was only for 4 to 8 months in the year. In the 1890s the average male labourer earned only 2d to 4d per day, this increased to only 4d to 6d by the 1920s even though the purchasing power of the colonial rupee declined by over 50 percent over that period.¹¹⁷

Colonialism initiated changes in existing social, economic and political structures. The introduction of the cash economy and substitution of traditional crops with commercial ones help place massive stresses on indigenous social and political structures.

¹¹³ Sandhu, 1969, pp. 36-37.

¹¹⁴ Sandhu, 1969, p. 39.

¹¹⁵ Sandhu, 1969, p. 40.

¹¹⁶ Sandhu, 1969, p. 41.

¹¹⁷ Sandhu, 1969, p. 41.

Even among the higher castes and upper echelons of the Indian population, there were few opportunities. Government jobs for the English-educated were limited, while employment in the industrial and private sector was unpopular. This was exacerbated by the fact that the majority of the educated classes consisted of the higher caste groups who were extremely particular in choosing caste 'acceptable' employment. As with their lower caste counterparts, this group also found it hard to maintain an acceptable standard of living. While the price of foodstuffs increased from 80 percent to 100 percent between 1888 and 1908, wages of government employees rose by only 30 percent to 50 percent.¹¹⁸

Caste was still a strong determinant of employment and employability and played a vital role in migration to Malaya and the Straits Settlements. In the Tamilnadu states alone, the Brahmin castes monopolised the administrative structure of the state.¹¹⁹ The Brahmins, having a long scholarly tradition and the general affluence behind them were soon able to dominate the available opportunities in the Civil Service. This one-sided dominance resulted in caste-based nepotism which helped frustrate other non-Brahmin caste groups.¹²⁰ It can be assumed from this that many unemployable but educated non-Brahmins, upon finding little to no opportunities in India, took to emigration.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Sandhu, 1969, p. 42.

¹¹⁹ Rajakrishnan Ramasamy, 'The Role of Caste in the Migration of Indian Tamils to Malaya' in *Sarjana*, Dec. 1981, p. 98.

¹²⁰ Brahmin dominance might have been proportionately high, however the sheer size of the non-Brahmin caste groups would still make them a force to be reckoned with. For example, the Nayar caste groups in the Kerala were perceived by many to have dominated the civil service. Interview with Mr V. A. George of Singapore (born 1906), 27 January 1997.

¹²¹ Ramasamy, 1981, p. 99.

Chapter 3

Transience and establishment in British Malaya

Indian labour immigration to the Malay peninsula

The incentives for British interest in the Malay peninsula were economically based. Acquisition of the Straits Settlements was designed to profit from and control the main international shipping lanes that channelled through the Straits of Malacca and the Straits of Singapore. In the same way, political intervention in the Malay states followed a disruption to British interests, trade and business profits. Economic growth was seen as being synonymous with social and political development. And on no account were British economic interests in the region going to be slowed or disrupted. Similarly, a reliable supply of labour was essential to the success of future capitalist profitability. Not being able to rely on established Malay communities, colonial governments and their business interests found it necessary to recruit overseas, often using justifications based on perceived concepts of 'backwardness' and 'modernity' to vindicate ensuing the labour policies.

Labour immigration to the Malay states and the Straits Settlements was economically motivated. Chinese immigration was encouraged to feed the heavy labour needs of the tin industry. In the same way, South Indian immigration was facilitated via government channels to bolster the production of the new rubber industry at the turn of the twentieth century. By and large Indian labour recruitment was extremely effective in its primary aim to supply cheap labour to the British dominated economic engine of Malaya.

Systematic Indian immigration to the Malay archipelago began, according to Dharma Kumar, in 1833.¹²² K. S. Sandhu however puts this date much earlier in 1787, citing Francis Light's request to the Governor-General in Council, India, to send a 'supply of one hundred coolies, as the price of labour in Penang was enormous.'¹²³ With regard to Indian Christians, no official documents exist which list their numbers or dates of arrival. However several Indian Christian marriages were celebrated at the Roman

¹²² D. Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, (UK: Cambridge at the University, 1965), p. 131.

Catholic Assumption Church (later Cathedral) in Penang during the first decade of the 1800s.¹²⁴ Although such importation of labour from India, Christian or otherwise, would probably not come under the strict definition of labour migration, according to Sandhu there were often provisions for small numbers of workers to be imported for specific purposes.¹²⁵ From this observation, it would appear that Indian Christians played a role from the inception of labour immigration to the Malay archipelago.

The establishment of Christianity in the Malay archipelago

Unlike the more cosmopolitan environment of India and its exposure to different belief systems, in comparison, the Malay archipelago was rather more insular. Foreign influences did permeate into the fabric of social, cultural and political aspects of the various Malay sultanates but not to the extent of diversity within its South Indian cousins. Of the major foreign belief systems that proliferated into the Malay archipelago, Hinduism and Islam remained paramount. Hinduism made an early appearance as a result of contact with Hindu Indian traders and missionaries, probably from South India ports. Brahmin priests were reported to have converted tribal chiefs to Hinduism and according to Chinese sources, even intermarried into families of local heads.¹²⁶

Islam was the next major religious influence and was later to supplant Hinduism in the Malay archipelago. Early contemporary reports of the presence of Islam date back to as early as 622 A.D. by Chinese chroniclers. However it probably did not gain a strong foothold till the arrival of Arab, Persian and Indian merchants with their accompanying missionaries.¹²⁷ According to Sayyid Fatimi, the first direct evidence of Islam in the archipelago dates back to 878 A.D., when it had already appeared to have established itself along the coastal regions.¹²⁸ However many other sources hold the

¹²³ K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 47.

¹²⁴ *Marriages beginning 1799*, (Marriage Register), Assumption Cathedral (Roman Catholic), Penang, Malaysia.

¹²⁵ Sandhu, 1969, p. 47.

¹²⁶ Williams, 1976, p. 9.

¹²⁷ S. F. Mahmud, *The Story of Islam*, (Karachi: OUP, 1960), p. 111.

¹²⁸ S. Fatimi, *Islam comes to Malaysia*, (Singapore: Malaysia Sociological Institute, 1963), pp. 39-40.

twelfth or thirteenth A. D. centuries as a more probable time.¹²⁹ By the time of the Portuguese conquests of Malacca, Islam predominated in the archipelago.

The intrusion of the British and other European interests into the affairs of the Malay archipelago and the region brought in tow associated institutions such as Christianity and the Church. Christian evangelisation was tied in with British commercial and political interests.¹³⁰

The establishment of the Roman Catholic Church

Christianity came to the Malay archipelago with the Portuguese conquest of the sultanate of Malacca in 1511. Vasco da Gama's successful discovery of a sea-route to the East via the Cape of Good Hope in 1498, laid open opportunities for commercial and religious conquests of which Malacca was soon to become part. In 1511, with the successful defeat of the Malacca sultanate, their new commander Alfonso Albuquerque made it clear from the onset that profit and evangelisation were the prime objectives. There was no perceived differentiation between colonial conquest and religious evangelisation. The following quote by Paulo da Trindade (1638), although made a little over a century after the Malacca conquest, illustrates this point.

The two swords of the civil and the ecclesiastical power were always so close together in the conquest of the East that we seldom find one being used without the other; for the weapons only conquered through the right that the preaching of the Gospel gave them, and the preaching was only of some use when it was accompanied and protected by the weapons.¹³¹

Legislation was put in place which forced non-Christians to convert to Roman Catholicism. To encourage conversion, incentives such as government employment was used to lure would-be converts into Christianity. Large numbers converted

¹²⁹ S. Ackerman and R. Lee, *Heaven in Transition*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p. 19.

¹³⁰ Loh Keng Aun, *Fifty years of the Anglican Church in Singapore Island 1909-1959*, (Singapore: University of Singapore, 1963), p. 5.

¹³¹ Paulo da Trindade, *Conquista Espiritual de Oriente*, cited in translation in Boxer, *The Portuguese*, (1638) - quoted from K. M. Williams, *The Church in West Malaysia and Singapore*, [Ph.D. thesis, Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven] (Kuala Lumpur: unpublished, 1976), p. 74.

primarily to avoid being discriminated against. Fraternising was encouraged between Portuguese and the locals.

By the seventeenth century Portuguese maritime supremacy was being challenged by other rising European powers. By 1641 Portuguese Malacca fell to the Dutch. Unlike their predecessors, the Dutch did not share a similar commitment to Christian evangelicism or belief in integration into local communities.¹³² Little attempt was made to convert locals to the Protestant faith and by the beginning of the eighteenth century, Protestant converts were outnumbered by the native Roman Catholics by a factor of six to one.¹³³

Christianity's introduction into Malacca, unlike the generally peaceful coexistence of firstly Hinduism and then Islam,¹³⁴ was rather more militaristic and violent in its inception. Apart from the military conquest of Malacca, the Portuguese were often in a state of war with the neighbouring sultanates of Johor and Aceh. This resulted in the pitting of Islam and Christianity in the region, and made the predominantly Muslim Malays antagonistic towards anything Christian. William Milne (1795-1822), a missionary with the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1820, made an interesting observation. He noted the disenchantment of the Malay Muslim population towards Christians in the colony. He described the 'avarice, lying, and cozening which appear in carrying on commerce; the drunkenness, loose morals, and hardness of heart towards slaves, which have at times been manifested by the professors of the gospel, have steeled the Musselman's soul against Christianity.'¹³⁵ Consequently, Christianity had little long-term effect on the local populations, and most certainly did not take root or possessed little appeal with the local Malay population. Christianity in Malacca, for example, remained within the confines of its small community of Luso-Malay (Eurasian) descendants and did not spread beyond these parameters. It was only after British interests began infiltrating the Malay archipelago that new initiatives in Christian evangelisation began, and then only so with its new non-Muslim immigrant arrivals.

¹³² B. Sng, *In His Good Time*, (Singapore: Graduates' Christian Fellowship, 1980), pp. 22, 24.

¹³³ R. Balhetchet (ed.), *From the Mustard Seed ...*, (Singapore: R. P. Balhetchet, 1996), p. 53.

¹³⁴ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 20.

On the 7th November 1781, Bishop Condé and Father Arnaud Garnault headed south into the Malay state of Kedah where they found a small colony of refugee Roman Catholics from Siam.¹³⁶ Along with another small band of Malacca Luso-Malay (Eurasian) Roman Catholics, who were at the time serving under Francis Light and the East India Company, the priests decided to establish a parish. The Sultan of Kedah was approached and permission was given to build a chapel which was duly dedicated to St. Michael.¹³⁷ A large attap house was built for the eighty-strong congregation and a small port at Kuala Kedah was put at the disposal of this new Catholic mission. By 1784, the jurisdiction of the vicarate apostolic of Siam was extended into Malay state of Kedah.

After the British occupation of Penang in 1786, Father Garnault who had recently taken over responsibilities from Bishop Condé, who had died the previous year in Siam, moved his small parish to the Penang island. In the following year Garnault was officially ordained bishop of 'Metellopolis [sic] and vicar apostolic of Siam' in Pondicherry, India. Between 1788 to 1791, plans for the building of a Roman Catholic Church in Penang, the Assumption Church, was underway and seen through to fruition by the recently arrived parish priest Father Michel Rectenwald. Rectenwald was given charge of the Catholic communities scattered along the peninsula coast from Mergui to Kedah - approximately 850 in all.¹³⁸

However there were inherent difficulties within the realm of Roman Catholicism in the Southeast Asian region. The Portuguese, being the first Catholics in the area, enjoyed a degree of recognition even after their forced withdrawal from Malacca in 1641. However the decline in Portuguese and Spanish dominance in comparison to other European interests was becoming strongly apparent by the seventeenth century.¹³⁹ Rome proceeded to remedy this situation with the creation of a central agency called the 'Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide' in 1622. This was meant to

¹³⁵ Sng, 1980, p. 39. Ackerman and Lee, 1988, p. 26.

¹³⁶ Williams, 1976, p. 93.

¹³⁷ Fr. Rene Nicholas (Mission Etrangeres de Paris), *A Chronology of the Catholic Church in Malaya and Singapore*, (Singapore: unpublished, 1996). p. 3.

¹³⁸ Nicholas (M.E.P.), 1996, p. 4.

¹³⁹ C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1902), p. 243. During the zenith of Spanish and Portuguese colonial might, the Pope (in 1498) had given the Portuguese jurisdiction to the east.

help break the system of royal patronage long enjoyed by the Portuguese and Spanish and bring about stronger consistency with regards to policies in the region. The Portuguese also often refused to recognise their compatriot French-based Mission Etrangeres de Paris (M. E. P.) sovereignty and vice-versa. A dispute over control between the Portuguese (sometimes Spanish) and Rome continued well into the nineteenth century and was only resolved in 1886.¹⁴⁰ Consequently by the time of British intervention in the Malay archipelago, there were two (sometimes three) contenders to the mantle of head of the Roman Catholic Church in the Malay archipelago.

Another aspect that numerically propelled the Roman Catholic Church ahead of the other Christian denominations was its educational arm. In 1852 the order of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (F. S. C.) and the Dames de Saint-Muar (Sisters of the Holy Infant Jesus) began setting up educational establishments in Singapore and Penang. The reason for their arrival were two-fold; a Protestant-based school system already existed, and this move hoped to counter its growing influence. And secondly, the Roman Catholic Church hoped to use its school system to bolster its evangelisation process.¹⁴¹

The evangelical enthusiasm of the Roman Catholic Church is illustrated in its often zealous attempts to pursue its goal of religious conversion. According to K. M. Williams, there was a strong emphasis on numbers. When the number of baptisms, conversions, confessions or communions were down (especially if there was a decline from the previous year), there would be an apology from the bishop and this was followed by an explanation. Similarly if the numbers were an improvement it 'was an occasion for rejoicing'. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that these statistics came under stronger scrutiny and actually showed many of these early baptisms were of dying adults!¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Buckley, 1902, pp. 242-3.

¹⁴¹ Williams, 1976, p. 104. Ackerman and Lee, 1988, p. 29. Leslie O'Brien, 'Education and Colonialism: The Case of Malaya', in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 16 (2), July 1980, p. 54. Similar sentiments, with regards to evangelism in schools, were expressed by the Anglican Church. Rev. C. D. Gnanamani in *The Diocesan Magazine*, XXIV (88), Singapore, Nov. 1932, p. 31.

¹⁴² Williams, 1976, p. 103.

In addition to this, the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church were not totally confined to the realms of British influence and protection. There was a strong pioneering element evident among some of the priests within the French-based Mission Etrangeres de Paris (M. E. P.). As stated earlier, the M. E. P. had established themselves in the state of Kedah as early as 1781, approximately seven years before the establishment of British sovereignty in Penang.

For example, Father Francis Xavier Hab (1829-1890) was a priest who along with a small band of Tamil parishioners, settled and established the Church of St. Francis Xavier (Penang) in 1857. St. Francis Xavier, the sixteenth century Basque Jesuit priest, was a popular figure among the Indian Christian communities. He had a strong connection with South India and was also associated with early Catholic evangelisation in the archipelago. Latourette noted that many Christian Goanese immigrants preferred to travel on boats named after St Francis Xavier.¹⁴³ The parish has remained primarily Tamil to this day.¹⁴⁴ In the state of Perak, Father Rene Michel Marie Fee (1856-1904), who was influenced and encouraged by Father Hab¹⁴⁵, facilitated the establishment of the small Tamil settlement of 'Soosay Paleam' (St. Joseph's town) in virgin jungle in Bagan Serai, near Taiping, in 1889.¹⁴⁶ In the first few decades of the twentieth century, Father Louis Riboud (1890-1960), regularly travelled far into the state of Kedah in an old truck equipped with a chapel dedicated to St. Theresa alongside a portable toilet mounted on its back!¹⁴⁷

The strong activities of the Roman Catholic Church put it at the forefront of the Christian movement in the nineteenth century. No other Christian denomination committed as much resources to the Malay archipelago as did the Roman Catholic Church. A good summation of the situation was made by a Methodist minister W. T. Cherry in 1910, when he frustratingly noted the '35,000 Tamils, and the only work being done amongst them besides ours is that of the Church of England and the

¹⁴³ Latourette, vol. 6, 1940-5, p. 208.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas, 1996, p. 11.

¹⁴⁵ Fr. Michel Rene Marie Fee (1889), *Kampong Padre: A Tamil Settlement near Bagan Serai, Perak*, (Singapore: Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society, May 1963), p. 154.

¹⁴⁶ Fee (1889), May 1963, p. 153.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat (M. E. P.) (born 1910), Cheras, 25 October 1997. Interview with Fr. Rene Nicholas (M. E. P.), (born 1930), Singapore, June 1996.

Roman Catholics. We have been fumbling a good opportunity here for 12 years'.¹⁴⁸
Most Protestant missionaries of the day were sent to China instead.¹⁴⁹

The establishment of the Indian-based Anglican Church

The establishment of the missionary arm of the Anglican Church was reported to have been a direct result of the particularly stirring sermon delivered by the Resident chaplain, William Humphrey on Whitsunday 1856, in Singapore. As a result, by October of that same year, a Tamil catechist named Peter Tychicus, was put in charge of the task.¹⁵⁰ However this initiative remained confined to Singapore for some time, as no similar initiatives had been made in other parts of the Malay archipelago.

As a result of the neglect, the Anglican Church was non-existent among non-European communities in the Straits Settlements, let alone the Malay states before the 1870s. For example, when a Tamil catechist employed by the Church of England, Mr. Royappan Balavendrum¹⁵¹, arrived in Penang island in 1871 to establish a non-European based Anglican congregation, he recorded that 'there were no Protestant (Indian) Christians in Penang'. However with time and effort a small congregation of five was put together and before long Balavendrum was setting his sights on Province Wellesley on the mainland. By 1873, Balavendrum and his wife had managed to start up a school. And in 1886, a small chapel was being built.¹⁵² By the beginning of the twentieth century the number of Tamil Anglicans had risen to over eight hundred in Malaya alone.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ 'Singapore District (Report by Rev. W. T. Cherry, Supt.)' in *Malaysia Message*, (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, February 1910). These sentiments were echoed by Rev. J. A. Bethune Cook in 1907. He noted how the Roman Catholic Church benefited, 'largely because of the want of enterprise and foresight of the English Established Church. But the British Evangelical Free Churches were also much to blame in neglecting the Straits for so many years.' J. A. Bethune Cook, *Sunny Singapore: An Account of the Place and its People with a Sketch of the Results of Missionary Work*, (London: Elliot Stock, 1907), p. 131.

¹⁴⁹ Sng, 1980, pp. 25, 35. Ackerman and Lee, 1988, p. 29. Loh, 1963, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ Loh, 1963, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ Balavendrum's Christian roots went back at least three generations. His grand-parents had been baptized by Christian F. Schwartz of the early Tranquebar Mission in the early eighteenth century. Sng, 1980, p. 95.

¹⁵² Paul G. T. Samuel, *A Hundred Years of the Tamil Mission Diocese of West Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: P. G. T. Samuel, 1971), p.8. Sng, 1980, pp. 94-95

¹⁵³ Sng, 1980, p. 95.

In Singapore, despite its early evangelical initiative, the Indian congregation in the Anglican Church of St. Andrew's in Singapore was put at only twenty-five by 1871.¹⁵⁴ However three years later, the number had jumped to forty under the guidance of the newly appointed Reverend William Henry Gomez (a Ceylonese)¹⁵⁵, who had two catechists, Chok Loy-Fat¹⁵⁶ for the Chinese congregation and Francis Samuel for the Indian.¹⁵⁷ It could be deduced that Reverend Gomez oversaw the care of both the Chinese and Indian Anglican communities at the time. However by 1877, only Samuel the Indian catechist is mentioned, and by 1891 the congregation is broken up into two sections of a hundred each, indicating that the Chinese community was still under his overall care.¹⁵⁸

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a wide variety of smaller Protestant groups being set-up in the Straits Settlements, particularly in Singapore. In the 1860s, the 'Society for the Propagation of the Gospel' was established and was particularly active in funding the non-European services of the Anglican Church.¹⁵⁹ Another group, the 'Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge', contributed financially to schools and Sunday schools.¹⁶⁰

By and large, the Anglican Church, like its other Protestant contemporaries, was small in comparison to that of the Roman Catholic Church. Despite the fact that it was one of the few Churches to have maintained a continuous presence in the Straits Settlements and the Malay states from the late eighteenth century, its ensuing adherence among non-European communities was quite low. In 1871, there were only twenty-five Tamil members of the Anglican Church in Singapore, along with another

¹⁵⁴ 'Ecclesiastical Return, Straits Settlements, 1870' in *Straits Settlements Blue Book for the year 1870*, (Calcutta: Government of the Straits Settlements, 1873), R1.

¹⁵⁵ Loh, 1963, p. 3. Samuel, 1971, pp. 8-9. Rev. W. H. Gomez, B. D., was Missioner in charge of St. Andrew's Mission.

¹⁵⁶ Loh, 1963, p. 2. Choy was also reportedly the founder of St. Andrew's School.

¹⁵⁷ 'Ecclesiastical Return. Straits Settlements, 1871', in *Straits Settlements Blue Book for the year 1871*, (Calcutta: Government of the Straits Settlements, 1873), R1.

¹⁵⁸ 'Ecclesiastical Return, Straits Settlements, 1877'. Unlike the Roman Catholic and the Methodist Churches, Anglican-Church based population figures were not made available in Singapore. In Malaysia, archival material pertaining to numbers were destroyed in a flood in Kuala Lumpur in 1971.

¹⁵⁹ K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, vol.6*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1940-5), pp. 238-40. Samuel, 1971, p.8. 'Ecclesiastical Return, Straits Settlements, 1870', R1.

¹⁶⁰ C. F. Pascoe, *Two hundred years of the S.P.G.: An historical account of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1900*, (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1901), pp. 695-702.

thirty-five from the Chinese community. In comparison, the local Roman Catholic Church had between three to four hundred communicants.¹⁶¹

The Churches failing was due to the fact that, like most of its other Protestant contemporaries, they were more keen to concentrate on evangelical opportunities in China than in the Straits Settlements and the Malay states. Compounding this lack of evangelical resources, no attempt was made to convert or preach among the Asian communities, and then only well after the 1850s in Singapore and the 1870s in Penang.¹⁶²

The establishment of the Indian-based Methodist Church

The Methodist Church in Malaya and the Straits Settlements was established on the initiative of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America in the mid-1880s. This Church had been active in India, thirty years prior, and was thus poised to produce results in Malaya. With a strong background and experience with Indians, the Methodist Episcopal Church was quick to establish a Tamil-speaking congregation within a year of their establishment.¹⁶³

Under the guidance of its resident Tamil-speaking missionary, William Oldham, Dr. Kensett, a Ceylonese-Tamil missionary Rev. Henry Hoisington and two Ceylonese-Tamil assistances M. Gnanamuthu and G. W. Underwood, congregations in both Kuala Lumpur and Singapore was set up.¹⁶⁴

The Kuala Lumpur branch of the Tamil Church was established in 1896, primarily as Bible and prayer meetings at members' homes. According to a contemporary report of the day, on the 18th of June 1897, seven 'of our young men called at his (Dr. Kensett's) house and asked him to start an English Bible Class and to secure the services of a Tamil Pastor to organize a Tamil Church.'¹⁶⁵ By 1897, a small Church was opened, followed by a school, in a shop-house at the junction of Batu Road (now

¹⁶¹ 'Ecclesiastical Return. Straits Settlements. 1871', R1.

¹⁶² Loh, 1963, p. 5. Samuel, 1971, p. 8.

¹⁶³ Sng, 1980, p. 95.

¹⁶⁴ Sng, 1980, p. 95-6.

¹⁶⁵ F. T. John, 'Tamil Work in Malaysia', in *The Malaysia Mission*, (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, April 1905), p. 62.

known as Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman) and Jawa Street (Jalan Tun Perak).¹⁶⁶ In 1899 the then presiding elder, a Dr. West, foresaw a bright future for the Tamil-speaking parish and proceeded to get a new pastor.¹⁶⁷ By 1900, a Church had been built and a Tamil pastor, Reverend S. Abraham served as both pastor to Tamil, English and Chinese congregations as well as headmaster of the Anglo-Tamil school. By 1913 Rev. Abraham had become the first 'Asiatic' superintendent of the Methodist Church.¹⁶⁸

The other pioneering branch of the Methodist Church was located in Singapore. Methodist Church groups were already working from Singapore before 1885. Charles Phillip, a Methodist missionary, was in-charge of the 'Christian Institute' situated in Middle Road. However by February 1885, on Phillip's request, a group of missionaries were sent from India under the guidance of Reverend James Thorburn, his wife Julia Battie and Reverend William Oldham.¹⁶⁹ Several days later a series of five public meeting was held at the local Town hall, with the intention of canvassing for prospective religious conversions. When Rev. Thoburn asked the gathering if anyone was interested in becoming a Methodist, 'among the number were four men from India.'¹⁷⁰ With the beginnings of an infant Tamil-speaking Church, Reverend Thoburn sent a request to a colleague in Jaffna, Ceylon requesting a Tamil Church worker be sent to Singapore.¹⁷¹ By the early 1890s a small parish headed by three Ceylonese-Tamil Church workers was started.¹⁷²

The Methodist Church of the Straits Settlements and the Malay states played a numerically minor role in comparison with that of the Roman Catholic Church. Despite this, the Church excelled in other areas. Unlike the other major denominations, namely the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics, the Methodist congregations appeared to have enjoyed a special level of intellectual freedom largely absent in other Churches. This was especially prevalent in its publication, 'The

¹⁶⁶ Tamil Methodist Church (K. L.), *One Hundred years celebration: souvenir program*, (Kuala Lumpur: Tamil Methodist Church, 1996), p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ John, April 1905, p. 62.

¹⁶⁸ Tamil Methodist Church (K. L.), 1996, p. 10.

¹⁶⁹ Sng, 1980, p. 106.

¹⁷⁰ Bishop James Thoburn, 'The Bishop's Response', in *The Malaysia Mission*, (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, April 1905), p. 63.

¹⁷¹ Thoburn, April 1905, p. 63.

Malaysia Mission', which was dominated in its early years by its Tamil congregations. The publication did not confine itself to matters religious, but encouraged a level of intellectual discourse unseen (or unrecorded) in the other Churches. These viewpoints will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Other Protestant Churches

The climate under which the stage for Protestant missionary work in the Malay archipelago had been created in late eighteenth century in Europe. The rise of the 'Pietist' movement, which de-emphasised excessive intellectualism and formalism in religion, had a direct influence on missionary groups.¹⁷³ The first Protestant organisation to become active in the Malay archipelago after the arrival of the Protestant Dutch was the London Missionary Society (L. M. S.). Initially their work was aimed at the Chinese and Malay populations in the Straits Settlements.

Another major feature of the Protestant Church was its early decision to redirect evangelical resources to China. Missionary work in the peninsula was not deemed to be very spiritually profitable and this was hampered by the transient nature of migratory labour.¹⁷⁴ Many new or would be converts did not stay long enough in their parishes to create a stable Christian community. By 1846 the London Missionary Society (L. M. S.) made a decision to pull out of its evangelical work in the Straits Settlements to take advantage of the opportunities open to them in China. This decision stunted the future growth of the Protestant Churches in the Malay archipelago and basically allowed the Roman Catholic Church full advantage of whatever evangelical opportunities lay ahead. Although there was a small number of dedicated clergy working in the Straits Settlements and the Malay states, these territories remained outside the mainstream of the Protestant evangelical movement especially from 1846 to 1881.¹⁷⁵

Some of these groups were particularly specialised like the 'Society for Promoting Female Education in the East' (1843) and were eventually taken over by Church of England's 'Zenana Missionary Society' (1900). The Presbyterian Church officially

¹⁷² Sng, 1980, p. 95-6.

¹⁷³ Sng, 1980, p. 24.

¹⁷⁴ Fee (1889), May 1963, pp. 153-4.

began in work in 1814 under the auspices of William Milne (1795-1822)¹⁷⁶ but was primarily occupied with the Malay and especially Chinese populations. And by the beginning of the twentieth century it had eleven stations with several Churches and schools in Malaya. Among the many others were the 'Plymouth Brethren', the 'Seventh Day Adventist', the 'Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations', and the 'British and Foreign Bible Societies'. The twentieth century also brought the Salvation Army and the South Indian Mar Thoma Syrian and Jacobite Churches.

The Syrian Christian Churches were not evangelical in nature. Affiliation was and still is determined by ethnicity. It was therefore confined to a small community within the Malayali Indian population. Most of these arrived after the second and third decades of the twentieth century.¹⁷⁷

Despite the wide variety of different Protestant groups and the active alliances that prevailed among some of these Churches, most if not all of them were extremely small in size, with minimal resources at hand and therefore destined to remain small from the onset. Even the two decades of active evangelical work prior to the L. M. S.' decision to withdraw from the Straits Settlements and the Malay states in 1846, was deemed in Bobby Sng's assessment, as disappointing.¹⁷⁸ No indigenous Church had been established, almost all the Protestant schools found it hard to maintain themselves and many converts reverted back to their old religions.¹⁷⁹ It would appear the main reason for its failure truly to launch itself in the Malay archipelago was its lack of resources.

Indian Christian populations in the Malay archipelago

Specific statistics on the religious breakdown of the Indian communities were never kept by British colonial administration.¹⁸⁰ Even parish population statistics, maintained by the different Churches, were often sporadic. Statistics from the

¹⁷⁵ Ackerman and Lee, 1988, pp. 29, 38. Loh, 1963, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ Sng, 1980, pp. 27-30.

¹⁷⁷ Sandhu, 1969, p. 123.

¹⁷⁸ Sng, 1980, p. 37. Loh, 1963, p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ Sng, 1980, p. 37.

¹⁸⁰ Sandhu, 1969, p. 233.

nineteenth century do exist but are extremely sporadic and general in nature mainly due to the high turnover of immigrant labour of the time.¹⁸¹ And more recently, accessibility to most Church records have been largely hampered by disinterest and negligence with regards to the maintenance of historical records. Information for the Roman Catholic Church was found by chance in a disused ex-parish residence.¹⁸² Statistics for the Methodist Church begin in 1891, around the time of its establishment, and run to 1921.¹⁸³ Figures on the Anglican Church were not available because the records were destroyed in a flood in 1971. No official statistics on the percentage of Indian Christians working as rural labour are available. Statistical figures illustrating the size or proportion of the Christian component on an average rural estate are not officially available. However estimates have placed this figure at 5 to 15 per cent.¹⁸⁴ Indians were in all contemporary Christian Churches. However the largest Indian communities existed within the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican and Syrian Christian Churches, and it will be the first three denominations that this study will be concentrating on.¹⁸⁵

Since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1511, the Roman Catholic population have predominated among Christians in the Malay archipelago. This is not due wholly to its early inception. The Roman Catholic Church remained localized between the sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries. Thus from the late eighteenth century to the 1880s, there were primarily two major Christian Churches in Malaya at the time, the Roman Catholic and the Anglican Churches. A series of smaller Church movements such as the London Missionary Society (L. M. S.) were only active for a couple of decades. Even then the Roman Catholic Indian communities were over twice the size of that of the Anglican communities.¹⁸⁶ This reflected the fact that a majority of Indians Christians immigrating to the Malay archipelago were Roman Catholic, a

¹⁸¹ Sng, 1980, p.166 quoting Bishop William Oldham. *Official Minutes of the seventh session of the Malaysian Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Penang, February 9th to 14th 1899*, (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, 1899), p. 24. Fee (1889), May 1963, p. 154.

¹⁸² *Administration and Education Returns, 1922-1952*, Bishop of Malacca.

¹⁸³ *Malaysia Mission Annual Meeting*, (annual reports) between 1891-1912, (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House). Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo and Mr. Joseph John, 21 November 1996, Singapore.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick (born 1937), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997.

¹⁸⁵ Traditionally (all ethnic groups included), the Catholic Church is largest, followed by the Methodists and lastly the Anglicans. Ackerman and Lee, 1988, p. 65.

¹⁸⁶ 'Ecclesiastical Return, Straits Settlements, 1887'.

predicament which reflected the denominational make-up in South India at the time. Geoffrey Oddie estimated that in Trichinopoly and Tanjore, the two states which have been recognised as the primary source of Christian Indian immigration to the Malay archipelago¹⁸⁷, the Catholic population outnumbered that of the Protestant by 18 to 1 in the former and 6 to 1 in the latter.¹⁸⁸

In 1887 an Indian Catholic population of around four hundred, with approximately two hundred attending 'mass' every week existed in Singapore. In the Anglican Church, approximately eighty people (Singapore) belonged to its 'Mission Chapel' - of this number some would have been ethnic Chinese.

Table 1
**Indian population in the Roman Catholic (RC) Church
of Malaya and Straits Settlements, 1922-1952**

Year	no. of Indians	% of RC population	Total RC population
1922	18,580	45.0%	41,250
1923	19,754	44.3%	44,514
1924	20,668	45.2%	45,637
1925	22,466	45.4%	49,432
1926	24,305	46.5%	52,161
1927	24,567	44.2%	55,522
1928	26,295	44.2%	59,431
1929	27,587	43.6%	63,247
1930	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1931	30,750	44.9%	68,320
1932	28,450	42.8%	66,465
1933	26,700	40.8%	65,422
1934	27,880	41.2%	67,545
1935	33,000	44.2%	74,593
1936	33,077	42.7%	77,395

¹⁸⁷ Daniel, 1992, p. 47. The other district being Tirunelveli.

¹⁸⁸ Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 194. G. Oddie, *Hindu and Christian in Southeast India*, (Massachusetts: Curzon Press, 1991), p. 171.

1937	32,080	40.2%	79,730
1938	33,130	41.2%	80,339
1939	35,230	43.2%	81,470
1940	35,888	42.9%	83,642
1941*	35,469	41.8%	84,755
1947	36,525	42.3%	86,144
1948	36,781	41.5%	88,467
1949	38,415	41.3%	92,923
1950	40,908	42.7%	95,624
1951	42,981	42.9%	100,026
1952	46,235	44.3%	104,338

Figures supplied are an approximate.

n.a. - figures missing.

* no figures till 1947.

Source: *Administration and Education Returns* (Annual Reports), 1922 to 1952, Bishop of Malacca.

Indian labour migration to Malaya, particularly for purposes of estate labour, was specifically South Indian. This was due to the fact that the Indian government refused to allow the sanctioning of indentured emigration from any other part of India, other than that of the province of Madras. This was probably done so to help facilitate governmental control of labour recruitment. Consequently the majority of workers were drawn from the districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madras and to a lesser extent Salem and Coimbatore.¹⁸⁹ It was these districts which coincidentally had sizable Christian populations as noted by J. R. Daniel. Daniel states that the primary source of Christian Indians came from the districts of Trichinopoly, Tanjore and Tirunelveli.

Table 2

Estimated percentage of Indian Roman Catholics to the total Indian population of Malaya and the Straits Settlements, 1922-1947

Year	no. of Indian Catholics	Total Indian population
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¹⁸⁹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 82. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 15. Daniel, 1992, p. 47.

1922	18,580 (3.95%)	470,180
1931	30,750 (4.94%)	621,847
1947	36,525 (6.09%)	599,616

Source: K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some aspects of their immigration and settlement 1786-1957*, p. 182. *Administration and Education Returns* (Annual Reports), 1922 to 1952, Bishop of Malacca.

The Indian Roman Catholic population was 3.95 per cent of the total Indian population in Malaya in 1922. This figure rises to 4.94 per cent by 1931 and then to 6.09 per cent by 1947. It is not possible to determine an accurate number with regards to the Christian communities in Malayan archipelago. Firstly, as stated earlier, the figures are only available in specific periods. Secondly, not all figures available for the different denominations can be lined up for comparison. The available figures for the Catholic Church begin from 1922 and finish in the early 1950s, whereas the figures for the Methodist Church begin in the 1890s, and for purposes of this study, was only traced to the 1920s. Finally, there are no figures available on the Anglican Church.

An estimate of the historical development can be made by using more recent figures. Indian Christian immigration did not experience any large sustained swings during any specific period in time, after 1910.¹⁹⁰ It can be assumed a steady flow of immigrants ensued from the districts of the Madras Presidency and other parts of South India. Therefore the religious dynamics of the Indian population in general would not have changed significantly between the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. For example, the only figure on the religious breakdown of the Indian communities in Malaya and Singapore was made in 1931 and cited by K. S. Sandhu and W. G. Huff. It put the total Indian Christian population at 5.9 per cent of the overall Indian population.¹⁹¹ A decade earlier (1921), C. E. Ferguson-Davie had

¹⁹⁰ Sandhu, 1969, p. 175, table 6a.

¹⁹¹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 233. (1931 figures) 81.5 per cent were Hindu, 5.9 per cent were Christian, 9 per cent were Muslim, 2.9 per cent were Sikh, and the remainder being Buddhist, Jain and Zoroastrianist. W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 165, quotes a source as putting the population at 6 per cent in Singapore only.

estimated this figure at 7 per cent.¹⁹² This compares well with this studies estimate of 4.94 per cent for the majority Indian Roman Catholic population alone.

Taking census information from 1970,¹⁹³ the Roman Catholic population stood at approximately 80 per cent of the total of Indian Christians. Both the Anglican and Methodist communities had an approximate equal 6 per cent each, while the combined strength of both the Mar Thoma and Orthodox Jacobite Syrian Churches amounted to about 3.20 per cent.¹⁹⁴

Table 3
**Indian population in the Methodist Church
of the F. M. S. and Straits Settlements, 1891-1921**

Year	no. of Indians	% of population	Total Meth. population
1891	6	7.4%	81
1892	32	21.9%	146
1893	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1894	28	17.2%	163
1895	37	17.37%	213
1896	42	14.9%	281
1897	52	18.6%	279
1898	77	21.6%	351
1899	103	22.7%	453
1900*	106	22.4%	473
1905	332	58.0%	572
1913	570	30.4%	1,871
1914	451	23.3%	1,933
1915	494	22.4%	2,202

¹⁹² C. E. Ferguson-Davie (ed.), *In Rubber Lands: An account of the work of the Church in Malaya*, (Westminster: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1921), p. 59.

¹⁹³ Daniel, 1992, p. 68, citing C. D. Thomas, *Diaspora Indians: Church Growth among Indians in West Malaysia*, (Penang: Malaysia Indian Evangelism Council, 1978), p. 88.

¹⁹⁴ There was a slight trend away from the mainstream Churches in the 1960's, which saw the rise of smaller Churches such as the Seventh Day Adventist, Assemblies of God, Pentecostal Church of Malaysia, Advent Christian Church and the Independent Pentecostals. However this trend would not deviate profoundly from the general trends within the Christian populations in Malaysia. Most of them amounted to less than 1 per cent of the total Indian population. Daniel, 1992, p. 68.

1916	508	26.2%	1,933
1917	503	28.8%	1,742
1918	496	24.9%	1,989
1919	609	25.1%	2,417
1920	688	25.6%	2,678
1921	751	24.2%	3,093

Figures supplied are an approximate.

n.a. - figures not available.

* no figures available till 1905 and 1913.

Source: *Malaysia Mission Annual Meeting* (Annual), 1891 to 1921, Methodist Publishing House, Singapore.

Government policy and Indian immigration

Governmental control of Indian immigration in general was aimed at officially controlling the amount of labour allowed into the Malay archipelago. There was no official policy with regard to the Indian population, let alone the Christian Indians. The government's only concern was with the supply of cheap labour to feed the needs of the Malayan economy, and this was done in conjunction with the British Indian government who only allowed South Indian labour recruitment at the time.¹⁹⁵ This approach was adopted mainly because most recruiters were stationed in and around the port of Negapatam, the principal point of departure for all regulated indentured emigration.¹⁹⁶

Once a worker was allowed into the colony, it was up to him or her to fulfil the requirements of employment. Indians who immigrated to Malaya for non-labour related purposes, were ignored. The main concern of the colonial government was for political stability, and anyone threatening this stability, be it through political or even simple industrial action, was not tolerated.¹⁹⁷ This was illustrated in 1907 when an alleged strike action took place at a railway yard in Selangor. The accused perpetrator

¹⁹⁵ Small numbers of North Indians were recruited, but mainly for government service, i.e. police.

¹⁹⁶ Sandhu, 1969, p. 82.

¹⁹⁷ Sandhu, 1969, p. 147.

was not allowed to have his case heard and was immediately shipped back to India despite an attempt to appeal.¹⁹⁸

The distribution and expansion of the Indian population was tied with development of the rubber industry in the Malay peninsula. For example, immigration was halted in 1914 due to a lull in the industry. However by 1915 numbers were beginning to climb and by the early 1920s, censal figures showed that Indian immigration was proportionately larger than even Chinese or Malay immigration.¹⁹⁹ During the Depression, Indian immigration was virtually halted. Repatriations amounting to around 250,000 persons between 1930 to 1933 were recorded.²⁰⁰ Despite the damper on immigration quota during economically depressed periods, overall immigration levels were generally high, and the total number of arrivals stood at 4,245,990 by 1957.²⁰¹

According to Sandhu, British legislation was personified by 'lack of consistency; vacillation and instability'. He also notes how the government consistently distanced themselves from moral responsibilities involved in the process of employing immigrant labour while maintaining a constant flow of cheap labour.²⁰² Colonial policy was aimed at labour and labour alone. There was little or no incentive for Indian-based large business interests to come to Malaya. In fact, according to Sandhu it was actually discouraged. It was obvious that the British did not welcome any competing business interests that might eat away at their market supremacy, or for that matter undermine the 'British Raj'.²⁰³ Even Chinese enterprise was primarily confined to servicing larger British interests or acting as grass-root service providers (i.e. retailers and merchants) to local Asian communities.

Rural communities: Methods of recruitment

¹⁹⁸ 'Arrest of Ramasamy for causing a strike', Selangor Secretariat 4682-4/1907.

¹⁹⁹ Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 29. J. Nagata, *Malaysian Mosaic: Perspectives from a Poly-Ethnic Society*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 17.

²⁰⁰ Sandhu, 1969, p. 106. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 30.

²⁰¹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 159. This figure illustrates the number of arrivals only between 1786-1957. This number does not take into account persons who may have left Malaya. Of this figure 99.2% of arrivals were of South Indian descent.

²⁰² Sandhu, 1969, p. 147.

²⁰³ Sandhu, 1969, pp. 45-6, 147.

In order to understand governmental policy to Indian immigration, a summary of the different types of labour recruitment will be looked at. This is needed to show the different types of labour recruitment which were employed and the ensuing conditions recruited labour were expected to work under.

Immigration schemes were haphazard to say the least. Legislation relating to implementation was not uniform and before the 1870's illegal recruitment continued. However by 1877 some semblance of control was implemented with the creation of official positions that managed immigration. The Straits Settlement government appointed an agent stationed at Negapatam (one of the major points of departure to Malaya) while the Madras government appointed a Protector of Emigrants. Specified emigration depots were set out, supervised emigration methods and procedures were put in place, licenses were issued to acknowledged recruiters and designated areas were allocated where such recruitment could take place.²⁰⁴

Indian immigration was divided into two main categories. The first was the Assisted Migration system. This system was officially in use from around 1810 to 1910. It operated around labour recruitment firms based in India, usually Madras. Prospective employers in Malaya would make an order for a specified number of labourers. This order would in turn be filled by an agent of the Indian-based recruitment firm, who then shipped the new immigrants back to Malay archipelago. This labourer upon arrival was contracted to their new employer for a period of three years.²⁰⁵ This system left employers little choice with regards to the health or suitability of new recruits. Once an order had been received in India, the actual task of recruitment was left to sub-agents who had a free hand in the choice of persons bound for Malaya.

The second category was popularly referred to as the 'Indentured system'. Under this an intending employer put an order with a labour recruiter based in India. The firm thereupon sub-contracted agents to recruit the appropriate number of workers from villages. Successful applicants would then be expected to sign a contract placing them under 'indenture' to their new employer, usually for a period of five years. Wages

²⁰⁴ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 13.

²⁰⁵ Daniel, *Indian Christians in Peninsula Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Tamil Annual Conference [Methodist Church, Malaysia], 1992), p. 46.

were fixed at the time of signing the contract and once 'indentured' to an employer, it was not possible for the worker to be re-employed by another. Transportation costs of the labourer were borne by the employer and wages would have been calculated with this in mind.²⁰⁶

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a parallel system of labour recruitment was introduced. This was popularly called the 'kangany' system. The Tamil term 'kangany' means supervisor or overseer. In Malaya and Ceylon, it became a popular term associated with a plantation foreman.²⁰⁷ Unlike the previous recruitment methods, which relied heavily on independent agencies to provide appropriate labour, the kangany system gave a strong degree of control over to the employer. The kangany, who was already an employee of the prospective employer/recruiter, was given the authority (and licensed by the colonial government)²⁰⁸ to travel to India and make a personal choice, thus cutting out indiscriminate recruiting. Upon return to the plantation in Malaya, the new labour recruits were delivered to the employer and were then worked under the supervision of the kangany who recruited them in the first place. The cost of passage and other supposed expenses were treated as a loan which the new labourer had to settle with the new employer within a period of two years. The kangany system of recruitment gave Malayan-based employers and the government strong personal control over the labour force. Wages were paid directly to labourers. In turn the kangany was given material incentives to recover the cost of recruitment which had been, up to this point, been borne by estate management. For his intermediary efforts he often received a commission for each labourer who reported for work every day.²⁰⁹ The unique position of the kangany, as middle-man, allowed him to exploit ordinary labourers' unfamiliarity with recruiting practices and rules on the estate. In times of conflict with labour, the kangany could rely on the strong support of the estate manager and vice-versa.²¹⁰ In turn the kangany was at the 'beck and call' of his estate manager, often doing his dirty work. Some cases have

²⁰⁶ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 11-12.

²⁰⁷ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 16.

²⁰⁸ Sandhu, 1969, p. xxv, figure 1. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 18.

²⁰⁹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 91.

²¹⁰ Sandhu, 1969, p. 100.

noted the use of kangany in the sanctioned killing of a worker for 'crimes' done on an estate.²¹¹

Labour immigration to Malaya was tainted with allegations of abuses directed at the government and plantation employers. This put the Indian colonial government in a difficult situation, whereby they were compelled to oversee the welfare of their immigrant charges, while on the other hand giving in to the demands of British business interest in the Malay peninsula. In spite of regulatory safeguards designed to oversee the overall well-being of the labourer, there were serious problems relating to the treatment of plantation labour. For example, the British sub-collector of Tanjore stated in 1877 labour immigration to Malaya was 'a regularly organised system of kidnapping.'²¹² According to Arasaratnam, abuses continued in Malaya, and many employers, due to the nature of their contract, were able to work immigrant labour extremely hard, with the intention of getting as much out of them as possible. Length of stay, which was stipulated in the contract, would be extended by the manipulation of a labourer's expenditure, adding to their indebtedness to their employer. Wages were also considerably lower, in comparison with fellow immigrants who may have come over as free labourers. For example, daily pay in the 1860's was around 9 cents per day. By the 1900's this increased to 16 to 18 cents, or approximately \$54 per year.²¹³ In comparison, a white collar South Indian civil servant would get between \$300 to \$1860 per annum.²¹⁴

The Indentured recruitment system was abandoned in 1910, mainly due to dissatisfaction of employers and British planters. They had little influence or choice over the recruitment process of labourers. Prior to the implementation of rigorous health checks by Indian-based authorities at the end of the nineteenth century, recruiters were often forced to accept workers too old or sick to fulfil their tasks.²¹⁵

²¹¹ P. Ramasamy, 'Labour Control and Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya', in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 19 (3-4), Malaysia, Apr./Jul. 1992, p. 99. Many of these so-called 'crimes' involved pre-marital sex.

²¹² Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 13.

²¹³ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 14. K. S. Sandhu, 1969, pp. 68-9. Civil Service pay scales in Malaya and the Straits Settlements were two to four times higher than equivalent pay scales in India and Ceylon.

²¹⁴ 'Straits Settlements Civil Establishment Lists' (annual), 1885-1899. Pay scales varied markedly depending on the type of job and seniority.

²¹⁵ Sandhu, 1969, p. 81.

The kangany centred recruitment process became the mainstay of labour supply. Although the introduction of the kangany system of recruitment did not help stem the abuses of the process, it brought about some changes which were to have a large affect on the dynamics of Indian rural societies in Malaya. Unlike the previous systems which were strongly based on the recruitment of individuals, kangany-based recruitment actually encouraged family immigration. This brought about a swing away from the totally male dominated plantation labour force and for the first time actually laid the ground work for the establishment of families in Malaya. This in effect kept immigrants in Malaya.²¹⁶

The kangany system also moulded the future dynamics of plantation communities. Kanganies were used as supervisors of the labour force, and therefore acted as a conduit with managerial staff. Kanganies therefore enjoyed a strong degree of respect among the labourers and were often seen in the role of leadership figures.²¹⁷ This development would have a strong influence on the future dynamics of plantation leadership in the coming years.

Urban communities: The Civil Service and South Indian immigration

From the onset, the British government had a problem securing appropriately qualified British officers to serve in the Malay states or the Straits Settlements. Prospective British officers to the service did not find the option of working in Malaya or the Straits Settlements particularly appealing and looked upon it as a sort of 'cultural wilderness'.²¹⁸ Several reasons are given, one being the inappropriate curriculum of the East India Company's training college in Haileybury. It emphasised the learning of the customs and languages of the Indian subcontinent only, hence alienating many from the idea of working in areas outside this region. Thus in 1859, Governor-General of India, Lord Canning admitted that,

no officer of the Indian Civil Service [would] willingly go to the Straits for a permanency, except in the position of Governor. To be transferred there at the beginning of his career on the understanding that he [should] remain

²¹⁶ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 16.

²¹⁷ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 16.

²¹⁸ Mavis Puthuchery 'Indians in the Public Sector in Malaysia', in K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani (ed.),

attached to the Straits throughout the whole or even the greater part of it would involve so large a sacrifice of prospects on the part of a young Indian Civil Servant that he [could not] reasonably be expected to make it.²¹⁹

This problem was remedied with the establishment of policy relating to the training of civil servants specifically for British Malaya.²²⁰ In 1867, formal links with the Indian Civil Service were severed as a result of the transfer of the Straits Settlements to the auspices of the Colonial office in London. Recruitment was now procured from the Eastern cadetship system instead.²²¹

However, Mavis Puthucreary points out that a strong *esprit de corp* developed within the Malayan Civil Service (M. C. S.) and proceeded to become highly influential in the formulation of British policy in the Malay States and the Straits Settlements.²²² A Europeans-only bar in regards to recruitment into the M. C. S. was put in place in spite of the absence of such a ruling in other regional civil services. This was introduced after 1904 in view of the perceived animosity the mass of Asians had for non-European officials. Colonialism under the British, by the beginning of the twentieth century appeared to have made a strong impression on the non-European elites of the Malay states, making them more conducive to European governance and authority than to any other non-British/European community - especially South Indians.²²³ During this time, a colour-bar ruling was made by Sultan Idris of Perak who had objected to an Indian cadet serving in his state. The colour bar included all non-Europeans including Malays. A claim was made some forty years later by W. P. Hume, a civil servant serving in Perak at the time which does seem to hold some water since the bar would not have extended to the Malay elite.²²⁴ The M. C. S. was

Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), p. 334.

²¹⁹ L. A. Mills, 'British Malaya 1824-1867', in *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Nov. 1925, p. 97.

²²⁰ Mills, 1925, p. 98.

²²¹ This incorporated the Ceylon Civil Service and the Hong Kong Civil Service.

²²² Puthucreary, 1993, p. 363.

²²³ Khoo Kay Kim, 'Malay Attitudes towards Indians' in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), pp. 271, 272-273, 278-279.

²²⁴ J. G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, p. 107-8. Also see K. Johan, *The Emergence of the Modern Malay Administrative Elite*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 110.

opened only partially to Chinese and Indians from August 1932, but only in certain areas.²²⁵

There were generally limited opportunities open to the Malay elites in the recruitment scheme launched by the British in 1910, in both the Federated Malay States (F. M. S.) and the Unfederated Malay States (U. M. S.).²²⁶ In total, there were twenty Malays in the M. C. S. in 1940, of whom five were of royal lineage).²²⁷ During the 1920s and 1930s this was intensified by the 'Pro-Malay' policy of colonial administration. After 1932 a lower division of the M. C. S., the Straits Settlement Civil Service (S. S. C. S.) was created for the purposes of recruiting Asians into the civil service, but only in the Straits Settlements. This fanned dissatisfaction in the Federated Malay States (F. M. S.) and Unfederated Malay States (U. M. S.), with many non-Malay community leaders calling for the introduction of similar schemes to that implemented for Malays.²²⁸ In 1935, in the Federal Council, S. R. Krishnan proposed that a similar scheme (along the lines of the Malay Administrative Service) be created for the Asian non-Malay communities. The Acting Chief Secretary of the day, in his reply, stated that in the Malay states the 'difficulty of nationality was extraordinary' and therefore the 'service must be confined to Malays'. As for the recommendation for a parallel scheme for non-Malays in the civil service, it was stated that, 'There is already in existence a Malay Administrative Service which is considered adequate for the needs of the country and there would not appear to be any justification on purely administrative grounds for the creation of a parallel service for non-Malays'.

Opportunities for Indians were therefore only open at the lower levels of the government civil service and recruitment was aimed for entry at this group.²²⁹ The

²²⁵ U. Mahajani, *The Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya*, (New York: Vora and Company, 1960), p. 133. K. S. Sandhu, 1969, p. 44.

²²⁶ Johan, 1984, pp. 1, 109. A separate arm called the Malay Administrative Service (M. A. S.) was created.

²²⁷ Johan, 1984, p. 155.

²²⁸ Johan, 1984, p. 111-2. Mahajani, 1960, p. 133.

²²⁹ Mahajani, 1960, p. 133. Sandhu, 1969, p. 44. There appeared to be one exception to this rule. A 1929 report noted there was one Indian member of the M. C. S., who retired that same year. 'Report of the A. G. I. for 1928: High infantile mortality on Estates', in *The Indian Pioneer*, vol. 3, no. 50, Kuala Lumpur, 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

highest position a non-European could aspire to in government clerical service, was that of Chief Clerkship, and then 'only to the highly intelligent ones'.²³⁰

Within both the Malay States and the Straits Settlements, there were few people with a competent knowledge of the English language, let alone an English language educational background. The majority of the immigrants coming into the region were Chinese, who did not have access to a Western-style education system. Most if not all of them preferred to stay within the confines of Chinese controlled businesses. There seems to be a prevalent belief among observers that the Chinese were not suitable for government service,²³¹ often as if to imply that the atmosphere of the clerical professions could not satisfy their strong entrepreneurial spirit. Available statistics, however, do not support this stand. For example in 1883, the number of Chinese persons employed as clerks²³² stood at 2,577 or 83.5 per cent of the total official clerical workforce in Singapore. Indians could only muster up 170, Malays 96 and Eurasians 240. Within the government civil service (which used English as the medium of communication), Chinese in turn numbered only 81, as opposed to 148 Malays, 138 Indians and 100 Eurasians. The figures indicate that clerical professions was not shunned by the Chinese communities and that other reasons for their exclusion from government employment need to be taken into account. Much more significant was their inability to use the English language adequately, limiting employment opportunities to Chinese-speaking firms and enterprises.

Other local groups such as the Eurasian communities had already placed a strong importance on English medium education in the nineteenth century.²³³ Urban-based Indian and especially Indian Christian²³⁴ communities were exposed to English medium education in India, and continued this tradition on arrival in Malaya and

²³⁰ *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, p. 25.

²³¹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 68.

²³² *Straits Settlements Blue Book 1883*, (Singapore: Government of the Straits Settlement, 1884), p. 13. Clerical professions included clerks, engineers, architects and surveyors. This number does not include civil servants. Malays are classified with other natives of the Archipelago'. 'Indians' include all Indians, Hindu and non-Hindu, northerners and southerners, although the majority would be Southern Indians.

²³³ 'Untitled letter of complaint from the Catholic Eurasian community at the inadequacy of the teaching of the English language at St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore', 21 July 1877. De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya.

²³⁴ Puthuchery, 1993, p. 339.

Singapore. By the beginning of the twentieth century Chinese communities began to follow suit which saw a steady increase within English medium schools.²³⁵

Constructing bureaucracies: Development of the urban ‘middle classes’

The superficial dynamics of colonial society were not complicated. The British elites occupied the upper strata of the social, economic and political spectrum, while the large Asian communities were left to contend for secondary roles, usually in support of the European dominated upper strata. The Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian communities were allocated employment in accordance to their supposed racial capacities. Within the Indian or Indian Christian communities, the issue of economic and social delineation was even simpler. As a result of colonial labour practices, the communities developed in duality. On one hand, there was the large labour force recruited mainly for rubber production and, to a lesser extent, as labourers in government services. On the other hand there was ‘white-collar’ labour. This group, although not as large as the former, did make up a sizable population in urban centres and to an extent made their presence felt on issues relating to the Indian communities. This community popularly described themselves as ‘middle-class’, a title denoting a progressive ‘western’ outlook, an educated English background, ‘respectable’ permanent employment, good pay (as opposed to ‘daily rated pay’ - an interviewee defined ‘middle-class’ as being on a monthly pay packet) and upward mobility. A person of ‘lower’ class or labourer status was often relatively financially ‘poor’, casually employed and paid daily.²³⁶ These occupations were usually government or privately based, and related to jobs such as that of gardeners, peons, tandels, tailors, merchants, artisans or kanganys and contractors. ‘Lowly’ status in comparison with the middle class did not relate directly to an equivalent low social status within their own circles. For example, kanganys and contractors often had at their immediate

²³⁵ H. R. Cheeseman, ‘Education in Malaya, 1900-1941’, in *The Malayan Historical Journal*, Kuala Lumpur, Malayan Historical Society, vol. 1, no. 1-v. 3, no. 1, 1955, p. 33. *Reports of the Committee appointed by H. E. The Governor of the Straits Settlements and the High Commissioner of the F. M. S. to Enquire into, and Report on, the Salaries paid to Officers of the General Clerical Services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1919* (Kuala Lumpur: F. M. S. Printing Office, 1919), pp. 12-13. A sample of 42 private banking and mercantile businesses in Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan was made. In Perak and Selangor, Chinese held approximately 56 per cent of all clerical jobs, while Indian ‘Tamils’ and Ceylonese Tamils held around 30 per cent. Only in Negri Sembilan did Ceylonese Tamils outnumber Chinese.

disposal subservient labourers or employees, a type of authority not experienced by the urban-based civil communities. Persons holding these occupations had little to no English writing skills. Literacy was indicated in the entries of marriage registrations, where both the bride and groom were expected to leave a signature. In most cases, the persons in question made a 'cross' (indicating they were illiterate) or in fewer cases, signed in the Tamil language.²³⁷

Table 4

Composition of total Indian labour immigration into Malaya, 1844-1941

total no.						total	non-
arrivals	indentured	kangani	voluntary	others			assisted
2725917	9.1%	43.7%	10.7%	6.6%	70.1%		29.9%

Note: This includes all Indians, northerners, southerners, Hindu and non-Hindus.

Source: K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, p. 97.

Most subjects of this study came into Malaya and Singapore as the 'non-assisted' immigrants who made up 29.9 per cent of the overall labour figures (see Table 4). Employment opportunities in India were experiencing a glut in its white-collar job market. However the situation in Malaya and the Straits Settlements was very much the opposite. Wages offered were considerably higher than those offered in India or Ceylon.²³⁸ The better job situation in Malaya and the Singapore compared to India created a steady flow of candidates from India, without the official processes of recruitment having to be organised, unlike more general labour migration.

Another feature which facilitated the employability of the Christian South Indian communities was the fact that most of them settled in urban areas. Daniel noted

²³⁶ Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), 27 Jan. 1997, Singapore.

²³⁷ The following figures show the number of literate persons according to profession: Kanganys - 4, Peons - 27, Tandels - 3, Gardeners - 5, Merchants/vendors - 8, Tailors - 8, Contractors - 4, Artisans - 7. *Marriages: St. John's Cathedral, 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906, Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, 2 Apr. 1923 - 12 Sept. 1936, Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, 14 Sept. 1936 - 12 Feb. 1949.*

²³⁸ *Straits Settlements Annual Reports 1892*, (Singapore: Government of the Straits Settlement, 1893), p. 383. Mahajani, 1960, p. 116. Lewis noted how local wages were determined by rates of pay at the country of origin, coupled with the cost of migration. W. Arthur Lewis, *Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour*, in *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, Vol. 22, (1954): p. 436.

approximately 62 per cent of the Indian Christian communities resided in urban areas while only 37 per cent were rural based.²³⁹ This trend was already evident in South India with more than half of all Indian Christians living in urban areas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁴⁰ These conditions put them in good stead to benefit from primarily urban, Christian mission English medium school system, a background which gave many opportunities for employment overseas.

K. S. Latourette noted how illiteracy among Christian communities was at a rate three to four times lower in comparison to the rest of Indian society, and that most tertiary degree holders had been the product of Christian mission school by the early years of the twentieth century. The 1901 census figures from the states of Tanjore and Trichinopoly put English language literacy among Indian Christians at more than twice that of their Hindu counterparts.²⁴¹ Corresponding with the higher socio-economic status, crime rates in this group was less than one-fifth and one-third, in comparison with Hindus and Muslims respectively.²⁴²

Several accounts by individuals of how they came over from India show that there were generally few civil servants who were directly sourced by government departments in India itself. Mr V. A. George, an Indian Christian school teacher in Klang and Singapore since 1925, told of discrimination in government positions in Kerala, India:

Kerala was a Nayar²⁴³ dominant society and the posts were only given to Nayars or Hindus, and Christians had to wait. They had the tail-end.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Daniel, 1992, p. 72. Also see p. 74. In 1947, the total number of Indians living in rural and urban settings stood at 25.8 per cent and 74.2 per cent respectively. Keith Watson, 'Rulers and Ruled: Racial perceptions, curriculum and schooling in colonial Malaya and Singapore', in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial images and education in the British colonial experience*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 152.

²⁴⁰ Geoffrey Oddie, 'Christianity and Social Mobility in South India 1840-1920: A continuing debate', in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, XIX (Special Edition), (1996): p. 153.

²⁴¹ G. A. Oddie, *Hindu and Christian in South India: Aspects of religious continuity and change, 1800-1900*, (London: Curzon Press, 1991), p. 183. The percentage of Hindus to Christians were; 0.70 per cent to 2.19 per cent in Tanjore and 0.15 per cent to 1.14 per cent in Trichinopoly.

²⁴² K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity 1800-1914*, vol. 6, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1940-45), pp. 197-9.

²⁴³ The 'Nayar' (or Nair) are a caste group prevalent in south-west India. They are traditionally militaristically inclined and therefore influential.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Mr V. A. George, (born 1906), 27 January 1997, Singapore. Mr George is a Syrian Christian, a member of the Mar Thoma Church.

He also mentioned discrimination by the Brahmin and Pillai²⁴⁵ caste groups. This was despite the fact that the Syrian Christian community was traditionally viewed as a high caste group themselves.

My cousin was in Klang in 1925, Mr. Chacko. He wrote to me to come over in Malaysia. And my parents and brothers all decided to send me to Malaysia, and so I came to Klang first in 1925. From Klang I was teaching in the Jubilee School. I came over to Singapore in 1926 and there was a friend, called Mr. P. E. Thomas who welcomed me.²⁴⁶

This is one of the features of non-labour migration to the region - there is a high incidence of migration through the 'good word' of friends and family which predominates as the initial reason for leaving India or Ceylon.²⁴⁷ The use of social networks and process of chain migration appears to be a common one. Once begun, the process of chain migration becomes self-sustaining, and perpetuates itself with assistance and obligations which develop between the communities in India and Malaya.²⁴⁸ In this case Mr. George was either encouraged or helped out by a relative or else by another member of the Syrian Christian community.

Jacintha Stephens' study of Catholic Vellalar,²⁴⁹ many of whom had worked in the civil service, also gives a good account of immigration via word of mouth. She gives

²⁴⁵ Pillai's was a caste title used by the high farmer/landowner castes.

²⁴⁶ Mr V. A. George, (born 1906), 27 January 1997, Singapore.

²⁴⁷ Sandhu, 1969, p. 123. M. Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia*, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980), p. 26. C. Muzzaffar, 'Political Marginalization in Malaysia', in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), p. 213. S. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 33. Interview with Mr. Jaganaden, (born 1935), 28 Oct. 1997, Melaka (Merlimau).

²⁴⁸ Monica Boyd, 'Family and Personal Networks In International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas', in *International Migration Review*, 23 (Fall), (1989): pp. 639, 641, 655. Charles Tilly, 'Transplanted Networks', in Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (ed.), *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 84, 88. Alejandro Portes, 'Economic Sociology and the Sociology of Immigration: A Conceptual Overview', in Alejandro Portes (ed.), *The Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on Networks, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship*, (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1995 [1998]), p. 12.

²⁴⁹ Vellalar (cultivator and merchant) caste group, reputed by many sources to be the second highest group, just under the Brahmins. Of the so-called 'high' caste group, the Vellalar were numerically prominent converts to Christianity. According to the 1871 census, 'Cultivating castes' comprised a high 8.8 per cent of the Christian population of the Madras Presidency alone. India, Census, 1871, Madras, p. 112.

an account of one member of what she claims could be the first Catholic family of the Vellalar caste in Malaya. In this instance the new migrant was a catechist and came to Malaya in the company of a Catholic priest. After some time in the new country, the priest decided they needed a woman to help keep house and cook for them. The catechist proceeded to write to his widowed niece in Tanjore, requesting that she and her two children join them at their mission in Ipoh. The niece and children arrived in 1887. Not long after this small group moved to Taiping and then to Kuala Lumpur. By this time the widowed niece wrote to her relatives in Tanjore encouraging them to come over to take advantage of better prospects for employment²⁵⁰.

In another account a Mr. Arputham David, born in 1904, while in South India worked in his father's wholesale business. He had since completed his fifth-form education at a Catholic mission school.²⁵¹ However with time, the family business declined and his father suggested that he begin looking for alternative employment. It was at this time that a visiting uncle from Taiping (Perak), persuaded his young nephew to return with him to Taiping. Arputham David arrived in Malaya in 1921, age 17.²⁵²

With the help of Arputham's uncle he was able to secure his first job in a coconut plantation as a supervisor in charge of a section of the estate's workforce. However he was not happy with the generally bad conditions he found himself in. His pay amounted to only Ringgit \$20 a month, and he did not like the estate's 'hazardous monsoon drains'. After a month on the job he resigned and left to live with other relatives in Taiping. His next job was procured with the help of a well-to-do uncle who lived in Seremban. This 'Seremban uncle' had been in Malaya since the turn of the century and had a well paying civil service job as a Health Inspector. He was earning Ringgit \$200 per month. Arputham managed to pick up most of the knowledge necessary to help him branch off as a health worker on his own.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ J. Stephens, 'Catholic Vellalar: Preserving a Special Identity in New Place, Old Ways: essays on Indian society and culture in modern Singapore', in A. R. Walker (ed.), *New Places, Old Ways: Essays on Indian Society and Culture in modern Singapore*, (Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Dehli, 1984), p. 212. Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), 1 September 1997, Singapore.

²⁵¹ The equivalent of almost completing the General Cambridge Education 'Advanced' level.

²⁵² Stephens, 1984, p. 213.

²⁵³ Stephens, 1984, pp. 213-4.

Not all people migrated for better economic opportunities. One account given to J. R. Daniel, tells of coming to Malaya in 1920 to 'seek for adventure as he had heard many good stories about this land from others.' He had left home without notifying his family or friends.²⁵⁴ He had gotten two letters of recommendation from a missionary stationed in his home district. One letter was addressed to the Emigration Depot in Negapatam (a major exit point for immigrants) recommending free passage for himself on the understanding that employment and accommodation awaited him in Malaya, and the other letter was an introduction to an Anglican priest residing in Ipoh. Upon arrival, he introduced himself to the Anglican priest in Ipoh, and later settled in Buntong (near Ipoh) which was by then beginning to become a Indian Christian-based village.²⁵⁵

One of the interesting observations made about Indian Christian communities was their incessant practice of moving on to other unspecified areas, and how this often affected the work of the Church. As early as the 1880s, a Roman Catholic priest Father Michel Fee described the case of a particular Indian Christian woman. She was born in India, married in Mauritius, lived for several years in Martinique and presently lived in Penang. Fr. Fee noted, 'today she may be in Sumatra, tomorrow in New Caledonia, another day somewhere else ... Such are Indians abroad.'²⁵⁶ Methodist Church sources mentioned on several occasions the incessant practice of Indian Christian parishioners moving on to other unspecified areas, and how this had held back the work of the Church. In another account, there was a complaint from one of the Methodist Church leaders that many of its parishioners moved out town to work in the railways²⁵⁷; an occupation notorious for keeping many of their employees away from home, travelling great distances or permanently moving house with interstate postings.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ This appeared to be relatively common. Other accounts tell of young males secretly leaving home, without the permission of family. Anonymous, (born 1930s), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. In another account, an interviewee's father stowed away onboard a ship around 1918, to escape military duties in the British Indian army. Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

²⁵⁵ Daniel, 1992, p. 58.

²⁵⁶ Fr. Michel Marie Fee (M. E. P.), 'Kampong Padre: A Tamil Settlement near Bagan Serai, Perak', (translated by Fr. Manickam) in *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, XXXVI (1), Singapore, May 1963, p. 154.

²⁵⁷ *Official minutes of the 7th session of the Malaysian Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Penang, February 9-14, 1899*, (Singapore:Methodist Publishing House, 1899).

²⁵⁸ Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo, Singapore, 1996.

Unfortunately, no migration statistics or data are available on Indian white-collar labour, unlike their rural labour counterparts. After their arrival in Malaya or the Straits Settlements, for example, recruitment for clerks was done by the State Secretariat. Applications for clerical employment were placed on a waiting list and positions were offered as they transpired to the applicants at the top of the list. In 1919, a applicant would be expected to at least have passed their seventh standard examination and be between sixteen and twenty-two years of age.²⁵⁹ Many clerical staff, skilled workers, clerks, administrators and teachers and the like, were sourced from India and brought over to Malaya and Singapore by employers. This was particularly so for clerical staff working in Indian firms.²⁶⁰ There were also instances of secondment and or recruitment direct from the India. This practice ceased after the transfer of administration of the Straits Settlements to Colonial Office in London in 1867.²⁶¹ However most of these type of white-collar migrants came under 'their own steam'. Mostly on the good-word or being sent for by relatives or friends, who usually had the necessary resources to entertain the idea in the first place.²⁶²

Despite the predominance of cases where relatives facilitated in the migratory process, there were instances of economic and particularly socially induced hardships which drove some to immigrate. Mrs. Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel) spoke of her father's circumstances in Salem, India around 1905.

My father was the only son. You know property goes only to the son, not to the daughters. He had sisters younger than him. So with this property, something went wrong there. The uncle swindled all the property and left him stranded. So he had to work by taking cattle or something like that.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ *Report of the Committee to Enquire into, and Report on, the Salaries paid to Officers of the General Clerical Services of the S.S. and the F.M.S., 1919.* Kuala Lumpur.

²⁶⁰ Sandhu, 1969, p. 122, with reference to the *Madras Annual Report on Emigration and Immigration* (Madras, 1931), p. 11.

²⁶¹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 68. Secondment from the Indian Civil Service was halted after the 'Transfer' in 1867.

²⁶² Sandhu, 1969, p. 123. Stenson, 1980, p. 26. Muzzaffar, 1993, p. 213. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 33, Daniel, 1992, pp. 58-60. S. Siddique and N. P. Shotam, *Singapore's Little India*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), pp. 70-72.

²⁶³ Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson nee Manuel, (born 1931), 3 Mar. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.

As a young boy, her father had been originally recruited to work at a tea plantation in Ceylon, but while there he had a medical problem with one of his legs. He was told he could have the problem surgically remedied in Penang. This all would have happened at a very young age, because Mrs. Dawson goes on to say that he was later converted to Christianity at St. Francis Xavier's Orphanage in Penang at the tender age of nine. It would have been doubtful if he was travelling with any relatives, and it appears that both his parents' or at least his father's death had precipitated the problems with regards to his right of inheritance. Mrs. Dawson's father, Mr. Michael Manuel later worked as a yard foreman at the Prai Railway Station in Province Wellesley (now known as Butterworth). Mr. Manuel died in Petaling Jaya, Selangor in the 1987.

Another account of social dislocation was related by Mr. David Sebastian. His father, Sebastian²⁶⁴, an older brother, a younger sister and their widowed father arrived in Penang from Coimbatore around 1910. Their father, Michel Mudaliyar had been part of his father's family textile business in Coimbatore town. The story goes that Michel Mudaliyar was converted to Christianity at the local French Roman Catholic Church in Coimbatore town, and upon discovering his renunciation of Hinduism, his father disowned him and his three grand-children. Apparently the family withheld much of their property and wealth. Michel then tried to start up his own business, but when that did not work out he and his small family left for Penang. No information is available on whether they had monetary or social assistance on migrating to Penang. He found employment at the Bukit Mertajam Railway Station as a clerical staffer and retired around 1919. Mr. Mudaliyar died in the early 1920s in Bukit Mertajam, Kedah. During his employment in Bukit Mertajam he had placed his two sons as boarders in St. Xavier's Institution around 1910, in Penang, about fifty kilometres away.²⁶⁵ His two sons were later to find employment as clerical staff, like their father, with the

²⁶⁴ Many Indian names were constructed along the lines of i) father's name, ii) caste title, iii) person's name. His name was later Anglicised to Mr. Michael Sebastian around 1916, 'Sebastian' becoming the surname.

²⁶⁵ St. Xavier's Institution (S. X. I.) boarder records are only available from after 1918. However it would have been highly probable, judging from the records of budgetary costs and occupation of parent (usually being that of the father), that they stayed there. The premises, which had been earlier used as an orphanage was partially cleared in 1914 - most of the orphans being sent to Melaka. His daughter might have been placed at the nearby Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (C. H. I. J.). No access was given to the convent records. This was a common practice among some clerical railway workers. 'Diary of St. Xavier's Institution 1852-1924', (unpublished, 1924), Penang. Information from interview with Mr. George James, (born 1912), National Archives of Singapore, Oral History Dept., undated, (transcript), p. 3.

Malayan Railways while his daughter worked at a hospital in Kuala Lumpur as an 'Ayahmah' until her death in the late 1940s.²⁶⁶

The proportion of cases where people arrived relatively prosperous or under conditions of duress, has up to this point been vague. However, indicated by various interviews, the majority of people coming in under relatively stable and economically good circumstances is plausible. It is important to keep in mind that there was a strong variation in regards to conditions.

This study can therefore conclude that economic hardship was often the primary motive for emigrating to Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Secondly, emigration was facilitated by friends (usually from the same Church denominations as their own) or relatives.²⁶⁷ And in most cases, the immigrants were already converted to Christianity and educated in the English language.

Subordinate populations in the Civil Service

As already stated, South Indian and Tamil Ceylonese civil servants were familiar with the English language due to the long presence of the British in India. Many had therefore gone through and attained general or technical educations in India or Ceylon. In comparison, the education system in British Malaya seemed inadequate and did not produce the required number of suitable personnel to fill its ranks.²⁶⁸ By the beginning of the twentieth century, the region experienced surges in economic growth and an extending of British colonialist rule. Similar trends were also prevalent with the expansion and consolidation of French control in Indo-China. New administrative structures were needed and the use of indigenous communities viewed as a necessary step.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Interview with Mr. D. Sebastian, (born 1931), 15 July 1988, Singapore. Sandhu, 1969, p. 67.

²⁶⁷ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 33. Interview with Mr. Jaganaden, (born 1935), 28 Oct 1997, Melaka (Merlimau).

²⁶⁸ Keith Watson, 'Rulers and ruled: racial perceptions, curriculum and schooling colonial Malaya and Singapore', in J. A. Mangan (ed.) *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial images and education in the British colonial experience*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 153.

²⁶⁹ D. G. E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1964), p. 714.

This again created the need for large numbers of staff in the expanding technical and professional departments²⁷⁰. By 1919, government clerical appointments were dominated by 46 per cent of Ceylonese Tamils and 9 per cent of Indian Tamils; in total occupying 55 per cent of all subordinate governmental appointments.²⁷¹ Table 5 illustrates the Indian presence in the Civil Service of the Straits Settlements between 1873 and 1933.

Table 5

**Racial/Religious Breakdown of South Indian Hindu/Christian,
Chinese and Malay Civil Servants in the Straits Settlement, 1873-1933**

	Hindu S. Indian	Christian ^{a*} S. Indian	Muslims ^b	Chinese ^c	Total
1873	28 (19.4%)	10 (6.9%)	64 (44.4%)	42 (29.1%)	144
1883	31 (13.3%)	30 (12.9%)	90 (38.7%)	81 (34.9%)	232
1893	37 (15.4%)	35 (14.6%)	60 (25.1%)	107 (44.7%)	239
1903	143 (27.1%)	57 (10.8%)	115 (21.7%)	213 (40.3%)	528
1913	161 (19.5%)	110 (13.3%)	228 (27.7%)	323 (39.3%)	822
1923	292 (17.3%)	142 (8.4%)	503 (29.9%)	743 (44.2%)	1680
1933	428 (16.1%)	118 (4.4%)	781 (29.3%)	1337 (50.2%)	2664
Total no.	1120	502	1841	2846	6309
Total %	17.75%	7.95%	29.18%	45.11%	

^a May include a few Eurasians.

^b This includes Indian Muslims.

^c This includes Chinese of all religious persuasions and dialect groups.

* nos. supplied are approx 10% lower than should be. This is a result of the fact that some of the South Indian Christian names were often similar to that of Malacca

²⁷⁰ Puthucheary, 1993, pp. 336-7.

²⁷¹ These departments were: The postal Clerical Service, the Railway Clerical Service, the Subordinate Staff of the Engineering, Locomotive, Signalling and Telegraph Departments of the Railway, Locomotive Chargemen and Underforemen, Draftsman of the Public Works Department, Dressers and Hospital Assistants, and Sanitary Inspectors. *Reports of the Committee appointed by H. E. The Governor of the Straits Settlements and the High Commissioner of the F. M. S. to Enquire into, and Report on, the Salaries paid to Officers of the General Clerical Services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1919.* (Kuala Lumpur: F. M. S. Printing Office, 1919), p. 3.

Eurasian names, particularly between Kerala/Malayali Christians. Therefore to limit inclusion of Eurasian numbers to the Christian Indian total, many suspect Malaccan and Keralese names were excluded.

Source: Straits Settlement Blue Books, Civil Service Establishment, 1873-1933. The Eurasian community was not included due to the small size of their community. They were however over represented in the service in relation to population size among the primarily English language educated civil servants. Myrna Braga-Blake & Ann Ebert-Oehlers, *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), pp. 14-15.

South Indians and Christian Indians, as shown in table 5, were over-represented in the sample in relation to their population size as a whole. The vast majority of Indians in Malaya and the Straits Settlements were South Indian in origin.²⁷² The total percentage of the Indian component in the Straits Settlements was 48.82 per cent. The Indian Christians made up 7.95 per cent of the workforce over the cumulative period. Taking into account that in 1931 Indian Christians only made up approximately 5.9 per cent of the entire Indian population.²⁷³ The Roman Catholic Indian population, which has been calculated for the purposes of this study, made up more than three-quarter of the Indian Christian populace. The Roman Catholic population stood at 3.95 per cent (18,580) in 1922, 4.94 per cent (30,750) in 1931, and 6.09 per cent (36,525) in 1947 of the overall Indian population. The attributed figure of a 7.95 per cent presence in the Straits Settlement civil service is sizable.

It is interesting to note that the Chinese section grows approximately at a steady 5 per cent per decade. The strangle-hold the Indian communities once enjoyed was beginning to slip, especially after 1900. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the British, realising that they had to pay more attention to 'native' English-language education, in order to address the shortage of staff, began to make an effort by building up the education system. As the numbers show, the Chinese communities were quick to take advantage of this, resulting in a steady increase of their numbers within the civil service.

²⁷² Sandhu, 1969, p. 82. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 15. Daniel, 1992, p. 46.

²⁷³ Sandhu, 1969, p. 233. 1931 estimate of 5.9 per cent, p. 233. Huff, 1994, p. 165.

Table 6
**Population of different Indian religious groups
 permillage (per 1000) in Malaya and Singapore, 1921 and 1931**

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Buddhist	Sikhs	Others
1921						
SS	73900.3	18700.6	5400.5	1400.7	300.2	70
F.M.S.	86900.8	5100.4	5200.9	2200.6	300.0	30
U.M.S.	85100.5	9800.1	3300.9	1300.9	200.2	40
1931						
SS	70900.1	18700.5	6400.3	3200.7	300.0	300.4
F.M.S.	84800.3	5300.1	6200.6	3100.9	100.5	200.6
U.M.S.	83200.6	10300.2	3800.7	1500.5	100.2	700.8

Source: U. Mahajani, 'The role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya', p. 104, in reference to M. Del Tufo, 'Malaya - A Report on the 1947 Census of Population', p. 78.

A precise breakdown is listed in table 6 and shows all religious categories for the year 1921 and 1931. The figures show that the Straits Settlements possess a slightly stronger Indian Christian component with 5400.5 (5.4 per cent) in 1921 and 6400.3 (6.4 per cent) in 1931. The Federated Malay States consisted of approximately 0.2 per cent less than that in the Straits Settlements. The Unfederated Malay States account for 3300.9 (3.3 per cent) in 1921 and jump to 3800.7 (3.8 per cent) in 1931. The overall percentage of Indian Christians in Malaya and Singapore was 500.87 per cent²⁷⁴. J. R. Daniel puts the major source states of Indian Christians the southern Indian states of Tanjore, Tiruchirapalli and Tirunelveli²⁷⁵.

²⁷⁴ Sandhu collaborates this figure with his 5.9 per cent (621, 874). Sandhu, 1969, p. 233. Huff, 1994, p. 165, quotes a source as putting the population at 6 per cent in Singapore only.

²⁷⁵ Daniel, 1992, p. 47. For more information and specifically population of Christians in these states and other associated states, it would be advisable to look up books by C. J. Fuller, R. L. Hardgrave, K. Dharma, D. Forrester, G. A. Oddie, D. Kooiman, K. S. Latourette, S. Manickam and M. N. Srinivas.

Table 7
**Number of individuals and occupations
held by Christian South Indians of the civil service
in the Straits Settlements, 1873-1946**

Clerks	224	Asst. Surgeons	9
Teachers	57	Apprentices	9
Dressers	46-58	Overseers	8
Compositors	36	Draftsman	7
Interpreters	17	Lightkeepers	7
Inspectors	17	Surveyors	6
Nurses	14	Copyholders	5
Bailiffs	11		

Note: Occupations with less than 5 individuals were excluded.

Source: *Straits Settlements Blue Books*, (Civil Service Establishment), 1873-1946.

Table 7 gives a breakdown of the most popular occupations within the Christian South Indian communities in the Straits Settlements civil service. The category of clerks, being the largest component within government administration, understandably far outnumbered any of the others. Next in line was the teaching profession. This was a rather exclusive career, which paid well, and teachers very often enjoyed a position well above that of most others within their communities. The teaching profession seems to have been dominated by Ceylonese Tamils. Out of the 72 teachers, 16 are Ceylonese Tamils (this figure is conservative as the 16 are the ones that could be verified). Out of the 72 teachers, 23 were from the Methodist Church. In total, 13 women from the Christian South Indian communities were teachers.²⁷⁶ Dressers basically performed tasks that one would expect from the nursing profession today, the main difference being that it was a male dominated profession, especially prior to the Japanese Occupation. Indian women working within the Medical professions were usually nurses. All in all, there were 5 South Indian Christian women working in the medical department (mainly as nurses and a midwife) from the late 1920s. None existed before then. However within months of the end of the Second World War, 8

women were employed, probably as a result of financial hardship.²⁷⁷ Like the Railways, hospitals were recognised as the occupational domain of the Indian community. Interestingly enough, the different Government Printing Offices had an extremely high proportion of South Indian Christians within their ranks.²⁷⁸ This shows up with the 36 Compositors and 5 Copyholders. The department was small, with approximately 50 people working there at any one time. Interpreters and Bailiffs mainly worked within the Judicial system, Inspectors within the Police, Marine and several other departments, Assistant Surgeons and Nurses within the medical hospitals, Apprentices in various departments, Overseers, Surveyors and Draftsmen usually from the Public Works Department (PWD) and finally Lightkeepers from the Marine department.

Table 8
**Number of Christian South Indians in
 individual S.S. government departments, 1873-1946**

<i>Department</i>	<i>Nos.</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Nos.</i>
1. Post Office	145	14. Veterinary	9
2. Medical	120	15. District Court	8
3. Public Works Dept.	77	16. Governor	6
4. Education	71	17. Chinese Protect.	6
5. Land Office	24	18. Indian Immigration	5
6. Treasury	21	19. Court of Request	5
7. Audit Office	19	20. Civil Court	4
8. Survey	18	21. Attorney-Gen.	4
9. Telecomms.	18	22. Official Assignee	4
10. Supreme Court	14	23. Custom & Excise	4
11. District Office	12	24. Botanic Gardens	3
12. Secretariat	12	25. Prisons	3
13. Police Court	9	26. Civil Aviation	3

²⁷⁶ *Straits Settlements Blue Books* (annual), in *Civil Service Establishment*, 1870-1946.

²⁷⁷ *Straits Settlements Blue Books*, 1870-1946.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, Oct. 1997.

Note: Departments categories have been streamlined and simplified. Jobs with less than 2 individuals have been excluded.

Government departments from the 'Civil Service Establishment' section of the S. S. Blue Books - (Railways not included in Straits Settlement Blue Books) Courts, Police, Police Courts, Public Works, Printing Office, Immigration, Marine, Education, Post Office, Hospitals, Botanic Gardens, Land Office, Treasury, Chinese Protectorate, District Office, Telegraph Department, Indian Immigration, The Governor, Secretariat, Forest Department, Audit Office, Prisons, Government Monopolies, Official Assignees Office, External Audit Department, Import and Exports, Government Veterinary Surgeon, Survey Department, Attorney General, Civil Courts, Statistics, Prosecutor's Office, Supreme Court, Criminal Courts, Volunteer Corp, Agriculture Department, Labour Department, Civil Aviation, Customs and Excise, Co-operative Societies, Forest Department, Meteorological, Social Welfare, Telecommunications Department & Court of Requests. South Indian Christian names had to be carefully picked out, since no indication of ethnicity or religious affiliation was given. Knowledgeable persons from the different Church denominations later verified these names.

Source: *Straits Settlements Blue Books*, (Civil Service Establishment), 1873-1946.

Table 8 is an elaboration of the previous table, showing the departments in which Christian Indians worked. Employment in the Post Office and the Medical professions was the most popular. The Post Office was well represented because there was a need for a huge number of clerks and the Medical profession because many Christian South Indians were Dressers (Nurses).

Table 9

**Number of Christian Indians civil servants/religious denomination
in the Straits Settlements, 1873-1946**

<i>Singapore</i>	<i>1873-1903</i>		<i>1903-1946</i>	
	Roman Catholic	42 (93.3%)	Roman Catholic	235 (69.9%)
	Methodist	0	Methodist	19 (5.6%)
	Protestant ^a	3 (6.6%)	Protestant ^a	57 (16.9%)
	Syrian Christian	0	Syrian Christian	25 (7.4%)
<i>Penang</i>	<i>1873-1903</i>		<i>1903-1946</i>	
	Roman Catholic	28 (68.2%)	Roman Catholic	69 (71.1%)
	Methodist	1 (2.4%)	Methodist	1 (1.0%)
	Protestant ^a	10 (24.3%)	Protestant ^a	26 (26.8%)
	Syrian Christian	2 (4.8%)	Syrian Christian	1 (1.0%)
<i>Malacca</i>	<i>1873-1903</i>		<i>1903-1946</i>	
	Roman Catholic	13 (100%)	Roman Catholic	30 (63.8%)
	Methodist	0	Methodist	6 (12.7%)
	Protestant ^a	0	Protestant ^a	10 (21.2%)
	Syrian Christian	0	Syrian Christian	1 (2.1%)

^a This groups Anglicans, Lutherans and others.

Source: Straits Settlements Blue Books, 1873-1946.

Table 9 shows a breakdown of the South Indian Christian communities according to Christian denomination.²⁷⁹ In the first period (1873-1903), migration was limited when compared to the period after the 1900s – it was largely sporadic and limited in scope. The immigration patterns during this early period is not comparable to the

²⁷⁹ I have also split the figures into 2 distinct time periods. One between 1873 to 1903 and the other 1903-1946. The reason for doing this is two-fold. Firstly the Straits Settlement Blue Books database was updated at 10 year intervals eg. 1873, 1883, 1893. Secondly, the first decade of the twentieth century saw a massive increase in the number of Indians coming into Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Therefore a new period has to be made distinct after 1900, 1903 being the closest year to that one. The database concludes in 1946.

demographic patterns of the twentieth century. For example in Singapore, Roman Catholics totaled 93.3 per cent of the 45 Indian Christian employees. There was no record of Methodists or Syrian Christians in the listing.

Singapore had at this time, as indicated by the figures, a sizable Roman Catholic following, which necessitated the building of a separate Church in 1888.²⁸⁰ In Penang, the numbers were more spread out. The Roman Catholics numbered 68.2 per cent, the Methodist 2.4 per cent, the other Protestants 24.3 per cent and the Syrian Christians 4.8 per cent. This diversity could be attributed to the fact that all Indian migrants were channelled through Penang. Many originally settled there and only moved to other areas of the peninsula later on. Of the three Straits Settlements, Malacca was the smallest. Before 1903, a small group of Roman Catholics working mainly within the Public Works, Schools, Hospitals and the Courts predominate. By the beginning of the twentieth century a wider cross-section of the Christian communities is represented.

By the turn of the twentieth century, there is a marked increase in the diversity of denominations. In Singapore, the Roman Catholic percentage had dropped to 69.9 per cent, due to the sizable increase by the other Church denominations. The small Methodist contingent had increased in number to make up 5.6 per cent. Their congregation only taking hold in the late 1880's and early 1890's at its Church on the corner of Middle Road and Short Street near the city centre. The other Protestant Churches had also increased by about 10 per cent to 16.9 per cent. The Syrian Christians were disproportionately large at 7.4 per cent, but this would hardly be surprising as many more Malayalis were domiciled in Singapore than any other state in Malaya.²⁸¹

In Penang, where the diversification of denominations had persisted, the percentages remained largely the same. The Roman Catholic communities increased their number by a mere 3 per cent to 71.1 per cent. The Methodists dropped from 2.4 per cent to 1 per cent but the Protestant congregations increased marginally from 24.3 per cent to 26.8 per cent. Syrian Christians had dropped from a strong 4.8 per cent to 1 per cent.

²⁸⁰ The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (1888), at Ophir Road. Its foundation was initiated by Fr. Menevier, M. E. P. (1858-1915) who presided over the Tamil congregation based at the primarily Teochew (Chinese) Church of St. Peter and Paul (established 1870) in Queen Street, Singapore.

Malacca saw its Roman Catholic dominance broken by other Churches. The Catholic congregation had dropped to 63.8 per cent. The Methodist had jumped to 12.7 per cent and the Protestants to 21.2 per cent. The Syrian Christians had 2.1 per cent.

Table 10

Breakdown of Christian Indian communities by Dialects & State employed in the Straits Settlements civil service, 1873-1946

<i>1873-1903</i>	<i>Tamil^a</i>	<i>Malayali^b</i>	<i>Telegu^c</i>
Singapore	14 (31.1%)	31 (68.8%)	0
Penang	37 (88.1%)	4 (9.5%)	1 (2.3%)
Malacca	4 (30.7%)	9 (69.2%)	0
<i>1903-1946</i>	<i>Tamil^a</i>	<i>Malayali^b</i>	<i>Telegu</i>
Singapore	211 (62.6%)	125 (37.1%)	1 (0.2%)
Penang	84 (85.7%)	13 (13.2%)	1 (1%)
Malacca	27 (56.2%)	20 (41.6%)	1 (2%)

^a This includes Indian Tamils and Ceylon Tamils. Ceylon Tamils (Jaffna Tamils) and Indian Tamils, for reasons of convenience, are combined together. This has been carried out throughout this study.

^b May include a few Eurasians.

^c Telegus came mainly from Andhra Pradesh.

Source: Straits Settlements Blue Books, 1873-1946.

Apart from the obvious dominance of the Tamil communities, it is hard not to notice the predominance of the Malayali communities. Singapore appears to be a Malayali stronghold from as early as the nineteenth century, which would in turn have encouraged many other Malayalis to settle there. The Malayalis enjoyed a dominance in Singapore during most of the nineteenth century. In Singapore they were twice as large in comparison to their Tamil counterparts, with thirty-one civil servants as

²⁸¹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 262, p. 123. Interview with Mr. D. Sebastian, 9 August 1996, Singapore.

opposed to only fourteen. On the other hand, Penang appears to be that of a Tamil stronghold with a strong majority appearing in the civil service - thirty-seven Tamils to four Malayalis. In Malacca again, Malayalis outnumber Tamils. In all three settlements, Telugus are very much in the minority.

By the twentieth century, the influx of Tamil Christians coming into the Straits Settlements becomes apparent. In Singapore, Tamils numbered two hundred and eleven and Malayalis one hundred and twenty-five. In Penang Tamils had also marginally increased to eighty-four, while Malayalis climbed up to thirteen. In Malacca Tamils numbered twenty-seven and Malayalis twenty. It must be noted that Malayalis only comprised 6.4 per cent of the overall Indian population in Malaya between 1844 to 1941. The ethno-linguistic breakdown of general South Indian labour migration in Malaya and the Straits Settlements between 1844-1941 was: Tamil 85.2 per cent, Telugu 6.8 per cent, Malayali 6.4 per cent, other South Indian 0.8 per cent. South Indian population made up 99.2 per cent of the total Indian population.²⁸² Therefore their presence in the civil service was by far disproportionate to their overall population. They averaged 68.8 per cent of the civil service workforce in Singapore between the years 1873 to 1903. In Malacca they averaged 69.2 per cent and only in Penang were they generally proportionate to their population size with 9.5 per cent. However by the early twentieth century, the proportion of their dominance had fallen considerably to 37.1 per cent in Singapore, 13.2 per cent in Penang and 41.6 per cent in Malacca.

Sandhu noted that Malayali labour migration only began in earnest from the 1920s. With it came a large proportion of English language educated immigrants. By the 1930s, they had very much displaced Indian and Ceylon Tamils as conductors, clerks and assistants on European-owned palm oil, rubber²⁸³ and various other plantations²⁸⁴. They proceeded to dominate the clerical ranks of the British War Department installations in Malaya and the Straits Settlements.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Sandhu, 1969, p. 159.

²⁸³ Interview with Mr G. A. George, 30 January 1997, Kuala Lumpur.

²⁸⁴ Sandhu, 1969, p. 123.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Fr. A. Fortier M. E. P., (born 1920) former parish priest and founder of the Church of Our Lady Star of the Sea, established 1949, (popularly known as the 'Naval Base Church'), 28

Table 11
**Number of Christian South Indians in
 the S.S. government departments by gender, 1873-1946**

<i>1873-1903</i>		<i>1903-1946</i>	
Female	0	Female	29 (5.6%)
Male	101 (100%)	Male	480
(94.3%)			

Source: Straits Settlements Blue Books, 1873-1946.

Gender imbalances in the civil service was indicative of the position of women in the communities of the day and the level of economic 'development' apparent in colonial Malaya and Singapore.²⁸⁶ Women from all ethnic backgrounds were not well represented. An exception to the rule was the Eurasian community. Most Eurasian women working in the Straits Settlements civil service were employed as telephone operators.²⁸⁷ Before 1903, I have not been able to locate any women in the civil service. One can safely assume that white-collar immigrants, like that of their more numerous labour counterparts, were male. Patriarchal practices from mainland India and Ceylon (as well as in Malaya and Singapore) dictated that women, be they Hindu or Christian, were to be tied to domestic-type duties based mainly around family structures. Occupations or duties which brought them outside of these protective circles were not an option. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, most immigrants (including females) of this category came as a result of their own resources, and so no figures have been kept. When women did arrive, they usually did so under the protection of a male person or authority figure; a husband, father, mother or to stay with an in-law.²⁸⁸ With the high proportion of male immigration to the region, it

November 1996, Singapore.

²⁸⁶ W. Arthur Lewis, *The Theory of Economic Growth*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 422. Lewis notes how transfer of womens' work from home to commercial sector is a feature of economic 'development'. Women are a cheaper source of labour (in comparison to men) with labour specialisation specific tasks.

²⁸⁷ *Straits Settlements Blue Book* (annual), Singapore, 1871-1946.

²⁸⁸ Interview with Mrs Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel) (born 1931), 3 March 1997, Kuala Lumpur. Mrs. Mary Magdeline Sebastian (nee Soosay), 9 Aug 1996, Singapore. There were several instances of mothers and daughters coming over with the marriage of a sister/daughter to a man working in Malaya or the Straits Settlements.

would be very likely that the number of women were extremely low in regards to the number of men, and when there were any, they would have been married or widowed.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were signs of change - but only just. Female presence in the civil service was mainly in the well-paid professions such as teaching (this would not be surprising since the teaching and the later popularity of the nursing profession both possess a strong emphasis on the element of 'care' - an essential element of femininity in patriarchal society). As employment, teaching appeared to have been one of the first areas where respectable numbers of women were allowed to participate. As early as 1903, there were three female teachers working in government schools. Women maintained a rather high profile within the profession over the decades. All except one were full-time employees. In all, between the years 1903 to 1946, there were a total of thirteen Christian South Indian female teachers working in the civil service. They were still paid considerably less than males in the same position.²⁸⁹ It is also interesting to note that most of the working women stayed for less than a decade in any one position. They could have returned to India or Ceylon, or perhaps more likely that they resigned from their positions to pursue the family commitments such as childbearing.²⁹⁰ Another area where female employment grew was in the hospital system. Most women worked as nurses, in what till then were still a male dominated profession.²⁹¹ Even then only four women worked as nurses (and one midwife) before 1942. There appears to have been a change in attitudes, probably brought on by post-war financial difficulties after 1946 with the recruitment of eight women as nurses (and one clerk). In the other departments, there are only records of two female Christian South Indian typist employed after 1946.

Conclusion

The South Indian Christian communities were a diverse grouping of communities. Although broad similarities can be drawn, to speak of these communities as a general whole would be inaccurate. The communities were differentiated by region, language, caste (examined in Chapter six), and religious denomination. For example, arrivals were significantly rural-based and therefore poor. However there was a small but

²⁸⁹ *Straits Settlement Blue Books*, Civil Service Establishment List, 1873-1933.

²⁹⁰ I was not able to assess this trend after 1946 because the Straits Settlements Blue Books ceased publication.

prominent element of an urban-based, English language educated 'middle-class'. Despite differences in experiences, their reasons for leaving their homeland were linked to conditions created under British colonialism. While circumstances surrounding methods of migration differed quite significantly, rural labour being the big losers, both migrant groups were expected to fulfil a subservient role. Ruling elites found it necessary to adopt new pseudo-scientific theories that helped justify the hierarchical nature of colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements

²⁹¹ 58 Dressers (male) worked in the S. S. hospital system between 1873-1946.

Chapter 4

Theories of containment:

Controlling the Empire & imperial attitudes, 1900-1941

British commercial and imperialist successes of the nineteenth century played a disproportionate role in the world economic stage. Its industrial and technological supremacy, created a perception within British circles of their own cultural and racial superiority. However by the late nineteenth century, the balance of power began moving away from Britain to other up and coming industrialised nations like Germany, France and the United States of America. However influences from the first phase had helped consolidate British public support for what has been referred to as the 'ideology of imperialism'. If this was so among other Europeans, it was even more prevalent among its colonized non-white subjects. These perceptions were primarily a cultural construct, which nevertheless had a heavy influence on other aspects of empire and worked with the image construction for the purpose of shaping cultural consciousness. These concepts were usually epitomised with simplistic rationalizations of group/racial relationships and set behavioural patterns according to race. Subsequently traditional social hierarchies were replaced with race and culture. Colonial authorities did this by separating common non-European community interest and ricocheted hostilities back at the poor underclasses.

The chapter will examine the propagation of a new colonial racial hierarchy, loosely based on European socio-biological ideas. Some of these pseudo-scientific theories heralded the superiority of the so-called European 'Aryan' races and linked this race to the qualities of leadership, beauty and initiative. Other proponents were satisfied to emphasise the cultural superiority of Britain and its role to civilise the less civilised world. The prominent British legalist, Viscount James Bryce observed,

Democracy which has been a natural growth in the civilised countries that now enjoy it, will in these despotically ruled countries be an artificial creation, built

upon ideas brought in from outside, unfamiliar to all but the educated few, unintelligible to the masses.²⁹²

These ideas helped justified European colonialism's claim to rule - propagating the idea of white superiority over black and brown races. However it is important to highlight that such propositions are heavily determined by the fundamental purpose (be it social, economic or political) they served rather than the content of the theories being put forward. These ideas were used to appease contradictions of imperial despotic rule in the colonies which diverged from the much lauded democratic tradition of the British.²⁹³

Concepts of racial superiority

The idea that racial thought existed in ancient and medieval society is, as Ivan Hannaford argued, a fallacy. Hannaford claims much of this myth was largely an invention of nineteenth century historians keen to justify contemporary developments or was simply an anachronistic use of ancient terms in a modern context.²⁹⁴ The assumptions associated with the notions of 'racial differences' were a gradual process beginning in the seventeenth century with the writings of Francois Bernier (1625-1688). Bernier's work, *Nouvelle division de la terre par les differents especes ou races qui l'habitent*, was the first to utilise racial and ethnic divisions, departing from the older divide of heathen and Christian.²⁹⁵ Prior to this notions based on biblical myths such as the original sin of Adam and Eve, legend of Noah, or the curse of Ham were widespread, although such ideas continued to be accepted well into the eighteenth century.²⁹⁶ By this time, depictions of black and non-white cultures as 'innocent' and 'wayward' children were relatively common.²⁹⁷

²⁹² James Bryce, *Modern Democracies vol. II* (London: Macmillan, 1921), pp. 545.

²⁹³ Bryce, 1921, pp. 545, 550. P. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 13.

²⁹⁴ Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1996), p. xii.

²⁹⁵ Hannaford, 1996, p. 191.

²⁹⁶ Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 10. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 60.

²⁹⁷ Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience: From Carlyle to Forster*, (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 142. Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, (Manchester: Manchester University

In 1772, Edward Long, a prominent British historian, eulogized on the inferiority of the 'black' race over that of the English.²⁹⁸ Other changes to attitudes were beginning to surface by the first half of the nineteenth century, and some historians have argued that the successes of the anti-slavery movement of this period led to a backlash and a rise in virulent racism during the 1830s and 1840s.²⁹⁹ Liberal concepts of a universal human quality, as argued by John Dougan and Thomas Macaulay, were swept aside with the rise in popularity of primitive anthropological studies and other related new 'scientific' fields.³⁰⁰

By the first half of the nineteenth century, sentiments relating to 'non-white' laziness and indolence became popular stereotypes. An example was Thomas Carlyle's (1795-1881) book, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* published in 1849.³⁰¹ Carlyle wrote of forcing all 'lazy gourds' (non-whites) out of their lazy lifestyles and into the modern world whilst instilling 'modern' labour disciplines.³⁰² Likewise, contemporary writers of the period such as Anthony Trollope, G. A. Henty, William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Dickens, had no doubt as to where he stood in relation to the issue of race. Dickens wrote in 1853;

I have not the least belief in the Noble Savage. I consider him a prodigious nuisance, and an enormous superstition. His calling rum fire-water, and me a pale face, wholly fail to reconcile me to him. I don't care what he calls me. I call him a savage, and I call a savage a something highly desirable to be civilized off the face of the earth.³⁰³

Press, 1990), p. 200. John L. Comaroff, 'Images of Empire, Contest of Conscience', in A. L. Stoler and F. Cooper, *Tensions of Empire*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 180.

²⁹⁸ Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982, p. 59.

²⁹⁹ P. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 12. Eldridge, 1996, p. 142.

³⁰⁰ D. A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), p. 11.

³⁰¹ Carlyle's views were coloured by his belief that Germanic elements in Northern European cultures were the only way forward if regeneration of European life, literature and language was to be possible. Hannford, 1996, p. 243.

³⁰² T. Carlyle, 'Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1849) cited in Rich, 1986, p. 12.

Political opportunism and the conveniences of racial hierarchies

Changes in attitudes were dependent on the changing needs of society – especially those of the political elites. It was a period when British imperial objectives were regularly justified by its intellectual supporters with new ideologies and trends. The benefits from these new ideas undoubtedly were pushed harder by those who had most to gain. Hence we find the emerging economic and colonial powers of France, the future Germany states, and especially Great Britain to be its strongest proponents. This political culture was incorporated into both ‘high’ and ‘low’ collective social consciousness often marching in time to the patriotic music of Edward Elgar. Connoisseurs of the art establishment venerated the military paintings of Lady Elizabeth Thompson Butler. The literature of Kipling, Haggard, Henty, Henley and Newbolt were ardently read. It was in this developing ‘imperialist’ climate, Benjamin Disraeli in his three volume novel *Tancred*, ironically noted;

Is it the universal development of the faculties of man that had rendered an island, almost unknown to the ancients, the arbiter of the world? Clearly not. It is her inhabitants that have done this; it is an affair of race. A Saxon race, protected by an insular position, has stamped its diligent and methodic character on the century. All is race; there is no other truth.³⁰⁴

A justification of British political hegemony had developed on the basis of their political elite’s perceived superiority - as compared to other ‘inferior’ races. It was seen as the duty of the superior race to lead inferior races out of their ‘darkness of savagery towards the light of civilisation’.³⁰⁵ Rather more simplistically, ‘white’ was likened to light, righteousness, goodness and hence civilisation. On the other hand, ‘black’ was equated with darkness, evil, savagery and primitiveness.³⁰⁶

By the first decade of the twentieth century, acceptance of such discourse was prevalent in ethnic Indian Christian Churches in Singapore.³⁰⁷ Correlations were drawn between white and black, good and evil, civilisation and barbarism,

³⁰³ Eldridge, 1996, p. 146.

³⁰⁴ Eldridge, 1996, p. 140 citing B. Disraeli, *Tancred*, (Henry Colban, 1847), pp. 148-9.

³⁰⁵ Eldridge, 1996, p. 142.

³⁰⁶ Henri Baudet, 1965, p. 30. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982, pp. 60-1.

³⁰⁷ *Malaysia Message*, vol. XVII, no. 2, November 1907.

backwardness and modernity. These ideas, though not totally alien to customary Indian practices (like the practise of 'varna' - loosely interpreted as colour), were largely acquired via colonial structures. Although no direct emphasis was placed on the superiority of one race over another, there was an implied acknowledgment of racial differences and 'types'. It is no coincidence how traits of the 'uncivilised' were acquainted with darker pigmentation, attributes familiar between members of the Indian (or Indian Christian) communities. Such images harked back to the retrogressive image of 'Darkest Africa', animal barbarism and ungodliness. Subsequently in November 1907, a Singapore-based Indian Christian cleric clearly associated the imagery of 'darkness' and 'black' with things 'unchristian'. These were the fundamental symbols on which British imperialism and elitism was based. This is an original argument and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Apart from this simplistic black/white, good/evil symbolism, other developments, particularly in the area of technology played a role in the formulation of perceptions on the part of the British. Daniel Headrick argues that the real triumph of European 'civilisation' was reliant on technology.³⁰⁸ These sentiments were echoed by another Singapore-based Indian Christian Methodist pastor in March 1926, when he argued how, 'the inventions of steamships, the locomotive engine, the manumission of slaves, and the recent invention of electricity, telegraph, telephone and the wireless telegraph'³⁰⁹ showed the 'advanced' nature of western society. Therefore many an imperialist advocate equated technological resilience with superior intellectual capabilities,³¹⁰ and it was this narrow view of civilisation, advancement, superiority or progress that was inculcated over time within the Asian populations of colonial Malaya.

Colonial profitability and the moulding of British public compliance

As a result of the many divergent political views competing for prominence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an element of expediency was vital when trying to fit these often opposing pieces into a workable imperialistic-based puzzle.

³⁰⁸ D. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 4.

³⁰⁹ Rev. S. S. Pakianathan, *The Changing Asiatic Mind*, in *The Malaysia Mission*, Mar. 1926, 36 (6), p. 3.

³¹⁰ Metcalf, 1994, p. 81.

This section will show how such ideas developed over the decades and how they were often adopted or assimilated into the dominant hegemony of the time.

The concept of colonialism was in decline as early as the late eighteenth century. The loss of its North American colonies in 1783 and the popularity of Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature of and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), with its absolute denunciation of the old colonial and 'mercantilism' system, added to its decline in support. Minor uprisings and calls for autonomy in some colonies led to the dissolution of direct rule and the establishment of locally elected assemblies.³¹¹

Competing schools of thought arose from this dilemma. The 'Manchester School' led by Cobden and Bright, viewed colonial entities as a financial burden on the British government especially on issues relating to defence cost.³¹² By the 1860s, opponents of imperialism were overshadowed by changing economic and political circumstances. A lull in the British economy and the loss of supremacy in the commercial and industrial arena illustrated the need for change. In addition a growth in rival powers such as the United States of America, the unified German state and Tzarist Russia posed a threat to Britain's international standing. The move back to neo-mercantilist ideology and an expansionist imperial policy was now imminent.³¹³

Early colonial perceptions on imperialism differed greatly in comparison to the motives associated with it after the 1870s. After the 1870s, racial and societal perceptions were to play a stronger role and were heavily determined by the economic and political advantages they served, rather than the comprehensiveness of the ideas being put forward. In the former period the imperial cause was seen as being more inclined towards humanitarian and evangelical motives. Consequently, concepts of empire was not based on the expansionist model but rather on the idea of colonial cohesion; on using colonies for purposes of British settlement and the restructuring of the imperial relationship.³¹⁴

C. C. Eldridge illustrates this early attitude via popular literature of the day. He argues that the 'tub-thumping jingoism' had been absent from the earlier years. However it

³¹¹ Eldridge, 1996, p. 26.

³¹² Eldridge, 1996, pp. 26-7.

³¹³ Eldridge, 1996, pp. 28-9.

would be a mistake to assume an element of disinterest in the concept of empire. Eldridge goes on to illustrate this point by citing serious domestic novels of the day, and concluded how they, 'provided background colour or light relief, a convenient reason for the entry or exit of characters, a place for banishment or renewal, a utopia where even the unfortunate might prosper.' These elements are incorporated into the works of many writers. References to India are made by Jane Austen (*Sense and Sensibility*), Elizabeth Gaskell (*Cranford*), Charlotte Bronte (*Jane Eyre*), W. M. Thackeray (*Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Mahagan*), and Philip Meadows Taylor (*Confessions of a Thug*, *Seeta*). In fact, the Indian Mutiny of the 1850s spawned a succession of minor novels by George Lawrence (*Maurice Dering*), Sir George Chesney (*The Dilemma*) and James Grant (*First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny*). Even references to Australasia are made by Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, *Pickwick Papers*), Anthony Trollope (*The Three Clerks*, *John Caldigate*), Henry Kingsley (*The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, *The Hillyers and the Burtons*), Charles Reade (*It is Never Too Late to Mend*) and Samuel Butler (*Erewhon*).³¹⁵

'Scientific' Racism

The growing call for a policy of colonialism was a direct response to changing developments in the political and economic global landscape. Imperial objectives were regularly justified with the formulation of new ideologies and theories. Therefore the pseudo-science of 'scientific' racism and 'Aryan' theories arose in conjunction with the need to vindicate, consolidate, socially flatter and placate divergent opinions of British foreign policy in elite circles.³¹⁶ Although the study of Aryanism was fundamentally different from that of 'scientific' racism, which relied on the measure of anatomical features, shape of heads or size of brains; there was a convenient correlation between the two in that each complimented the other.³¹⁷ With recognition and acceptance of government and establishment circles, racial prejudice in Britain by the 1850s, took a more 'respectable' scientific turn with the help of primitive anthropology, craniology, skin spectrometry, linguistics and eugenics.

³¹⁴ Eldridge, 1996, p. 22.

³¹⁵ Eldridge, 1996, pp. 24-5.

³¹⁶ Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 63.

³¹⁷ Metcalf, 1994, p. 82.

In 1783 the term 'Arya' was introduced by Oriental linguist Sir William Jones (1746-1794). It was used to distinguish the speakers of certain Indian languages from others. It was Jones who was the first person to introduce the term 'Arya' into modern European usage. He had used the term precisely; to distinguish between some Indian languages from others. The word 'Arya' simply means 'noble', was Sanskritic in origin and often used to distinguish between Brahmanic Hinduism from other aspects of the religion.

By the early nineteenth century, Jones' work had found a keen following in Prussian philologist circles. This interest was largely the result of the poet Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829) who, together with his wife, learnt the Sanskrit language and later induced his brother August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1844) to do the same. In 1818 August Wilhelm became the first professor of Sanskrit in Europe. For the next few decades the study of Indian philology in Europe was centred at the University of Bonn. Over the next few decades following its popularity, philological studies grew in popularity. In the 1847, the Prussian Minister to Britain, Baron Christian Carl Josias Bunsen (1791-1860), a scholar of German philology, delivered a paper to the British Association at Oxford. In this paper, Bunsen sought to show that all of humankind could be categorised according to languages.³¹⁸ In 1848, a 25-year old protégé of Baron Bunsen, Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900), perpetuated this misinterpretation of the Jones' original linguistic definition of 'Arya' – he associated the term to connote, not only a linguistic, but a racial link, and even gave this new grouping an ancestral home in southern Russia, from where they were supposed to have spread out and conquered lands from that of Northern India to western Europe. Oxford-based Muller, later in life, realising his mistake (Aryan being a family of languages, not a race) tried to make amends in 1888,³¹⁹ by which time it was far too late to arrest its popularity. The appeal and flattery associated with this wrong assertion made it difficult to reintroduce the original definition back into the argument.³²⁰

³¹⁸ J. S. Huxley, A. C. Haddon, A. M. Carr-Saunders, *We Europeans: A Survey of 'Racial' Problems* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1935), pp. 148-9. Thomas Trautmann, 1997, p. 173.

³¹⁹ F. M. Muller, *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas* (London: Longmans Green, 1888), p. 245. Thomas Trautmann, 1997, pp. 172, 183.

³²⁰ Huxley et al, 1935, pp. 147-151. Thomas Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India III.4:*

A French aristocrat, Joseph de Gobineau (1816-1882) was one of the first advocates of the concept of the superior 'Aryan'³²¹ races, an advocate of race-based 'national' histories and racial purity.³²² Gobineau's 1853 work, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* heralded the superiority of the so-called 'Aryan' races and was strongly influential in the later works of French anthropometrist³²³ G. Vacher de Lapouge, which linked the 'Aryan' to the 'Nordic race'. Lapouge took this hypothetical 'race' and ascribed qualities to it such as leadership and initiative to it. According to this hypothesis, when these qualities showed in a scenario, it was attributed to the 'Nordic' elements coming to the fore. Back in Britain, Robert Knox, the author of 'The Races of Man' enhanced the claims of the of Gobineau's initial idea of white superiority over black and brown races. In the following decades scientific racism was to diversify into different branches. For example, Sir Henry Maine, a prominent legal intellectual and H. M. Hyndman, a socialist, opposed British economic policies because of the damaging affect they had on the 'Aryan' social system in India.³²⁴ Oxford Historian and Regius Professor Edward Augustus Freeman preferred to encourage an emphasis on awareness of a racial identity among European 'Aryan' or 'Teutonic' nations.³²⁵

The evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin, published in the 1850s, indirectly boosted concepts of racial superiority. 'Social Darwinism', a theoretical off-shoot of Darwin's theories of evolution, attempted to use evolutionary theory to explain differences in human society. Like Darwin, these theorists utilised the analogy of how animals and plants struggled for existence - resulting in evolutionary change. However the term 'change' was often interpreted as 'development', which in turn insinuated 'progress'. The convenient connotations denoted by the term 'progress' introduced a

Ideologies of the Raj (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 82.

³²¹ J. S. Huxley, *Races of Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), p. 20. Thomas Trautmann, 1997, p. 63.

³²² Huxley, 1939, p. 24.

³²³ The study of the 'science' of race.

³²⁴ Rich, 1986, p. 16, quoting H. Maine, *Village Communities in East and West*, (London: John Murray, 1896), p. 9. H. M. Hyndman, *The Bankruptcy of India*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1886), pp. 9-10. Alan Diamond (ed.), *The Victorian Achievement of Sir Henry Maine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 6. Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism*, (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 25, 127, 259, 271. Hannaford, 1996, pp. 292-293.

³²⁵ Rich, 1986, pp. 16-7. The Teutonic nations, according to Freeman, were the English and the Low Dutch. The rival German nation was conveniently not included. Edward Augustus Freeman (1823-1892) is regarded as one of the most prominent among nineteenth century English historians. Freeman was educated at Oxford, where he was a Fellow of Trinity College, and later Regius Professor of Modern History.

value judgement, where one did not exist before. Therefore Social Darwinists assumed the encouragement of a 'struggle' among human beings might produce social 'progress'.³²⁶ Connotations of racial competition and even warfare were implied giving credence to the domination of a more developed nation over another less developed one. Social Darwinism played a strong part in influencing future theories of social development.

Differing schools of thought in relation to British national identity also came into prominence. One of these proponents was Matthew Arnold who wanted to amalgamate British identity historically to include that of the long excluded Celts. Arnold drew on the stereotyped image of Celtic 'passionate melancholy' and argued that this characteristic helped moderate the English middle-class 'steadying Saxon temperament'. This, he claimed, in turn had a moderating affect on Britons so as to occupy the middle ground in relation to the German and the Welsh.³²⁷ In comparison, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and Anthony Froude (1818-1894) tended to assert a more singular racial base for Britain. Both emphasised the importance of racial 'improvement' and worried that only racial degeneration lay ahead for industrialised Britain. They felt that in order to stop this deterioration, a new almost 'nativist' emphasis on active country lifestyles should be enforced. T. W. Thompson hoped that such a move necessitate a renewal of, 'its mighty youth, bring forth as many millions as it would, and would still have means to breed and rear them strong as the best which she had produced in her early prime.'³²⁸

By the 1860s and 1870s, support for such ideas was strong within the British intelligentsia, and most importantly dovetailed with the growing interests of the pro-imperialist political lobby. Therefore many of the ideas behind scientific racism became a strong influence on British imperialist thought of the period.³²⁹ The schools of thought, though diverging in some aims, were unanimous in one area.³³⁰ The

³²⁶ D. R. Oldroyd, *Darwinian Impacts: An introduction to the Darwinian Revolution*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1980), pp. 212-213.

³²⁷ Rich, 1986, pp. 14, 98-99.

³²⁸ Rich, 1986, p. 15. Thompson, Thomas Walter, *James Anthony Froude on Nation and Empire: A study in Victorian racialism* [Ph.D. thesis, Miami University], (University Microfilms International: Miami University, 1978), p. 187.

³²⁹ Rich, 1986, p. 13.

³³⁰ Metcalf, 1994, p. 82.

intelligentsia and pro-imperialist lobby largely recognised the romantic tradition of the British racial mission. This racial mission became strongly linked with a specifically British brand of imperialism; the notion that British institutions and values were products of Anglo-Saxon tribal institutions and had been carried down through time to spread justice and freedom to other backward parts of the world.³³¹

However by the beginning of the twentieth century the popularity of 'scientific' racism began to lose ground and fall into question. Consensus on the exact classification of scientific racism was never very clear, as illustrated by Henry Maine and especially H. M. Hyndman's opposition to aspects of imperialism in India. H. M. Hyndman (1842-1921) had an interesting viewpoint. Despite being a Marxian socialist, coming from a liberal perspective, he still had a strong belief in Britain's position as an imperial power. He advocated a more equal deal between the colonised states and Britain, and therefore inadvertently condoned the imperialist hegemony of the period.³³² Uday S. Mehta highlights this aspect, which he points out as being more common than usually assumed. Mehta described British 'liberal history' as being 'unmistakably marked by the systematic and sustained political exclusion of various groups and "types"'.³³³

Conflict with scientific race theories began to manifest itself with the racial contradictions in play with regard to the contradictory North European versus North European dynamics of the Boer War. In addition to this there was a strong move towards an Anglo-Saxonist racial ideology that espoused Anglo-Saxon superiority above all other races, and did not necessarily classify itself with the Aryan connotations which had been associated with the Greek, Roman and Teuton analysis of previous racial theorists. By the beginning of the twentieth century, these ideas began to naturally develop and dovetail into the new science of Eugenics.

In conclusion, British racism and patriotism was not a clear cut display of nationalist or racial pride. It had a more deep-seated origin, that which came about as a result of

³³¹ Rich, 1986, p. 13.

³³² Rich, 1986, p. 25. Chushichi Tsuzuki, 1961, pp. 25, 127, 259, 271. Metcalf, 1994, p. 84.

³³³ Uday S. Mehta, *Liberal Strategies of Exclusion*, in F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler (ed.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 59.

feelings of national cultural insecurity and uncertainty. British economic and political dominance began to wane with the rise of other industrialising European powers. Bismarck's Germany grew to dominate continental Europe, Tzarist Russian influence spread over the Balkans, Central and East Asia, and the economic power of the United States was beginning to even threaten that of its former colonial master. Even Japan was undertaking a program of brisk modernisation.³³⁴

British cultural constructs did not solely act within economic and political spheres. It has a deep-seated social origin, probably indicative of a sense of social and cultural insecurity. Examples of this brand of insecurity showed through in a couple of journal articles in a Singapore-based Anglican newspaper, complaining about the social effect of showing footage of the Afro-American Joe Jackson, then world heavy weight boxing champion, defeating a white man and openly receiving the 'congratulations' of English women.³³⁵ This illustrated an open fear of non-white male sexuality, and may even indicated that some British were not confident playing the role of colonial superior.

This element of doubt could also have a deep-seated social origin, probably indicative of a sense of cultural insecurity.³³⁶ The popularity of the Aryan myths epitomised this predicament. Contemporary British history, or for that matter, northern European history, did not have a strong standing among the 'classical' civilisations.

'Civilisation' was a concept that originated in Greece, Rome and with the biblical Hebrews. By the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this was widened to include Egypt, India and Asia Minor.³³⁷ Countries like Great Britain were by far late comers into the arena. By assuming these civilisations were directly or indirectly influenced by European elements or types, these theories flattered British (and northern European) sentimentalities, and played an influential role in the rise of emerging nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore by identifying or associating themselves with older cultures and civilisations, it allowed the British a boost to their collective identity. A case in point is James Bryce's *The Ancient Roman*

³³⁴ Eldridge, 1996, p. 4. D. K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires*, (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 191, 208.

³³⁵ *Monthly Paper, St. Andrew's Cathedral*, (Singapore), F. G. Swindell (ed.), August 1915.

³³⁶ Eldridge, 1996, p. 4.

³³⁷ Hannaford, 1996, p. 236

Empire and the British Empire in India: The diffusion of Roman and English Law throughout the World, published in 1914.

British cultural hostilities to non-‘Aryan’ South India

Along with the development of scientific racism and the pseudo theories of Aryanism, a corresponding discourse hostile to non-‘Aryan’ South India was also developing. Within India, the biological definitions of being Aryan often proved contentious to the British colonialist. If Indians were Aryans, as were their British masters, how could Indians be specifically marked as being inferior? Consequently explanations for the disparity had to be found. This was answered by an amateur ethnologist and civil servant George Campbell. Since its introduction several decades before, Darwinian concepts and the relationship between race and language became more arbitrary and contingent. Consequently by 1893, Campbell surmised how among humans this was usually epitomised by the ‘degeneration’ of the race. Thus, while the British Aryan had progressed by leaps and bounds, the Indian Aryan stagnated as a result of their decline in racial purity via the ‘intermingling with the aboriginal races, and the innate decay of enervation by the climate.’³³⁸

The theory assumed that as the Aryans first settled India, they migrated further south of the sub-continent and came into contact with the non-Aryan Dravidians and Turanians. Dravidian and Turanian are actually language groups, however in keeping the British preoccupation with biological and racial linkages both groups were analysed as such. Dravidian was the major language grouping of South India, while the Turanian was loosely used to describe the speakers of non-Aryan, non-Semitic languages, of the Ural-Altai derivation.³³⁹ Consequently, as the ‘men of the stronger race (*Aryan*) took to themselves the women of the weaker’ (*Dravidian and Turanian*) this lessened the level of Aryan blood in the general Indian population.³⁴⁰

Campbell’s hypothesis essentially delineated between the superior Aryan and the inferior Dravidian. It put the blame for India’s collective decline to the racial impurity necessitated via the intermingling of the inferior South Indian elements into what was

³³⁸ Metcalf, 1994, p. 83, citing George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career*, Vol. 1, (London, 1893), pp. 46-47.

³³⁹ Metcalf, 1994, p. 83.

essentially a superior northern bloodline. Other areas in which Dravidian and Turanian had a strong corrupting influence on the Aryan north were that of caste. Herbert Risley (1851-1911), another civil servant, Director of Indian Ethnography and 1901 census commissioner,³⁴¹ claimed in 1915 that the concept of caste evolved as a result of the 'stress' of contact with non-Aryans as well as the absorption of non-Aryan superstitions.³⁴²

Even architecture, one of the areas in which South India historically excelled, was ridiculed. In 1876, historian James Fergusson emphasised that all Dravidian and Turanian architects sort to do was to 'display his powers of ornamentation, and he thought he had accomplished all his art demanded when he covered every part of his building with the most elaborate and difficult designs he could invent'.³⁴³ Fergusson used the logic of racial decline, and was therefore much more scathing of more modern structures than he was of earlier ones. This view was also echoed by George Birdwood, a patron of Indian art in Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Birdwood claimed that Turanian influences had stifled the creative spirit of the Aryan art form.³⁴⁴

Although there is little evidence to prove that these ideas were well-known within Indian circles in Malaya or the Straits Settlements, such negative knowledge, interwoven with other anti non-Aryan racial myths would have become common knowledge among many South Indians, especially those educated in colonial education system. During the course of research, most subjects interviewed were aware of the non-Aryan status of the Dravidian, and were to varying degrees, embarrassed about it. Such ideas would have grated against the collective identity of many South Indians, and it is therefore not surprising to note at approximately the same time counter arguments were beginning to be put forward by South Indian and even some Malayan-based Christian groups. 'Dravidian Nationalism' will be discussed later in this study.

³⁴⁰ Metcalf, 1994, p. 84.

³⁴¹ Trautmann, 1997, p. 198. Sir Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (London: W. Thacker and Co., 1915), p. ix.

³⁴² Metcalf, 1994, p. 86, citing Herbert Risley, *The People of India*, (London, 1915).

³⁴³ Metcalf, 1994, p. 87, citing James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, (London, 1876), pp. 10-12, 34-47.

³⁴⁴ Metcalf, 1994, p. 88.

Liberalism and its co-existence with colonialism

Liberalism championed the importance of personal freedom and tolerance, and was often willing to empower government to attain these goals. Since the eighteenth century liberal theory had long been transcultural, transracial and transhistorical, however by the nineteenth century, and especially with the rise of imperialism, liberal traditions were marred by a departure from its previously culturally neutral tradition. This conflict between the principles of imperialism and liberal traditions were bound to surface. Consequently there was a considerable shift away from the liberal ideals of Locke and Hobbes. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) were two prominent and influential examples.

Throughout the period of imperialism, no colony caught the imagination of imperialist Britain more than that of its largest 'jewel in the crown' - India. It played a continued role in the theoretical imagination of most nineteenth century political thinkers in Britain. This list included John Stuart Mill, Edmund Burke, Jeremy Bentham, Sir Charles Grant, the Trevelyan, Walter Bagehot, Thomas Carlyle³⁴⁵ and James Bryce.

Whilst pulling the imperialist bandwagon, Bentham noted in his work, 'Essay on the Influence of Time and Place in Matters of Legislation', that human nature was unchanging and that nationality was manifest. In John Stuart Mill's essay, 'On Liberty', Mill places three qualifiers on the principles of liberty. Firstly, it applies only to mature adults, as opposed to the 'child-like' nature of some countries. Secondly, and with reference to the first point, liberal principles did not apply to 'backward' societies. And lastly, a society must not be in a state of war or civil turmoil. Hence Mill observed, 'Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable to being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate to find one.'³⁴⁶

Mill also categorised political development into stages. Firstly recognising those states occupied by populations of similar 'blood and language' and 'similar civilisation to

³⁴⁵ Mehta, 1997, p. 71.

³⁴⁶ Mehta, 1997, p. 75.

the ruling country. And secondly noting the state's capability and readiness for representative government: such as the British possessions in North America and Australia.³⁴⁷ Other stages included possessions like India and the Malayan archipelago. Mill highlighted the difference in civilisation, language, culture and race, and opposed the introduction of democratic institutions into these states. He emphasised that authoritarian rule was necessary and that rule of 'barbarous or semi-barbarous' peoples was, for them, simply 'a choice of despotisms'. J. S. Mill argued;

The ruling country ought to be able to do for its subjects all that could be done by a succession of absolute monarchs, guaranteed by irresistible force against the precariousness of tenure attendant on barbarous despotisms, and qualified by their genius to anticipate all that experience has taught to the more advanced nation.³⁴⁸

Policy in regards to the Malay archipelago was viewed as an appendage to British India. Any political decision or policy that was deemed successful in India qualified itself for introduction to the Malay states and the Straits Settlements. Along with the work of William Marsden, Michael Symes, Thomas Stamford Raffles and John Crawfurd, direct links can be made with regard to the development of political approaches to the justification of British colonialism over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one political and legal theorist, Viscount James Bryce, appears to have had a direct influence on the formulation of developmental and race policy in colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements.

James Bryce: Moderate and pragmatic racist

Viscount James Bryce (1838-1922) was a liberal scholar, traveler, politician, and diplomat. Bryce was also an important and influential apologist for imperial policy overseas.³⁴⁹ His analysis was not so much based on fact but more on the practicalities of justifying the status quo of British power and business interests overseas. The

³⁴⁷ Mehta, 1997, pp. 76, 77.

³⁴⁸ Metha, 1997, p. 76, citing J. S. Mill, *Representative Government*, p. 409.

³⁴⁹ Apart from imperial policy, he also addressed general issues, with which the British government had a strong interest in. Consequently, in 1914, he published *Neutral Nations and the War*, which was an

concepts on which he based this were not new or original. In many ways his work was a synthesis incorporating the assumptions behind 'scientific' racism and the continued social/political and economic alienation of the colonised, while conveniently elevating the status of the British hegemony to that of almost mythical proportions. This is seen in his attempt to compare modern British imperial exploits with that of the ancient Roman state; hence his book, *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India*.³⁵⁰

What made Bryce different from his Victorian contemporaries was his belief in the role that relationships played in race relations. At a time when fellow academics made broad and sweeping assumptions based on race *per se*, Bryce was analysing circumstances from a cultural rather than economic perspective with regards to problems relating to racial relationships. He did amalgamate the assumption of racial superiority from scientific racism into his own cultural analysis, but used it mainly to justify the existence of 'superior' and 'subject' positions of different races.³⁵¹ Consequently he supported the British Raj's heavy handed despotic rule as necessary since Hindus and Muslims, according to him, had never experienced self-government beyond 'a scale larger than a Village Council'.³⁵²

Bryce strongly believed that economic forces in the imperial world, which had hitherto brought divergent peoples and nations together, would eventually mesh into a single global system. To explain this he often used familiar class-based analogies understandable to Victorian Britons;

all mankind is fast becoming one people, in which the hitherto backward nations are taking a place analogous to that which the unskilled workers have held in each one of the civilised nations.³⁵³

effort on his part to garner support for the British government and its allies. Viscount James Bryce, *Neutral Nations and the War*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914).

³⁵⁰ James Bryce, *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India: The diffusion of Roman and English Law throughout the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914).

³⁵¹ Bryce, vol. I, 1921, pp. 41, 59, 60, 74. Bryce, vol. II, 1921, p. 550.

³⁵² Rich, 1986, p. 22.

³⁵³ Rich, 1986, p. 21.

The usage of a class analogy is an interesting one, since British racial prejudices had the same dynamic structures as that of their domestic class prejudices.³⁵⁴ This approach worked in a two-fold process. Firstly within the British context, by placing the working classes in a position one step higher to that of the developing colonies. Secondly, by justifying the 'second class' status of the colony/colonial subject by claiming such status was a necessary learning step toward full development.

In addition to this, Bryce was aware of the rising popularity of Marxist 'class' analysis to explain the disparity in British capitalist society, which strongly differentiated the 'working' proletariat and the 'ruling' elites.³⁵⁵ However, by replacing the concept of class with that of race and culture, it could be argued that Bryce was making an attempt at changing the political agenda by uniting otherwise conflicting British societal interest. Bryce emphasised a shared cultural and racial identity, and redirected unresolved hostilities at foreign non-British peoples.³⁵⁶

It is interesting to note Bryce's usage of the terms 'backward' and 'advanced'. These terms were regularly used in the Victorian context to explain the different sociological behaviour derived from Darwin's concept associated with the 'survival of the fittest'. However when Bryce puts his analysis into a global context, he paints a picture of conflict between different 'races' (with differing physical and mental capacities). He illustrated this point at a lecture in Oxford in 1902, which he said;

Either the weaker race dies out before the stronger, or it is absorbed into the stronger, the latter remaining practically unaffected, or the two become commingled into something different from what either was before, or, finally, the two continue to dwell together unmixed, each preserving a character of its own.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Eldridge, 1996, p. 144. J. A. Mangan (ed.), *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial images and education in the British colonial experience*, (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 12-13.

³⁵⁵ Viscount James Bryce, *Modern Democracies, Vol. II*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 549.

³⁵⁶ Bryce was naturally hostile to the concept of Communism, being a real threat to capitalist hegemony. Bryce, vol. II, 1921, pp. 642-656.

³⁵⁷ Rich, 1986, p. 22 citing J. Bryce, *The Relations of Advanced and the Backward Races of Mankind*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1902), p. 10.

Parts of Bryce's analysis relied on strong gender overtones, making a distinct delineation between that of the male 'aggressor' and 'passive' femininity. He took particular pride in the fact that British imperial exploits largely came about due to its military might and aggression.³⁵⁸ To reaffirm this stance he later described his admirable recognition of the military prowess of the Marathas and Sikhs while also denigrating the militarily 'feeble' Bengalis and Tamils.³⁵⁹

In a way Bryce could be described as the acceptable face of late nineteenth and early twentieth century racism. He did not outwardly espouse the academically vague assumptions of 'Aryan' or 'Nordic' superiority, but still maintained and justified British superiority on the basis of a much more plausible element for that period in time, that of culture.³⁶⁰ His advocacy of the existence of 'superior' and 'subject' races dovetailed with the aims and objectives of British imperialism.

Bryces' intellectual legacy to colonial Malaya

British imperialism can be separated into two phases. The first was marked by perceptions of superiority, not only in comparison to all non-white peoples, but also with other European nations. The second phase began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This phase was influenced by the changing balance of power between Britain and other imperialist European nations. Influences from the earlier phase helped solidify British public support for what has been termed the 'ideology of imperialism'.

This new style of imperialism, while not overtly emphasising the blatantly racial theories of 'scientific' racism prevalent in the first phase, still encompassed its general

³⁵⁸ James Bryce, *The Roman and the British Empires*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914), pp. 8-9.

³⁵⁹ James Bryce, 1914, p. 11. Other British contemporaries had drawn similar gender related stereotypes see, George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career, vol. I*, (London, 1893), pp. 59, 194-195, cited in Metcalf, 1994, p. 84. Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 202. Aihwa Ong, 'Chinese Modernities: Narratives of Nation and of Capitalism' in Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (ed.), *Unground Empires: The cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 183. This idea was adopted by modern post-colonial leaders such as Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew. Lee reworked these ideas using the imagery of 'hard virility' versus 'soft femininity'.

³⁶⁰ His ideas coexisted with that of Marx, which unlike his, depended heavily on economic factors to explain relationships of the different classes. This could be a purposeful attempt on Bryce's part to detract from the damaging affect 'class' analysis had on the capitalist system on which the wealth of imperial Britain was based on.

aims of economic, political and military dominance in colonial pursuits. Significant in the development of this new imperialism was the advent of large-scale capitalism and the manipulation of ethnicity for maximisation of profit.³⁶¹

In light of these developments, British policy mirrored the intellectual ideology prevalent in the British establishment of the day. It is therefore not surprising to find Viscount Bryces' concepts of 'superior'/'subject', 'backward'/'advanced' utilised in British colonial policies of Malaya. British policy towards colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements relied on the assumption that economic growth within the capitalist economy was synonymous with economic/social development and political stability. Therefore economic growth only took place in sectors of the economy described as 'modern' since European investment was only attracted to this sector. In addition to this, it was assumed that the working population in the 'modern' sector were motivated by considerations of economic rationality and achievement. In contrast other sectors of the economy, notably the 'traditional' or 'subsistence' sectors, were regarded as 'backward'. Communities engaged in these economies were supposedly motivated by value orientations which emphasised the importance of leisure as opposed to achievement motivation. Significantly, this view placed the cause of so-called 'underdevelopment' in the 'backward' sector itself as due to the inability of 'traditional' communities to integrate themselves into the modes of the 'modern' economy.³⁶²

Bryce's analysis was heavily used in colonial policy. His concept of 'advanced'/'backward' or 'active'/'passive', is mirrored in the Malayan colonial government's identification of 'backward' agricultural-based economies (of the Malay communities) as opposed to the 'modern' city-based capitalist economy, which was epitomised by British and Chinese businesses. Likewise, 'backward' economies were driven by cultural elements which were important to each racial community. The 'backward' Malay community was based on the value orientation of leisure and other non-capitalist pursuits. The Chinese community were culturally motivated by capitalist-based aims and therefore more 'advanced'.

³⁶¹ C. Abraham, *The Roots of Race Relations in Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Institute for Social Analysis, 1997), p. 35.

³⁶² Abraham, 1997, p. 228.

Other aspects of British imperialism discussed in Bryces' work dealt with the British right to rule outright despite the belief in equality for all in law.³⁶³ A belief that racial and cultural disposition overrode influences from one's environment,³⁶⁴ and that autocratic rule was culturally acceptable to colonial entities which inadvertently justified British adoption of heavy-handed and paternalistic methods of government.³⁶⁵ This view was already prevalent in the nineteenth century and alluded to by the likes of Benjamin Disraeli, Edmund Burke and A. Carhill. For example, Disraeli showed an explicit preference for the 'Rights of Englishmen' over the more universalistic 'rights of man'.³⁶⁶

In conclusion, the British put themselves in a position of power, by emphasising attitudinal and cultural differences and mixing this in with rhetoric of cooperation and mutual prosperity - under whose tutorage all communities, 'backward' or 'advanced', would benefit under British colonial leadership.

British racism reinterpreted in Malaya

The large influx of new immigrants immediately created new economic opportunities in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Politically and economically, the British did maintain a degree of stability which contributed to a general climate of economic optimism with new immigrants from China and India. However it must be remembered that much of this civil turmoil or economic depression experienced in China or India were the direct or indirect result of European or British intervention.

Racism in the Southeast Asian region should not be seen as a natural development of colonialism. In the fifteenth and sixteenth century, European traders did not attribute any stereotypical ideas of behaviour to local communities. By and large, even the colonial Portuguese and Dutch only ruled small pockets of the Malay archipelago, and therefore found it essential to engage, on an equal footing, with many local trading

³⁶³ Bryce, 1914, pp. 41-43, 46, 47.

³⁶⁴ Bryce, vol. II, 1921, p. 550.

³⁶⁵ Bryce, vol. II, 1921, p. 545. James Bryce, *The Relations of the Backward and Advanced Races of Mankind*, (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1902), pp. 38-39.

³⁶⁶ Mehta, 1997, p. 62.

groups and populations.³⁶⁷ However colonial power relations changed under the British rule. At this juncture, it is important to note that in the 'new' environment of Malaya, the British effectively exploited their status as 'conduit' between the different communities by channeling all community deliberations through themselves. In addition to this, British reinforced, through its paternalistic policies, what Lily Rahim has termed the cultural deficit thesis.³⁶⁸ The colonial governmental analysis of Asian 'inferiority' justified a whole range of views which affirmed its continued ideological stand on its racial dominance.³⁶⁹ Under these special conditions, Asian communities living in the colonies were firstly expected to look upon the British colonialist as the ruling power - a status maintained largely by their position as owners of capital and administrators.³⁷⁰ Social (racial), economic and political authority dissipated after the Second World War. With the defeat of the British by the Japanese, many formerly 'servile' communities (such as in estates) were less willing to accept the 'natural' authority of the European.

Under such circumstances, despite the Britishers' small population, socio-economic and political power was exclusively in their hands - a point which was in no doubt appreciated to a large degree by the Asian communities. Generally Europeans enjoyed a high standing in the collective minds of non-white communities and enjoyed much higher pay and entitlements (this point is discussed at length in Chapter Two).³⁷¹ British as colonial administrators and the controllers of capital, enjoyed an enhanced position in the minds of many. The British for that matter, had already made an impact on Indian and Chinese immigrants before many had even set foot in Malaya or the

³⁶⁷ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, (London, Frank Cass, 1977), p. 22.

³⁶⁸ Lily Rahim, *The Singapore Dilemma: The political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 3-4.

³⁶⁹ Alatas, 1977, pp. 18-19. Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 95.

³⁷⁰ R. Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*, (New York, Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 30. Kashnor Johan, *The Emergence of the Modern Malay Administrative Elite*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 157. L. E. Curtis, *Egypt, Burma and British Malaya*, (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1905), pp. 388-9.

³⁷¹ Johan, 1984, p. 148, sourced from C. W. Harrison, *The Government Services in British Malaya*, (London: London Information Agency, 1929), p29, enclosure in CO 273/634. *The Singapore Diocesan Magazine*, (Anglican Church), February 1931, p. 31. *St Andrew's Cathedral* (Anglican Church), August 1915. *Interview of Benjamin Ponnuthurai Alfreds*, (transcript of recorded interview) National Archives of Singapore, (undated, probably early 1980s), p. 206. R. Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 30. *Minutes of the Woman's Conference of Malaysia Mission held at Singapore, January 10th to 16th 1914*, (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, 1914), p. 23.

Straits Settlements. Many a South Chinese migrant, would have been aware of the powerful interests the British and other European nations had in nineteenth century China. They were aware of British (or at least European) financial and military authority, and as the Chinese 'Boxer Rebellion' showed, were often embittered by it. Similarly in South India, the British imperial presence was just as strong.

Conclusion

Cultural constructs utilised in Britain were strongly reliant on economic, political and social factors. Political and economic developments served to justify the British establishment's position as a colonial and economic power. These developments influenced other aspects of empire, especially in the shaping of a sense of cultural consciousness, a consciousness that was used to appease contradictions of imperial despotic rule in the colonies, and diverged from the much lauded 'democratic' tradition of the British ruling elites.³⁷²

The development of racial theories in Britain and the rest of Europe had a strong impact on colonies like Malaya. The creation and use of cultural constructs by the British influenced colonised communities in their own cultural viewpoints. This was especially so among communities exposed to British ideas, and this was done mainly through the English language education system. This will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Four.

The new immigrant communities of Malaya and the Straits Settlements were transient in nature, and development of a socio-economic or political reliance on other immigrant communities would not have been feasible. These new and inexperienced migrant communities operated by and large, as entities with only sporadic contact being made with other communities or persons from time to time. This was especially so among the working classes where few means of communication (language) or commonalities in employment were encouraged. What became popularly known as the 'divide and rule' tactic, was practised not only with the labour classes but even with the generally more affluent middle-classes as well.

³⁷² Bryce, 1921, pp. 545, 550. Rich, 1986, p. 13.

K. S. Sandhu highlighted the unwillingness of the British colonialist to allow any one ethnic grouping absolute dominance in the economy. In the rural sector, the encouragement of the already expanding Chinese population was seen as unwise. It was understood that it was 'by no means desirable to let the Chinese obtain too exclusive a possession of the Peninsula'³⁷³. The casting of the Indian component into the equation was considered a prudent step in this direction. Likewise, G. D. Ness argues how 'foreign' business always advocated the use of Chinese in sales while on the other hand encouraged the use of Indians as bookkeepers and accountants. The rationale being 'enmity between the Indians and the Chinese is said to prevent collusion' which could have been harmful to the firm.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ G. D. Ness, *Bureaucracy and Rural Development in Malaysia*, (California: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 48-9. K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya, 1786-1957*, (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1969), p. 58 - with reference to CO 273, 2 (1858-9), 4.2.1858; 6 (1863-4).

³⁷⁴ Ness, 1967, pp. 48-9.

Chapter 5

Conforming to Colonial Hegemonies, 1900-1941

This chapter will look at the socio-economic and political orientation of the Indian Christian communities and how these viewpoints were perpetuated under the influence of British colonialism. It will examine how the adoption of colonial hegemony was achieved, the different guises it assumed in urban and rural landscapes and how different ethnic communities were isolated in a classic example of colonial 'divide and rule'.

This chapter will also examine influences affecting collective self-perception and how the issue of 'race' was utilised to separate ethnic communities and bolster the superior status of the ruling colonial elites. It will also examine colonial influences regarding 'backwardness' and 'progressiveness' and their influence in the construction and adoption of Christian names. Finally this chapter will also examine the colonial government's attitudes toward and use of the education system (rural and urban) and the way it was employed to manipulate public opinion.

Learning subservience: The use of social distance

This study has shown how race and cultural difference were utilized to justify its own dominant stand of the colonial government – as espoused in the writings of James Bryce.³⁷⁵ Theories of 'scientific racism', if not absorbed via educational channels, were most certainly conveyed by other means - usually by way of socio-economic and political structures in colonial society.

The colonial British made it a point to maintain a substantial social distance from their colonial subjects. The high status of the Britisher (and European) was clearly defined by social conventions all communities were honor-bound or compelled to adhere to. C. W. Harrison, a former colonial civil servant wrote of life in Malaya as being, 'strict and very necessarily so in a country where the British public servant lives a very

³⁷⁵ James Bryce, *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India: The diffusion of Roman and English Law throughout the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914). James Bryce,

conspicuous life, constantly under the acute observation of its Asiatic inhabitants'. Harrison was keenly aware of the British status as 'ruling trustees', and noted 'persons above the weaknesses common to other human kind and vested with a peculiar uprightness, whose operation may be very inconvenient for some individuals but is of the utmost benefit to the whole community.'³⁷⁶ Illustrating this point, objections were raised in an Anglican-based periodical in 1915 as to the relevance of showing 'pictures of a famous coloured Boxer defeating a white man and receiving the congratulations of English ladies?'. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, concern was voiced within official circles as to the effect of cinema on the local Asian communities - especially since the content of these films 'laid bare the worst sides of the life of the white man'.³⁷⁷

It is therefore not surprising to note how the British colonial community 'marginalised' itself into living above and outside colonialised society. By limiting interaction and creating a social, political and economic distance between themselves and their colonial subjects, they helped mythologise themselves in the minds of many.³⁷⁸

In order to maintain this social distance from Asian communities the British found it imperative their own salary levels remained high, in order to sustain an expensive, hence exclusive standard of living.³⁷⁹ Malaya and the Straits Settlements in the 1920s were described as a 'country where every kind of social entertainment goes on continually'. 'Dinner parties, bridge parties, picnics, both bathing and dry land, race meetings, games of all kinds and the clubs ensure that anyone who has taste for a lively life amongst his or her fellows need never have a dull moment.'³⁸⁰

Modern Democracies, vol. I, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), pp. 41, 59, 60, 74. James Bryce, *Modern Democracies*, vol. II, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 550.

³⁷⁶ K. Johan, *The Emergence of the Modern Malay Administrative Elite*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 148, citing C. W. Harrison, *The Government Services in British Malaya*, (London Information Agency, 1929), p. 29, enclosure in CO 273/634.

³⁷⁷ *Monthly Paper, St. Andrew's Cathedral*, F. G. Swindell (ed.), Singapore, August 1915. John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, (Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 171.

³⁷⁸ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 20. Tan Beng Hui, 'Controlling Women's Bodies: The Use of Women and Girls' Protection Legislation in Colonial Malaya (c. 1860s-1940s)', (Kuala Lumpur: unpublished, 1999), p. 36.

³⁷⁹ John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 92.

³⁸⁰ Johan, 1984, p. 157, citing C. W. Harrison, *The Government Services in British Malaya*, (London Information Agency, 1929), p. 15, enclosure in CO 273/634. Leopold Ainsworth, *The Confessions of a*

The high lifestyle was not confined to the upper echelons of the British hierarchy. Junior British officers were expected to throw 'large dinner parties with champagne and other extravagances', and 'great balls in stately surroundings given as official or semi-official entertainment, through the affairs of five to six hundred people at the large clubs down to *thes dansants* in the afternoon and small dances at people's own houses. Manila bands of fifteen or twenty players provided the music and play very well.'³⁸¹ Many in the Asian and especially in the Indian Christian communities looked upon this luxurious lifestyle in awe – with some attempting to emulate it themselves. In turn, Asian urban middle class communities were notorious for their lack of financial foresight and savings. For example, in a Singapore-based government inquiry held in 1923 it was noted how most clerical workers were 'very improvident' with their earnings.³⁸²

Even during the brief Japanese Occupation (1942-45) these artificial social parameters between colonialiser and colonised were not wholly adhered to. For example, it was well known that a British official never set foot in the household of a subordinate Asian employee.³⁸³ However during the Japanese Occupation, despite the obvious power discrepancies existing within a militarily occupied state, it was rather commonplace to hear of Japanese officers accepting social invitations to their non-Japanese (but Asian) homes.³⁸⁴ Even Charles Gamba, little over a decade after the Japanese Occupation, noted how there were less perceived differences between

Planter in Malaya, (London: H. F. and G. Witherby, 1933), pp. 182-3.

³⁸¹ Johan, 1984, pp. 149, 160, citing *Minute by Edward Gent*, 4 Nov. 1929, CO 273/559.

³⁸² *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, pp. 24, 27. *Petition of C. S. Paul*, 612/50007, 1936, CO 273. Interview with Mr. David Sebastian, (born 1931), Singapore, Aug. 1996. Interview with V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 27 Jan. 1997. There was a strong awareness of this, on the part of the clerical fraternity. A 1919 government enquiry noted that the 'absence of a Provident Fund' (superannuation scheme) was one of the main grievances of government subordinate clerical staff. *Reports of the Committee appointed by H. E. The Governor of the Straits Settlements and the High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States to Enquire into, and report on, the salaries paid to officers of the General Clerical Services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States*, (Kuala Lumpur: F. M. S. Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 6.

³⁸³ This practice was mimicked by Indian estate clerical staffers with regards to Indian estate workers. It persisted right up to the 1960s. Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick, (born 1938), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

³⁸⁴ Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. This was particularly so for Kuala Lumpur-based railway staff. Some interviewees spoke of the fondness many Japanese officers had for young children. Interview with Ms. Margaret Joseph, (born 1926), Kuala Lumpur, 18 Oct. 1997. Interview with Philip Wee Peng Leng (1906-1991), Singapore, Mar. 1982 (In Teochew and English). Interview with Mrs. Margory van der Klooster (nee Wee), (born 1932), Singapore, Oct. 1999.

employer and employee; 'The civil servant and his Japanese master ate the same food, went to many of the same places regardless of class and race'.³⁸⁵

A chasm was purposely created to epitomize the opulent lifestyles of the colonial British, and to a large extent illustrated the social, economic and political disparities between that of the British and Asian communities. This entrenched political bias existed in all aspects of colonial officialdom and the education curriculum, and was bolstered by an inferiority complex (to varying degrees) within most Asian communities. Lily Rahim refers to this complex as the 'cultural deficit' hypothesis.³⁸⁶ Used in the context of this study, it illustrates how colonialism used Asian community insecurities against themselves.

Urban communities: The Benevolent guise of colonialism

Another aspect which has consistently appeared in many interviews, was the almost unanimous belief in, and admiration of, a British sense of 'fair-play'. The British believed in their own superiority which placed all others as, 'people to be taught, governed albeit fairly and wisely but never treated as equals.'³⁸⁷ With this in mind they projected an unrealistic picture of their own moral rectitude which gained the jaundiced admiration of many an awe-struck urban Christian Indian.

The British supposedly personified an instinct for discipline and integrity. This 'civilised' approach was an effective ploy on the part of the British in psychologically castrating possible challenges to its colonial status quo. Consequently for many urban Indian Christians, direct action, even non-violent direct action as espoused by the Indian nationalist Mohandas K. Gandhi, was seen as being too militant. Hence many believed that 'justice' under colonialism could be achieved - in a sober, level-headed and fair manner; thus emulating the perceived example of its colonial masters.³⁸⁸ It was often said that one could trust in the 'British word'.³⁸⁹ This degree of subjugation

³⁸⁵ Charles Gamba, *The Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya: A Study in Colonial Labour Unrest*, (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press Ltd., 1962), p. 71. Gamba noted that some elements of racial elitism still existed, as with seating in public transport and access to consumer goods.

³⁸⁶ Lily Z. Rahim, *The Singapore Dilemma*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 50.

³⁸⁷ Yvonne Quah, *We Remember: Cameos of pioneer life*, (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1988), p. 72.

³⁸⁸ Interview with Mr. B. Norman Nathan, (born 1940), Petaling Jaya, 22 Oct. 1997. This was discussed in relation to the influences of his father, a pioneer Malayan Trade Unionist, X. E. Nathan (1916-1977).

³⁸⁹ Johan, 1984, p. 150.

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³⁸⁹ Johan, 1984, p. 150.

appeared to attain ridiculous heights in the rarified political atmosphere of the First World War. The intensely pro-British Ceylonese-Tamil community actually purchased and presented a fighter-plane, the 'Jaffna', to the British government! A Mr. K. Nagamuttu, a surveyor, donated his entire pension to the British government.³⁹⁰ This was followed by a pledge of 'loyalty and devotion' towards the British cause in the war.³⁹¹ Another similar initiative was led by Mr. K. K. Benjamin, president of the Selangor Indian Association in 1939. The 'Selangor Indian Patriotic Fund Committee' raised almost \$50,000 in Singapore and Selangor alone.³⁹²

Liberalism and draconian colonial rule sat uneasily, side by side, in the colonies. Partha Chatterjee notes a decline in liberal Benthamism and evangelism following the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Theorists such as James Fitzjames Stephens and Henry Maine were intent on changing the perceived sentimental bent existent within colonial policy at the time. According to J. F. Stephens, colonial government was under no obligation to incorporate subordinate/colonialised views into its institutions.³⁹³ However even in the first decades of the twentieth century, this liberal perception persisted among many Asian communities. Many believed colonial structures were not unjustifiably prejudiced. While such issues were often beyond the analytical scope of many non-Europeans, avenues for so-called self-criticism within British power-structures helped placate and mute local discontent - reinstating non-European belief in the inherent justice and democratic principles of British colonialism. This 'soft' approach, as opposed to whipping up controversy with an outright censure, permitted opposition views to be heard in a controlled public arena, then allowed to die away over time. For example from December 1911 to April 1912, a series of parliamentary questions were brought up by Scottish Liberal MP Alexander MacCullum Scott³⁹⁴ in Westminster pertaining to the exclusive recruitment of military and police staff of 'European

³⁹⁰ S. Durai Raja Singam, *A Hundred Years of Ceylonese in Malaysia and Singapore 1867-1967*, (Singapore: S. Singam, 1968, p. 116.

³⁹¹ 'All India and Ceylonese Mass Meeting, 1918', 3 Aug. 1918, CO 273, V. 469/49643.

³⁹² Michael Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case*, (Queensland: University of Queensland, 1980), p. 59. Apart from showing enthusiastic support, it is interesting to note how such a pledge was keen to emphasise the 'unity' of the otherwise feuding Ceylonese Tamil and Indian Tamil communities. It thus seemed more of a political tactic than a genuine outpouring of patriotic fervour.

³⁹³ Chatterjee, 1995, pp.19-20.

³⁹⁴ 'MacCullum Scott Papers', in *Glasgow University Library Special Collections*, Reference Code: GB 247, accessed 19 July 2001, <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/collection/maccallum.html>.

descent of both sides' and why Asians were excluded from this process.³⁹⁵ The Straits Times editorialised on the issue (supporting the ban on 'Asiatics') and there was a mild flurry of letters to the editor and a series of questions put to the Legislative Council by Mr. Tan Jiak Kim on the 9th of February 1912.³⁹⁶ The issue appeared to have stirred up strong feelings on both sides, especially among those in the expatriate British community.³⁹⁷ The issue began to die down by mid-1912, with no further mention in the pro-government press or political action by the colonial government.

A similar situation had developed in the Bengal region in 1882. An anomaly in the law disallowed Indian magistrates from hearing cases involving Europeans had come to light. The viceroy at the time, a liberal, correctly initiated the redressing of the issue in favour of the Indian magistrates. However there ensued a massive non-official European backlash to the new legislation. The law was then struck off.³⁹⁸ Authorities were obviously aware of the consequences of acting on such issues and by the early twentieth century preferred to ignore it.³⁹⁹

Benjamin Ponnuthurai Alfreds, a clerical officer with the Royal Air Force in Singapore from the 1940s, tells of an incident when he found himself defending an old Eurasian employee who had managed to get in trouble with his British superiors. In this instance, Alfreds pleaded on the 'old man's' behalf directly to the Base Commander. The Commander agreed to hear the case again but insisted that 'I shall not change my mind'. The 'old man' was interviewed by the Commander, and as instructed by Alfreds, broke down and cried. This show of emotion 'shocked' the British Commander. Feeling uneasy about the circumstances, he quickly got Alfreds to take the man out and console him. Alfreds then hypothesizes on the incident.

³⁹⁵ 'Parliament questions on racial conditions in the F. M. S.', in *A Select List of files of the office of the High Commissioner for the Malay States held by Arkib Negara Malaysia 1897-1942*, Arkib Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 135/1912.

³⁹⁶ In the previous month a protest meeting organised by non-Europeans, had been curiously postponed with no provisions for an alternative date. 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Legislative Council, Straits Settlements', Singapore, No. 1, 9 Feb. 1912, p. A2.

³⁹⁷ One of the organisers of the abandoned public meeting, E. W. Goonaratne, was later assaulted by a disgruntled Britisher - whether there was a connection to the planned meeting, is not clear. Straits Civil Service: Non-European protest meeting to be postponed', *Straits Times*, 27 Jan. 1912: p. 10. Thanks to Patrick Ferry for collating this information from the Menzies library, Australian National University.

³⁹⁸ Chatterjee, 1995, pp. 20-21.

³⁹⁹ *Straits Times*, 10 Feb. 1912, p. 10.

That's the Englishman. Where there is opportunity for you to go and represent your case Play them in their own card. You (the British) taught us how to talk, you taught us how to be loyal, we are playing you in the same card. We know you are sympathetic.⁴⁰⁰

Alfreds basically understood the so-called 'British' sympathies of his Base Commander and played on them.

As early as the 1860's European unemployment in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore was gravely viewed as undermining British status. Such elements were seen as bringing 'discredit and contempt upon the British community'. To the British, the Asian communities did not differentiate between European nationalities, and the demeaning of one section of a European community would tarnish the prestige of the British.⁴⁰¹ This preoccupation of keeping up appearances was highlighted in the case of Mr. B. E. Alleyn in 1940. He was deported from Penang, returning to Rangoon because he could not convince British authorities that he could maintain living standards 'necessary for a European'. In another account, Father Louis Guittat (Mission Etrangeres de Paris), a Frenchman, spoke of his desire as a young priest, to live and work with his Indian Christian parishioners as a lowly rubber tapper in a local estate. Father Guittat put this to the British estate manager, who rejected it on account that he was obliged to report it to his superiors.⁴⁰²

Mr. V. Ambiavagar, a Singapore-based teacher and later school principal, related how a policy of apartheid was practiced during his early teaching days in an elite government school.

This apartheid policy applied strictly between the whites and non-whites. The Principal, apparently on instructions from above, told the European teachers never to frequent the Asian common room. I remember a Welsh teacher in

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with B. P. Alfreds, (born 1917), Oral History Dept., National Archives of Singapore, 1983, (transcript), pp. 203-4.

⁴⁰¹ Butcher, 1979, pp. 93-94, citing the *Bucknill Report*, 1919. A difficult quandary for the colonial British in the early twentieth century was the employment of British train drivers. These British drivers were often treated by their European officers, 'on the same level as an Asiatic', due to their low social status in Britain. Interview with David Sebastian, (born 1931), Singapore, 9 Aug. 1996.

⁴⁰² Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat M. E. P., (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

1933 or 1934 who probably didn't believe in that sort of an attitude of the white man. He used to frequent our common room and he was very happy. He was called up by the Principal and told to stop visiting our common room. He disobeyed within a few days he was transferred up north, somewhere in Kedah.⁴⁰³

This policy was so apparent that even when changing classes, some of the British teaching staff 'would look right over us and refuse to look at our faces even to greet us'. However the British staff of the day must have been rather uncertain of their supposed status in the colonial hierarchy. When forced under unusual circumstances to mingle with Asian staff, Mr. Ambiavagar recalled how when playing sports such as 'staff versus pupils - they would be very sociable, very friendly as though we were close chums. But the very next day, they would look over our heads.'⁴⁰⁴

Reactions to 'benevolent' colonialism

This conflict between the 'powerful' and 'powerless' was clearly illustrated in two separate observations made, one before the Japanese Occupation, and the other after (with British imperialism in decline). In the first pre-war account, the interviewee's father, a clerical officer with the Malayan railways, while smoking a cigarette (outside working hours), coincidentally saw his British 'boss' while waiting on a platform at the Kuala Lumpurs' central train station. This obviously shocked him to a degree and in an inexplicable but momentary panic, he hid his cigarette despite there being no smoking restrictions. His British superior noticed this and was strangely compelled to react. He walked up to the smoking man and humiliatingly demanded he extinguish his cigarette. The demand was subserviently obeyed.

After the Second World War, circumstances relating to British hegemony was not as clear cut, and therefore seemed far less formidable than it did before the war. In the next account (post-war), a British friend obviously on amicable terms, called out to the interviewee's father from across the railway platform. Upon hearing this, his father

⁴⁰³ Quah, 1988, pp. 73-4.

⁴⁰⁴ Quah, 1988, p. 74.

angrily told him to address him as 'mister', and not by his first name. The Britisher was shocked by this sudden outburst and perplexed by the reaction of his friend.⁴⁰⁵

These two accounts illustrate the complexities of stratification in colonial society, to a point where work-related hierarchies operated in the social plain. In the first pre-war account, the interviewee made the point clear that his father was greatly humiliated. An insult he would not have tolerated, were it demanded by any other non-British/European person. However after the war and with the winding down of the British Raj, and defeat to the Japanese, the tolerated humiliation and the need to hide it was no longer deemed as pertinent as it was before the war. Hence the demand for recognition of his status.

Similar experiences were recounted by a French priest who worked with various rural Indian Catholic communities from 1936. Father Louis Guittat told of an incident when he and another Tamil parishioner were working in a field. They began arguing over the method of planting a certain crop - as Fr. Guittat described it, the argument got very 'heated'. The parishioner began threatening Guittat with his farm tool. Guittat backed away, took a stick and hit the tool out of the parishioner's hand. Guittat later acknowledged this as being little more than a test. The parishioner was simply testing the boundaries of his friendship with a 'white-man'.

In another incident, now stationed in Bagan Serai (Perak), while preparing a sermon, a group of young men who had too much 'toddy'⁴⁰⁶ to drink began making too much noise outside the parish house where he was working. He proceeded to ask them to quieten down. They dispersed. They then defiantly returned with much noisier 'tom-toms'.⁴⁰⁷

These are typical examples of persons, who have internalized the culture of self-denial, and to a degree self-hatred, which epitomizes itself as an uncertainty on their part as to where they stand in conjunction in dealing with a 'superior' European. This was despite the fact, as with the first example in Kuala Lumpur showed, the subject

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

⁴⁰⁶ Traditional Indian alcoholic beverage.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

was a pristine example of Asian assimilation into British outlook and lifestyle. A French colonial observation made in 1911 illustrates this point well;

Look at the instructor in the city, constantly in contact with French people, he truly speaks like a Parisian; his rustic colleague, on the other hand, searches for his words and stammers: he always seems to be on tenterhooks.⁴⁰⁸

Therefore reactions exhibited by colonial subjects were not necessarily logical. It should be simply seen as emotional ‘knee-jerk’ reactions, or in other cases to ‘test the water’, assessing the boundaries of social interaction with the ‘superior’ subject.

Colonial influences in the construction of Indian Christian names

The use, construction and dynamics of Indian Christian names were another indicator of subordination under British colonialism. Name usage, especially among the lower caste groups, was traditionally used to reflect low status and denoted servility and dependence.⁴⁰⁹ With conversion and the ensuing name change, many saw this as a clear psychological break from their low status. Hence the choosing of a name often denoted a strong willingness on their part to bring about improvements to themselves and their community. For the higher caste groups and the more well-to-do converts, adoption of a Christian name denoted similar sentiments,⁴¹⁰ but with a colonial twist.

Names were constructed primarily in two ways. Firstly, a person could keep his/her father’s name as their own which was more traditional. Secondly, one could adopt the European tradition of keeping one’s patrilineal name. These two styles were especially common among Roman Catholic Indian communities.⁴¹¹ After an examination of Roman Catholic Church records, it became clear that most names before the late

⁴⁰⁸ Fanny Colonna (translated by B. Harshav), ‘Educating Conformity in French Colonial Algeria’, in A. L. Stoler and F. Cooper (ed.), *Tensions in Empire*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), p.362-3, citing the Director of the Teacher Training School, ‘Advice to Monitors and Native Assistants’, 1911.

⁴⁰⁹ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 19.

⁴¹⁰ An element of shame of their status as ‘non-Europeans’ fed this trend. Similar ‘shame’ associated with being non-white was strong among other English-educated, middle-class Asian communities. Myrna Braga-Blake and Ann Ebert-Oehlers, *Eurasians in Singapore: Memories and Hopes*, (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 23.

⁴¹¹ Alexius A. Pereira, *Ethnic ‘Adaptions of Religious Orthodoxy: A study of Chinese, Indian and Eurasian Catholics in Singapore’*, (Singapore: University of Singapore [Academic Exercise], 1991-2), p. 40.

1920s and early 1930s comprised mainly of first category (father's name adopted as part of name). Thus a person had their own baptismal name, for example 'John', while their father's baptismal name was 'Arokiasamy'. Hence John (son of) Arokiasamy or John Arokiasamy. The next generation would therefore use 'John' as their last name, and so on.

The 'European' tradition of maintaining a patrilineal surname was more common after the late 1920s and early 1930s, and then mainly with the urban middle-classes; particularly with those holding clerical or 'white-collar' occupations.⁴¹² This was especially common with Malayali parishioners.

The choice of a baptismal name was often regulated by one's parish priest.⁴¹³ By convention no names honoring Hindu deities were allowed, but Indianised Christian names were acceptable. The use of Indianised Christian names were especially commonplace up to the first two or three decades of the twentieth century - most adherents recent arrivals from India. For example, Soosay is Joseph, Sinnapur is Paul, Erayapan is Peter, Yagappar is James.⁴¹⁴ The choice of names also corresponded with the popularity of particular saints or religious figures.⁴¹⁵

Many of these uniquely Indianised names often had direct or indirect connections with the Church, many constructed from Hindu terms. The name 'Kolandasamy' when broken down means 'Koland' (baby) and 'samy' (god) or Baby of God. Likewise a name like Mariadass, is a veneration of the Virgin Mary, hence 'Maria' (Mary) and 'dass' (servant) or Servant of the Virgin Mary. Certain names were used more predominantly in some Churches than others. For example, names ending with 'samy'

⁴¹² *Marriages, St. John's Cathedral, 6.4.1891-29.1.1906*, Kuala Lumpur, *Marriage Book, Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, 7 May 1884 - 7 Apr.1947*, Singapore. *Baptisms, Church of Our Lady Lourdes, 14 May 1884 - 15 Sept. 1895*, Singapore.

⁴¹³ Interview with David Sebastian, (born 1931), Singapore, 9 Aug. 1996.

⁴¹⁴ Pereira, 1991-2, p. 40.

⁴¹⁵ St. Anthony of Padua, St. Paul the Hermit, St. Sebastian, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier (1506-1551), the Blessed Virgin Mary and the three archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Henriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), p. 140. Bayly, 1989, pp. 381-3. St. Francis Xavier, St. James the Great (d. 44 A. D.) and the Virgin Mary were popular adopted deities from as early as 1644. David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1978]).

tended to be Roman Catholic.⁴¹⁶ Names honoring popular saints such as St. Francis Xavier, St. Anthony, St. Anne or even religious occurrences such as at the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Lourdes (France) were popular with Indian Roman Catholic devotees. Names not originally used as patrilineal surnames were gradually utilised as such over the years. Examples of such names are Saverimuthu, Lazarus, Peter, Pragasam, Manuel, Joseph, Louis, Kolandasamy, Doraisamy, Ponnusamy, George, David, Anthony, Lourdes, Mariadass, Jesudass, Gnanamuthu, Sebastian and Aloysius. Female names were always used as first names, strung onto their father's name or patrilineal surname. Examples of female names are Saveriammal, Salome, Anna, Rose, Grace, Lily, Agnes, Anthoniammal, Lourdamal, Annammal, Mary, Elizabeth, Jessy, Ruby, Violet and Mariammal.

Among the mainly urban-based and white collar Malayali communities (who had been originally converted under Portuguese rule in the sixteenth century)⁴¹⁷, names such as Gomez, Pereira, D'Cruz, Fernandez (and to a lesser extent Lobo, Netto, Lopez, Miranda, D'Cunha, Morais and Mendez)⁴¹⁸ were commonly used as surnames. The use of Portuguese first names was still prevalent in the late nineteenth century. However in keeping with their primarily English-educated backgrounds, there was an apparent shift towards more 'Anglicized' first (male) names such as Walter, Edward, Richard, Frederick, Edwin, Lawrance, or other popular Anglicized biblical names by the late nineteenth century. These Malayali communities maintained the use of their Portuguese surnames.⁴¹⁹

Syrian Christians, also Malayali, have long functioned as a separate entity from that of the Portuguese-influenced Roman Catholic Malayalis. Examples of popular names are Abraham/Abragam, George/Verghese, Peter/Puthros/Ittlyerah/Itte, Paul/Powlos, John/Yohan/Sonanan/Chona, Titus/Tetos, Matthew/Mathai/Mathen, Philip/Philippos/Papi/Eippe/Eapen, Thomas/Thoma/Thommi/Thommen,

⁴¹⁶ J. Rabindra Daniel, *Indian Christians in Peninsular Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Tamil Annual Conference, 1992), p. 157.

⁴¹⁷ Bugge, 1994, p. 43. Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 6, (Madras: Government Press, 1909), p. 428.

⁴¹⁸ Many of these names were also used by Goanese immigrants. Goa had been a Portuguese protectorate. They made up a very small proportion of the South Indian population of Malaya and Singapore.

⁴¹⁹ *Straits Settlements Blue Books*, (annual), 1871-1946. Civil Establishment Listings.

Joseph/Ouseph, Jacob/Yacob/Chacko, Alexander/Chandi, Samuel/Chamuel, Mary/Maria/Mariam, Sarah/Sara, Susannah/Sosa, Rebecca/Rabka/Raca, Elizabeth/Elspeth/Elia/Elacha, Rachael/Rachi/Raghael/Chacha.⁴²⁰ Construction of traditional Syrian Christian names would firstly take the clan/caste name, father's name and finally their own name.⁴²¹ However in keeping with the trends of the day, many began to 'Anglicize' their names preferring the English interpretation of Biblical names.

Within the Protestant Churches certain names were popular, although there were many cross-overs with the Roman Catholic Church. Examples were Abraham, Zachariah, Joshua, Benjamin, Caleb, Daniel, David, Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, Pandian or Thangam (for males) and Hilda, Thamgammal and Beatrice (for females).

Consequently, one finds a diverse array of Indianised, European or biblical names in the Indian Christian communities, which to the outsider can seem rather confusing. After the 1930s, a trend towards 'Anglicization' was becoming apparent. Firstly the use of surnames were adopted, while Indianized Christian names were dropped in favour of more 'Europeanized' biblical ones. This was particularly prevalent among white-collar workers (who tended to originate from 'higher'⁴²² caste backgrounds) with their ready acceptance of things 'British' or 'European'. There were often other forces, other than British influence, which initiated the adoption of certain names. Many Indian Christians were converted to Christianity by French or occasionally Portuguese Churches in India. Hence by the nineteenth century, adherents often used French Christian names such as Soosay for Susay (Joseph) or Michel for Micheal, Saveri for Xavier (in honor of St. Francis Xavier), or occasionally even Pierre for Peter.⁴²³

The use of caste titles, especially of those belonging to the higher caste groups such as the Vellalars, Mudaliyars, Odaiyar (Reddiar), Nairs and Pillais were in some cases maintained as patrilineal surnames. There has been some speculation that persons

⁴²⁰ Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, p. 456. Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 27 Jan. 1997.

⁴²¹ Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 27 Jan. 1997.

⁴²² Vellalar, Mudaliyar, Chettiar and Odaiyar caste groups.

⁴²³ *Straits Settlements Blue Books*, (annual), 1871-1946. Civil Establishment Listings.

from these 'higher' caste groups tended to keep their caste names as surnames.⁴²⁴ From the available records, this was not necessarily true. Most high caste Christians had dropped their caste titles in favour of conventional Christian-based surnames by the early twentieth century. Apart from discouragement from some Churches (particularly Protestant), it would appear that the use of a caste title was very much dependent on a person's conception of what it meant to themselves and their peers. It would seem the instilling of capitalist/materialist views was by far more complete in comparison to others. They were strongly aware of a correlation between the 'old ways' (Hindu, caste hierarchies, less prosperous, rural-based, pre-capitalist, undemocratic, traditional, superstitious and backward) and the 'new ways' (Christian, egalitarian, prosperous, urban-based, capitalist, democratic, progressive, non-superstitious and forward-thinking). In keeping with this line of thought, it was often found that in many high caste families, their caste title had usually been dropped by a very 'Europeanized/Anglicized' ancestor. The adoption of names was therefore often aimed at the improvement of perceived social standing. In some cases, Indian Christian adherents even adopted British-style surnames. For example, in the Methodist Churches, surnames such as Hoisington, Kingston, Emerson, Wellington, Knight, Marsh, Oswald and Davies were used by its mainly middle-class Ceylonese-Tamil adherents by the late nineteenth century. Lionel Caplan also notes how foreign missionaries in India, often acted as nuptial matchmakers for socially isolated 'high' caste converts. Many converts often adopted their names in turn.⁴²⁵

The manufacture of Race: The building blocks of colonial divisions

Colonial authorities constantly utilised the issue of race to negate the possibility of colonialisised communities combining to challenge their colonial hegemony. Therefore issues relating to race were rarely far from the surface of colonial society. This is especially true of those multiracial/cultural societies that feel the need to advance racial tolerance as part of official ideology. In spite of this, promoting racial tolerance did not suggest the promotion of racial indifference. Colonialism's 'multiracialism', for instance, encouraged a high consciousness of one's race even while it insisted on

⁴²⁴ Pereira, 1991-2, p. 40.

⁴²⁵ 'Personals' in *The Malaysia Message*, 45 (10), Oct. 1935, p. 2. 'Personals' in *The Malaysia Message*, 40 (2), Feb. 1930, p. 2. 'Tamil Work at Kuala Lumpur', (sic) in *The Malaysia Message*, Aug. 1904, VIII, no. (11), p. 103. Lionel Caplan, 'Caste and castelessness among South Indian Christians', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Jul. - Dec. 1980, 14 (2), p. 219.

tolerance. Unfamiliarity to the different social, political and economic landscape of the Malay archipelago, on the part of new arrivals, facilitated this colonial tactic.

The new immigrant communities of Malaya and the Straits Settlements were transient in nature. The early development of interdependency between these new immigrant communities was not feasible. These communities operated by and large as separate entities, often fragmented along sub-ethnic, sub-regional and language lines – so early contact tended to be sporadic. This was especially so among the working classes where few means of communication (language) or commonalities in employment were encouraged. What became popularly known as the ‘divide and rule’ tactic, was practised not only with the labour classes but even with the generally more affluent middle-classes as well.

K. S. Sandhu and G. D. Ness highlight the unwillingness of the British colonialists to allow any one ethnic grouping absolute dominance in the economy. In the rural sector, British administrators viewed encouraging the already large Chinese population to expand as unwise. Colonial authorities noted how it was ‘by no means desirable to let the Chinese obtain too exclusive a possession of the Peninsula’.⁴²⁶ The casting of the Indian component into the equation was considered a prudent step in this direction. Likewise, G. D. Ness argues that ‘foreign’ business always advocated the use of Chinese in sales while on the other hand encouraged the use of Indians as bookkeepers and accountants. The rationale being ‘enmity between the Indians and the Chinese is said to prevent collusion’ which could have been harmful to the firm.⁴²⁷ This is also illustrated in an extract from the *Selangor Journal*, a publication for British estate owners;

To secure your independence, work with Javanese and Tamils, and if you have sufficient experience, also with Malays and Chinese; you can then always play one against the other In case of a strike, you will never be left without labour, and the coolies of one nationality will think twice before they make

⁴²⁶ G. D. Ness, *Bureacracy and Rural Development in Malaysia*, (California: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 48-9. Sandhu, 1969, p. 58 - with reference to CO 273, 2 (1858-9), 4.2.1858; 6 (1863-4).

⁴²⁷ Ness, 1967, pp. 48-9.

their terms, if they know that you are in a position that you can do without them.⁴²⁸

The British were therefore keen to impress on all, the importance of their continued presence. The Indian community, being the smallest of the major racial groups, were aware of the British status as 'protector'. This point was made all the more pressing by the fact that many Indian Christians (and Indians in general) were employed in the civil service, many under the direct charge of the British officials. Likewise, in the rubber estates, a British manager oversaw the strict social hierarchy in the plantation.

The relationship between the Indian and Chinese, in particular it's Christian communities, is difficult to gauge accurately. Early written accounts relating this relationship appear relatively mild. In February 1885, Bishop Garnier, based in Singapore, claimed the Indian communities did not enjoy a high standing among other Roman Catholic congregations. No reasons were provided.⁴²⁹ Several months later, an altercation between an Indian catechist and a Chinese labourer on Church premises was deemed urgent enough to warrant mention in a letter from Bishop Garnier in a report back to the M.E.P. in Paris.⁴³⁰ No mention was made of reactions by both congregations who utilised the same Church premises. This author assumes there might have been some tension because the same letter pushed for funding for a separate Indian Church. While assumptions that slight tension or minor hostilities might have existed between the two congregations there are other ways by which interaction can be more accurately gauged. Anecdotal accounts indicate cross-cultural/racial friendships were quite common, especially among urban-based, middle-class communities. From the author's informal conversations with persons growing up in the 1900s and 1910s, it was common for young urban-based people to mix in groups comprising of Chinese, Indians and Eurasians. Especially if you shared a common language, like English or Malay. However, there appeared to be limits to this level of interaction. Intermarriage in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was still rare. In the first four decades of the twentieth century,

⁴²⁸ Kua Kia Soong (ed.), *Polarisation in Malaysia: The Root Causes*, (Selangor: K. Das Ink, 1987), pp. 19-20.

⁴²⁹ Correspondence of Bishop Edward Garnier to Pean (M. E. P.), Paris, 2 Feb. 1885.

⁴³⁰ Bishop Edward Garnier, 'A Report by Bishop Edward Garnier concerning an incident at Sts. Peter and Paul's between Chinese and Indians', Singapore, 4 Sept. 1885 (translation from French).

Church records show a number of marriages with between Indian Christians and members of the Luso-Malay (Melaka Eurasian) communities. By the late 1930s and especially after the Second World War, inter-marriages with members of the numerically larger Chinese community overtook this trend.⁴³¹ These issues will be examined at length in chapter seven.

The cultural deficit thesis⁴³² was used by the colonial governments as ideological ballast for the entrenchment of its racial stereotypes, and in turn racial segregation. The colonial government's promotion of racial hierarchies strengthened negative stereotypes harboured by the non-Indian communities against Indians. This resulted in limited public empathy for Indian social, economic and political marginality. This was especially so in the plantation sector. The lack of empathy was even mirrored in divisions among the Indians themselves - usually from the more well-to-do urban-based communities and among white-collar administrative staff on plantations. This lack of empathy was nurtured by the adoption of colonialism's stress on utilitarian individualism and the virtues of the disciplined, self-made person. Status and private property was used as a measure of success. Poverty was seen as an appropriate punishment for failure.⁴³³

Different ethnic groupings in Malaya and Straits Settlements were theoretically imparted with idealized stereotypical behavior. Such discourse had its roots in 'scientific' racial literature prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and was perpetuated by British colonial governments. The Malays were seen as, 'generally kindly, his manners are polite and easy lazy to a degree, is without method or order of any kind, knows no regularity even in the hours of his meals, and considers time as of no importance'.⁴³⁴ They were portrayed as not being interested in new economic

⁴³¹ 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral, (Kuala Lumpur) 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906'. 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, (Kuala Lumpur) 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'.

⁴³² Rahim, 1998, p. 3-4.

⁴³³ M. J. D'Cruz, 'Indian Associations and The Coolies', in *The Indian*, 5 (1), Aug. 1925, Singapore, p. 94. T. G. Thomas, B. A., 'Some of our Needs', in *The Indian*, 1 (1), Apr. 1925, Singapore, p. 6. John L. Comaroff, 'Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience', in A. L. Stoler and F. Cooper (ed.), *Tensions in Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 169. Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Kuala Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Mr. Chinnapen noted that some Indian Christian clerical staff, when pressed, often sided with Indian Christian workers against Hindus.

⁴³⁴ F. A. Sweetenham, *Malay Sketches*, (London: John Lane, 1913 4th edition), p. 3. Mangan, 1993, p. 169. Alatas, 1977, pp. 17, 44-45, 50.

opportunities that were being taken advantage of by other ethnic groups. They were supposed to be satisfied to stay in their idyllic but backward kampongs/villages.

The 'Chinese' on the other hand was quite the opposite of the Malay.⁴³⁵ They were seen as hardworking, enterprising, skillful 'whether manual labour or crimping, merchandising, mining or prospecting, usury or piracy or gang robbery'.⁴³⁶ They were supposedly imbued with qualities like ruthlessness, were shrewd and often confrontational. The 'Chinese' communities in the nineteenth century were still very fragmentary. Characteristics differed with different dialect groups. However even within this group there appeared to be differences. The Peranakan 'Croele' Chinese were described as being intelligent but were inferior in industry. The Fukiens were entrepreneurially superior in respectability and enterprise. The Cantonese ranked second behind the Fukiens. The Macao Chinese were not considered respectable but very disorderly.⁴³⁷

Indians (specifically Southern Indians) were somewhat in the middle of the Chinese and Malays. According to this theory there were examples of some Indians taking advantage of new economic opportunities, but by and large Southern Indians were docile, easily satisfied and of limited intelligence.⁴³⁸ This idea was especially popular when explaining the supposedly backward nature of the majority Indian labourer population. An account reprinted in the Methodist Church paper *The Malaysia Message* in 1897 illustrated this viewpoint well. It observed;

But 'Ramasami'⁴³⁹ does not like a nice house. Give him a close, stuffy, tumbling-down but, utterly unventilated and full of smoke, and he is supremely happy.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁵ H. Marriot, *The Peoples of Singapore*, in W. Makepeace, G. E. Brooke, R. Braddell, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, vol. 1, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1921]), p. 346.

⁴³⁶ Sandhu, 1969, p. 54. Also see W. S. Morgan, (1956, 9th edition), p. 98.

⁴³⁷ Marriot, 1991 [1921], p. 346

⁴³⁸ Marriot, 1991 [1921], p. 347. Ness, 1967, p. 46.

⁴³⁹ The use of 'Ramasami', a common name, is used in a derogatory way.

⁴⁴⁰ *The Malaysia Message*, vol. VI, no. 9, June 1897, p. 1. This particular article was adapted from the *Church Missionary Gleaner*.

Even before their arrival in Malaya and the Straits Settlements, Indians and Christian Indians were exposed to negative views of themselves. This was well illustrated by Rev. J. A. Sharrock writing from South India in 1910;

English people often speak ill of native Christians. Yet what do they know of them? They may be twenty years in South India, not know six words of Tamil or ever see a Mission station, yet they pose as impartial witnesses if one were to judge from the rubbish that one hears on the deck of an Indian steamer, there is not a single real Christian in the whole country.⁴⁴¹

By the early part of the twentieth century such ideas of complacency and docility began to be used by some missionaries as an excuse to explain their failed ventures involving Indians. Consequently it was observed by missionaries ministering to their South Indian flock;

In spite of the fact that the Tamils are far more accessible than any other nation in the East. This discouragement is due to the superficiality of their character.⁴⁴²

The 'disappointments' seem to be more reflective of the abilities of the missionary than that of the dissatisfying characteristics of any particular racial group. Attitudes towards Indian Christians seem to vary. For example, W. G. Shellabear wrote positively of the 'brighter' prospects of work among Tamils in Kuala Lumpur.

Indians were often compared to their Chinese counterparts, both equally new to the Malayan landscape.

Very different from the Chinese is the Tamil work⁴⁴³, yet not less necessary.

We cannot speak very encouragingly of this work among the natives of

⁴⁴¹ J. A. Sharrock, *South Indian Missions*, (Westminster: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1910), p. 292.

⁴⁴² H. L. E. Luering, '85th Annual Report, 1903, Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church', in *Malaysia Message*, p. 50. W. G. Shellabear, *Malaysia Message*, VI (11), 1897, p. 128.

⁴⁴³ 'Work' denoting Christian ministering/evangelization among the communities.

southern India. The weakness of the Tamil character gives rise to many disappointments.⁴⁴⁴

Even within the Roman Catholic Church, there appeared to exist negative attitudes towards members of the Indian community. This situation was serious enough to warrant a letter from the Bishop, Edward Garnier (M. E. P.), to his superiors in Paris about the tendency of many mission dioceses to look down on Indians.⁴⁴⁵

Even issues relating to health were put down to racial differences. In the 'Negri Sembilan Medical Report, 1899', high mortality rates in the Tamil estate communities were assumed to be the result of both an 'inferior physique' and a reluctance on the part of labourers to spend money on mosquito nets and proper food.⁴⁴⁶

In January 1930, High Commissioner to the F. M. S., John Scott, wrote to Lord Passfield of the Colonial Office complaining about the high retirement rate of 'Tamils from India and Ceylon', making the point that a considerable proportion of this number was 'due to what may be described as mental causes.' According to Commissioner Scott as many as 88 per cent [sic] of all Railway Clerical Service retirees were Tamil⁴⁴⁷ in origin. He went on to conclude;

It is an accepted fact that the Tamil is not only more prone to mental derangements but is also less robust and physically suited to local climate conditions than the Chinese, Malay or Eurasian. He possesses less stamina and self-reliance than these other races and these defects are liable to be accentuated

⁴⁴⁴ H. L. E. Luering, *83th Annual Report, 1901, Malaysia, in Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 69.

⁴⁴⁵ Correspondence of Bishop Edward Garnier (M. E. P.), Singapore, 2 Feb. 1885, vol. 905/355.

⁴⁴⁶ Lenore Manderson, 'Race, Colonial Mentality and Public Health', in P. J. Rimmer and L. M. Allen (ed.), *The Underside of Malaysian History*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), p. 199, citing the *Negri Sembilan Medical Report 1899*, in *Accounts and Papers ZHC/6411*, London, Public Records Office. A. H. Cretch, *Malayan Mining Methods, with an Account of the Physique, Living Conditions and Food Requirements of the Asiatic Miner*, M. S. S. Indian Ocean S 96, Oxford, Rhodes House Library Colonial Records Project. Major G. St. J. Orde-Brown, *Labour Conditions in Ceylon, Mauritius and Malaya*, Cmd. 6423, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office. *Physique of labourers coming from India*, in *A Select list of files of the High Commissioner for the Malay States held by Arkib Negara Malaysia 1897-1942*, 2072/1918.

⁴⁴⁷ The term 'Tamil' was often used to classify all South Indians. This included Ceylonese Tamils, Malayalis and Telegus.

in out-stations where he is deprived of the social material advantages appertaining to life in large centres.⁴⁴⁸

It should be noted that many of these illnesses were often 'diagnosed' while on vacation in India or Ceylon, conveniently allowing for early retirement and thus the pension.

Contemporary perceptions of Christian South Indian communities were created and influenced by 'Orientalist'⁴⁴⁹ and colonial discourse on South Indians. Even within academic discourses of the day, which may not have been overtly reliant on racial stereotypes, a dependence on the new parameters of the 'science' of race was clearly in evidence. R. J. Wilkinson, who was to be appointed Inspector of Schools to the Federated Malay States (F. M. S.) in 1903, made constant references to 'brown', 'black' and 'fair' races using it as a demarcator to different groups in a talk given to the Straits Philosophical Society around 1900.⁴⁵⁰

There are at least four divisions, two brown and two black. The blacks can be easily divided into Melanesians proper, with frizzled hair, such as are found in Papua, and Australian blacks, with wavy or almost straight hair, such as are found in Australia and were found in Tasmania.⁴⁵¹

Although this article does use absolute racial stereotypes popular within British intellectual circles at the time, there is a strong element of tacit encouragement to view the issue of racial differences along the lines of levels of pigmentation (skin colouring) and hair types. Although Wilkinson does not make any value judgements in relation to the Asian communities in his paper, he still does refer to the Australian aborigine (or Melanesian) as being 'degraded'.

⁴⁴⁸ John Scott, 'F. M. S.: High Commissioner's despatches to the Secretary of State, Jan. to June 1930', G. 1192/1928, no. 28, 16 Jan. 1930, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 207.

⁴⁵⁰ R. J. Wilkinson, 'The Ethnology of the Indian Archipelago', in *Malaysia Message*, IX (6), February and March 1900. This article was originally a paper. It was read before the 'Straits Philosophical Society'. Wilkinson was also a keen supporter of the De La Salle Brothers (C. B. S.) schools and took a personal interest in their development. 'Seremban's Institution: St. Paul's New Wing Opened, a successful function', in *Malay Mail*, 28 September 1912.

⁴⁵¹ Wilkinson, March 1900, p. 63.

Tamils are often as black as negroes, but that they differ very materially in features and hair from the negro type. They differ also from the degraded Australian type.⁴⁵²

These ideas implied a racial deficiency, especially with its associations with high levels of pigmentation; South Indians being the 'darkest' of the major racial groupings in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. These ideas gained added currency when prominent members of the South Indian community themselves began to mimic or reinterpret these ideas in relation to themselves. Many of these protagonists were members of the urban elites, educated in the English-medium schools and often held relatively well paid jobs in government service. They were therefore socially positioned above that of the majority 'labourer' Indian population.

Imperial indoctrination and control

The use of English language education is generally seen as being one of the important arms of imperialism. It is important to point out that there was no standard plan by which educational policy was formulated. According to Keith Watson, educational policy varied from colony to colony, influenced by differences in the social, political and economic landscape as well as the preferences of individual administrators.⁴⁵³

In Malaya and the Straits Settlements, many young urban-based Indian Christians were well represented in these English-medium schools,⁴⁵⁴ and were therefore open to accepting a European-type outlook.⁴⁵⁵ Gauri Viswanathan notes how a Eurocentric education was in nineteenth century India 'less a statement of superiority of the Western tradition than a vital, active instrument of Western hegemony in concert with commercial expansionism and military action'.⁴⁵⁶ One of the methods used to acclimatize young minds to British hegemony was to introduce them to English

⁴⁵² Wilkinson, March 1900, p. 63.

⁴⁵³ Keith Watson, 'Rulers and Ruled: Racial perceptions, curriculum and schooling in colonial Malaya and Singapore', in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 147.

⁴⁵⁴ Puthuchery, 1993, p. 339.

⁴⁵⁵ O'Brien, *Education and Colonialism: The Case of Malaya*, in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol. 16, no. 2, July 1980, p. 57. R. Raja Krishnan, *The Jaffna Tamils in Prewar Malaya: the myth of the return*, in *Sixth International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies*, (Petaling Jaya: Thirumagal Printers, 1987), p. 250.

⁴⁵⁶ G. Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, (New York:

literature. The teaching of English literature had first been initiated in the colonies long before it was introduced into 'mother-England'. According to Viswanathan, it was introduced to help the British acclimatize the indigenous populations into acceptance of British ideals of enlightenment and therefore support for their own political and social control by the British. The colonies were the testing ground for many social control strategies later used in Britain, like the use of a standard language.⁴⁵⁷ It is therefore of little surprise to note that one of the immediate cultural features of the Christian Indian communities was the little knowledge they had of their own mother-tongue. This seems to have predominated from early in the twentieth century and was also prevalent in India.⁴⁵⁸ Little wonder by the early 1940s many rural workers sarcastically referred to these educated, middle-class Indians as 'Black Europeans'. This derogative term was used during the Klang Estate workers strikes of 1941 to ridicule middle class Indian support of colonial authority.⁴⁵⁹

Another example of Indian Christian correlations being made between authority figures and British sovereignty was illustrated by R. L. Hardgrave when he described an incident in a nineteenth century mission school in India; its pupils mistook a visiting bishop as the representative of Queen Victoria.⁴⁶⁰ Despite opposition by some administrators that the provision of too much education, might encourage an educated anti-imperial powerbase to emerge,⁴⁶¹ schools primarily functioned as political agencies in the service of the British crown. For example, issues such as

Colombia University Press, 1989), pp. 166-7.

⁴⁵⁷ Viswanathan, 1989, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁸ Frank R. Moraes, 'The Future of Indian Catholics', in *Malaya Catholic Leader*, V (3), 21 Jan. 1939, Singapore, p. 1. S. Arasaratnam, 'The Christians of Ceylon and Nationalist Politics', in *Religion in South Asia: Religious conversion and revival movements in South Asia in medieval and modern times*, (U. K.: Curzon Press, 1977), p. 169. According to a 1911 census, only 1,500 out of 2,026 Christians in Ceylon, could speak their mother-tongue. Interview with L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921), Singapore, 21 Nov. 1996. Interview with Arch. Emer. Dominic Vendargon, (born 1909), Kuala Lumpur, 13 Sept. 1996. Interview with David Sebastian, (born 1931), Singapore, 9 Aug. 1996. Rev. S. S. Pakianathan, 'Our Responsibility in Malaya', in *The Indian*, (Singapore), Oct. 1925, 7 (1), R. B. Krishnan and C. R. Menon (ed.), pp. 149-150. 'P. W. D. officers to learn Malay instead of Tamil', in *A Select list of files of the office of the High Commissioner for the Malay States held by Arkib Negara Malaysia 1897-1942*, 1483/1918.

⁴⁵⁹ Stenson, 1980, p. 64. Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 29. Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Patricia Todd, *Trade Unions and the State in Peninsular Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 67. Arokia Dass, *Not Beyond Repair: Reflections of a Malaysian Trade Unionist*, (Hong Kong: Asia Monitor Resource Centre, 1991), p. 30.

⁴⁶⁰ R. L. Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, (California: University of California, 1969), p. 55.

⁴⁶¹ Watson, 1993, p. 156.

indoctrination (inculcation of values/beliefs as truths), socialisation (emphasizing certain values while ignoring others) and political education (overt political teaching with limited alternatives or discussion) were used unreservedly.⁴⁶² The education system inculcated views conducive to the adherence and recognition of governmental authority. It instilled compatible cultural parameters which helped identify 'government' as the sole authority and helped consolidate a 'collective mentality' drawn from pro-establishment theories, philosophies, ideas and forms of knowledge.⁴⁶³ As noted by Ann Laura Stoler, such a system was used to 'educate consent' and for 'extracting consensus', conducive to the political hegemony of the time.⁴⁶⁴

Urban schools: The making of the 'Black European'

The education system in Malaya and the Straits Settlements was, like that of Britain, grossly inadequate and piecemeal. The education system in colonial Britain, especially that supplied by non-elite schools, were inadequate.⁴⁶⁵ In 1923, the Inspector of Schools (Singapore & Labuan) admitted that there were 'too many children in the schools, they are overcrowded and working under adverse conditions'.⁴⁶⁶ This was in spite of the fact that English-medium education was established as early as 1816. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were approximately 9,000 students in English-language schools, and most of them were only in the lower classes. Teacher-training was non-existent until 1907. A technical school⁴⁶⁷ opened in 1906 only attained college status just before the Japanese Occupation. A medical school and an arts

⁴⁶² Rahim, 1998, p. 170.

⁴⁶³ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, (London: Sage Publications, 1999), p. 16. Mitchell Dean, in a recent study, examines how these elements of government control and responsibility are relatively new and illustrate how they work together. To explain this, Dean coined the term 'governmentality'. Governmentality defines the 'calculated direction of human conduct' within the 'arts and regimes of government and administration.' According to Dean, governments work on the assumption that human conduct should be predictable and therefore can be controlled. (p. 2, 15)

⁴⁶⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, (London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 143.

⁴⁶⁵ George Sampson, *English for the English*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1952 [1921]), pp. 19, 26. Rich families in Britain commonly chose to educate their children privately at home, prior to 1900. Robert Bell and Nigel Grant, *Patterns of Education in the British Isles*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977), pp. 59, 66.

⁴⁶⁶ Mangan (ed.), 1993, p. 154. Puthucheary, 1993, p. 337. *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, p. 34.

⁴⁶⁷ The Inspector of Schools (Singapore and Labuan), H. T. Clark admitted that there was no provision for proper trade related education in 1923. *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to*

college were set up in 1904 and 1920 respectively, with the primary purpose of training 'assistants'. There were no universities until after the Second World War.⁴⁶⁸

Even with British government financial assistance, much of the education system was heavily reliant on missionary bodies, private organisations and philanthropists. This mirrored the two-track educational system existent in the British isles from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when a vast number of private teachers and schools were set up, with the creation of an education system for the rich and another for the poor.⁴⁶⁹

It has been argued that the British were purposefully reluctant to provide an adequate English-medium educational system, mainly concentrating on vernacular schools, to 'avoid any challenge to colonial rule'. It also noted that a unemployable native 'become dissatisfied and, far from being an asset, is a danger to the community in that his outlook become warped and bitter.'⁴⁷⁰ The provision of financial assistance to English-medium schools were only encouraged on the proviso that it was in line with the demands of government and industry, and even then was extremely meagre. This aspect will be discussed in later in this chapter.⁴⁷¹

Therefore most schools, which were run by non-government concerns, found themselves heavily reliant on small amounts of government funding.⁴⁷² Under such piecemeal circumstances, the education system was well-known for its inadequacy. In July 1877, in response to an article written in the 'Daily Times' in Singapore, the following sentiments were expressed by a member of the Eurasian community;

consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community, Singapore, 1923, p. 35.

⁴⁶⁸ Sandhu, 1969, p. 68.

⁴⁶⁹ Bell and Grant, 1977, p. 56.

⁴⁷⁰ 'A Memorandum on Education Policy in the Straits Settlements and in the Federated Malay States', Apr. 1936, Public Records Office, SSOC (misc.), p. 39. Mangan (ed.), *The Imperial Curriculum*, (London; Routledge, 1993), p. 164.

⁴⁷¹ Ho Seng Ong, 1964, p. 129. O'Brien, July 1980, p. 57. Susan E. Ackerman and Raymond L. M. Lee, *Heaven in Transition: Non-Muslim Religious Innovation and Ethnic Identity in Malaysia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1988), p. 30. H. R. Cheeseman, 'Education in Malaysia, 1900-1941', in *The Malaysian Historical Journal*, Kuala Lumpur, Malayan Historical Society, vol. 1, no. 1-v.3, no. 1, May 1954-July 1956, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁷² P. C. Wicks, *Education, British Colonialism and a plural society in West Malaysia*, in *History of Education Quarterly*, Summer 1980, XX (2), pp. 179-89.

It will be acknowledged that a sound knowledge of the English language is a matter of great importance We are not in the position to judge as to the alleged deficiencies in the teaching of English in the Christian Brothers' School, but taking it for granted that there must be something wrong or there would not be a formal complaint;⁴⁷³

Many of these early teachers in the Catholic schools were French brothers of the De La Salle Order and therefore not traditional English-speakers. It was only after recruitment of English-speaking Irish nuns and brothers that this problem was partially overcome.

In 1870, a Select Committee of the Legislative Council was created, and the final report noted that:

a great number and variety of schools, some purely educational, others combining charity with education. Many of these are under the control of the Roman Catholic Clergy, but all ... having a system of their own, unchecked, as a rule, by any government supervision. By Government grants-in-aid, by voluntary subscriptions and other means, considerable sums of money have been expended in the cause of education, but, owing to the absence of effective supervision and the want of well defined principles on which schools should be conducted, your committee is of opinion that the general result has been far from satisfactory.⁴⁷⁴

As can be seen in the following Table 1, government expenditure on education in the F. M. S. often hovered around a mere 1 percent of total revenue.

⁴⁷³ 'Untitled letter of complaint from the Catholic Eurasian community at the inadequacy of the teaching of the English language at St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore', 21 July 1877. De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya.

⁴⁷⁴ H. E. Wilson, *Social Engineering in Singapore*, (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 1978), p. 25, citing the *Special Reports on Education Subjects* by the Great Britain, Board of

Table 1

Government expenditure on Education in the F. M. S., 1875-1900

	Total revenue (\$)	Expenditure on education (\$)
1875	409,394	-
1896	8,434,083	-
1898	9,364,467	96,699 (1.03%)
1899	13,486,410	106,588 (0.79%)
1900	15,609,807	139,059 (0.89%)

Source: J. A. Mangan, *The Imperial Curriculum*, 1993, p. 159, sourced from *The System of Education in F. M. S.*, 1902.

In 1917 a prominent mission educationist, C. W. Derbyshire who was distressed by government inaction to establish a proper higher education system in the colonies said:

Government initiative is responsible for a very miserable share in the education of this Colony ... three-quarters of the education ... is not conducted directly by the Government ... The whole trouble is that the Government have never had any definite scheme, and they have consistently grudged giving the money.⁴⁷⁵

Nevertheless, Malaya and the Straits Settlements compared favourably with other British colonies of the day with regards to its educational facilities. The colonial attitude to the provision of education was that it was only secondary. Thus in the 'Report of the Retrenchment Committee' of 1932, it was stated that;

However desirably cheap or free education may be, it must be remembered that there can be no State-aided education at all except under the conditions of a stable administration, and the cost of education and of the social and development services generally must be met from what we may describe as

Education, 1905, p. 138.

⁴⁷⁵ Wilson, 1978, p. 71, citing the *Straits Settlements Proceedings of Legislative Council, 1917*. p.

a residual fund, that is, from money left over after the costs of services necessary for the maintenance of the fabric of the State have been provided.⁴⁷⁶

Under such circumstances, the education system was primarily centred in areas where there was a strong British presence. Therefore education was most accessible in the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and only in the twentieth century, the Unfederated Malay States. The development of the English-medium school, were based on economic convenience; to fulfil the need for English language educated junior clerks and civil servants.⁴⁷⁷ Such job vacancies predominated in administrative centres primarily in urban areas. The urban-based nature of the education system became apparent when compared to rural areas. The population build-up and strong economic activity, so apparent in the cities and towns, were not as apparent in rural areas, and with the passing of time there was a growing educational disparity between urban and rural spheres. In a 1936 memorandum on education policy, it was stated of rural 'peasants';

An English education will turn the peasant into an urban-minded 'gentleman' and will increase the concentration of population in the towns. It is said that English education would not be provided in the rural areas. Perhaps not. But since, as has been stated above, a knowledge of English is necessary for the best jobs and since the rural inhabitants will see (as indeed he sees already) all the plums going to boys with English education, will he rest content in his village? Will he not clamour for an English education too? Certainly he will. Therefore let us restrict English education as much as possible and remove the temptation from the peasant.⁴⁷⁸

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⁴⁷⁶ D. F. Cooke, 'The Mission Schools of Malaya', 1815-1942, in *Paedagogica Historica*, 2 (2), 1966. p. 364.

⁴⁷⁷ Watson in Mangan (ed.), 1993, p. 163. Leslie O'Brien, 'Education and Colonialism: The Case of Malaya', in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Melbourne, 16 (2), July 1980, p. 55. W. Arthur Lewis, *Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour*, in *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, Vol. 22, (1954), p. 406.

⁴⁷⁸ 'A Memorandum on Education Policy in the Straits Settlements and in the Federated Malay States', Apr. 1936, Public Records Office, SSOC (misc.), p. 39.

Mission schools and Colonial indoctrination

The British allowed the haphazard evolution of what developed into three parallel school systems - wholly government funded schools, partially funded 'grant-in-aid' mission schools and private (usually ethno-linguistically specific in nature) community schools.⁴⁷⁹ In 1852 the first large-scale⁴⁸⁰ effort was made by a non-government body with the opening of St. Joseph's Institution in Singapore and St. Xavier's Institution in Penang, both English-medium schools run by Brothers of the De La Salle Order (otherwise known as the Christian Brothers Schools). The Order of the Holy Infant Jesus (Sister of St. Muar) also set up a convent and school in Singapore in that same year. This was followed up by similar institutions over the following decades in Singapore, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Seremban, and Ipoh. The bulk of Catholic education for girls was handled by the Sisters of the Infant Jesus (C. H. I. J). These religious orders were to become major providers of English-medium education to the majority Roman Catholic communities in the Straits Settlements and Malaya. Early Protestant-based mission schools, like that of the London Missionary Society (L. M. S.), were more modest in scale. There were no more than 700 pupils in its 19 schools.⁴⁸¹ Several schools were also set up by the American Methodist Mission later in the nineteenth century, and to a lesser extent by the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church, even by their own admittance, declared their hold on the education system in Malaya was very small especially when compared to that of the Methodist Church.⁴⁸² (see Table 3), but were relatively smaller in scale when compared to those offered by the Roman Catholic or Methodist ventures.

⁴⁷⁹ Mangan (ed.), 1993, p. 150.

⁴⁸⁰ Cheeseman, May 1954-July 1956, pp. 30-47.

⁴⁸¹ Cooke, 1966, p. 376.

⁴⁸² Cooke, 1966, p. 389. Graham White, 'Church of England Schools in Malaya', in *The Cathedral Courier*, XXV, Apr. 1938, p. 28.

Table 2
Distribution of Students in Singapore
Government and Grant-in-Aid Schools, 1919.

Class of Schools	No. of schools	Enrolment
1. Boy's Schools		
English Government	4	2,127
English Aided	9	4,995
Malay Government	17	1,508
Chinese Aided	1	17
	31	8,607
2. Girl's Schools		
English Government	1	330
English Aided	5	1,934
Malay Government	3	75
Malay Aided	2	30
Chinese Aided	2	49
	12	2,418
3. Mixed Schools		
Tamil Aided	1	54
TOTAL	44	11,079

Source: H. E. Wilson, *Social Engineering in Singapore*, p.48 cited in the *Straits Settlement Annual Departmental Reports, 1919*, p. 589.

Among Christian communities, whatever their ethnic background, the point has to be made that there was a strong tradition, particularly in urban centres, to send one's children to a school that would correlate to one's own Christian denomination.⁴⁸³ This

⁴⁸³ This point was made again by D. F. Cooke, (1966) p. 373, in which the author mentions how Indian parents who could afford to send their children to missions school, would. 'Untitled answers to the Legislative Council by Bro. Lothaire, principal of St. Joseph's Institution [Singapore]', undated: probably 1880s, file D201, doc. i. De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya. C. Bazell, 'Education in Singapore', in W. Makepeace, G. E. Brooke, R. Braddell, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984 [1921]), p. 453.

practice was still strongly apparent after self-government and independence.⁴⁸⁴ C. Bazell, a former official of the Education Department, noted how in the 1890s Roman Catholic mission schools tended to enjoy the privilege of high enrolments. This was attributed to the control the Church 'exercises over its children, not allowing them to go elsewhere.'⁴⁸⁵ In Table 2, out of the fourteen English-language Grant-in-Aid schools, ten (six boys' and four girls' schools) were mission schools. In 1919, five were Roman Catholic, three Methodist and one each for Anglican and Seventh Day Adventist.⁴⁸⁶ Below in Table 3, the major Church denominations and their stake in the education system is shown. The Roman Catholic missions schools, despite their much larger population, only just manages to surpass that of the much smaller Methodist Churches.

There was no Christian-based government school,⁴⁸⁷ eventhough 7 male Christian Indian teachers served in the government-funded Raffles Institution, a wholly funded government school, between the years 1903 and 1946.

Table 3
Percentage of Student Enrolments in Mission Schools,
Singapore 1905-1938^a

	1905	1921	1938
Roman Catholic	1,367 (49.6%)	2,871 (46.9%)	4,635 (57.6%)
Methodist	1,111 (40.3%)	2,612 (42.7%)	2,573 (32.0%)
Anglican	275 (9.9%)	632 (10.3%)	832 (10.3%)
TOTAL	2,753	6,115	8,040

^a Adventist mission school was omitted due to its small size.

Source: *Straits Settlements Blue Books* (annual), 1905, 1921, 1938.

⁴⁸⁴ This was further accentuated by the use of 'feeder' schools - schools channeling pupils into other affiliated schools. Such practices were common with the Christian Brothers Schools (De La Salle Order) and C. H. I. J. convents which preferenced its own primary schools over other non-affiliated schools. O'Brien, July 1980, p. 56.

⁴⁸⁵ Bazell, in Makepeace, Brooke, Braddell, 1991 [1921], p. 453. 'Untitled letter from Mr. S. Colandasamy (Labour Office Penang) to Rt. Rev. Devals, Bishop of Malacca, Singapore dated 17 Jan. 1941.

⁴⁸⁶ *Straits Settlements Blue Books*, 1918.

It is also interesting to note that Christian mission schools presided over half the population of the education system in Singapore in 1919.⁴⁸⁸ By the beginning of the 1940s, this figure had jumped to 64 per cent.⁴⁸⁹ For the most part, the colonial government was satisfied to exploit Christian missionary groups to get education 'on the cheap'.⁴⁹⁰ The prominence of the Christian mission schools continued well after the Japanese Occupation before a change in governmental attitudes to education began to appear in the 1950s, mainly as a result of self-government and independence.⁴⁹¹

So far this section has shown that the British educational curriculum was used to promote the political interests, ideological preferences and perpetuation of the hegemonic influences of the day. It was under these circumstances that urban-based Indian Christians, being predominantly educated in the English language-medium Christian mission school system, shaped their own admiration for things British; British institutions, traditions, dress and even manners. The school curriculum was distinctly Eurocentric in orientation. For example in the 1880s, the syllabi at St. Joseph's Institution (Singapore), included the *History of England, Rome and Greece*.⁴⁹² Many of the books used in the education system over the colonial period were little changed variations of texts used in British schools. Some of the texts were pertinent to the region and examples of these would be W. S. Morgan's *The Story of Malaya* (Wheaton and Co. Exeter), P. Nazareth's *The Malayan Story* (Macmillan & Peter Chong, Singapore) and N. J. Ryan's *Malaya through Four Centuries: An Anthology 1500-1900* (Oxford University Press).

W. S. Morgan's work originally published in the late 1930s, has been found in several prominent school libraries in Malaysia and Singapore - indicating its use in the school syllabus of the day. British benevolence was constantly stressed in content, as in the

⁴⁸⁷ *Straits Settlements Blue Books* (annual) 1903-1946.

⁴⁸⁸ *Straits Settlements Blue Books*, 1918 and 1919. Out of the 11,079 pupil in 1919, 5,576 (1918) were going to mission schools. That is over 50.3 per cent.

⁴⁸⁹ Cooke, 1966, p. 397.

⁴⁹⁰ Mangan (ed.), 1993, p. 159.

⁴⁹¹ Wilson, 1978, p. 240.

⁴⁹² 'Untitled answers to the Legislative Council [Singapore] by Bro. Lothaire, principal of St. Joseph's Institution', undated: probably 1880s, file D201, doc. i. De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya. Other subjects taught were Natural Philosophy, Geometry, Mensuration, Algebra, Astronomy, Arithmetic, Geography, Reading, Writing and Religious Instruction. Watson in Mangan (ed.), 1993, pp. 165-6.

portrayal of British authority figures such as Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore. According to Morgan, '(Raffles) dreamed of the British becoming the overlords of the whole Malay world ... why should not the British become the 'Bitana' (ruler) for the Malays?'. And with regards to their closest European rival in the region, 'He disliked the Dutch and their ways of government. Their desire to grab all trade, and their bleeding of the island for the sake of profits, had brought no good but only bankruptcy to their Company and poverty and discontent to the Malays'. Raffles was obviously being portrayed as a sort of collective benevolent consciousness of British rule. In another passage Morgan tried to attribute '(the abolition of) slavery⁴⁹³, piracy' to Raffles and showed how deeply loved he was by his people and servants.⁴⁹⁴ The overall theme of the text was the justification of British intervention in the region. The Malays and the Malay states were portrayed as being in a state of misrule, where 'a Kris was worth more than a legal document, and where every man went about armed for his own protection.'

In N. J. Ryan's school text *Malaya through four Centuries: An Anthology 1500-1900*, students were taught; 'Malaya after 1896 is the story of steady development towards unity, prosperity and eventual self-government. Malaya's history, which in the preceding centuries had been colourful and turbulent, became more prosaic and peaceful.'⁴⁹⁵

School text books of the day heavily endorsed arbitrary racial classifications. First published around the time of the Second World War, W. S. Morgan's, *Story of Malaya*, utilised in Christian mission schools, used demarcations based on levels of pigmentation, hair type and bodily proportions. It was observed;

Scholars who study races, can tell the tale of a man's ancestry by the shape of his head, his colour, his height and, best of all, his hair. They have agreed that

⁴⁹³ Although Raffles had promulgated laws against slavery in Java and even devoted a section of his book, 'History of Java' (1817: 78-9), to it, he was conveniently dismissive of the British practise of 'forced deliveries' on the west coast of Sumatra. Raffles had justified such action as being natural to these people. Mary Quilty, *Textual Empires: A reading of Early Histories of Southeast Asia*, (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1998), pp. 93-4.

⁴⁹⁴ W. S. Morgan, *Story of Malaya*, (Singapore: Malayan Publishing House, 1956 [9th edition]), p. 10.

⁴⁹⁵ Mangan (ed.), 1993, p. 167. 'Raffles', in *Malaysia Message*, XXIX (4), Jan. 1920, p. 27 - a review of Rev. Bethune Cook's study of Stamford Raffles highlights his 'self-sacrificing' ways and 'sincere, Christian' demeanor.

mankind is divided into three great families - woolly-haired, the wavy haired and the straight-haired.⁴⁹⁶

It is interesting to note that the anthropometrical methods, used in this school text book, had been discredited as early as 1895 and had been in decline ever since.

Another school textbook, which was co-published by a prominent Roman Catholic mission school book supplier Peter Chong & Co., Philip Nazareth's *The Malayan Story* assesses the appearance and insinuates the 'advancement' of the different indigenous races of the Malay peninsular,⁴⁹⁷

Men have measured the skulls of the Malays, and they say the Malay has a bigger skull than the other races of the peninsula. Thus he has a bigger brain and is more intelligent. This is because the Malay, as a dweller and wanderer in the Archipelago, has mixed with other people.⁴⁹⁸

Although no direct correlation was made between the superiority of one race over another, there was an implied recognition and appreciation of 'socio-biological' associations between racial 'types' and its supposed inherent attributes. Young students from different racial groupings would frame themselves, as well as members of other communities, along these supposed scientific boundaries mentioned in these school texts. Therefore ideal physical attributes for hair type, pigmentation and other affinities would be created even if it did not exist in the first place.⁴⁹⁹ It is no coincidence that the attributes of the 'less civilized/backward' are acquainted with stronger pigmentation, smaller frames and cranial size - attributes common among members of the Asian communities.

⁴⁹⁶ Morgan, 1956, p. 7. P. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 103-4.

⁴⁹⁷ Peter Chong and Company was a Roman Catholic, family owned bookstore/publisher, based in Victoria Street, Singapore. It supplied school text books to Catholic mission schools in the region. Information from Dr. Hong Lysa (Department of History, National University of Singapore). Interview with Mr. Stephen Cheng Chin Mong (born 1918), Singapore, 22 Jan. 1997.

⁴⁹⁸ P. Nazareth, *The Malayan Story*, (Singapore: Peter Chong and Co., early 1950s), p. 11.

⁴⁹⁹ This also facilitated the idea of how the European (or 'Aryan') was the pinnacle of human beauty. This was in keeping with nineteenth century racialist perceptions. Richard Dyer, *White*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 71.

Even popular youth pastimes such as cinema-going, helped inculcate cultural preferences. By the 1930s, accessibility to 'movies' were relatively cheap, between 5 cents (for a bench seat) and 10 cents (for a padded chair) per sitting. North American movies were the popular choice among the young.⁵⁰⁰ In India, Western films and its 'stars' dominated in popularity polls.⁵⁰¹ Screen personalities such as Greta Garbo (she outnumbered others by a factor of 2:1)⁵⁰², Fredric March, Shirley Temple, Norma Shearer, Claudette Colbert, Maurice Chevalier, Laurel and Hardy and Boris Karloff were very popular. Films like *Clive of India* (1935), *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935), *Anna Karenina* (1935), *David Copperfield* (1935), *Bonnie Scotland* (1935), *Painted Veil* (1934), and the *Count of Monte Cristo* (1934) were popular favourites with cinema patrons. Indian movies, although quite popular, did not canvass as many votes as that of their European and North American counterparts.⁵⁰³ Such preferences were mirrored among Indian communities in British Malaya.

The British educational curriculum was used in tandem with other cultural influences to promote the political interests, ideological preferences and perpetuation of the hegemonic influences of the day. This facilitated an indirect process of socialization, referred to by Elizabeth Vallance as the 'hidden curriculum'.⁵⁰⁴ K. S. Maniam illustrates this point well in his short novel, 'The Return'. He notes how western practices were inculcated by ridiculing local customs and dress. He recounts how in school traditional dress and sanitary habits were ridiculed as part of a lesson.

She (Miss Nancy, the teacher) started innocently, mimicking – I don't know how she learned Chinese and Indian sanitary habits – the way we cleaned our teeth with rice-husk ash. She had even assembled the articles we used during our morning wash on the teacher's desk. The collection of rusty pail, milk-tin dipper

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), 1 Sept. 1997, Singapore. Mr. Lourdes spoke admirably of the 1930s science-fiction serial, *Flash Gordon*.

⁵⁰¹ 'S. D. Subbulakshmi Heads the List: Madras Film Ballot', in *The Indian*, 14, 28 Mar. 1936, p. 15.

⁵⁰² Greta Garbo received 411 votes, Fredric March followed with 265 votes. The next closest female 'star' was Shirley Temple with 132 votes. Dyer (1997) noted how strong lighting, usually concentrated on the Garbo's face, predominated in many of her films. Richard Dyer, *White*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 134. This emphasised the 'whiteness' of her skin colouration - an element tied in with the 'Aryan' ideal.

⁵⁰³ Indian 'stars' such as Vemuri Gaggayya, Saigral, S. D. Subbulakshmi, M. S. Vijayal and Subita Devi only received up to 170 votes.

and even a cracked, enamel spittoon (final insult?), one afternoon in front of the class unnerved us, the Indians.⁵⁰⁵

Another important point is how the education system portrayed itself as an ideological neutral and politically independent entity. This assumption of equality in all things under the auspices of the empire, was a notion which helped conceal the overt political engineering of the education system and therefore made it much more efficient.⁵⁰⁶

It is obvious that the education system was directly inculcating compliance to the status quo as ascribed by the British colonial system. The writings of Viscount James Bryce (1838-1922), which this study has shown to be the intellectual ballast for British colonialism in Malaya and the Straits Settlements, placed a strong emphasis on a racial hierarchy and on perceived behavioral attributes was the cornerstone of British authority in the region.

If the function of an educational system was to inculcate elements of social responsibility, moral rectitude and political compliance; then the question has to be asked - who would be the arbiter of such vague terms? Under the circumstances, governmental authority, being paramount in society, took precedence. Therefore any interpretation of social responsibility, morality and political allegiances had to be compliant with governmental definitions and interests.

These developments, and the resultant conditions, manifested themselves via a resignation to authority and acceptance of existing social hierarchies. This is clearly reflected in the school environment and its appointment of school prefects and class monitors. School 'prefects' were used in the 1930s to implement Education Department language policy. An interviewee described how 'prefects' were expected to report students who spoke any language other than English during school hours. As noted by a principal of a mission school, native languages had long been regarded as

⁵⁰⁴ Elizabeth Vallance, 'Hiding the hidden curriculum: An interpretation of the language of justification in the 19th century educational reform', in Henry Giroux and D. Purpel, *The hidden curriculum and moral education*, (Berkeley: McCutchan Publications, 1983), p. 10, cited in Lily Rahim, 1998, p. 171.

⁵⁰⁵ K. S. Maniam, *The Return*, (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Asia, 1981), pp. 31, 35, 39, 41.

⁵⁰⁶ Rahim, 1998, p. 171.

not being 'of much service to the colony'.⁵⁰⁷ These monitory appointments served as a link between teaching staff and students, and were expected to act as 'positive' role models. Such appointments were usually made in recognition of their academic achievements and or ability to conform to authority. Leadership qualities alone were not a strong prerequisite. In turn, these appointments gave this select group the power to discipline and inform on non-conformist elements within the school.

The standard of education, according to H. T. Clark, Inspector of Schools (Singapore & Labuan), was 'not as high as in England' - a strong emphasis on rote learning predominated in local schools which de-emphasized critical thinking and problem solving. This showed how many British officials had little knowledge of circumstances in Great Britain. In his report, Clark critically compared the local colonial school system to the standards of the elite English 'public' school system, not realising that British state schools were by far worse off in comparison to many mission schools in colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements.⁵⁰⁸ In addition, there was the general practice of segregating the so-called 'good' academic performers from the 'bad' ones. Streaming according to academic performance was commonplace and reinforced justifications for societal disparities, not to faults in the economic, societal or political structures, but simplistically attributed to individual capability and 'intelligence'.

Technology was also used as a justification for colonialism - it was through western colonialism, that local access to modern technology was first made available. Therefore a continued patronage of colonialism bore a promise of a brighter technological future. From the grass-roots level, support for technology emanated from several sources. Science-fiction and adventure serials with predictable allegories of the unstoppable march of modern society and technology versus backward cultures, were extremely commonplace. These ideas were popularly conveyed through contemporary literature and especially via the new medium of cinema. This proved to

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921), Singapore, 21 November 1996. *Education Department Circular 8/1938* (Director of Education 370/38), 1 June 1938, file D316. 'Untitled answers to the Legislative Council by Bro. Lothaire, principal of St. Joseph's Institution [Singapore]', undated: probably 1880s, file D201, doc. i. De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya. 'Untitled letter from Bro. James to the Inspector of Schools [Penang]', 12 March 1928, p. 2. file B298, De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya.

be a popular mode by which youth, particularly young males, absorbed the optimistic promise of a new technological society. Even among the older and more influential members of the Indian Christian communities, such views were quite common, as noted by Rev. S. S. Pakianathan when he marvelled at the, 'invention of the steamships, the locomotive engine, the recent invention of electricity, telegraph, telephone and the wireless telegraph.'⁵⁰⁹

Concepts of militarism were strongly advocated from the early part of the twentieth century. For example, the establishment of Cadet Corps and Scouts in all-male mission schools was common practice by the 1920s. Other mission and elite government schools of the day had established similar para-military groups into their curriculum from about the time of the First World War. In 1924, the St. John's Institution Cadet Corp, in Kuala Lumpur, comprised of 2 officers, 68 'other ranks', and 12 recruits.⁵¹⁰ This was used to foster stronger identification and approval for the military establishment, which in turn manufactured approval for acts of political aggression and the aggrandizement of warfare.⁵¹¹ It also affirmed the hegemony of the military superiority of the colonial British in the minds of many a student. Notions of 'might is right' and an unquestioning compliance to authority and hierarchy ensued. In all-male schools, public humiliation via corporal punishment, usually in the form of caning, was a common deterrent to non-conformity and reinforcement of school authority.

The development of a strong element of what J. A. Mangan refers to as the 'games ethic', mainly prevalent in male only environments, began to emerge in some mission schools. A strong code of personal conduct was the mainstay of this line of thinking, brought about by a zealous exaltation of authority and its authority figures. Consequently, an element of 'machismo' was occasionally played out in disputes between pupils which were resolved under the supervision of a teacher in a boxing

⁵⁰⁸ *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, p. 36.

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Rev. S. S. Pakianathan, 'The Changing Asiatic Mind', in *The Malaysia Message*, Feb. 1926, p. 3.

⁵¹⁰ 'St. John's Institution Cadet Corps (Kuala Lumpur), Annual Inspection on 6th August 1924, in St. John's, K. L. 1904-1933', De La Salle Provincilate, Petaling Jaya. 'Untitled account of Armistice Day celebrations 1922', St. George's School (Taiping), De La Salle Provincilate, Petaling Jaya.

⁵¹¹ Unlike developing trends in Europe immediately after the First World War, it appeared anti-war sentiments were not prevalent in Malaya and Singapore.

match.⁵¹² Although this study could not confirm the popularity of such tactics or whether it was endorsed by school authorities, attitudes like this affirmed notions exalting masculinist culture and its emphasis on physical aggression and domination over that of reason, mediation or even the concept of Christian forgiveness.

The colonial policy-makers wanted to reconstruct a cross-section of Malayan colonial society - within the confines of the classroom. Issues of 'law and order' were mirrored via its authoritarian rules and regulations. Strongly delineated social/racial hierarchies mimicked the teacher-student relationship and likewise class and wealth disparities were simplistically attributed to differences in intellectual capabilities. Corporal punishment meted out to non-conformists and the exaltation of the military via paramilitary groups, helped many a student accept the dictates and responsibilities required of colonial 'nationalism' and the modern capitalist nation state.

Support of British colonial hegemony was often articulated by teaching staff. On the 11th of November 1922 (Armistice Day), Brother James Gilbert, Director Brother of St. George's Institution (Taiping), addressing a school assembly, exalted the 'victory of Britain and her allies' and claimed, 'that right had once again triumphed over might', and 'that ideas, not force, were in the future to rule the world'. Bro. Gilbert went on to say;

The people of Malaya saw few of the horrors of actual warfare; but the men who fought for us in Europe, Asia and Africa by land and sea and in the air were fighting our battles no less than if the enemy had been in our own towns and villages killing, burning and pillaging. Think what that would have meant the benefits of just government and the ideals of freedom and truth. These are the solid foundations on which the British Empire is built.⁵¹³

Bro. Gilbert's overt 'patriotism', should be taken with a degree of cynicism. Political allegiances were often coloured by their own objectives - in this case the survival of their school, religious order and Catholic Church in British Malaya. Many members of

⁵¹² This study has not been able to confirm if this was a common practice. However it obviously did take place from time to time under the supervision of some teaching staff up to the Second World War.

⁵¹³ 'S. G. I. Taiping 1915-1949', (unpublished), De La Salle Provinciate, Petaling Jaya.

the clergy did not express any identification with any particular nation state, even though many may have been born and bred there. Many came to Malaya, lived and died, not as foreign subjects but with a strong sense of being part of their adopted communities.⁵¹⁴ The M. E. P. comprised primarily of 'secular' clergy; their sole objective being religious with 'no earthly motives', with 'no political intercourse with their country, no interference in political service. They are priests, and profess to belong to no party, no political creed, no ambition but propagation of the Christian religion, and with it education and civilization'.⁵¹⁵ The allegiances expounded by members of the clergy, especially those of the Mission Etrangeres de Paris (M. E. P.), became apparent mainly through dealings with the Japanese during the Second World War. Japanese authorities often unofficially demanded statements as to whether particular clerics were for or against the Axis powers; in reply many claimed themselves subjects of the Vatican.⁵¹⁶

This stand was also illustrated in a letter to the Director of Education, Dr. Richard Winstedt⁵¹⁷ from Bro. James of St. Xavier's Institution in May 1931. The letter concerned a rumoured governmental plan to reduce the number of Brothers in all De La Salle mission schools. Bro. James argued that should such a step be taken, 'we should be driven to the necessity, in defence of our most sacred rights, to conduct our schools - financially unaided by the Department - a private institution'. In addition, Bro. James iterated that he was prepared to 'dispense with the services of all the lay teachers' in order to allow all Brothers a teaching post and therefore reason to stay within the mission school system. Bro. James ended the letter wishing to continue the school's commitment to the 'sound principles of religion, loyalty and patriotism'.⁵¹⁸ This letter showed that their primary allegiance lay with the continued survival of their

⁵¹⁴ Interview with Fr. Albert Fortier (M. E. P.), (born 1920), November 1996, Singapore. Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat (M. E. P.), (born 1910), Cheras, 25 October 1997.

⁵¹⁵ Rev. J. A. Bethune Cook, *Sunny Singapore: An Account of the Place and its People, with a sketch of the results of Missionary work*, (London: Elliot Stock, 1907), p. 123, citing Mr. Thomas Braddell, C. M. G., fifty years earlier.

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat (M. E. P.), (born 1910), Cheras, 25 October 1997.

⁵¹⁷ Richard Winstedt was appointed Director of Education in 1916. He stayed in this position for 16 years.

⁵¹⁸ Bro. James, 'Staffing of St. John's and St. Paul's, 1931', 23 May 1931. Penang. B296. De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya. Ho Seng Ong, *Methodist Schools in Malaysia*, (Petaling Jaya: Board of Education of the Malaya Annual Conference, 1964), p. 129. Ho spoke of how early reports of government support was 'painted rather rosy'. This was most certainly done, in light of the Methodist Church's disappointment about the meagre amounts involved, to secure future contributions from the colonial government.

school and religious order. Continued loyalty to the British colonial government was therefore quite conditional.

An interviewee noted how some of the Irish brothers (teaching staff) sometimes criticised British colonialism describing the injustices imposed on the Irish people, as in the 'Potato Famine', the Uprisings of the 'Black and Tans', and the persecutions under Oliver Cromwell. This additional information was often provided during some history lessons that used government approved, pro-British text books. However when it came to addressing issues involving 'non-white' or Asian elements in conflict with British interests, these same Irish teachers would side with the British, painting (as stipulated by the text books) competing Asian or non-white components as the villain.⁵¹⁹

These contradictions should be seen in light of the competing political loyalties demanded by the British authorities. While on one hand, being Irish, many were very aware of the negativities of British colonialism, however due to political expediency, could not relate direct political messages to their pupils. To do so was unwise for themselves, their religious order and their school. One would optimistically (this is open to conjecture) assume that some of these brothers were in effect trying to instill some degree of understanding with regards to the true nature of British colonialism. On the other hand, it could just be that the brothers were simply distressed by the historical treatment of the Irish nation and its people, but did not correlate it to the circumstances prevalent in colonial Malaya at the time. Whatever the reason of this stand, many interviewed ex-pupils showed little comprehension of these lessons and often took the lessons at face value. Only occasionally were such contradictions understood.

There were other ways of keeping mission schools in line with British colonial interests. Financial assistance was used to keep schools in check. From 1919, the grant system was revised to incorporate 'payment of a grant equal to the difference between the revenue from fees and other sources and the approved expenditure.' Mission

⁵¹⁹ Interview with James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, 12 January 1999. Irish brothers played a prominent part in the Roman Catholic school system. They were integral in the running of these schools and even well after the Second World War, dominated appointments to its Directorships especially in its secondary schools.

school teachers, with parallel qualifications, were paid the same amount as that of government teachers. A 'special salary (flat rate)' and leave conditions were paid to missionary teachers.⁵²⁰ Government funding was not sufficient and when such remuneration was made available, it was received with much pomp and ceremony. With the acquisition of government moneys to erect a new building extension, St. Paul's Institution in Seremban held a special function to celebrate its opening. In attendance was the Resident of Negri Sembilan, Mr. A. H. Lemon and Mrs. Lemon, Capt. and Mrs. Graham, Mr. J. P. Swettenham, Mr. Sumner, Mr. J. Harrup, Rev. Bro. Marcian (Director of St. Xavier's Institution, Penang), the Bro. Director of St. Paul's Institution (Seremban) and 'a score of members of the Order from Kuala Lumpur, Kajang, Malacca, Port Dickson, etc'. There is no doubt that scarcity in funding was used by the colonial authorities to control and regulate the policy of these otherwise 'independent' schools. A Methodist source noted in 1904 how government grants were 'meagre' and a 'burden to the treasurers and a dilemma to the principals'.⁵²¹ To help curtail possible political divergence or dissent in the teaching staff and its pupils, the government resorted to regular intimidatory school inspections from 1870, whose reports assessed the eligibility of a school to much needed financial assistance.⁵²² This was partly alluded to by the Board of Education in a menacing 1905 report which noted how the, 'Roman Catholic Clergy, but all ... having a system of their own, unchecked, as a rule, by any government supervision.' This shows the concern exhibited on the part British to the compatibility of the Roman Catholic Church objectives, mission school curriculum, the political allegiances of the large Irish teaching staff, along with the aims of the British colonial government.⁵²³

Education of females lagged far behind the generally male-dominated education system. Leslie O'Brien noted that females, of any class or ethnicity, had less access to

⁵²⁰ Such methods were used with the vernacular Chinese schools from the 1920s, mainly because they were viewed as being a potential security threat. O'Brien, July 1980, p. 57. Susan E. Ackerman and Raymond L. M. Lee, *Heaven in Transition: Non-Muslim Religious Innovation and Ethnic Identity in Malaysia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1988), p. 30. Cheeseman, May 1954-July 1956, pp. 39-40.

⁵²¹ 'Seremban's Institution: St. Paul's new wing opened. A successful function', in *Malay Mail*, 28 September 1912. Ho Seng Ong, 1964, p. 129.

⁵²² Wilson, 1978, p. 26. David A. Bishop (Acting Inspector of Schools, Selangor), 'Annual Inspections', (1909-1910), in *St. John's, K. L. 1904-1933*, unpublished, De la Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya. J. Watson (Chief Inspector of English Schools, S. S. and F. M. S.), 'The Oral English Examination, 1935', 14 March 1936, file B302, De La Salle Provincialate, Petaling Jaya. Cheeseman, May 1954-July 1956, p. 39.

⁵²³ Wilson, 1978, p. 25, citing the *Special Reports on Education Subject* by the Great Britain, Board of

education than their male counterparts. Patriarchal-based traditions tied familial expectations of their daughters to domestic responsibilities. Issues relating to wage-earning and education was seen as a male responsibility.⁵²⁴ This was compounded by the general lack of interest on the part of colonial government, as O'Brien noted, which did not necessarily discriminate against women, but simply ignored them.

If the educational system was characterised by a shortage of schools for all children, the probability of a good proportion of that being allocated for female education was close to non-existent.⁵²⁵ If a young girl was lucky enough to be given the chance to get an education, the limited selection of subjects often mirrored the narrow gender roles expectant of British and Malayan colonial society.⁵²⁶

Several Church groups did cater to female education, but these efforts were few and far between.⁵²⁷ In addition to this, traditional practices imposed on girls often had a detrimental affect on the educational opportunities of boys. In 1905, a Church paper reported that a number of the 'brightest young men' were often forced to leave school to find employment because of the dowry requirements of an unmarried sister.⁵²⁸ These dowry costs, appeared to be the biggest impediment to female education. Women, apart from being the 'most expensive item in the family', did not compensate the cost of an expensive education. In fact, an education was deemed a negative in the marriage stakes. Discriminatory stereotypes of the 'educated' women, devoid of womanly grace and modesty, were common.⁵²⁹

Most mission schools also ran orphanages for the young. This area of study has hardly been touched on in academic circles. Although the size of such establishments were

Education, 1905, p. 138.

⁵²⁴ O'Brien, July 1980, p. 58. Cheeseman, May 1954-July 1956. p. 41.

⁵²⁵ Rev. S. S. Pakianathan, 'Our Responsibility in Malaya', in *The Indian*, 7 (1), Oct. 1925, R. B. Krishan and C. R. Menon (ed.), p. 149.

⁵²⁶ O'Brien, 1980, p. 59.

⁵²⁷ 'The Anglo Tamil School, Singapore', in *The Malaysia Message*, XV (3), Dec. 1905, p. 25.

⁵²⁸ 'Tamil Wedding Dowries', in *The Malaysia Message*, XV (1), Oct. 1905, p. 2. This was supposedly common among both Hindu and Christian boys.

⁵²⁹ Mrs. E. V. Davies M. A., 'Women's Education in South India', in *The Malaysia Message*, 37 (4), Jan. 1927, p. 6. 'Our Women's Corner', in *The Indian*, 28 March 1936, Kuala Lumpur, p. 15.

never very large, demand for places were consistently strong.⁵³⁰ Many of these young girls were educated to varying degrees.⁵³¹ However, in keeping with the prevalent ideas of domestic female responsibilities,⁵³² the orphanages particularly of those of the Roman Catholic convents encouraged many of their young charges, on reaching the age of fifteen or so, to get married. Many of their male suitors were members of the local Church, and upon recommendation by his parish priest, visited the convent and chose a wife, with the permission of the nuns in residence. This was a common practice, especially in the nineteenth and well into the first decades of the twentieth century. This will be discussed in detail later on in this study.

Plantation Schools: Subsistence education

If colonial government policy lacked resolve with regards to its urban-based education system, government initiatives towards plantation schools was non-existent.⁵³³ Urban concerns relating to financial sustainability of education were infinitesimal in comparison to the fundamental failings of the colonial education system in rural areas.

Rural education in the Indian labour dominated rubber plantations, (75 per cent of all Indian schools were estate schools)⁵³⁴ was in affect left to the dictates of plantation owners. Such 'schools' were not compelled to register themselves with corresponding government departments.⁵³⁵ According to K. S. Sandhu, many planters looked upon the provision of education as threatening the *status quo* in highly stratified plantation society.⁵³⁶ Even after the enactment of the *Labour Code* (1912), which made the provision of schools mandatory on any estate with more than ten children of school-age, many planters made sure any moves in this direction remained ineffective by purposely impeding their implementation. For example, few plantations before the Japanese Occupation employed any qualified teachers. Teaching personnel were little

⁵³⁰ 'Tamil Girls' Orphanage and Training School, Penang', in *The Malaysia Message*, XV (3), Dec. 1905, p. 30. 'Application from Roman Catholic Convent, Taiping, for aid towards maintenance of orphans', 12 Jan. 1900, High Commissioner 636/1900. (translation from French).

⁵³¹ As noted from Church marriage records, some could sign their names while others could not.

⁵³² 'Application from Roman Catholic Convent, Taiping, for aid towards maintenance of orphans', 12 Jan 1900, High Commissioner for Malay States 636/1900. Sr. Marie refers to the convents duty to 'bring up these children and make good housewives and good Mothers of them', p. 2.

⁵³³ Primary education was provided by the colonial government for rural Malay communities. O'Brien, 1980, pp. 56-7.

⁵³⁴ Cheeseman, May 1954-July 1956, p. 39.

⁵³⁵ 'Report of the A. G. I. for 1928: High infantile mortality on Estates', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (50), Kuala Lumpur, 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

more than kanganies (foreman), plantation clerks or possibly part-time teachers.⁵³⁷ These 'schools' were usually sheds, and in most cases more than one grade was taught by the same teacher. In addition to this attendance was not compulsory.⁵³⁸

Compounding this problem, most pre-war labourer family units earned between \$10 to \$15 per month (this increased to around \$50 to \$65 by the 1950s)⁵³⁹ and could not afford to send children to study at the better equipped urban schools.⁵⁴⁰

Family units found themselves reliant on the earning capacity of their children.⁵⁴¹ As noted by K. S. Sandhu, most plantations provided job opportunities for children from ages ten to twelve years old.⁵⁴² Under such circumstances few children stayed in school beyond the first few years, completing several years of a very rudimentary primary education.⁵⁴³ Therefore little to no skills relevant to social mobility were passed on to these children. Even the medium of instruction was not in English,⁵⁴⁴ the language in which the realities of the colonial society and economy were transmitted.

An assessment of plantation worker attitudes to education would not be complete if only an examination of facilities and funding is discussed. A more comprehensive view, taking into account overall socio-economic status and avenues for mobility has to be examined. Many writers in the past have cited 'ignorance and illiteracy' and 'incompetency' among plantation workers (and teaching staff) as being among the reasons for the lack of education for plantation children.⁵⁴⁵ Even within the estate communities, there appeared to have been a strong understanding of the link between

⁵³⁶ Sandhu, 1969, p. 259.

⁵³⁷ *The Indian Pioneer*, Dec. 1929, p. 1.

⁵³⁸ Sandhu, 1969, p. 260. Cheeseman, May 1954-July 1956, p. 39. *The Indian Pioneer*, 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

⁵³⁹ Interview with Mr. Jaganaden, (born 1935), Melaka (Merlimau), 28 Oct. 1997. Sandhu, 1969, p. 261. Sandhu puts the average 1957 wage at between \$65 to \$80.

⁵⁴⁰ O'Brien, 1980, p. 55. Sandhu, 1969, p. 260. Jain, 1970, pp. 434-5. Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997 (in Tamil). Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁴¹ Helen Ong, 'Our Lady of Lourdes and the Indians', in *The Malayan Catholic News*, Singapore, 3 Feb. 1952, p. 3.

⁵⁴² Sandhu, 1969, p. 260. Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997 (in Tamil). Mr. Chinnapen began employment at age 14.

⁵⁴³ Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997 (in Tamil).

⁵⁴⁴ The languages used in these schools were mainly Tamil, some Telegu, and a few Malayalam. 'The Indian Pioneer', 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

a good English-education as opposed to one provided by a estate school.⁵⁴⁶ Ravindra K. Jain addresses this issue more comprehensively when he argues that recruitment and existence within the plantation 'took on the aspect of a total institution'. Under such a regime, all relationships were personified by superordination and subordination. Draconian structures were purposely imposed by managerial staff to help maintain total control on all aspects of plantation operations in the hope of maximising profits. Therefore, even if there was some degree of recognition by the labourer community that educational opportunities were wanting, there were no channels for action anyway. As Jain noted, 'serious limitations were placed upon an estate coolie's spatial movements and occupational mobility'.⁵⁴⁷

Fanny Colonna argued that the reason for rural indifference to education was due to its lack of relevance to those communities. Illustrating this point, by examining educational policy in colonial Algeria, Colonna concluded that this indifference had little to do with rural 'passivity'. She noted the concept of education was created for and by the 'dominant' society, in this case urban-based colonial society.⁵⁴⁸ The 'language' and 'culture' of the plantation was different from that of urban centres.⁵⁴⁹ Putting this into the Malayan context, there was a difference in language, plantation workers often speaking what was regarded as lower and colloquial dialect variations from that of the 'educated' classical dialects spoken by some urbanites. Even prewar Malayan Tamil novelists, who wrote about rural estate life, were mostly educated in the English language-medium school system.⁵⁵⁰ Culturally the vast majority of these workers came from village/rural environments, where ideals and expectations concerning lifestyle options of the urbanite would seem very alien.

It was therefore not surprising to find that academic performance was strongly linked with a series of social advantages. More than half of all Christian Indians was

⁵⁴⁵ Sandhu, 1969, p. 260. Cheeseman, May 1954 - July 1956, p. 39. T. G. Thomas, B. A, in *The Indian*, Apr. 1925, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁴⁶ Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁴⁷ Ravindra. K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 295.

⁵⁴⁸ Colonna, 1997, pp. 347-8.

⁵⁴⁹ Dass, 1991, p. 32. Dass mentions that the urban educated Indian administrative staffer differed by 'language, culture, and social position' from that of the Indian worker.

⁵⁵⁰ Sababathy s/o Venugopal, *Malaysian Tamil Novels after Independence*, (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, Ph.D. thesis, 1993), pp. 19-20.

originally from urban centres in India.⁵⁵¹ Many had an early exposure to an urban-based mission education in India and enjoyed its ensuing privileges. Culturally acclimatised to urban centres, where they had a level of contact with British and things British, it was therefore not surprising the closer physically and geographically a community lived in relation to the 'dominant' society, the stronger the degree of cultural advantage. Urban dwellers found they were the only ones allowed relative access to an education profile close to that of a British student.⁵⁵²

Urban students found themselves better located in relation to the 'dominant' culture than rural students. Due to social, geographical and cultural distance imposed on rural students, academic excellence was rarely achieved, and if so, a rural student had to possess extraordinary academic characteristics in order to break out from its mould. The element of social pressure was a determinant of academic performance. It was to a student's disadvantage to differ from their peers. To achieve too much or too little academically was dependent on the level of school performance. This performance was in turn tied in with the element of social and cultural distance the school and community had in relation to the dominant culture.⁵⁵³ Consequently socio-economic backgrounds, or more precisely a student or school's relationship to the 'dominant' culture were strong determinants in the role or selection of elites.

Conclusion

When all is said and done, the question still has to be asked - what was the Christian Indian communities' general view of their British colonial masters? From the information gathered, this study would surmise that the feeling were twofold; specific to both urban centres and rural estates.

In the urban centres the feeling were that of confused but fearful respect. 'Confused' because negative racial colonial images largely contradicted their own cultural 'identity'⁵⁵⁴ (as South Indians). These images conveniently dovetailed with the

⁵⁵¹ Geoffrey Oddie, *Christianity and Social Mobility in South India 1840-1920: A continuing debate*, in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 1996, XIX, Special Edition, (Australia: South Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1996), p. 153.

⁵⁵² *The Indian Pioneer*, 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

⁵⁵³ Colonna, 1997, pp. 356-7.

⁵⁵⁴ Partha Chatterjee noted how Bengali nationalist from the nineteenth century were often convinced of the 'superiority' of their indigenous culture but at the same time eager to adopt new ideas from the

traditional concepts of 'varna' and their status as dark, lowly Dravidians. At the same time, these ideas were challenged by the rise of Dravidian nationalist and Indian nationalist ideas emanating from South India and the local press in Malaya and the Straits Settlements – a point discussed in greater detail in chapter 6. 'Fearful respect' because the colonial authorities held much sway with regards to employment, especially in realm of the civil service.

Among the urban communities it was generally accepted that the British were a necessary force to help maintain peace and order or act as a buffer against other supposedly 'hostile' groups. This idea was bolstered by a lack of cultural 'confidence', not only of the Indian Christian communities, but of all Asian communities in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Secondly, the Indian Christian population being largely immigrant-based, and therefore 'visitors' and 'outsiders' to the territories, often tempered their compulsion to challenge the status quo.⁵⁵⁵ Thirdly, strong divisions between the ethnic groups themselves, were often left purposely unresolved by the colonial British which helped in their 'divide and rule' tactic.⁵⁵⁶ Fourthly, there was an implicit understanding that the British community, as colonialist masters or as a 'race', were inherently superior and therefore acted as a 'civilizing' example to the newly westernizing Asian communities. And lastly, particularly with the case of urban-based Indian Christian communities, the twin issues of keeping one's employment and the threat of hostile government surveillance was often uppermost in the mind of many a government employee.

The ambivalence harboured by urban communities for its rural 'cousins' is noteworthy. To many, the differences between the two groups strongly helped to identify the other. Thus within the urban communities, it was the 'self-inflicted' circumstances of the rural worker which, unlike the 'educated' urbanite, was the reason for their poverty.

West. Two standpoints which were difficult to consolidate. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 88, 120.

⁵⁵⁵ Arasaratnam, 1970, pp. 82-3 citing B. K. Chengapa's article in *The Selangor Indian*, January 1932, p. 7. Khoo Kay Kim, 'The "Indian Association Movement" in Peninsular Malaysia: The Early Years', in *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, LXI (2), Dec. 1992, p. 10 citing Rev. Raju Naidu's inaugural speech of the Penang Indian Association on 2nd April 1906. Reported in *The Pinang Gazette*, April 24, 1928 and *The Malaya Tribune*, April 26, 1928.

⁵⁵⁶ Ness, 1967, pp. 48-9. Sandhu, 1969, p. 58, with reference to CO 273, 2 (1858-9), 4.2.1858; 6 (1863-4).

However the element of control, generally more subtle in urban centres, was blatant in the estates. Colonialism in the plantation frontier differed greatly from that of the urban centres. Colonialism in the urban sphere was heavily reliant on the concepts of its own moral righteousness and benevolence. Colonialism in the rural estates was by far more openly draconian, cruel and inequitable. No ideological attempt to hide these features was made in the rural environment.

The education system, which played a large role in ideologically subjugating entire urban communities, was not relied on in the estates. Laws and intellectual boundaries in the cities and towns were exchanged for gates, fences and the whip in the estates. And it is therefore in these isolated estates that one first finds the seeds of dissent that were only to take root decades later in the form of anti-colonialism in the cities and towns of Malaya and the Straits Settlements.

Chapter 6

Collusion and Resistance

This chapter will examine resistance to colonial hegemony and how it personified itself. Resistance, under normal circumstances, could not be overtly articulated in view of socio-economic or political retribution and marginalisation by 'hostile' colonial authorities. Challenging the colonial status quo was not an option open to the vast majority. Many found it necessary to put up with daily humiliation rather than confront the uncertainties of unemployment. People felt British colonial financial power very deeply.

Such repression contributed to a stifled environment and the inability to express such grievances often showed up as manipulative and 'back-stabbing' tactics in the workplace. This type of behaviour is called 'subordinate resistance'. Other more direct forms of resistance will also be examine. This brand of resistance was more direct and often embodied itself in criticism, action or directly challenging colonial ideology. These approaches appeared to be popular among some sections of the 'middle-classes' communities and largely by the trade union movement.

Unmasking the Raj: The Malevolent face of Colonialism in the estates

Political marginality was the by-product of British policy in the plantations. This policy directly hampered developments in estate communities. From the onset, plantation labour was destined to poverty. Wages were low, working conditions restrictive and conditions bad. Land ownership among estate labourers was non-existent in Malaya and the Straits Settlements.⁵⁵⁷ With the large-scale implementation of the kangany system by the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a small improvement, but not enough to bring about positive change. Chandra Muzaffar notes how colonial recruitment systems 'bore the characteristics of slavery' and disallowed

⁵⁵⁷ 'Report of the A. G. I. for 1928: High infantile mortality on Estates', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (50), Kuala Lumpur, 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

any improvement from one generation to the next because it 'completely lacked of free market mobility'.⁵⁵⁸

Profit maximisation was the order of the day. The dual targets of profit generation and worker welfare were not compatible. For example, wages were kept low by both the colonial government and plantation management by regulating the supply of labour. During the period of the 'Great Depression', it was no coincidence that immigration from South India almost stopped with many being repatriated or simply made redundant.⁵⁵⁹ Consequently there was no impetus for any increase in wages, since there existed little market pressure for such a decision to be made.

Another negative aspect of plantation conditions was the 'captive' nature of its employment.⁵⁶⁰ Employment mobility was largely curtailed by the need of an official permit in order to find alternative employment at other estates.⁵⁶¹ Even for something as minor as temporary leave from estate premises, managerial permission had to be sought. Fr. Louis Guitatt (M. E. P.), a Roman Catholic priest, regularly had to seek the permission of plantation managers in order for parishioners to attend or celebrate Mass in or outside estate premises. Religious facilities were sometimes built within some estates, but usually at the expense of the labourer community. A 1929 report noted that many estates deducted from 10 to 50 cents per head, per month.⁵⁶² A large sum, taking account many earned between \$10 to \$15 a month. Flexibility differed from estate to estate, according to the whims of the manager. In Fr. Guitatt's experience (pre-war), access was allowed approximately once in three months, although a degree of flexibility was shown after the Japanese Occupation. Especially with the onslaught of trade unionism and the anti-colonial/anti-British sentiments

⁵⁵⁸ Chandra Muzaffar, 'Political Marginalisation in Malaysia', in K. S. Sandhu and A. Mani (ed.), *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: ISEAS/Times Academic Press, 1994), p. 212.

⁵⁵⁹ Arokia Dass, *Not Beyond Repair: Reflections of a Malaysian Trade Unionist*, (Hong Kong: Asia Monitor Resource Centre, 1991), p. 17. Armajit Kaur, 'Tappers and Weeders: South Indian Plantation Workers in Peninsular Malaysia, 1880-1970, in *South Asia*, (Armidale: South Asian Studies Association, 1998), pp.88, 90.

⁵⁶⁰ Colin Barlow, 'Changes of Economic Position of Workers on Rubber Estates and Smallholdings in Peninsular Malaysia, 1910-1985', in *The Underside of Malaysian History*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), p. 28.

⁵⁶¹ P. Ramasamy, 'Malaysian Indians: the ethnic and class loyalties', in *Kaum, kelas dan pembangunan*, (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia, 1984), p. 114. Resignation notices were not accepted. All estates used a discharge ticket system. In order for a person to get employment at another estate, one had to have this permit.

prevalent during the 'Emergency' which left many an 'isolated' British estate manager feeling very vulnerable. Another account from Melaka exhibited a greater level of flexibility, although this was probably in the post-war period, with estate management even providing transportation to the nearest Church sixteen miles away.⁵⁶³

A 1929 report from *The Indian Pioneer* notes an excessively high mortality rate in estates with the majority of deaths caused by malaria and pneumonia. High infant mortality was also blamed on the lack of trained midwives and nurses. The lack of a clean water supply was often a problem. Housing conditions were atrocious with accounts of two or three generations being forced to live within the confines of a small room being commonplace in the late 1930s.⁵⁶⁴ Legislation had been passed a decade earlier, noting that no more than three single men or one single family could be allotted into a room '10 feet by 10 feet'.⁵⁶⁵ As late as the 1950s, governmental sample surveys still showed disturbingly unhealthy household practices among Indian plantation workers. Food consumption was found to be low with a higher percentage of cost directed to alcohol, tobacco and the like. Sanitary practices were dismal in the majority of cases, resulting in a high number of bowel infections such as 'yaws'.⁵⁶⁶ Medical facilities were few and far between, and when in existence, staffed by inadequately trained 'dressers' (nursing) personnel.⁵⁶⁷ K. S. Sandhu notes how in 1918, at the height of Indian labour recruitment, there were only eight qualified doctors to 1,006 estates in the Federated Malay States.⁵⁶⁸ Many isolated estates often did not have ready access to hospitals, most of which serviced primarily urban centres.

Estate management was often fearful of rival estates 'crimping' (stealing/recruitment of labour from another estate) their labourers while convalescing in hospital, and were therefore reluctant to send sick or injured workers for hospital treatment until all other

⁵⁶² 'Report of the A. G. I. for 1928: High infantile mortality on Estates', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (50), Kuala Lumpur, 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

⁵⁶³ Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. Jaganaden, (born 1935), Melaka (Merlimau), 28 Oct. 1997. In the Klang estate strikes of 1941, one of the demands was for the free access of relatives and friends to estates. Dass, 1991, p. 30. G. D. James, *Missionary Tours in Malaya*, (Singapore: Malayan Evangelistic Fellowship, 1962), p. 53. Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Kuala Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁶⁴ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910) Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁶⁵ *Report of the A. G. I. for 1928: High infantile mortality on Estates*, 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

⁵⁶⁶ K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 170 citing *Malayan Department of Statistics 1957 - 8a*, tables 1-18.

⁵⁶⁷ 'Report of the A. G. I. for 1928: High infantile mortality on Estates', 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1.

avenues were used up. Under such circumstances the rate of mortality was high, and in order to cover up their self-serving actions, estates managers often resorted to leaving mortally sick workers on isolated roadsides, often to die or if lucky, to be picked up by a concerned passerby.⁵⁶⁹

In many cases, 60 to 90 per cent mortality rates have been recorded in some estates, especially within the first year of workers' arrival. This total disregard for their physical welfare resulted, by 1957, in an estimated mortality of 750,000 deaths accrued during the colonial period.⁵⁷⁰

Under these circumstances, poverty and exploitation contributed to an environment of despair.⁵⁷¹ Total obedience was demanded from not only the estate management, but the kangany as well.⁵⁷² The kangany was very much an agent of estate management, and not a mediator between the management and the workers. Reports from 1890 and 1910 notes how labourers were often beaten by both kangany and European management. In some documented cases the kangany was authorised by management to kill workers engaged in premarital sexual liaisons.⁵⁷³ This total subservience laid workers open to all manner of demands. Even the sexual molestation by British managers and their Asian staffers was commonplace. During the Klang estate strikes of 1941, one of the demands of the union was the stopping of the sexual molestation of workers, especially women workers.⁵⁷⁴

Given the pathetic conditions which plantation labourers were forced to endure, it can be argued that most if not all of them experienced a total degradation of human

⁵⁶⁸ Sandhu, 1969, p. 170.

⁵⁶⁹ Sandhu, 1969, p. 171.

⁵⁷⁰ This includes deaths occurring during the Japanese Occupation, where more than 50,000 lost their lives. Sandhu, 1969, p. 171.

⁵⁷¹ According to a 1929 account, a writer lamented, 'How can self-respect be given to the Indian labourer when what little of that self-respect he may have possessed before getting into the emigration depots in India is entirely rooted out of him before he reaches these shores?' 'Indian Labour: Ramasamy's Voyage to Malaya', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (13), Kuala Lumpur, 5 Apr. 1929, p. 1.

⁵⁷² Interview with Mr. Jaganaden, (born 1935), Melaka (Merlimau), 28 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁷³ P. Ramasamy, *Labour Control and Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya*, in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 19 (3-4), Malaysia, Apr./Jul. 1992, p. 99.

⁵⁷⁴ Dass, 1991, p. 30. Jain, Ravindra Kumar, *South Indians on the plantation frontier in Malaya*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1970), pp. 218-9. John G. Butcher, *British in Malaya 1880-1941*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 212. Chandra Muzaffar, 1994, p. 214. Four labourers were killed and over 300 arrested when the army was called in.

integrity and dignity. As a community, be they Hindu or Christian, (Christians on average made up between 5 to 15 per cent of estate populations)⁵⁷⁵ few showed a genuine interest in the alleviation of their conditions, let alone other more affluent Indians.⁵⁷⁶ Plantation social structures were themselves policed by Indians, usually holding administrative positions. The majority of these administrative positions were held by mainly Malayali or Ceylonese-Tamils who were more likely to side with the interests of their British bosses than with the mainly Indian-Tamil workers.⁵⁷⁷ The relationship between manager and staff was good, with staffers being the sole link between workers and management. No worker was allowed to approach management except through the proper channels; via the Indian administrative staff.⁵⁷⁸ Animosity between both workers and Indian staff was high. This animosity was best illustrated immediately after the Japanese Occupation. Many estate workers made serious accusations against Indian staff, accusing them of Japanese collaboration, brutality, theft as well as sending off young married males to work in Japanese war-time ventures in Thailand so as to have access to their wives.⁵⁷⁹ Even religious rivalry or animosity was strong in the estates, unlike urban towns and cities. Several former estate workers noted how they often found their 'Christian' status in a largely Hindu estate environment problematic. In one account an interviewee noted how being Christian meant association with 'meat-eaters' or worse, 'beef-eaters'.⁵⁸⁰ In addition, new anti-social habits alien to social milieu of South Indian rural communities were introduced by estate management.⁵⁸¹ Seeing a market for alcohol consumption under such depressive conditions, estate management often encouraged their Asian

⁵⁷⁵ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat M. E. P., (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick, (born 1938), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997. Mr. Patrick (Executive Secretary, Rubber Research Institute Staff Union) assessed that Indian Christians had made up approximately 5 per cent of the total estate population. Fr. Guittat's estimate was 15 per cent.

⁵⁷⁶ Arasaratnam, 1970, pp. 84-5.

⁵⁷⁷ Ravindra Kumar Jain, *South Indians on the plantation frontier in Malaya*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 290-4. Dass, 1991, p. 32. Interview with Mrs. Arputthamani, (born 1930), Pulau Carey (Selangor), 11 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Kuala Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁷⁸ Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Kuala Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁷⁹ Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 94-5.

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Mr. Jeganaden, (born 1936), Merlimau (Melaka), 28 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. Pandian (born 1920s), Pulau Carey (Selangor), 11 Oct. 1997. Mrs. Arputhamani, (born 1930), Pulau Carey (Selangor), 11 Oct. 1997. Sababathy Venugopal noted how many early Malaysian Tamil-language novels often depicted the cruel estate administrative staffer as Christian. Sababathy Venugopal, *Early Malaysian Tamil Novels, 1910-1960*, (Kuala Lumpur: M. A. thesis, University of Malaya, 1988).

⁵⁸¹ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 70.

administrative underlings to open and run alcoholic 'toddy' shops.⁵⁸² Crime and suicide were extremely high in the estate environment.⁵⁸³

The popular assumption of plantation labourers being 'ignorant' or 'incompetent', under the prevailing circumstances, was therefore unfair.⁵⁸⁴ Even Chinese estate labourers, historically portrayed as much more politically resilient in comparison to their Indian counterparts,⁵⁸⁵ were not able to organise any strike action until 1937.⁵⁸⁶ Stifling socio-economic and political conditions, not culture or race, were in most cases the culprit for a lack of mobility within plantation communities.

Resistance in the estates

Despite these conditions there were a succession of strikes on different estates in the early twentieth century. In December 1912, about 1500 Telegu labourers stopped work at the Rantau Panjang-Sungei Tinggi estate marching in the direction of Klang, because of the employers' harsh treatment and non-payment of wages for six months. Several months later another strike took place at the Escot estate, Tanjung Malim.

⁵⁸² Dass, 1991, p. 17. Ramasamy, Apr./Jul. 1992, p. 100. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 70. Some estate managers argued how prohibition of toddy sales in their estates would lead to an exodus of their labour. 'Indian Labour: XIV - How to Increase Efficiency', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3, (15), Kuala Lumpur, 19 Apr. 1929, p. 1.

⁵⁸³ 'Report of the A. G. I. for 1928: High infantile mortality on Estates', 20 Dec. 1929, p. 1. 'Indians and Murder: Toddy a chief cause', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (15), 19 Apr. 1929.

⁵⁸⁴ Sandhu, 1969, pp. 59, 260. H. R. Cheeseman, 'Education in Malaya, 1900-1941', in *The Malayan Historical Journal (Kuala Lumpur)*, May 1954 - July 1956, 3 (1), (Kuala Lumpur: Malayan Historical Society, 1956), p. 39. H. L. E. Luering, '83th Annual Report, 1901, Malaysia', in *Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 69. H. L. E. Luering, '85th Annual Report, 1903, Malaysia', in *Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 50. *The Malaysia Message*, VL (9), June 1897, p. 1. This article was adapted from the *Church Missionary Gleaner*. H. Marriot, 'The Peoples of Singapore', in W. Makepeace, G. E. Brooke, R. Braddell, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, 1, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1921]), p. 347. Ness, 1967, p. 46. Lenore Manderson, 'Race, Colonial Mentality and Public Health', in P. J. Rimmer and L. M. Allen (ed.), *The Underside of Malaysian History*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), p. 199, citing the 'Negri Sembilan Medical Report 1899', in *Accounts and Papers ZHC/6411*, London, Public Records Office. A. H. Cretch, *Malayan Mining Methods, with an Account of the Physique, Living Conditions and Food Requirements of the Asiatic Miner*, M. S. S. Indian Ocean S 96, Oxford, Rhodes House Library Colonial Records Project. Major G. St. J. Orde-Brown, *Labour Conditions in Ceylon, Mauritius and Malaya*, Cmd. 6423, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office. *Physique of labourers coming from India*, in *A Select list of files of the High Commissioner for the Malay States held by Arkib Negara Malaysia 1897-1942*, 2072/1918. M. J. D'Cruz, 'Indian Associations and The Coolies', in *The Indian*, 5 (1), Aug. 1925, Singapore, p. 94. T. G. Thomas, B. A., 'Some of our Needs', in *The Indian*, 1 (1), Apr. 1925, Singapore, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁵ Marriot, 1991 [1921], p. 346.

⁵⁸⁶ Armajit Kaur, 'Tappers and Weeders: South Indian Plantation Workers in Peninsular Malaysia, 1880-1970', in *South Asia*, (Armidale: South Asian Studies Association, 1998), p. 95. P. Ramasamy, *Labour Control and Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya*, in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 19 (3-4), Malaysia, Apr./Jul. 1992, p. 95.

Around 280 labourers, again Telegus, stopped work this time marching to Tapah in protest against a high mortality rate, bad wages, harsh treatment and the broken promises of management. In 1915 a strike action involving over 100 labourers from the Sipantas estate took place in Sabak Bernam due to unhealthy working and living conditions. In addition there were numerous examples of mass desertions, which according to P. Ramasamy, often reflected conflicts between estate managers and kanganyas.⁵⁸⁷ The defiance of many of these workers persisted after their release from jail. Many declared they preferred to stay in jail or 'walk into the sea and be drowned' than return to their old estates.⁵⁸⁸ Between 1902 to 1910, estate desertions averaged around 14 per cent.⁵⁸⁹ Throughout this period small isolated incidences of 'disturbances' and minor strikes were extremely common.⁵⁹⁰

To assume traditional social structures were responsible for the subservient stance of the South Indian estate populations is incorrect - even when examined from a traditional Indian context. Henriette Bugge notes how within the traditional caste structures of South India, the ancient concept of 'raja-dharma' was strongly adhered to. This was very clearly recognised by even the poorest sections of society. They believed it was the duty of the ruler to secure the 'peace, prosperity, justice and dharmic order within his realm'. Any attempt to upset the order, especially as a result of the wrongful actions of a landowner, often led to riots and revolts. More commonplace was the organised 'stop-work' action, which consisted of workers refusing to work in the fields until their demands were addressed. According to Bugge, this was an annual ritual, primarily towards the negotiation of the division of the crops.⁵⁹¹

Many were obviously aware of the strangle-hold the estate had, and went to great lengths to break away from this cycle of poverty. Mr. Jaganaden, a Melaka-based shopkeeper, told of his strong desire as a young man to get into a local shopkeeping business being set up by some 'Muslim' acquaintances.⁵⁹² They were not willing to

⁵⁸⁷ Ramasamy, Apr./Jul. 1992, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁸⁸ Ramasamy, Apr./Jul. 1992, p. 102.

⁵⁸⁹ Ramasamy, Apr./Jul. 1992, p. 101. In 1904 alone desertions jumped to as high as 20.6 per cent.

⁵⁹⁰ 'Report of the A. G. I. for 1928: High Infantile Mortality on Estates', 20 Dec. 1929, p. 4.

⁵⁹¹ Henriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), p. 157.

⁵⁹² The interviewee did not bring up the issue of religious differences. He is a Roman Catholic.

accept him into the venture, so he made them a proposition to work without pay for a full year. He did so successfully. He was then kept on a salary of a mere \$25, which compared badly with the \$50 to \$65 that could be made if working in the plantations. However for him, the sacrifices were obviously worth it.⁵⁹³

Many estate-based workers were aware of the link a good English education had over that offered by an estate-based Tamil school. However due to the isolation of estate communities, and the fact that all English language based schools were located in urban centres, little could be done to redress this problem. Workers did not make enough money to justify sending their children to these urban centres let alone keep up with the associated costs involved in educating them.⁵⁹⁴ After the Second World War, educational facilities did improve, although in many estates these schools continued to be under the control of committees made up of representative plantation employers.⁵⁹⁵

The colonial contradictions and the implications of being 'Indian'

The internalization of cultural self-denial and self-hatred resulted in a strong degree of confusion for many in the community. While being strongly aware of their own cultural background,⁵⁹⁶ they were constantly being reminded by colonial authorities and structures that they were in some way 'inferior'.⁵⁹⁷ This appeared to be a bigger problem with the urban communities than it was for the estate-based populations.

Dependency on governmental jobs, supplies, loans⁵⁹⁸, medical benefits⁵⁹⁹ and accommodation⁶⁰⁰ were paramount in perpetuating this unequal relationship.⁶⁰¹ Many

⁵⁹³ Interview with Mr. Jaganaden, (born 1935), Melaka (Merlimau), 28 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁹⁴ Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁵⁹⁵ Ravindra. K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 434.

⁵⁹⁶ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Interview with Mr. V. David, (born 1932), Petaling Jaya, 27 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. B. Norman Nathan (born 1940), Petaling Jaya, 22 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. R. Raja Krishnan, *The Jaffna Tamils in Prewar Malaya: The Myth of the Return*, in *Sixth International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies*, (Petaling Jaya: Thirumagal Printers, 1987), p. 251.

⁵⁹⁷ This 'inferiority complex' was common among all Asian communities. Myrna Braga-Blake and Ann Ebert-Oehlers relate similar sentiments with regards to the Eurasian community in Singapore - a tendency to highlight bad points while ignoring the good. Myrna Braga-Blake and Ann Ebert-Oehlers, *Eurasians in Singapore: Memories and Hopes*, (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 23.

⁵⁹⁸ Government loans were available from 1910 to all subordinate officers. This was designed to help 'tide an officer over the pecuniary troubles entailed by unavoidable misfortune.' No financial security was required. Officers who had served more than 6 years were applicable for this scheme. Loans varied from between 6 to 12 months of a worker's salary. Interest was charged at 6 per cent. *Reports of the Committee appointed by H. E. The Governor of the Straits Settlements and the High Commissioner of*

preferred to put up with the daily humiliation than face the uncertainties of unemployment. Retrenchments, sackings and low wages were commonplace, even in times of plenty.⁶⁰² Under such conditions many workers viewed employment in a narrow or short-term fashion. Consequently many preferred to earn as much money as possible in as little time as possible. This view was also common among estate workers.⁶⁰³ This reaction was compounded by a constant fear of dismissal from employment, which was usually instant with no opportunity for the challenging of official decisions. In most cases no reasons were given; colonial authorities simply stating that 'it is not in the public interests that the Resident should disclose details of the information upon which these banishment proceedings are founded.'⁶⁰⁴ Many felt British colonial financial power deeply.

In 1923 H. T. Clark, the Inspector of Schools (Singapore and Labuan), noted how clerks were the first to go in time of economic slump.⁶⁰⁵ In some cases the withdrawal of the pension on which many desperately relied on for their retirement, was viewed

the F. M. S. to Enquire into, and Report on, the Salaries paid to Officers of the General Clerical Services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1919. (Kuala Lumpur: F. M. S. Printing Office, 1919), p. 4.

⁵⁹⁹ For example, Singapore Municipal employees were not billed more than 30 per cent of their income (while in hospital). Any excess amount was charged to the 'Municipal Fund'. Singapore Municipality, *Sundry Rules and Regulations*, Singapore Municipality, 1936, p. 20. 'Singapore Tamil Notes', in *The Diocesan Magazine*, Singapore, no. 88, Nov. 1932, p. 31. Many people could not afford the high cost associated with hospital care.

⁶⁰⁰ Subordinate staff were allotted either unfurnished terraces, semi-detached or tenements. Rent was calculated at 8 per cent of an employee's salary. Labourers were given free housing - if this was not possible, an allowance of \$1.20 a month was paid. *Sundry Rules and Regulations*, Singapore, Singapore Municipality, 1936, p. 25.

⁶⁰¹ Despite having higher qualifications, many were forced to hold subordinate positions to lesser qualified Europeans. Butcher, 1979, pp. 109, 178-9. Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Patricia Todd, *Trade Unions and the State in Peninsular Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 55. R. Raja Krishnan, *The Jaffna Tamils in Prewar Malaya: The Myth of the Return*, in *Sixth International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies*, (Petaling Jaya: Thirumagal Printers, 1987), p. 251.

⁶⁰² Amarjit Kaur, 'Tappers and Weeders: South Indian Plantation Workers in Peninsular Malaysia, 1880-1970', in *South Asia*, (Armidale: South Asian Studies Association, 1998), p. 88. Sundaram and Todd, 1994, pp. 59-60. For example, by 1934 the price of rural produce had rose substantially. However employers were still unwilling to pass on the benefits to its workers several years later.

⁶⁰³ Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁶⁰⁴ 'Arrest of Ramasamy for causing a strike', Selangor Secretariat 4682-4/1907. 'The arrest and conviction of his brother A. V. Ramasamy Pillai. Fitter Loco. Dept. for causing a strike', Selangor Secretariat 4684/1907, Kuala Lumpur, 30 Aug. 1907. Sandhu, 1969, pp. 45, 147. Interview with V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 27 Jan. 1997. Mr. George spoke of an incident where a school teacher was sacked 'on the spot' by a British School Inspector. Leopold Ainsworth, *The Confessions of a Planter in Malaya*, (London: H. F. and G. Witherby, 1933), p. 189. Sundaram and Todd, 1994, pp. 59, 58. Official banishment legislation was only introduced in 1933, although banishment had been regularly used for decades.

⁶⁰⁵ *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, p. 33.

as a problem.⁶⁰⁶ Competition for clerical positions was very strong.⁶⁰⁷ Unemployment, even before the mass retrenchments of the 'Great Depression' was commonplace among the urban educated. By 1921, a 'Non-European Unemployment Fund' was set up by G. H. Kiat and Sze Onn, following numerous pleas from retrenched clerical workers for financial help. In some cases these workers were found new employment, or in the majority of cases sent back to China or India. The St. Vincent de Paul Society, working under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church, was another welfare organisation which provided relief to largely unemployed clerical workers.⁶⁰⁸ Even simple preventable health problems among the so-called 'affluent' urban-based middle-classes, were surprisingly high. A medical inspection of 431 boys in March 1931 at St. Paul's Institution, Seremban, illustrated this point. There were 8 counts of malnutrition, 54 with 'enlarged glands', 98 with 'enlarged tonsils', 174 with dental problems, 64 with no shoes, 24 with skin diseases, 110 with weak eyesight along with numerous other ailments.⁶⁰⁹

The fear of retribution was constant. Consequently many felt the price for dissension was far too high and accepted anything they were served. However to suggest that Indian Christians, under the dictates of such an oppressive relationship, played a part in the perpetuation of their own oppression is not to deny the many ways the British kept them involuntarily in their place. The whole process was primarily an 'interaction' between the 'powerful' and the 'powerless'.⁶¹⁰ These people got something from the relationship and that was employment and a standard of living unattainable unemployed or in their native India.

⁶⁰⁶ 'Petition of M. David', vol. 613, no. 5007, 26 Aug. 1936, CO 273. 'Petition of A. C. Devadawson', vol. 603, no. 50007/16 (undated; around 1932), CO 273. 'Petition of J. M. Fernandez', despatch no. 121, 27 Apr. 1937, CO 273. *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, p. 31.

⁶⁰⁷ *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, p. 6.

⁶⁰⁸ *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, pp. 21-23. By 1923 there were 61 Indians, 154 Chinese, 131 Eurasians, 12 Malay, 2 Philipinos, 1 Arab, 1 Burmese, and 1 Goanese on their listings.

⁶⁰⁹ 'Year 1923 to Year 1951: Diary, St. Paul's Institution. Seremban, F. M. S.'. Inspection was carried out by Charan Singh, Medical Inspector, B. S., Negri Sembilan. A total of 431 boys were screened. Other ailments were: deformity - 3, scabies - 4, adenoids - 2, dirty cloths - 12, eye diseases - 6, intestinal worms (?) - 4, Anaemia - 4, enlarged spleen - 4.

⁶¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Truth and Power*, in *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews of and other writings*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 119.

With time this collusion of interest began to affect the outlook of many communities. According to Sinnapah Arasaratnam, the middle-classes by the 1930s were beginning to become isolated from the ideologies and political movements that were strong influences in India. It was very much the result of a political wariness on the part of the Malayan governments who actively censored and vetted literature and often screened visitors coming from India. By 1932 (similar observations were also made as early as 1906) an observer had noted how the general outlook of the Malayan Indian was rather superficial, narrow, lethargic and apathetic even in regards to their own welfare.⁶¹¹

Among the middle-classes, there were strong differences between that of the Malayan-born or 'Straits-born' Indians and more recent Indian arrivals. Differences arose out of the separate experiences of both groups. The Straits-born developed more of a Malayan perspective; encompassing multi-racial affiliations appropriate to their class and social standing. They were not only involved with their own communal organisations, but actively worked with other more multi-racial entities.⁶¹² Several elements influenced this trend. Among the middle-classes and its Christian communities, there was little to differentiate in terms of educational facilities. Young Christian boys and girls, of all racial denominations, attended the same schools. To a degree, capitalist trends particularly in urban centres, de-emphasised issues of race while placing a stronger importance on social and economic mobility. Secondly, the growing rift between overseas Indian-born immigrants was accentuated by the intense competition for good jobs.⁶¹³ Many of these new arrivals often possessed better educational qualifications to that of the Malayan born population - educational facilities in India being much better in comparison to what was available in Malay states or the Straits Settlements. Lastly, these new arrivals, unused to the ethnically

⁶¹¹ Arasaratnam, 1970, pp. 82-3 citing B. K. Chengapa's article in *The Selangor Indian*, January 1932, p. 7. Michael Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case*, (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1980), pp. 36, 77. Khoo Kay Kim, *The 'Indian Association Movement' in Peninsular Malaysia: The Early Years*, in *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, LXI (2), Dec. 1992, p. 10 citing Rev. Raju Naidu's inaugural speech of the Penang Indian Association on 2nd April 1906. Reported in *The Pinang Gazette*, April 24, 1928 and *The Malaya Tribune*, April 26, 1928. Syed Hussien Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 20.

⁶¹² Michael Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case*, (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1980), p. 73.

⁶¹³ Stenson, 1980, p. 76.

pluralist environment, tended to be very communalist.⁶¹⁴ Indian-born attitudes, particularly among the young,⁶¹⁵ differed politically to local born inhabitants. Many identified strongly with the more militant stream of anti-colonialism in keeping with the rise of the independence movement in India. This was in stark contrast to the generally politically compliant nature of local-born Indians. The colonial government was aware of this, and was keen to discourage local Indians from following these trends. Government controlled media, such as that of the *Straits Times*, often criticized the nationalist/anti-colonial tendencies and often published supposed letters from Malayan-born Indians reiterating their pro-colonial stand.⁶¹⁶ However circumstances up to the 1930s, showed attitudes associated with the pro-colonial 'Straits-born' Indians, were still in minority. Such agitation was limited to a relatively small group. The large majority of Indians, local and overseas born, were generally conducive to Indian nationalism.

Such economic and political co-option was less likely to exist in estate environments. Hierarchies were more clearly defined, and this was personified by high levels of oppression and control. In fact during the course of research, as a result of blatant oppression, the researcher has come across more instances of direct insubordination or even violence against Britishers in estate communities than in urban communities. Accounts of Indian labourer or staff conflict were relatively common, even before the Second World War. In one account, an estate staffer punched and whipped his British manager over a labour related issue. The staffer left the estate immediately, before retaliatory action could be taken.⁶¹⁷

Colonialism in the urban sphere, on the other hand, was heavily reliant on the concept of its own benevolence and moral righteousness to rule. It psychologically isolated urban from rural communities by adopting a dual persona - it was openly repressive to estate communities while coercing the urban elites. It therefore isolated one from the other by 'accepting' some groups and openly excluding others.⁶¹⁸ Despite being politically and economically subordinate to the British, these middle classes took on

⁶¹⁴ Stenson, 1980, pp. 76-77.

⁶¹⁵ Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 97.

⁶¹⁶ Stenson, *Class*, 1980, p. 77.

⁶¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Robert (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

the mantle of cultural leadership among other 'lower' class rural Indian communities.⁶¹⁹ The colonial government inculcated culturally biased texts, images and histories, which worked in favour of maintaining the colonial status quo. It misrepresented 'reality' and reordered colonial society to its own benefit.⁶²⁰ Colonial regimes pacified important essential elements (for example, urban administration) in subjugated societies with comparatively high salaries.⁶²¹ Colonialism taught submission under the subliminal threat of tyranny. It made its subjects believe in order to be 'normal', one had to submit to the regimen of 'progress' as determined by the colonisers.⁶²² It made a point of labeling communities with predetermined behavioural patterns, in most cases more negative than positive. On one hand it encouraged communities to build themselves up, only to 'pull the rug' from under them when ones status threatened their own. For example, Asians were not allowed to hold a position where they could have authority over a European. Mr. E. T. MacIntyre, a Ceylonese-Tamil, was unable to rise beyond junior medical positions despite having a higher educational qualification than his British superiors.⁶²³ The tenuous nature of a community's standing was very much at the bequest of colonial authority. This in turn made many in the Asian communities, let alone Indian Christians, extremely unsure of their social standing - encouraging subservience and servility. Low collective self-esteem was often a problem in these communities, forcing many to concentrate too much on bolstering one's own self-esteem - often leaving little time to learn or improve their own circumstances.

⁶¹⁸ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 31.

⁶¹⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 36.

⁶²⁰ Many interviewees distinctively noted their communities own 'backwardness'. For example, many strongly believed that the Chinese and Malay communities were historically less divided than that of the Indians. Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. Balraj, (born 1931), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁶²¹ Loomba, 1998, p. 57.

⁶²² Kenneth M. Williams, *The Church in West Malaysia and Singapore: A study of the Catholic Church in West Malaysia and Singapore regarding her situation as an Indigenous Church*, (Katholieke Universiteit te Leven, Ph.D. thesis, 1976), p. 115 citing Bertram Schrieke, 'Native Society in the Transformation Period', in Bertram Schrieke (ed.), *Influence on Native Civilisations in the Malay Archipelago*, (Batavia: Koninklijk Bataviaansch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1929), pp. 237-47.

⁶²³ Butcher, 1979, pp. 109-10, 178-9. S. Durai Raja Singam, *A Hundred years of Ceylonese in Malaysia and Singapore 1867-1967*, (Singapore: S. Durai Raja Singam, 1968), p. 46.

Subordinate forms of Resistance

Even in the urban sphere, the unbalanced power relationship between the British authorities (as a social class) and their Indian Christian underlings contributed to a 'bottling up' of what could be deduced as dissatisfaction with the colonial hegemony. The inability to express negativities or grievances often showed up as manipulative and 'back-stabbing' tactics in the workplace - in all cases against each other. This was the unfortunate product of this brand of 'resistance' - it often involved action not necessarily directed against the actual source of a persons' discontent.

This took a more insidious turn in the oppressive environment of the rubber estate. Internal disputes among estate workers were common, many resulting in murder. In 1928 alone, out of the sixteen persons condemned to death in the Federated Malay States, twelve were Indians.⁶²⁴ R. K. Jain noted this conflict; 'A Malayali estate conductor stated it in these words: "If a Chinese tries to 'climb the ladder' other Chinese at the top will lend him a helping hand; if an Indian does the same, those below will drag him down.'"⁶²⁵

European attitudes to such reactions were primarily condescending and superficial. Many attributed such actions to deception, cunning or even a lack of character.⁶²⁶ However James C. Scott argues such action was the only alternative open to subordinate peoples, where self-control and indirect action was the only avenue available. Such persons did not have the luxury of direct confrontation, due to the danger of retaliation from their superiors. Direct action was therefore only a viable alternative for the powerful. Consequently any political action taken by subordinate communities tended to be opaque and cryptic, dealing with the shadowy and guerilla-

⁶²⁴ 'Indians and Murder: Toddy a chief cause', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (15), Singapore, 19 Apr. 1929.

⁶²⁵ R. K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 434. Similar sentiments were also expressed in the following interviews: Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Interview with Anonymous woman, (born 1930s), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. Balraj, (born 1931), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁶²⁶ H. L. E. Luering, *85th Annual Report, 1903, Malaysia*, in *Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 50. H. L. E. Luering, *83th Annual Report, 1901, Malaysia*, in *Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 69. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1990), p. 136.

like tactics of rumour, drunkenness, anonymity, gossip, the 'poison pen letter', euphemism, ritual gestures, spirit possession and hysteria.⁶²⁷

The 'Poison Pen' letter

The use of the poison pen letter, in most cases anonymous, was a case in point. The 'poison pen' letter was used to usually accuse a person or persons of impropriety during employment.⁶²⁸ This was particularly popular in urban centres where many male Indian Christians were literate. This action was akin to that of 'snitching' – the act of conveying damaging information on someone, to one's superior. It was commonplace during the Japanese Occupation and continued to be a popular form of character assassination during the 'Emergency'.⁶²⁹

Feigned Illness

This was significant among urban-based, white-collar administrative workers. Such actions were often necessary due to the unequal working relationship between themselves and their British bosses. In addition trade unions, if they existed, were too frightened to directly address the inequitable relationship. Grievances had to be aired in a 'subordinate' manner.

In 1930, High Commissioner to the F. M. S., John Scott, wrote to the Colonial Office bitterly complaining about the high retirement rate of 'Tamils from India and Ceylon'. He noted a considerable proportion of this number was 'due to what may be described as mental causes.' According to Commissioner Scott as many as 88 per cent [sic] of all Railway Clerical Service retirees were Tamil⁶³⁰ in origin. He attributed this trait to how the 'Tamil is only more prone to mental derangements but is also less robust and physically suited to local climate conditions.' He also noted how, 'these defects are

⁶²⁷ Scott, 1990, pp. 136, 139.

⁶²⁸ 'Petition of G. S. Paul', vol. 622, no. 5007, May 1935, CO 273. 'Petition of S. V. Ponniah', vol. 622, no. 5007, 26 Apr. 1937, CO 273. 'Petition of J. M. Fernandez', despatch no. 121, 27 Apr. 1937, CO 273. 'Petition of A. Soosay', vol. 394, no. 6028, 30 Jan. 1912, CO 273. 'Untitled letters from Mr. P. Mathews to Fr. Riboud (St. Francis Xavier's Church, Penang)', 26 Jun., 27 Jul., 2 Aug. 1939. 'Arrest of Ramasamy for causing a strike', Selangor Secretariat, 4682/1907, Kuala Lumpur, 16 Aug. 1907, 4683/1907, Kuala Lumpur, 23 Aug. 1907.

⁶²⁹ Interview with Mr. Balraj, (born 1931), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

⁶³⁰ The term 'Tamil' was often used to classify all South Indian. This would have included Ceylonese Tamils, Malayalis and Telegus.

liable to be accentuated in out-stations where he is deprived of the social material advantages appertaining to life in large centres.⁶³¹

Many Indian and Indian Christian white-collar workers came to Malaya and the Straits Settlements with employment in mind. Many had no intention of staying permanently, having left their families and social networks in India and Ceylon. Well-paid employment was harder to come by in India and Ceylon, with pay rates much higher in Malaya and the Straits Settlements.⁶³² Working to the dictates of a doctrinaire office colonial hierarchy must have been frustrating. Premature resignation before retirement, would hamper a persons eligibility to a pension. However this obstacle could be overcome if serious ill health could be medically proven. According to government reports of day, many Indian clerks obtained extensions to leave entitlements, while on leave, from medical certificates issued in Ceylon.⁶³³

In the absence of representatory bodies such as proper trade unions, little to no outlet for discontent was made available to subordinate staff. Grievances varied from the inadequacy of salaries, high living cost, unfavourable employment gradings, absence of a superannuation scheme, inadequate pensions for widows and orphans, unsatisfactory leave regulations, lack of government accommodation, high rents and water-rates, inadequate government funded medical facilities, and having no fixed retirement age (preferably at 55).⁶³⁴ Dissatisfaction in government employment resulted with many turning to alternative employment in the private mercantile sector, although much of this kind of clerical employment was dominated by Chinese due to the predominance of Chinese business houses.⁶³⁵

⁶³¹ John Scott, 'F. M. S.: High Commissioner's despatches to the Secretary of State, Jan. to June 1930', G. 1192/1928, no. 28, 16 Jan. 1930, pp. 2-3.

⁶³² R. Rajakrishnan, 'The role of caste in the migration of Indian Tamils to Malaya', in *Sarjana*, 1 (1), Dec. 1981, p. 98-101.

⁶³³ *Reports of the Committee appointed by H. E. The Governor of the Straits Settlements and the High Commissioner of the F. M. S. to Enquire into, and Report on, the Salaries paid to Officers of the General Clerical Services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1919*. (Kuala Lumpur: F. M. S. Printing Office, 1919), p. 4.

⁶³⁴ *Reports of the Committee appointed by H. E. The Governor of the Straits Settlements and the High Commissioner of the F. M. S. to Enquire into, and Report on, the Salaries paid to Officers of the General Clerical Services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1919, 1919*, pp. 6-7, 15, 24-25, 26.

⁶³⁵ *Reports of the Committee appointed by H. E. The Governor of the Straits Settlements and the High Commissioner of the F. M. S. to Enquire into, and Report on, the Salaries paid to Officers of the General Clerical Services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1919, 1919*, pp. 12-13. A sample of 42 private banking and mercantile businesses in Perak, Selangor and Negri

Gossip and 'Snitching'

Gossip was another popular tactic. The author was anonymous. However the information was perpetuated by people eager to convey the material. It was usually confined to attacks on persons of similar social status and was designed to hamper or ruin the reputation of an individual or group.⁶³⁶

The act of 'snitching' was far more serious. This was often made possible within a hierarchical environment, where subordinates were able to find favour with their superiors by providing information they were not usually be privy to. An example was related to the researcher by a former estate staff employee during the 'Emergency' of the 1950s. The estate staffer had been specifically instructed by his British estate manager, frightened by the operations of the Malayan Communist Party (M. C. P.) and the militant mood of his Indian estate workforce, to comply with the demands of the workers. Excess food provisions were given out. A short while later, this subordinate staffers name was found in a government 'black list' by a friend working in the local police station. The information had been provided by an anonymous source, which accused him of being a 'Communist'. The consequences of this act if proven in a court of law, were dire - death by hanging if found guilty! He was advised by his policeman friend to leave his place of work immediately, which he did.⁶³⁷ This was not only common during under the British colonial regime, but also during the Japanese Occupation.⁶³⁸

Rumour

Rumour, related to gossip, acted as a powerful form of anonymous communication and served particular interests. Rumour thrived in environments where little reliable information was available.⁶³⁹ Consequently we find that specific areas can be located where conditions were especially rife for the thriving of rumour; such as in the

Sembilan was made. In Perak and Selangor, Chinese held approximately 56 per cent of all clerical jobs, while Indian 'Tamils' and Ceylonese Tamils held around 30 per cent. Only in Negri Sembilan Ceylonese Tamils outnumber Chinese.

⁶³⁶ Scott, 1990, p. 142.

⁶³⁷ Anonymous, Selangor, 1997.

⁶³⁸ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

⁶³⁹ Scott, 1990, p. 144.

limited environment of the plantation, during the Japanese Occupation and with regards to the social life of the British community in colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements.

During the Japanese Occupation, there was strong censorship of reliable news. Lines of communications were cut off from the outside world, with all information being filtered through the occupational government. One such rumour popular towards the end of the war, related to a 'super-bomb' developed by the Allied powers. This bomb was the size of a man's fist. After being dropped from high-flying bombers, it had the uncanny ability to drill itself four miles into the ground and then explode with catastrophic results. According to this rumour, the city of Tokyo had been destroyed by one such weapon. This is undoubtedly a corrupted account of the dropping of the Atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.⁶⁴⁰

In the 1930s, the closed relationship between the colonial British and their non-European subordinates contributed to the propagation of similar myths and rumours. For example, a rumour deduced how British persons, being the 'super-race' that they were, did not need to defecate, unlike other ordinary people. In another account, it was believed by some that the 'All Free Masons' beheaded people to ensure the success of many structural enterprises. This was especially so if it involved a new bridge. It was said the severed heads were displayed at either end of the bridge after completion, while others contended that it was 'incorporated' into the structure itself. This rumour was so convincing that the interviewee's uncle, a guard at the Railway yards, avoided the nearby Masons' Lodge during night shifts. All 'Free Masons' in those days were British. It is interesting to note how such 'beheading' rumours were commonplace from as early as the 1830s. The *Hikayat Abdullah* (1849) give accounts of similar rumours about St. Andrew's Cathedral (Anglican) in Singapore. According to the account, many non-Europeans believed the British Resident authorised beheadings, using the severed heads as food for 'devils which haunt the Church'. Others believed government convicts were the murderers. Another account in J. F. A. McNair's book *Prisoners Their Own Warders* (1899), told of a similar scare which surfaced in 1852. Apparently some Chinese had claimed that all the Europeans had abandoned worship

⁶⁴⁰ Interview with James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. This story had been recounted to Mr. Sebastian by his uncle.

at St. Andrew's Cathedral because of the large number of evil spirits, and had moved to the nearby Court House. In order to appease these spirits, the Governor had apparently 'required thirty heads, and had ordered government convicts to waylay people at night and kill them.' In 1875, during construction of a new reservoir in Singapore, it was rumoured that a 'human sacrifice' was needed during the construction of a 'puddle trench'.⁶⁴¹

Another rumour, this time more precisely Roman Catholic in nature, accounted how a large cement statue of Saint Joseph at the Church of St. Joseph (Upper Bukit Timah, Singapore), was actually slowly growing larger. This was a popular myth amongst most worshippers irregardless of racial background.

Consequently rumour among subordinate populations often mirrored the hopes and fears of those who conveyed it.⁶⁴² Hence we find the optimistic rendition of a new Allied weapon that would hopefully defeat the Japanese. In the same way, curiosity as to the true nature of the British community is echoed with the rumour about their elevated status, putting them above the need to fulfil the more base tasks of life, unlike other lesser beings. The closed nature of the British community, added to by the secrecy of the 'Free Masons', helped personify the fear of many towards the 'powerful' British. And finally the need for the physical expression of one's faith, best epitomised in the miraculous act of a 'growing' statue.

In many cases rumour was usually the final step that initiated direct action. This was particularly the case in rural estates, where information and movement were controlled by a small elite, and where a large subordinate body existed. In some cases, dissatisfaction with management could easily be ignited. A typical account was related in an insignificant 1933 autobiographical publication entitled *The Confessions of a Planter in Malaya*. It told of a dispute between the estates' Tamil 'conductor'⁶⁴³ and his British manager. One day their relationship came to blows, with the manager

⁶⁴¹ Interview with James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan, 1999. Major J. F. A. McNair, *Prisoners Their Own Warders*, (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1899), pp. 68-9. Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 282-5. 'Legends concerning the first Cathedral', in *The Monthly Paper (St. Andrew's Cathedral)*, XI (125), May 1924, pp. 4-7.

⁶⁴² Scott, 1990, p. 145.

⁶⁴³ The foreman, who usually presided over all the estate kanganyans.

giving the conductor 'a straight left on the point of the jaw.' The conductor then ran off to the workers' compound complaining to all about the conflict. The manager realising the gravity of the situation made for his car only to be confronted by the entire workforce of approximately four-hundred men and women, all armed with sticks and various farm implements.⁶⁴⁴ This story ends in the British managers' favour and spared little expense when recounting his interpretation of his own heroic exploits.⁶⁴⁵

However it is interesting to note the ease at which the 'mob' was so easily agitated to action. Taking into account that the incident involved the estate 'conductor', traditionally not a popular figure among labourers (the conductor had been, on a previous occasion, at loggerheads with one of the Kanganys). The 'mob' was simply using the situation to act out existing grievances they had with the estate management - especially with that of its British manager. Consequently little was needed to precipitate a situation involving 'direct action' by the disgruntled workers.

Drunkenness and Hysteria

Drunkenness in estates, especially among the male worker population was rife. Drunkenness allowed a perpetrator to disavow personal responsibility to intrusive or abusive behaviour without having to take the responsibility for his or her actions. Consequently actions, otherwise taboo to someone of their station in the social order, could be gotten away with. Grievances, abuse and the wholesale disregard for recognised social, political and economic boundaries could therefore be violated without the mandatory retaliation.⁶⁴⁶ Hysteria was used in a similar way. It was utilised by disempowered elements in society; in this case usually women and poor males. Consequently, examples of religious related 'hysterical' fits were quite common during large Christian services. Economically well-to-do males were never seen to experience such episodes. In a similar fashion it was also common, upon the

⁶⁴⁴ Ainsworth, 1933, pp. 184-9.

⁶⁴⁵ Many colonial officers were themselves of low standing in British society and therefore fully aware of their 'dubious command over the natives'. Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, (London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 103-4. Michael Taussig, 'Culture of Terror - Space of Death. Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26 (3), July 1984, p. 492. A. L. Stoler, 'In Cold Blood: Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives' in *Representation* 37, Winter 1992, pp. 151-89.

⁶⁴⁶ Scott, 1990, pp. 141-2.

death of an important family member, for a servant to claim he or she was visited by the recently departed soul.⁶⁴⁷ These examples clearly illustrate how members of the lower (and disempowered) rungs of the social order, having little to no outlet to express dissatisfaction with circumstances in the life, use other means to draw attention to themselves; or in this case create a sense of religious or spiritual importance.

Domestic & Marital disputes

Domestic, marital disputes and romantic conflicts were common in the estate environment. In 1935 alone, thirteen cases appeared before the courts with regards to the 'enticing away' of married South Indian women.⁶⁴⁸ Rural South Indian communities were notorious in this aspect. Sex related crimes became rife and this was exacerbated by heavy imbalance between the ratio of males to females - men greatly outnumbered women.⁶⁴⁹ Under such conditions, marital status and access to regular sexual contact became a highly prized 'commodity' for many men. Women, who up to that point would have held very little sway in the male-dominated estate hierarchies, found new leverage from which to challenge the male-dominated status quo.⁶⁵⁰ Consequently by shifting allegiances from one male to another, it often made it possible to better one's own social, economic or political standing. Disputes were viewed so gravely in some estates, management even authorised kangany's to kill workers who engaged in premarital sexual liaisons.⁶⁵¹

To date such disputes have been portrayed as a rural phenomenon, something associated within the repressive confines of the estates. However evidence uncovered from local Church records have shown this was not the case. Numerous examples of

⁶⁴⁷ Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. The spiritual experiences of servants were assumed to be a tactical move to impress on his/her new boss. This was to show they are spiritually tied into the family.

⁶⁴⁸ 'Prosecutions in U. M. S. courts for enticing away married Indian women', in *A Select list of files of the office of the High Commissioner for the Malay States held by Arkib Negara Malaysia 1897-1942*, 39/1936, Kuala Lumpur. Brij Lal, 'Veil of dishonour: Sexual jealousy and suicide on Fiji plantations', in *Journal of Pacific History*, 20 (3-4), 1985, p. 137.

⁶⁴⁹ Armajit Kaur, 'Tappers and Weeders: South Indian Plantation Workers in Peninsular Malaysia, 1880-1970, in *South Asia*, (Armidale: South Asian Studies Association, 1998), p. 86. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 67. 'Indian Labour: XIV - How to Increase Efficiency', 29 Mar. 1929, p. 2. *Straits Settlements Annual Report 1935*, Singapore, pp. 802-4.

⁶⁵⁰ Examples of older women marrying men, often ten years their junior, did occur. This was not apparent in the urban communities. 'Marriages 2 Apr. 1923 - 12 Sept. 1936', 'Marriages 14 Sept. 1936 - 12 Feb. 1949', St. Anthony's Church (Roman Catholic), Kuala Lumpur. Lal, 1985, pp. 141-142.

co-habitation outside of marriage, adultery, marital and domestic violence in urban communities, appeared to be more common than first thought; and in a large proportion of the cases a female was involved, often enforcing demands onto a male partner or family.⁶⁵²

Euphemism

Unlike the indirect and anonymous actions used by rumour and gossip, euphemism did not enjoy the advantage of anonymity. It utilised 'appropriate' deference to authority to convey its message of 'defiance'. Euphemism disguised its message just enough so as to skirt retaliation from a superior. It is a way by which a subordinate agenda can be 'expressed' in a power-laden situation without the retaliation direct action would bring. As Scott notes, 'what is left in the public transcript is an allusion to profanity without a full accomplishment of it; a blasphemy with its teeth pulled.'⁶⁵³

The use of euphemism as a disguise brings to light aspects of colonial life which, under normal circumstances, could not be questioned openly by subordinate populations.

What is this *viterchil*,⁶⁵⁴ Port Dickson Railway,
Indian guards, Malay ticket collectors,
Eurasian drivers and Chinese passengers.

This prose, popular among Port Dickson (Negri Sembilan) Railways employees in the 1920s and 1930s, was a direct questioning of the British colonial policy of 'divide and rule', whereby the workforce and communities were segregated along racial lines. The

⁶⁵¹ P. Ramasamy, Apr./Jul. 1992, p. 99.

⁶⁵² 'Untitled letter from Fr. L. S. Norris to Fr. Riboud' dated 14 July 1947, 'Untitled letter from J. F. Regis to the Police Magistrate Penang' (copy to Fr. Riboud) dated 13 Oct. 1937, 'The Humble Petition of the Above named Anthoniamal from Anthoniamal c/o The Priest Roman Catholic Church to The Honourable Judge', High Court Penang dated 22 July 2602, 'Untitled Statement of Anthonisamy (driver) of Butterworth to the Senior Judge', Supreme Court Penang (copy to Fr. Riboud) dated 11 Oct. 1939, 'Untitled letter from Anthony Francis (P. Besar) to Fr. Riboud' dated 6 Nov. 1940, 'Untitled letter from Fr. Clement (Bagan Serai) to Fr. Riboud' dated 4 Dec. 2602, 'Untitled letter from Mr S. G. Pereira (Labour Office, Penang) to Fr. Riboud' dated 24 Nov. 1940, 'Note from Rev. S. M. Swaminathan (Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Mar. 1948, 'Untitled note from S. G. Pereira (Labour Office, Penang) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Sept. 2602, 'Untitled letter from Nagammal alias Papa d/o Govindasamy (Railway Quarters, Prai) to Fr. Riboud' dated 21 Jan. 1952.

⁶⁵³ Scott, 1990, pp. 152-3.

viterchil (stomach ache) showed that many disliked segregation and were prepared, in a subordinate fashion, to question the policy. It was a policy that had little relevance; especially those from urban towns like Port Dickson, where the emergence of common cultural parameters had begun to blur racial lines, especially with the emergence of English-medium education.

The beginnings of the Indian Association Movement

According to Khoo Kay Kim, associations were of two kinds; the first being the solely 'Indian' association, and the second being the 'Hindu' association. Aims and objectives for both kinds of associations differed. The 'Indian' being more political while the 'Hindu' being religious and cultural. Khoo noted that such associations were already in existence in Malaya from as early as the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵⁵

Singapore was first to see the establishment of a 'Hindu' association although references were made in a *Straits Times* (2nd October 1891) article which indicated an earlier existence; 'A few years ago there were many such associations here, but they ceased to exist from want of union, which was mainly due to caste prejudices and social customs.' Information is not available whether this 'Hindu' association survived long after. It was not until 1923 that another 'Indian' association was formed.

656

Similar organisations sprang up in Penang soon after. In 1892, an 'Indian Association' was formed, however it only lasted three years. Before its demise it had been able to set up another branch in Taiping, Perak in September 1894. These organisations appeared rather liberal in outlook and supposedly allowed membership, irrespective of creed or nationality. An Indian resident wrote in the *Straits Echo* (11th November 1905) about the dire need for an organisation that would encompass all aspects of Indian communities (not just Hindu), hence, 'as the name may not be appreciated by many let it be changed if possible to any other name, say "Indian Association", so that

⁶⁵⁴ Tamil for 'stomach-ache'.

⁶⁵⁵ Khoo Kay Kim, *The 'Indian Association Movement' in Peninsular Malaysia: The early years*, in *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1992, 65 (2), p. 4.

⁶⁵⁶ Khoo, 1992, p. 4.

all Indians without any distinction may become its members.'⁶⁵⁷ By 1904 the Penang Hindu Association was reopened at 31A Leith Street, after a hiatus of almost a decade, and even had several Indian Christians within its ranks. Activities in these organisations were primarily social, subscribing to various newspapers and journals, keeping a small library of approximately forty books, plus the organisation of soccer games and public lectures.⁶⁵⁸

In 1906, an 'Indian Christian Association' was announced in the Methodist Church publication, *The Malaysia Message*. It was situated in a school classroom of the Methodist Chapel in Serangoon Road (Singapore) and was open to 'any Indian, irrespective of creed'. The association was for the purposes of 'mutual instruction and help in good things. Debates, short papers, readings with criticism, and lectures, make up the programme'. The president was a Mr. H. Rickard.⁶⁵⁹ By the late 1920s, similar associations in Penang boasted a diverse array of denominations within its ranks and even included many Roman Catholics. Fr. Louis Riboud, the parish priest of the local St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church, maintained a quiet scrutiny of his parishioners involved with this rival Christian venture. He kept all local press clippings and a name list of all Roman Catholic perpetrators in his diary!⁶⁶⁰

Organisations within the Roman Catholic Church were much more conservative. The St. Francis Xavier's Association (Penang) was formed around 1915 under the tutelage of the parish priest, but did not appear to become very active till the 1920s. Its aims related directly to the parish itself. It professed to 'promote piety among Indian Catholics', to assist any Indian Catholic in 'want of assistance, provided the funds of the Association permit', and that all members shall be obliged to 'attend Sunday Mass and receive the communion'.⁶⁶¹ There appeared to be little to no participation from women. According to its admissions register, there appeared to be little enthusiasm shown on the part of members, most being 'struck off' for non-payment of subscriptions or as a result of returning permanently to India.⁶⁶² Judging from

⁶⁵⁷ Khoo, 1992, pp. 4, 6.

⁶⁵⁸ Khoo, 1992, p. 5.

⁶⁵⁹ 'News Items', in *The Malaysia Message*, Aug 1906, XV (11), p. 6.

⁶⁶⁰ 'Cash Book, 1928', Fr. Louis Riboud M. E. P., St. Francis Xavier's Church, Penang.

⁶⁶¹ 'Rules and Bye-Laws of the St. Francis Xavier's Association, Penang', Penang, 15 Jul. 1915, p. 1.

⁶⁶² 'Admissions Register: St. Francis Xavier's Association, Penang,' 1916-1922. Penang.

documented requests, activities were limited to that of soccer, badminton, cricket, tennis and ping-pong.⁶⁶³ The association maintained a small library of mainly religious books in both Tamil and English. Activity in the association died down by the late 1930s.

The Singapore Indian Association and 'The Indian'

The Singapore Indian Association was established in 1923.⁶⁶⁴ Support was made up of primarily business persons, professionals, as well as 'a wide range of educated groups: Indian priests of various Christian missions, schoolmasters, Government officers and clerks, and officers in private firms and on the plantations'.⁶⁶⁵ The Singapore Indian Association published its monthly, *The Indian* from 1925.

English language publications such as the 'The Indian' were particularly concerned with Indian representation on various Legislative Councils of the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements. It was, like that of the general 'middle-class' Indian population, very loyal to British colonialism. It must be understood that the Indian Christian component within these organisations did not operate as a 'Christian' element within a majority 'Indian/Hindu' establishment, but worked more or less hand in hand on issues that concerned all of them as 'Indians'.⁶⁶⁶ Fundamentally, the issue of class seemed to override differences in religion or ethnicity.⁶⁶⁷ All members were very much English-educated (locally, or to lesser extents in India),⁶⁶⁸ primarily civil servants, very occasionally 'professional' or ran a business, urban-based (except the estate-based administrative staff) and most importantly, regarded themselves as proud members of the middle-class Indian elite.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶³ 'Complaints Book: St. Francis Xavier's Association, Penang', Penang, 1916-1920. 'Untitled (Library book list), St. Francis Xavier's Association, Penang', Penang, undated (probably early 1920s).

⁶⁶⁴ It is still in existence today.

⁶⁶⁵ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 83.

⁶⁶⁶ S. Abraham, *Malaysia Message*, Oct. 1904, XIV (1), p. 4. An early example of Hindu interests assisting Indian Christians was illustrated by the donation of \$2,000 by R. Durysamy Pillai, 'Hindu leader of the Tamil community in Selangor', towards the building of a Methodist school.

⁶⁶⁷ For example, Thos. D. Cornelius, a Eurasian of Melakan origin who lived near Ceylon Road (Katong, Singapore), contributed a poem to *The Indian* in June/July 1929, (p. 129). The contents of the poem were unfortunately racist recounting the imagined laments of a well-meaning European who idealistic married an 'uncivilised' African, who turned out to be a cannibal! Mr. George James, (born 1912), Oral History Dept., National Archives of Singapore, undated, (transcript), p. 78.

⁶⁶⁸ *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, p. 5.

⁶⁶⁹ Partha Chatterjee noted how 'conservative' and 'progressive' elements in Calcutta middle-class society were unanimous in how western-based modernisation and reform were necessary in Indian

The element of class, with the added emphasis between estate labourers and themselves, appeared to strongly fragment the interest of the Indian communities. The educated urbanites suffered from a bad bout of the 'cultural cringe', constantly trying to live down their perceived ethnic and cultural baggage, often over-doing it by portraying themselves as 'progressive' and 'civilised'.⁶⁷⁰ Many found the contradictions of the 'modern' and 'progressive' capitalist/materialist views in stark contrast to supposedly 'Hindu' views and attitudes. Consequently dialectic between the 'old ways' (Hindu, caste hierarchies, less-prosperous, rural-based, pre-capitalist, traditional and superstitious), and the 'new ways' (Christian, egalitarian, prosperous, urban, capitalist) was quite debilitating.

This was the fundamental problem of the Indian communities of the day. Judging from the articles published in *The Indian* over the years, there appeared to be a strong ambivalence with regards to the 'civilised' middle-class' conception of themselves and the nagging issue of Indian poverty in the estates.⁶⁷¹ British colonialism manipulated and drove divisions between communities. It portrayed itself as being the social, economic and political leader and placed itself on top of a racial hierarchy while other groups and communities clamoured for respectable positions beneath it.

This was the dilemma of the Indian middle-class communities. While enjoying the relative privilege of being a member of the Asiatic middle-class, it felt the poverty-stricken image of its estate worker cousins was dragging it down.⁶⁷²

society. In a similar way middle-class Hindu and Christian elements shared a similar political outlook. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 92-93.

⁶⁷⁰ *Proceedings and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the problem of destitution among the various Sections of the Community*, Singapore, 1923, p. 26. Many viewed rural and labour related employment as 'beneath them.'

⁶⁷¹ This 'ambivalence' (between rich/poor, rural/urban, civilised/uncivilised) was acted out well in a series of articles over complaints by outraged Indians over the 'misrepresentation' of India in the film 'India Speaks'. 'India and the League of Nations: Combating Anti-Indian Propaganda', in *The Indian*, no. 14, Kuala Lumpur, 28 Mar. 1936, p. 3. 'India systematically slandered: Some details of 'India Speaks'', in *The Indian*, no. 12, Kuala Lumpur, 24 Mar. 1936, p. 15. Similar complaints were made about 'Clive of India' and 'The Lives of a Bengal Lancer'. 'India full of beasts and snakes: What Englishmen at home think', in *The Indian*, no. 3, Kuala Lumpur, 11 Jan. 1936.

⁶⁷² This unease was well illustrated when the Singapore Indian Association opened its doors to labourer/estate worker membership in 1936, only to close it again in 1937. The elites found their 'British' club-like atmosphere disrupted with labourer membership. Michael Stenson, 1980, p. 58.

Issues relating exclusively to middle-class Indian interests such as representation on the Federal Council and Straits Settlements Legislature were primarily concerned with issues affecting urban-based members of their community. Pressing issues pertaining to Indian labour were brought up, but such intervention was not stringently followed up. According to S. Arasaratnam, when such issues were brought up, representatives 'did not show full knowledge of the matters they were talking about'.⁶⁷³

Indian Christian contributors to periodicals like *The Indian*, often highlighted a need to consolidate the direction of the Indian community. Much of the sentiments expressed in the Indian press of the day appeared to act out a degree of ambivalence between the need to identify with being 'Indian' and negotiating the problematic issue of Indian-based poverty. Consequently these persons acknowledged the need to assimilate all aspects of the 'Indian' community but often attributed their poor economic circumstances to the labourers' own lack of foresight - a foresight not lacking in themselves.

In August 1925, M. J. D'Cruz⁶⁷⁴ wrote of the Singapore Indian Association's exclusion of 'coolies' and described it as that of a 'man without his backbone'. D'Cruz described the social degradation of the 'coolie' as being the sole responsibility of Indians and that it was the duty of, 'educated Indians ... to instil into the minds of these people the value of good habits, the importance of their duties to themselves, their community, and to the country where they earn their livelihood.'⁶⁷⁵ This was also echoed in an article by T. G. Thomas, who deduced the low worth of coolie labour to 'his own lack of ambition, which is again due to his ignorance'.⁶⁷⁶ In both articles, the negative predicament of plantation labour was placed back at the feet of the Indian community. This was inspite that all the facets which dictated the poor predicament of the rural worker were under the direct control of British legislation and colonial administration.⁶⁷⁷ This aspect is interesting since it illustrates the urban middle-class' 'innate' belief in the colonial government and its supposedly benevolent demeanour. It would appear, if any fault existed, it was placed back at the feet of the victims (south

⁶⁷³ Arasaratnam, 1970, pp. 87-8.

⁶⁷⁴ A common Malayali Roman Catholic name.

⁶⁷⁵ M. J. D'Cruz, *Indian Associations and the Coolies*, *The Indian*, Aug. 1925, pp. 94-5.

⁶⁷⁶ T. G. Thomas, B. A., *Some of Our Needs*, in *The Indian*, Apr. 1925, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁷⁷ Chandra Muzaffar, 1993, pp. 212-213.

Indian rural workers) themselves, overlooking the fact that these conditions were framed by the 'benevolent' colonial government in the first place.

This attitude could also be deduced to the affects of the cultural deficit thesis, whereby righteous self-criticism was acceptable on the grounds that the Indian community had not attained similar standards comparable to that of the superior British. D'Cruz and Thomas were obviously ignorant of the physical constraints that facilitated the containment of plantation labour of the day. For both writers, poverty could be corrected by simplistically instilling 'the value of good habits'.

D'Cruz and Thomas were typical examples of colonial urban-based Indian Christian disempowerment, disillusionment and most importantly confusion, with elements of their own culture, community and personal identity. Disempowerment turned hostility and criticism against themselves, where it became self-blame. Issues of success and failure, were also modified along these colonial parameters taking into account concepts of 'backward' and 'advanced'. It was therefore 'advanced' to emulate the 'progressive' 'British' but retrogressive to hark back to being 'Indian'. However both writers found it necessary to address the question of the 'other' half of Indian community - that of the estate worker. A question that would have vexed them greatly, taking into account that both communities were supposed to share a common cultural and racial heritage.

British racism and the reinforcement of the traditional 'Aryan' myth

The colonial discourse was not the only negative source influencing South Indian 'inferiority'. Traditionally, within the belief systems of Hinduism, there existed negative connotations relating to persons with dark complexions - South Indians being the 'darkest' of the races in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Even throughout the process of my research, many interviewees often made reference to 'fairness' of complexion, associating this with beauty and a 'good' (usually denoting 'high' caste) background.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁸ The practise of 'Muitsai', the buying of Chinese children by South Indian families, was relatively common in Malaya and Singapore. According to a Tamil language newspaper in 1952, such children were brought up as part of the family and in the long run married into the family. This was reportedly popular among 'illiterate Tamils'. 'Chinese Children bought by Tamils', in *Tamil Murasu*, 16 Oct. 1952, Singapore. A correlation could be drawn between the desire for social mobility and Indian/Hindu

Nineteenth century British racial theories unfortunately dovetailed well with traditional Hindu concepts of 'varna' (loosely translated as 'colour') and modern British imposed race/colour-based theories of inferiority and superiority. A. Mani defined the concept of varna as being 'associated with a symbolic colour, ... the Brahmins, Kshatriya and Vaisya are called white or twice-born castes in contrast with the Sudras or black caste who are excluded from ritual privileges belonging to the twice-born'.⁶⁷⁹ It was common knowledge that Southern Indians were in general 'darker' in skin complexion in comparison to their Northern Indian counterparts. This bias was noted by a Singapore-based Malayali writer in 1926, when she wrote, 'If a girl is dark, her fate is worse still. In the best of times, it is hard for a parent to find a suitable husband for his daughter; it is hard still if she is darker than usual ... it shows the prejudice even among people who are already classified as dark.' (sic)⁶⁸⁰ Another example of this identification with 'black' inferiority appeared in an article from *The Indian* in 1936. It made reference to the wrongful perception of the English that India was populated by, 'black, ugly, uneducated and dull people' and contrary to popular belief there are 'Indians who are 'fair'⁶⁸¹ and handsome'.⁶⁸² Many related news articles regularly appeared in local papers, mirroring a degree of anxiousness on the part of the community. In a 1929 article from the *Indian Pioneer*, it was reported that a Japanese biologist from Brazil had been able to change bodily proportions and human complexion via the use of 'electric nutrition', 'glandular control' and ultra-violet rays!⁶⁸³

Even within the realms of Christianity, subliminal concepts of the goodness of 'white' as opposed to the evil of 'black', were as strong as in Hinduism. For example, in popular westernised Christian art, the ethos of a European ideal of 'whiteness' and beauty was strongly established.⁶⁸⁴ Richard Dyer noted how European taste in skin

concepts of 'varna' or colour. By marrying a 'fairer' Chinese, the next generation would not be condemned to endure the stigma of a dark complexion.

⁶⁷⁹ A. Mani, 'The Relevance of Caste in the Study of Singapore Indians', in *Review of Southeast Asian Studies (Nanyang Quarterly)*, V (1-4), South Seas Society (Singapore), Dec. 1975, p. 35.

⁶⁸⁰ Mrs. E. V. Davies M. A., 'Colour and Culture', in *The Indian*, 1 (12), Mar. 1926, p. 273.

⁶⁸¹ The term 'fair' is almost certainly used in the context of the level of colour/pigmentation of skin.

⁶⁸² 'India full of Beasts and Snakes: What Englishmen at Home Think', in *The Indian*, 11 Jan. 1936.

⁶⁸³ 'Supermen to Order: Claims to Changes Faces, Frames and Height', in *The Indian Pioneer*, Singapore, 3 (48), 6 Dec. 1929.

⁶⁸⁴ Richard Dyer, *White*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 66.

colouration shifted from 'pinky-yellow' in medieval times to a much paler white after the Renaissance. Dyer argued that such preferences in hue were influenced by the Crusades and later, by European expansionism. Experiences of travel in foreign lands resulted in the encounters with populations 'darker' in appearance to that of the Europeans. Added to by the religious 'motives' behind the Crusades, a link was made between the 'dark' pagan and the 'white' Christian. Consequently, ensuing Christianity brought with it a duality of black and white; a moral dualism in which the enemy was perceived to be 'black'.⁶⁸⁵ With this tradition in tow, Christian art coincidentally fitted in well with the Hindu concepts of 'varna' and the nineteenth century pseudo-science of 'scientific racism'. One of the most popular renditions of Jesus Christ, by the United States artist Warner E. Sallman (*Head of Christ*), stood in pride of place in most Indian Christian homes. This image of Christ depicted him with light complexioned skin, wavy light brown hair and blue eyes - clearly European. Similar renditions of a European Christ predominated in 'holy pictures', most of which were printed in Europe, and are still widely available today. In Roman Catholic Churches, imported statues from Europe dominated the spiritual landscape of many a Church.⁶⁸⁶ Such statues mirrored the ideal of the 'European' - chiselled featured, slim, tall, straight long flowing light coloured hair and fair-skin. In many cases, these statues were painted or coloured in by local parishioners or priests, often with white skin and blue eyes, perpetuating the concept of the 'European' God.⁶⁸⁷ By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such images tied in strongly with the colonial concept of the 'superior', light-skinned 'Aryan'-ideal.

It was these associations which helped illustrate the traditional differences between Aryan and Dravidian; north and south, light and dark, high caste and low caste, clean and unclean, caste and casteless. British concepts of racial differences between the so-called superior Aryan and the inferior Dravidian bolstered these traditional ideas in South Indian communities.

⁶⁸⁵ Dyer, 1997, p. 67.

⁶⁸⁶ Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984 [1902]), p. 252. *Church of Sts. Peter and Paul Centenary Souvenir Magazine*, (Singapore: Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, 1970). Religious statues, stained glass, baptismal fonts and paintings commonly came from Paris or Antwerp.

⁶⁸⁷ Books and pictures (in Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches) originated from the same, or if printed in the east, were usually a European reprint.

Within some Indian Christian communities, these definitions were directly challenged. Unlike the other major denominations, namely the Anglican and Roman Catholics, the Methodist Church, especially the views of its papers' editorial team, enjoyed a level of intellectual freedom which was absent in other Churches of the time. Issues relating to South Indian, and especially 'Dravidian' identity, appeared to be a popular point of discussion. As early as August 1902, the first Indian Christian-based article criticised the concept of caste and saw it as an introduction by Brahmanic sects from the 'North'. The writer described it as a 'plan to secure their [Aryan or Northern Indian] ascendancy permanently over the people by legalising their presumptions.'⁶⁸⁸ Over the years several more articles were written often expressing anti-Brahmanic sentiments. In 1926, Mrs. E. V. Davies, published *Colour and Culture*, which gave a concise account of the 'Aryan' conquest of India and how their descendants continued their reign of superiority via the caste system.⁶⁸⁹ Such ideas were also taken up by some of the North American congregation, particular one James J. Kingham in his 1931 article, *India's Response to Christ*.⁶⁹⁰

Many in the urban Indian Christian communities were acutely aware of these issues, but chose to ignore them.⁶⁹¹ It would appear that such anti-Brahmanist/pro-Dravidian Nationalist sentiments were only prevalent in the Methodist Church, or at least within the egalitarianist editorial team of the *Malaysia Message*. Judging from the articles, the *Malaysia Message* did not strongly delineate between rural and urban Indian concerns (unlike their compatriots in *The Indian*). Other Dravidian Nationalist organisations were already in existence, such as the Adi-Dravida Munnetra Kazakam (D. M. K.). However the mainstay of its popularity appeared to be rural and Hindu-based. It is interesting to note that most of its leaders were often members of the 'middle-class'.⁶⁹² The D. M. K. and its Dravidianist stand were seen by many

⁶⁸⁸ C. H. Santhanathan, 'Caste', in *The Malaysia Message*, XI (11), Singapore, Aug. 1902, p. 106.

⁶⁸⁹ Mrs. E. V. Davies, M. A., 'Colour and Culture', in *The Indian*, 1 (12), March 1926, p. 273.

⁶⁹⁰ James J. Kingham, 'India's Response to Christ', in *The Malaysia Message*, 41 (9), Sept. 1931, p. 24.

⁶⁹¹ For example, among the Syrian Christian and other non-Tamil communities, Dravidianism was seen as the sole concern of the Tamils. Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 27 Jan. 1997.

⁶⁹² P. Ramasamy, *Malaysian Indians: Ethnicity and Class Loyalties*, in Syed Husin Ali (ed.) *Kaum, Kelas dan Pembangunan Malaysia (Ethnicity, Class and Development Malaysia)*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia, 1984), p. 121. According to Bro. Anthony Rodgers F.S.C., (March 1996) the Dravidian movement was instrumental in the formation of the Malayan Indian labour movement.

'westernised', urban-based Christian Indians as being too plantation-based, too Hindu, too working class,⁶⁹³ too parochial and therefore too 'Indian' for their taste. This would explain their dismissal of the movement and its sentiments.

'Dravidian Nationalism': Redefining the racial parameters

'Dravidian Nationalism' or 'Dravidianism', was defined as a nationalist consciousness within a South Indian context. Arooran cites six pre-requisites:

- i. Similar language (literature and religion)
- ii. Language rivalry. In this case, with other languages from the north.
- iii. Common government and historical experiences
- iv. Conflict with a common enemy or rival
- v. A growth in communication systems⁶⁹⁴

The work of Bishop Robert Caldwell, in his book *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages*, granted the opportunity for South Indians to claim a separate identity from the historically dominant North. Caldwell basically challenged the prevailing theory of the day that Dravidian languages were directly descended from Sanskrit and therefore related to the Indo-European branch of languages.⁶⁹⁵ To the South Indian nationalist of the day, this study opened a 'Pandora's box' of possibilities, true or false, to a new discovery of a separate South Indian identity. Caldwell therefore assumed the existence of a pre-Aryan civilisation in the sub-continent and even speculated that it attained a strong degree of culture, despite of the absence of 'Aryan' influences.⁶⁹⁶

Caldwell's book influenced future work, and despite having some of his theories proven wrong, this did not strongly betray his assertion of the independence of South Indian languages. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the

⁶⁹³ Even in the cities, most of the D. M. K's support came from persons of working class background i.e. news vendors, railway engine drivers, welders, labourers, wire men, gardeners, 'serang', mandores and fitters. *List of Officers of the Adi Dravida Munettra Kazakam, Singapore*, (1951-1952), Ministry of Home Affairs, Registry of Societies 168/51-65/52.

⁶⁹⁴ N. K. Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*, (Madurai: Koodal Publishers, 1980), p. 6.

⁶⁹⁵ S. R. Aiyar, *Dravidian Theories*, (India: Motilal Banarsidas, 1987), p. 6.

⁶⁹⁶ Aiyar, 1987, p. 62.

twentieth century, South Indian nationalists (in the initial stages primarily Tamil) such as Tiru. Vi. Kaliyanacuntaranar began identifying the word 'nadu' (from the term 'Tamilnadu') with 'nation'.⁶⁹⁷ The perception of South India as an entity in itself was at its strongest point during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Arooran even refers to this period as a being part of a Tamil 'Renaissance'.⁶⁹⁸ In its early form, South Indian nationalism tended to exclude the Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada speaking areas because it was claimed they had been corrupted by an excess of Sanskrit influences.⁶⁹⁹

This reassessment of 'Dravidian' Tamil identity (and later the more encompassing South Indian) opened the 'flood gates' on a number of pivotally issues such as religion, caste and language.

Research in traditional Tamil literature during the second half of the nineteenth century brought to question the religious practices and beliefs of the day. G. U. Pope, deduced through his work with the Tamil literary classic, the 'Tiruvacagam', that Saivism was the old pre-historic religion of South India, existing well before the arrival of the first 'Aryan' settlers. More importantly, Pope asserted that over time influences from the North (Aryan, Vedic and Brahmanical) began to be absorbed into the religion.⁷⁰⁰ The argument added credence to the belief that the 'Aryans' had distorted the religion of the 'Dravidians' and more importantly had introduced the caste system.⁷⁰¹ Arooran argued that many South Indian non-Brahmin scholars made claim to the Saiva Siddhanta system definition of Siva as different to that of the modern 'Aryan' interpretation. It supposedly recognised Siva as being the pivot of five functions - protection, creation, destruction, liberation and grace. This differed dramatically from the post-Aryan definition of Siva as a destroyer.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁷ Arooran, 1980, p. 8. Such concepts of 'nationhood' were direct influences from developments in the European political scene. Nationalism, territoriality, religion and language all played a role in how many European minorities began lobbying for the establishment of separate statehood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. R. Pearson, *National Minorities in Eastern Europe*, (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 23-27.

⁶⁹⁸ Arooran, 1980, p. 6.

⁶⁹⁹ Aiyar, 1987, p. 9.

⁷⁰⁰ Arooran, 1987, p. 24.

⁷⁰¹ Arooran, 1987, p. 25.

⁷⁰² Arooran, 1987, p. 22.

Dravidian Nationalism or 'Dravidianism' was primarily a movement which originated in South India in the latter half of the nineteenth century which espoused, to varying degrees, the rejection of the caste system and especially Brahmanic Hinduism on the pretext that it was 'foreign' and had been imposed on Dravidian South India by the Aryan-speaking Northerners, very much to their own detriment.

By the early twentieth century, the growth of South Indian communities in Malaya and the Straits Settlements also saw a transplanting of these ideas in the region.

Although there is ample evidence of the popularity of 'Dravidian Nationalism' among Hindu South Indian communities, a connection has never been made with that of its Christian communities.⁷⁰³ In 1902, an article written by a Mr. C. H. Santhanathan showed a strong identification with Dravidianism and was another indication that despite religious conversion, political and cultural allegiances were still evidently homogeneous. The issue of Dravidianism was to appear sporadically for the next two to three decades in different articles. It is interesting to note that the term 'Dravidian Nationalism' was not explicitly used but merely insinuated. This would indicate empathy with the sentiments but not with the label.⁷⁰⁴ This could be attributed to the fact that Dravidianism was viewed as Hindu practice and did not have a place in the Indian Christian sphere of interest.

'The Malaysia Message'⁷⁰⁵ and 'Dravidian nationalism', 1902-1926

One of the major sources of Indian Christian writings came from the repositories of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America based Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Other Indian Churches did not maintain or encourage writings on contemporary issues the way the Methodist Church did. For example, when the Roman Catholic Church began publishing the *Malaya Catholic Leader* in 1935 (later to become the *Catholic News*), it basically functioned as a instrument of instruction for the Roman Catholic

⁷⁰³ Arasaratnam, 1970, pp. 166-7. According to Arasaratnam, Dravidian Nationalism or Dravidianism, was a primarily Hindu concern.

⁷⁰⁴ Many Indian Christian interviewees when asked about 'Dravidianism' spoke of it with an element of disdain.

⁷⁰⁵ The use of the term 'Malaysia' was a purposeful act on the part of the Methodist leadership to denote the Churches identification of the Malay peninsula as a political entity. The term was used from the Churches inception in the early 1890s. Bobby E. K. Sng, *In His Good Time*, (Singapore: Graduates' Christian Fellowship, 1980), p. 120.

Church.⁷⁰⁶ In no way is this study implying that the Methodist Church was so liberal as to not use its publications as a tool of 'propaganda' - if so it would appear it was less than that of other Church denominations, and was interspersed with the contemporary views of its Indian (and Chinese) laity and clergy.

The Methodists maintained what appeared to be a relatively relaxed hierarchical structure, which might have been attributable to the early dominance of a United States of America-based leadership.

Traditionally Methodism had emphasised a strong belief in the idea of personal spiritual salvation. This individualist approach differed greatly from that advocated by the Roman Catholic Church, which emphasised salvation through the Church establishment itself. Although this belief in personal salvation could not be ignored, several other aspects came into play, especially with regards to the Methodist Indian communities of Malaya and the Straits Settlements. The majority of Methodists (and Protestants) were from the Shanar (later renamed Nadar) caste groupings.⁷⁰⁷ They were traditionally a 'toddy' (alcoholic drink) producing grouping, but with the conversion to Christianity, were able to improve their economic status by taking full advantage of missionary-based education and financial assistance from missions.⁷⁰⁸ Self-improvement did not stop there. In India, political lobbying and court actions were taken by some Shanar/Nadar groups to elevate the status of their caste grouping.⁷⁰⁹ This strong degree of independence and determination were to influence the way future issues in Malaya and the Straits Settlements were to be confronted. Undeniably they encountered a degree of caste-based discrimination when mixing with 'higher' caste Hindus or Christians, of similar socio-economic standing. This discrimination would therefore have made their stand against caste more resolute than it would otherwise have been.

⁷⁰⁶ The Malayan Catholic Leader was described by the Roman Catholic Church as the 'Official Organ of Catholic Action'. *Malayan Catholic Leader*, Singapore, VI (27), 6 Jul. 1940.

⁷⁰⁷ Robert L. Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, (California: University of California Press, 1969), p. 47.

⁷⁰⁸ Hardgrave, 1969, pp. 58-9. Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 6, (Madras: Government Press, 1909), p. 372.

⁷⁰⁹ Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, pp. 365-70. One such case was heard in 1898 in the High Court of Madras.

The Churches of the local-based Methodist Episcopal Church of America, unlike the British (or French Roman Catholic missionaries), were not as compelled to view the trappings of colonialism in a positive light. On the other hand, most citizens of the United States took pride in attaining independence from and defeating colonialist Britain in 1776.⁷¹⁰ For example, H. B. Mansell, a North American missionary based in Malaya made a positive comparison of 'Malaysia' to the United States as examples of racial harmony amidst cultural diversity. In a June 1897 article, Principal Fairbarn criticised Hinduism for being little more than the practice of caste hierarchies. In another article J. J. Kingham questioned European hegemony. He observed strong 'socio-biological' overtones in caste practices and saw similarities with European paganism assimilation into Christian beliefs - so too for Hinduism. Kingham also reiterated 'Dravidian Nationalist' sentiments, something he would have picked up from his Indian counterparts.⁷¹¹ The point made here was that racial hierarchies within the Methodist Church were not as obvious as in wider colonialist society. However a degree of dissatisfaction was prevalent from time to time, and was illustrated in an article by Rev. Pakianathan. He observed how many Asian missionaries felt they were being treated more as 'spoon-fed' 'hirelings' than as equals.⁷¹²

The earliest article by an Indian Christian layperson was surprisingly also one of the most forthright political narratives. Mr. C. H. Santhanathan, an organist with the Methodist Episcopal Tamil Church in Kuala Lumpur, whose article was published in August 1902, illustrates how members within the Indian Christian communities were politically aware, and more importantly, not necessarily pro-colonial. The article, simply titled 'Caste', was a critique of the absurdity of the caste system in India and its continued practice in Malaya. Another noteworthy point was its insinuated 'Dravidian Nationalist' sentiments.

⁷¹⁰ S. S. Pakianathan, 'The Changing Asiatic Mind', in *The Malaysia Message*, 36 (6), March 1926, p. 3. Rev. Pakianathan stated that 'western nations hold these parts [colonialised Asia] only for the sole good of these several countries [western nations]' and that these nations 'excepting America' did so with financially-based ulterior motives.

⁷¹¹ H. B. Mansell, 'Malaysia, the Melting Pot of Asia', in *Malaysia Message*, Jan. 1920, XXIX (4), pp. 27-9. P. Fairbarn, in *Malaysia Message*, Aug. 1898. J. J. Kingham, 'India's Response to Christ', in *Malaysia Message*, Sept. 1931, 41 (9), p. 24.

⁷¹² Rev. S. S. Pakianathan, *The Changing Asiatic Mind*, in *The Malaysia Mission*, Mar. 1926, 36 (6), p. 11.

Just at a time when the original inhabitants of India were ignorantly and foolishly superstitious, a certain class of immigrants who came from the North, offered themselves to the people to be their priests and religious teachers. They called themselves Brahmins and professed to have been born from the head of Brahma the Creator.⁷¹³

Santhanathan made reference to the caste system being used, throughout history, by 'foreigners' to their benefit. And though contentious for the purposes of this study, it is believed that a veiled reference to colonial British rule was intended when he wrote;

Suffice to say, then, that the caste prejudices under the sanction and protection of the law, were the chief factors of the political disunion and consequent breaking up of the Indian Empire to the advantage of its enemies.⁷¹⁴

Many other articles dating back to as early as 1903, mainly anonymous editorials, highlighted the negative aspects of colonialism and its effect on Indian Christians.⁷¹⁵ Anonymity was important when criticising colonial governments of the day. Many of its parishioners were urban-based, white-collar workers - predominantly under the employ of colonial government. Outright criticism was politically unwise and could lead to difficulties at work. It was therefore not surprising to note that the individuals who were willing to identify themselves with their 'anti-colonial' views were not civil servants.

The Methodist Church, like all other sectors of colonial society, was not totally blanketed from racist colonial concepts. Unfortunately, such viewpoints did show up from time to time usually in the form of annual reports made by specific clergymen.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹³ Santhanathan, Aug. 1902, p. 106. Mr. Santhanathans' defiant intellectual views appeared to have influenced his outlook in working life. In 1916, a C. H. Santhanathan was accused of insubordination by his Chief Clerk in Kuala Lumpur and demoted to a '2nd grade clerkship'. 'Reduction of C. H. Santhanathan to 2nd Grade Clerkship', 445/20245, Mar. 1916, CO 273.

⁷¹⁴ Santhanathan, Aug. 1902, p. 108.

⁷¹⁵ 'A Spade is a Spade', in *The Malaysia Message*, Oct. 1903, 13, (1), p. 2. 'Superiority of Races', in *The Malaysia Message*, Oct. 1905, 15 (1), p. 1. 'Mistreatment of Asiatics', in *The Malaysia Message*, Aug. 1911, 20 (11), p. 83. 'The Trinity of Evils in the Indian Church', in *The Malaysia Message*, Feb. 1903, 12 (5), p. 43.

⁷¹⁶ H. L. E. Luering, *85th Annual Report, 1903, Malaysia*, in *Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 50. H. L. E. Luering, *83th Annual Report, 1901, Malaysia*, in *Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 69.

These attitudes appeared to have waned by the beginning of the twentieth century. It is also interesting to note that many of these racial remarks were never challenged by the ethnic Indian clergy. But then, neither were they reinforced.

'The Malaysia Message' and the rise of nationalism

Nationalist sentiments within the Methodist Church were strong by the turn of the nineteenth century, with both clergy and laity making their political views known. One such person was Reverend Raju Naidu of Taiping, a keen advocate of local Indian unity and a vocal opponent of the British opium trade. Despite his forthright views and commitment to these causes, he did not appear to have published any significant article in the *Malaysia Message*, but was more vocal in the local secular press.⁷¹⁷ Rev. Naidu, a Telegu, was born and grew up in India. He had been editor of the *Eastern Star*, a well-known Madras paper for several years before taking up residence as pastor to the Methodist Episcopal Church in Taiping, Perak.⁷¹⁸

In a letter to *The Perak Pioneer* in 1906, Rev. Naidu accused the British government of fueling the opium trade for its own financial gain. Naidu went on to say, 'Can any human being - and certainly any nation - afford to rule out all moral considerations and attend to money making only?'. He then illustrated his point by quoting the former British Prime Minister Gladstone's lament on Britain's part in the opium trade, 'What disgrace, what shame, with regard to a stimulant of that kind, to say that a great and powerful country like this should have resorted to such measures! what great melancholy facts of our human condition does that conduct illustrate? It illustrates the sad and deplorable fact that the conscience is always lagging behind duty instead of keeping abreast of it.'⁷¹⁹

The fact that such an attack was made by an Asian subject under the auspices of a politically intolerant colonial government, is amazing in itself. However it would be foolhardy to assume Naidu was totally unaware of the politically blinkered nature of British colonialism. In his 1906 *Perak Pioneer* article Naidu went to great lengths to

⁷¹⁷ This could indicate differences with the editorial team of the *Malaysia Message* at this time. The paper was to become more critical of British colonialism in the 1920s. However the Methodist Church did take a strong official stand against the use and proliferation of opium. 'Methodism's Official Attitude to Opium, etc.' in *The Malaysia Message*, Apr. 1909, XVIII (7), Singapore, p. 53.

⁷¹⁸ Khoo, 1992, p. 8.

quote prominent British sources, as if to show the contradictions in British policy were not only that of his own, but shared by British political dignitaries. This style of political criticism, would become a popular tool for Church-based anti-colonial writers in the *Malaysia Message*.

Without a doubt, the 'golden age' of the *Malaysia Message* took place under the editorial guidance of Rev. S. S. Pakianathan and Mrs. E. V. Davies in the 1920s and 1930s. Rev. Solomon S. Pakianathan was a pastor who served in many parts of the Malay peninsula. He worked with the Tamil Church in Singapore for several years in the 1920s. He was a teacher by profession and was born in Tirunelvely, Tamilnadu in 1881. He died in the 1960s. Mrs. E. V. Davies was one of the contributing editors to the *Malaysia Message* from 1929 and acted as assistant editor to *The Indian* in the early 1930s. She was married to Edward Vethayagam Davies, a prominent Ceylonese-Tamil government school teacher. She had been born and educated (attaining a Master of Arts degree) in Madras. Mr. Davies was a Malayali by birth.⁷²⁰

Both showed a degree of political analysis and boldness almost non-existent in local Indian Christian circles of the day. However even as writers for a small Church newspaper, many felt compelled to couch their political views in ambiguity to appease the governmental sensitivities.

Surveillance of activist Indians and groups in British Malaya and the Straits Settlements was initiated with the formation of the 'Special Branch', a governmental body in 1919. Two Indians from the Indian police force were seconded to help compile a 'local suspects list' of subversive Indians. Governmental definitions of 'subversive' activities related to anyone or group who 'evinced an interest in such matters as conditions of labour or political questions in general - and harass them if necessary'. According to Sandhu, most 'suspects' had a white-collar or professional background and the government seemed more concerned in their activities in conjunction with the Nationalist movement in India. A supposed 'link' had been made

⁷¹⁹ Khoo, 1992, p. 9.

⁷²⁰ Information from *The Malaysia Message*, 39 (2), Feb. 1929 and Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Jan. 1997, Singapore. Mrs. Davies was also one of the sponsors of the International Fellowship Association and served as vice-president in the late 1920s. The author was unable to find more information on Mrs. E. V. Davies.

between several Indian intellectuals in Malaya and the nationalist movement in the First World War.⁷²¹

Rev. Pakianathan was as forthright a nationalist as one could find within the local Indian Christian communities of the day. Like many of his generation, he was heavily influenced by the Indian nationalist movement and therefore analysed circumstances along those parameters. In his article 'The Changing Asiatic Mind' (March 1926, *Malaysia Message*), he made a veiled attack on British colonialism. By adopting a Pan-Asian perspective, he was able to highlight the socio-economic disparities in colonialism without directly challenging the power-base of British colonialism in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Neutral terms such as, 'Western' and 'Eastern', were used instead. Another feature of this argument was to highlight the contradictions within the British governments, usually with regards to the principles of its democratic traditions while acknowledging the 'advantages' it brought. This was obviously a device on his part to keep this article ambiguous and therefore not make him the direct target of the colonial authorities.

Pakianathan questioned the hegemony of colonialism and challenged its motives. He asked, 'Who made the Western powers trustees over the Asiatic countries? No one doubts that the Western nations have done good, and are still doing good to Asia.'. He then went on to accuse these 'Western' nations of being self-serving when he wrote;

Western nations hold these parts only for the sole good of these several countries, no thinking Asiatic is prepared to believe.⁷²²

He further illustrated this by pointing out the restrictive racist immigration policies of several 'western' countries like Australia, South Africa, Canada, the United States and discriminatory Customs tariffs in Asia; and described it as being, 'the open-door policy in the East, and the closed-door policy of the West'.

⁷²¹ Sandhu, 1969, p.45. Sundaram and Todd, 1994, p. 58.

⁷²² Rev. S. S. Pakianathan, *The Changing Asiatic Mind*, in *The Malaysia Mission*, Mar. 1926, 36 (6), p. 3.

He accused the British government of ignoring the 'rule of law' in the colonies. He described their attitude as showing an, 'unwillingness - of Britain to make the Executive body responsible to the Legislatures.'⁷²³ He summed his overall argument by concluding,

the Awakened Asia can now see a few serious faults in it as Western people themselves realize now. She detects as well the racial arrogance of the white man, and consequently the disregard of the brotherhood of man by the whites, and the apparent complacent thought of the white man that the world is solely or at least primarily made for him. It is expected the Asiatic should not question this right. So the present changing Asiatic mind is mistrustful and suspicious towards the Western people.⁷²⁴

While a staunch anti-colonial nationalist, Rev. Pakianathan was quite obviously first and foremost, a Christian. He married much of his nationalist ideals with his religious beliefs, and in this article he equates 'progress' with the acceptance of the 'teaching of Jesus Christ'.

the Western people had begun to accept the teaching of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. It was then dawn in the West which began changing for the better. The Renaissance, the Reformation, the discovery of America, the Independence of America, the coming into existence of the Republic of France, the inventions of steamships, the locomotive engine, the manumission of slaves, and the recent invention of electricity, telegraph, telephone and the wireless telegraph followed one after another.⁷²⁵

Here he puts forward the idea that material progress was strongly tied in with an acceptance of the 'teaching of Jesus Christ'. According to Romilar Thapar, this was a typical 'Evangelical' type analysis.⁷²⁶ Here lay the contradictions of the Malayan-based Indian Christian nationalist. While seeing the injustices of British colonial rule,

⁷²³ Pakianathan, Mar. 1926, p. 10.

⁷²⁴ Pakianathan, Mar. 1926, p. 10.

⁷²⁵ Pakianathan, Mar. 1926, p. 3.

⁷²⁶ Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, (New Dehli: Orient Longman, 1978), p. 5.

they were imitative in that they accepted the values and standards set by this 'invading' culture. Like many anti-colonial nationalist of the day, he used the political tools of the British in order to attack them. Much of his concepts of liberty, independence and freedom were appropriated from European models, the very model on which the colonial government and law was based.

Partha Chatterjee noted how such nationalist 'rejection' was ambivalent in nature; 'rejection of the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards, and rejection of ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity'. This was the dilemma of what Chatterjee called 'Eastern' (colonialized) nationalism. Unlike 'Western' (colonializing) nationalism, 'Eastern' nationalism was a direct product of colonial disparities, which set its brand of the anti-colonial nationalism in motion. 'Eastern' nationalism was based on peoples who had been 'recently drawn into a civilisation hitherto alien to them, and whose ancestral cultures are not adapted to success and excellence by these cosmopolitan and increasingly dominant standards.'⁷²⁷ It was therefore based on the feeling that the 'Eastern' (colonialized) nation was not culturally prepared to reach the high standards already attained by the 'western' colonializer.⁷²⁸

The 'ambivalence' of this brand of colonial 'rejection' was all the more prevalent in Rev. Pakianathan's definition of how this 'awakening' nationalism was to be epitomised; through the teachings of Christianity. While literally equating the material riches of Europe to its religious conversion to Christianity, he attributed the 'awakening' of Asian awareness to its contact with these 'Western Christian people'.⁷²⁹ Rev. Pakianathan clearly illustrates Chatterjee's argument of how 'Eastern' nationalism, while rejecting the 'alien intruder', imitates its very standards. Rev. Pakianathan noted;

⁷²⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World - A Derivative Discourse*, (London: Zed Books/United Nations University, 1986), p. 2.

⁷²⁸ Chatterjee, 1986, pp. 1-2.

⁷²⁹ Rev. S. S. Pakianathan, *The Changing Asiatic Mind*, in *The Malaysia Mission*, Mar. 1926, 36 (6), p. 3. And with regards to 'Western' education; Rev S. S. Pakianathan, *Our Responsibility in Malaya*, in *The Indian*, Oct. 1925, pp. 149-150. Aihwa Ong, 'Chinese Modernities: Narratives of Nation and of

Then we can hope for international peace and understanding, yea! the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Is Western civilisation the remedy? No, Christianity pure and unalloyed is the only and sure remedy. (sic)⁷³⁰

This viewpoint was also alluded to by Fred David, an Indian parishioner from the Tamil Methodist Church in Singapore. In his article 'Fire-walking and Pin-sticking' (February 1926, *Malaysia Message*), David defended Hindu religious practices (i.e. Thaipusam), from the 'arrogant' and 'perfervid tirade' of many British critics. His analysis, while sympathetic to Hindu Indians, was also self-defeating. David also noted how 'most of the educated Indians have not a scrap of faith in these torturings, is proven by the fact that they do not indulge in them'. Noting Chatterjee's argument on 'Eastern' nationalism, the writer's approach appears contradictory. While exhibiting a degree of understanding toward the Hindu Indian, he also differentiates himself by virtue of his acquired 'western' background. His answer to the issue of 'barbarous performances' was simplistically put into the context of misspent religious beliefs. He concluded that the, 'Gospel of the God of Love is what India wants to-day'.⁷³¹

Mrs. E. V. Davies' article 'Colour and Culture' (March 1926, *The Indian & The Malaysia Message*), was an admonition of European colonial hegemony, caste prejudice and to a degree, sexism. Her arguments, unlike Rev. Pakianathan and Fred David appeared more secularist, utilising a feminist framework to identify discrepancies in the modern world - and very unlike Rev. Pakianathan who viewed technology as a blessing from a Christian God; Mrs. Davies preferred to see it as a means of domination.

But there is no lack of the desire to dominate; and steamships and railways have opened up a wider field for the display of the worst in man.⁷³²

Capitalism' in Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (ed.), *Ungrounded Empires: The cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 187.

⁷³⁰ Pakianathan, Mar. 1926, p. 10.

⁷³¹ Fred David, *Fire-walking and Pin-sticking*, in *The Malaysia Message*, Feb. 1926, pp. 6, 11.

⁷³² Mrs. E. V. Davies, M.A., *Colour and Culture*, in *The Indian*, March 1926, p. 271.

The article made a swipe at the exclusivity of British colonial society. Although no mention of the 'British' was made, this was clarified by her substitution for the use of the terms 'colourless' and 'coloured' for which to describe the predicament of colonial society;

political circumstances and material prosperity have placed the latter ('colourless') in a position of advantage over the former ('coloured') everywhere, and naturally like the selfish human being that we all are, they have used it for their benefit.⁷³³

Her argument basically followed the same political line as that of Rev. Naidu, Rev. Pakianathan and Fred David; heavily reliant on bolstering her argument by highlighting contradictions between colonial rhetoric and practise. In addition to this, she reiterates Dravidian Nationalist ideas by describing the subjugation of the 'darker' Indians by that of the foreign 'lighter' skinned 'Aryan'. This was undeniably a ploy on her part to draw parallels between domestic Indian caste relationships (which all Indians could identify with) and the discriminatory British colonial regime.

But before man's selfishness invented this explanation, you find in the Vedas that the real beginning of the difference was in colour. The conquered Indians were called 'Dasyas' who were dark in colour and short in stature. The Aryan was tall and fair and he invoked his gods to come down and destroy the 'Black Dogs' as the aborigines were sometimes called. Centuries of change have made the system different; but both from ancient literature and from life in modern days, the self-imposed superiority of the descendants of the Aryan, can be easily traced.⁷³⁴

The importance of Dravidianist ideals should not be downplayed. Coincidentally, popular nineteenth and early twentieth century 'scientific racial' theories of racial stratification strongly paralleled that the traditional caste system. Superficially much of it was based on skin colouration. Although there is little evidence to prove that these ideas were well-known within Indian circles in Malaya or the Straits

⁷³³ Davies, March 1926, p. 272.

⁷³⁴ Davies, March 1926, p. 273.

Settlements, such negative knowledge, interwoven with other anti non-Aryan racial myths would have become common knowledge among many South Indians, especially those educated in colonial education system. Such ideas would have grated against the collective identity of many South Indians.

Another point worth noting was that Mrs. Davies was married to one of the highest paid Asian civil servants in the Straits Settlements. Her husband, Mr. Edward Vethayagam Davies, a government teacher by profession, who received \$4,800 annually - a huge sum for a non-European in the 1930s. It was therefore not surprising to note Mr. Davies never published any articles in any local paper. Were he as politically critical as his wife, he would have put his job and financial status in jeopardy. One could therefore assume much of Mrs. Davies' ideas were shared by Mr. Davies.

The rise of the pre-war trade union movement

There is no significant link between the Indian Christian communities and the rise of the Trade Union movement. Indian Christians did not participate in the trade union activities as an entity, and if present did so as irrespective of religious background.

Trade Unionism came into it's own by the late 1930s. There were sporadic examples of industrial action being made by Indian labour in the 1910s, but such action could not constitute the formation of a long-term industrial organisation. The earliest record of a local union organisation was that of the mainly Malay 'Kelab Kapitan-kapitan dan Injinir-injinir' in the 1890s. The formation of Chinese-based union bodies was already taking place by the 1920s, mainly due to the influence of the Kuomintang and its various bodies.⁷³⁵ Indian labour, unlike Chinese labour, were slow to develop. This was due to the confined and isolated conditions of the estate, which did not impede other working communities. In the urban centres and among estate administrative staff, organisations and professional bodies were formed in the late 1920s.

Government reaction to the trade unions was swift and repressive. Harassment, arrests and the occasional banishment of union leaders ensued and it was not till after the mid-1930s that unions, in this case the Malayan General Labour Union began to gain a strong degree of influence. By 1935 two large-scale strikes commenced in the Batu

Arang coal mines⁷³⁶ and among the disgruntled bus-men of the Singapore Traction Company. The significance of these strikes was its multi-racial dimension, which put into disarray the ethnically separationist tactics of colonial government. Other separate strikes continued well into 1937.⁷³⁷

The development of trade unionism in Malaya sounded a warning to the oppressive practices of employer groups. The colonial government itself, being one of the largest employers, had a direct interest in muzzling this growing influence. However by the late 1930s, trade unionism was begrudgingly accepted by government and private capital, mainly due to several factors; the halt to immigration in 1938, pressure from existing trade unions, the outbreak of war in Europe and advice from the Colonial Office in London. Related legislation was introduced from 1940, with the passing of the 'Colonial Development and Welfare Act' of 1940 which regulated that funds be made available for 'social progress' programmes. However this was conditional on the passing of related labour legislation.⁷³⁸ That same year, the 'Trade Unions Ordinance' of 1940 was hurriedly passed. This ordinance was modelled on the British 'Trade Disputes Act' of 1927, which was introduced after the defeat of the British labour movement in the general strike of 1926. The act called for the compulsory registration of all trade unions, emphasised 'conciliation procedures', disallowed sympathy and politically motivated strikes and also denied workers the right to picket. These conditions tried to halt certain developments prevalent in colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements at the time. Unlike its counterparts in northern Europe, trade unions did not solely agitate for economic benefits. Its demands were strongly politically motivated and were closely involved with the struggle for national independence.⁷³⁹

For most part, organisational developments in Indian circles were dualistic. On one hand, the large Tamil-educated population often supported communal organisation

⁷³⁵ Dass, 1991, p. 24.

⁷³⁶ According to a source, there was a sizeable Indian Roman Catholic community working at the coal miners of Batu Arang, Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Kuala Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁷³⁷ Dass, 1991, p. 26.

⁷³⁸ Dass, 1991, p. 27. Armajit Kaur, 'Tappers and Weeders: South Indian Plantation Workers in Peninsular Malaysia, 1880-1970, in *South Asia*, (Armidale: South Asian Studies Association, 1998), p. 97.

⁷³⁹ Dass, 1991, p. 27.

such as the Dravidian Nationalist, 'Dravida Kazagam'. Most of its followers were Tamil-educated school teachers, journalists and estate kanganys. This movement was also popular with estate populations that found its heavy emphasis on the development of 'self-respect' compatible with their own lowly status in society. On the other hand, the mainly urban-based English educated elites joined the 'Central Indian Association of Malaya' (C. I. A. M.), which by the late 1930s, had become affiliates with some Indian associations in the peninsula. While Dravidianist groups such as the Dravida Kazagam based their politics and allegiances along communal lines, the C. I. A. M. did so along nationalist ones.⁷⁴⁰ The C. I. A. M. leadership, by this time began taking a more politically radical line. Under the guidance of R. H. Nathan and Y. K. Menon, the organisation began championing the cause of the poorly paid and badly treated lot of the estate worker. They initiated workers' meetings and helped organise strikes through the Klang District Union. Even estate worker membership in these largely middle-class organisations grew considerably in the late 1930s, often to the indignation of its elitist middle-class clientele.⁷⁴¹ Despite this, some Indian associations and the C. I. A. M. continued its agitation for positive change in estates.⁷⁴² These political developments alarmed the colonial authorities, who immediately set-up the All-Malayan Tamil Association (A. M. T. A.) in 1941, to rival the rising status of the C. I. A. M. Quite predictably the A. M. T. A.'s role was cultural and social, which helped downplay the C. I. A. M. emphasis on workers' struggle and economic justice.⁷⁴³

By 1941, the C. I. A. M. understanding that negotiations with colonial authorities and employer groups were fruitless, began organising (under its affiliate, the Klang Indian Association) strikes in eight estates from March of that year. The strikes spread to the Batu Arang coalmines, and by mid-May 1941 most estate workers in Selangor and some in Negri Sembilan had joined in. A total of 10,000 workers had stopped work. The British declared a state of emergency in Selangor and despatched a military battalion to quell the unrest. On the 17th of May 1941, four estate labourers were

⁷⁴⁰ Stenson, 1980, p. 58.

⁷⁴¹ Stenson, 1980, p. 58. The Singapore Indian Association opened its membership to estate workers in 1936, only to exclude them again in 1937!

⁷⁴² Stenson, 1980, pp. 60-61.

⁷⁴³ Dass, 1991, p. 30.

killed by troops, and 300 were arrested. R. H. Nathan was arrested, accused of being a 'communist' (an accusation he strongly denied) and banished to India.⁷⁴⁴

The Japanese occupation and the Indian National Army (1942-45)

The defeat of the British at the hands of the Japanese dealt a significant psychological blow to the prestige of colonial British rule.⁷⁴⁵ Abandoned by the colonial government, the communities found themselves at the mercy of the invading Japanese army. The largely Chinese-based Malayan Communist Party (M. C. P.) organised the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (M. P. A. J. A.) along with a civilian based support organisation, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union (M. P. A. J. U.).⁷⁴⁶ Both these organisations were to act as an effective resistance to that of the Japanese as well as safeguarding the plight of oppressed labour populations in isolated areas.⁷⁴⁷

Membership in the M. P. A. J. A. was primarily Chinese and culturally China-based; although Micheal Stenson notes involvement of Indian⁷⁴⁸ and Malay youth in the organisation. Despite its non-communal, class-based Marxist ideology, membership to such a party was strongly influenced by ethnicity.⁷⁴⁹ This would have been an obstacle to recruitment, let alone involvement, of other ethnic groups. Anti-Japanese feelings in the Chinese communities ran high mainly due to their invasion of China from the early 1930s.⁷⁵⁰ This move, in a way, helped align the Chinese communities with the interest of the colonial British, which found imperial Japan a direct threat to its empire in the East. On the other hand, nationalist and the pro-independence movement in India had a direct influence on politically aware Indians in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. The continued occupation of India by the British, cultivated a strong anti-British element within nationalist circles. The heavy handed nature by which the British administration put down strikes and ignored estate worker concerns during the

⁷⁴⁴ Dass, 1991, p. 31. Kaur, 1998, p.97. Colonial banishment ordinances were a common means to discouraging the rise of militant unions.

⁷⁴⁵ Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 92.

⁷⁴⁶ Stenson, 1980, p. 87.

⁷⁴⁷ Dass, 1991, p. 32.

⁷⁴⁸ According to an informant, there were a number of Indians in the Malayan Communist Party. Anonymous, Selangor, 19 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁴⁹ Fujio Hara, *Leaders of the Malayan Communist Party during the Anti-Japanese War*, presented at the *Second International Malaysian Studies Conference*, 2-4 Aug. 1999, Kuala Lumpur. Hara noted that the majority of the pre-war M. C. P. and M. P. A. J. A. leadership were China-born. This helped retain a strong psychological link with mainland China and ethnic Chinese.

Klang strikes, just months before the Japanese invasion, added to anti-British feelings. Consequently, it was easier for Indian nationalists in Malaya and the Straits Settlements to align themselves with the invading Japanese army, which they viewed as an alternative powerbase, than it was for nationalist Chinese. However a clear line between Chinese or Indian loyalties could not be clearly drawn. For example, Indian estate labour support for the Communist was very high, and continued to be high well into the 1950s. Similarly Chinese attendees, usually M. C. P. supporters, at I. N. A. rallies were not unusual.⁷⁵¹ According to a former estate staff member, his British manager regarded all Indian estate workers as 'communist'. In 1954, this was taken so seriously that the manager actually allowed a drastic increase in provisions, (i.e. rice and sugar) despite this being against the law, so as to secure his own well-being.⁷⁵² Although membership in the M. C. P. was dominated by Chinese, there appeared to be a strong Indian and even Malay following.⁷⁵³ Much of this was apparently due to discontent with British rule, as well as anger against the consequences of a British and Australian military presence.⁷⁵⁴

The war had a disruptive effect on colonial hierarchies. With the embarrassing defeat of British rule, traditional colonial hierarchies were put into a state of flux. Even at the grass roots level, lowly estate workers were often unwilling to accept the authority of their Indian administrative staff (who were placed in-charge by the Japanese, with the departure of British managers).⁷⁵⁵ After the war these tensions were epitomised by workers' accusations of staff collaboration with the Japanese, stealing of rations, underpaid wages, brutality and sending off young married males to work on war-time ventures in Thailand so as to have access to their young wives.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁰ Hara, 2-4 Aug. 1999.

⁷⁵¹ Anonymous, Selangor, 19 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁵² Anonymous, Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. This was against the law since it was assumed that all excess food was given to the Malayan Communist Party and its forces.

⁷⁵³ Anonymous, Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁵⁴ Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. Balraj, (born 1931), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁵⁵ During the war, Japanese had a very low profile in the estates. It was due to the isolated nature of estates. Most stayed closer to the 'mainroads.' Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. Balraj, (born 1931), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁵⁶ 'Trial of Indian and Ceylonese collaborators', in *A Select List of Files in the Selangor Secretariat 1875-1955*, file no. 350, 23 Mar. 1946. Stenson, 1970, p. 95.

The Indian communities, unlike that of the Chinese who were largely led by a mercantile class, relied on professional and civil servants who led political developments in the name of the Indian community. This trend continued with the Japanese Occupation when the C. I. A. M. leadership helped establish the Indian National Army (I. N. A.). The developments brought about by the I. N. A., had long-term consequences for the Indian communities. Firstly it established an organisation that acted as a catalyst, for the first time, for all Indians - regardless of religious, ethnic, caste or linguistic differences. Secondly, it helped develop leadership skills which continued to be used after the war. Thirdly, it empowered a younger generation of lower level Tamil-speaking cadre, who would often take over local leadership when their superiors were imprisoned by the returning British. It was these young cadre who often linked up with the Malayan Communist Party (M. C. P.) front groups.⁷⁵⁷

The Indian National Army (I. N. A.) was headed by Subhas Chandra Bose, and was an interesting exercise in Indian community solidarity. Prior to this, the Indian communities were largely segregated along class, sub-ethnic and to a lesser extent religious lines. Between 1942 and 1945, the I. N. A. bridged all these boundaries. Many communities, once bitter rivals, were suddenly united under a single banner of pan-Indian solidarity. However the I. N. A. was primarily a pro-Indian independence organisation. Its orientation was towards India, not Malaya.

Subhas Chandra Bose was the sixth son of nine children to a Calcutta-based family. Bose was born in 1897 to a prominent Bengali family. His father Janaki Nath Bose was a successful lawyer, held the position of 'government pleader' and was seen as a community leader. His mother Prabhavati Bose (nee Dutt) hailed from another well-established Calcutta family.⁷⁵⁸ In the 1920s, after getting involved in nationalist politics, he differentiated himself from the politics of Gandhi and his stand on non-violence.⁷⁵⁹ By the start of the Second World War, Subhas Bose had aligned himself with the anti-British Axis powers. While not speaking out for the Axis' goals and conquests, he believed these alliances could bring about his ultimate goal –

⁷⁵⁷ Stenson, 1970, p. 97.

⁷⁵⁸ Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj: A biography of Indian Nationalists*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 7

independence for India. By 1942, after a stint in Berlin, he decidedly made advances to the Japanese thus making possible his move into the Southeast Asian region.⁷⁶⁰

The Japanese had already reached out to liaise with Indian communities in Thailand, Malaya and Burma by 1941. The Japanese government realised the Indian army, controlled by the British government, was a central element in the defense of British interests in the region. Therefore it was imperative to get on side whatever 'Indian' support they could muster in these countries.⁷⁶¹ Major Fujiwara Iwaichi, a young, inexperienced but intelligent 33-year old officer was appointed to the task. Fujiwara's first contact with the Indian communities of Bangkok was through the Indian Independence League (IIL) composed mainly of members from the Sikh community. With help from this group, successful attempts were made to dissuade Indian troops fighting for the British army in Malaya and surrender to the invading Japanese army. This was helped by the lightning-like advance of the Japanese army down the Malayan peninsula. Amid a propaganda offensive, thousands of Indian troops surrendered. Sometime around the 15th of December 1941, Fujiwara met Captain Mohan Singh an officer of the 1/14 Punjab Regiment of the Indian army. With time, Captain Mohan Singh was won over by Fujiwara and he agreed to organize an 'Indian National Army'. However Singh had expressed a great interest in Subhas Chandra Bose, then in Berlin, and pressed for his presence in the region, but this took time to eventuate. The request largely fell on deaf ears. However the Japanese administration began to recognise possible opportunities, and gave the go-ahead for a general conference in Tokyo for the Indian independence movement held in March 1942. Developments at the conference were mixed, and on return to Malaya the Indian delegates were given the task of building up the Indian Nationalist Army and its civilian arm, the Indian Independence League (IIL). By the 1st of September 1942, the First Division of the I.N.A. was formed with 16,300 men.⁷⁶²

However the INA was in deep strife. Suspicion was rife, with many in the I.N.A. feeling the Japanese were using them for their own narrow objectives. By December 1942, Captain Mohan Singh and two other I.N.A. officials resigned, and Singh was

⁷⁵⁹ Gordon, 1990, p. 69.

⁷⁶⁰ Gordon, 1990, p. 462.

⁷⁶¹ Gordon, 1990, p. 464-465.

arrested soon after. Prepared for this eventuality, Singh had drawn up an order dissolving the I.N.A. The INA and IIL were in disarray.⁷⁶³

Bose arrived in Singapore soon after, and immediately took over the Presidency of the IIL with much public fanfare. His main plan was to establish a provisional government in exile stationed in Singapore. This eventuated on the 21st of October 1942.⁷⁶⁴ By the end of 1943, he moved his headquarters to Rangoon.⁷⁶⁵

Despite the euphoria surrounding the I.N.A's public functions, it was quite apparent deep divisions lay beneath the surface of its relationship with the local Indian communities. For many in the estates, recruitment into the I. N. A. was the only alternative for young men for whom the only option was work on the notorious 'Death Railway' in Thailand.⁷⁶⁶ Accounts from this period also note the social and economic disruption brought about by I. N. A. recruitment drives. One interviewee noted how many young wage-earning males, upon volunteering for service, put their families in dire economic strife. Wages were often paid in rice rations, which was detrimental for survival. Recruitment even affected the market place, with some vendors, in this case the vegetable seller, closing shop to join the I. N. A.⁷⁶⁷

While there is ample evidence to show that much of the 'popularity' of the I. N. A. was 'enforced', at the grass roots level, the appeal of the I. N. A. was still undeniable.⁷⁶⁸ Their rallies were attended in the thousands, where demands for the removal of British rule were resoundingly supported. Fundraising did not appear to be a problem, with many women and men, even prepared to donate personal jewelery at rallies. This patriotic fervour can be analyzed as a reaction to British colonialism. The internalization of cultural self-denial and self-hatred resulted in a strong degree of

⁷⁶² Gordon, 1990, pp. 465-471.

⁷⁶³ Gordon, 1990, p. 472.

⁷⁶⁴ Gordon, 1990, p. 502.

⁷⁶⁵ Gordon, 1990, p. 510.

⁷⁶⁶ Dass, 1991, p. 33. Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. A similar point is made by Leonard A. Gordon, when he notes how many Indian officers of the defeated British Indian army joined the INA to 'avoid Japanese prison camps or to protect the lives of their men'. Gordon, 1990, p. 471.

⁷⁶⁷ Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

⁷⁶⁸ Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 24 Jan. 1997. Interview with Mr. S. P. Velusamy (born early 1920s), Kuala Lumpur, Nov. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born

confusion for many in the community. While strongly aware of their own cultural background,⁷⁶⁹ they were constantly reminded by colonial authorities and structures that they were in some way 'inferior'. Organisations such as the I. N. A. allowed the Indian community, within the strict confines of Japanese military patronage, to express sentiments long repressed under British colonialism. In a way it was an emotive and sentimentalist celebration in 'Indian' pride, where being 'Indian' did not contain negative connotations and flew in the face of colonial theories on Indian or Asian 'inferiority'. Among downtrodden estate and other disgruntled workers, the I. N. A. created a channel for anti-British sentiment, prevalent since the fatal suppression of industrial strikes between 1937 to 1941. In many urban Indian Christian families, the consequences of Japanese occupation and the rise of the I. N. A. were little understood.⁷⁷⁰ A climate of confused nationalism, in this case directed towards India, intermixed with the attractiveness of 'Asian' independence from the 'European', permeated formerly 'Anglophilic' households of the day.

From available research, there appears to be little direct contact between the Indian Christian communities and that of the I. N. A. Individual Churches did not encourage participation, but neither did they discourage it. Gauging solely from interviews, it appears that few Indian Christians participated in I. N. A. activities, and if they did so, was usually as a member of the wider Indian community, not as a Christian.⁷⁷¹ To date no statistics or religious breakdown of I. N. A. membership is available, so there is little to base this assertion. However a general climate of fear prevailed in the community, not directly as a result of the presence of the Japanese, but from local 'spies' in the community. Such accusations need often not be proved before punishment was metted out. Punishment came in the form of severe beatings by Japanese military staff.⁷⁷² Many Indian Christians, feeling guilty about supporting the I. N. A. and its pro-Japanese agenda, often sought forgiveness within the sanctity of

1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. Interview with Mr. Robert (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁶⁹ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Mr. B. Norman Nathan (born 1940), Petaling Jaya, 22 Oct. 1997. R. Raja Krishnan, *The Jaffna Tamils in Prewar Malaya: The Myth of the Return*, in *Sixth International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies*, (Petaling Jaya: Thirumagal Printers, 1987), p. 251.

⁷⁷⁰ Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

⁷⁷¹ Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921), Singapore, 21 Nov. 1996.

⁷⁷² Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

the Roman Catholic confessional for giving donations to the I. N. A. Many felt if they did not, they'd be accused of being anti-Japanese.⁷⁷³ It was therefore imperative to appear supportive, in some cases having to join the I. N. A., in order to stave off reprisals by one's enemies.

The pacification of unionism and communal post-war developments

Some members of the Indian Christian communities, have individually played significant roles in the formation of Trade Unionism in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. This was not due to any special relationship these individuals may have had with workers, but was often more telling of their isolated status as urban-based, English-educated individuals. In the eyes of the British colonial government, this made Indian Christians a 'good' leadership choice. Strategically, to appoint such a socially disenfranchised person in a strong political and economic situation often curtailed the unions own effectiveness. In the eyes of the returning British government, a strong initiative was needed on its part if it wanted to regain the initiative from the rising influence of independent trade unions in the post-war era. This tactic was already prevalent in the pre-war period with the purposeful appointment of minority, middle-class Ceylonese-Tamils as representatives of the Indian community. There appeared to be a preference for Straits-born as opposed to overseas born individuals, the latter tending not to directly identify with the nationalist struggles in the India.⁷⁷⁴ Politically, most Indian leaders from the pre-war and post-war period did not appear to possess a strong political analysis or understanding of their circumstances under colonialism. Most were content to address short-term grievances relating to education, wages, health and drunkenness.⁷⁷⁵ There appeared to be little understanding surrounding issues relating to the nature of colonialism, the fragmentary 'divide and rule' tactics, or their position within international capitalism.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷³ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁷⁴ Stenson, 1980, p. 38.

⁷⁷⁵ Stenson, 1980, p. 57.

⁷⁷⁶ Speeches made by the C. I. A. M. leaders in March and April 1941 appeared to show a leaning towards Marxism. R. H. Nathan and Y. K. Menon both described colonial-based business interests as 'capitalist'. Further developments were curtailed in the following weeks by arrests, banishments and the onset of the Japanese Occupation. Stenson, 1980, p. 57.

By 1946, realising it was unable to curtail the active demands of labour and its unions, the returning British colonial government decided to initiate the formation of its own moderate unions, to rival the position of established ones. As early as 1941, colonial authorities had become increasingly concerned with the spate of industrial unrest prevalent at the time. A decision to appoint a Labour Adviser to 'offer guidance and advice to the young immature union movement'⁷⁷⁷ as well as to government was made. Six labour advisers were finally appointed in December 1945, headed by John Alfred Brazier. Brazier had been a railway engine driver and a union organizer with the National Union of Railwaymen in the United Kingdom. He was reportedly one of the best products of British orthodox Socialism and had attended Rusking College in Oxford. He was reportedly anti-Communist. Brazier had served in the navy during the First World War, held positions as Magistrate and Borough Councillor in the Isle of Wight. He was decorated for his efforts in the civilian defence of southern England during the Second World War and had recently been appointed chairperson of the Labour Appeals Board set up during the war to adjudicate disputes.⁷⁷⁸

Brazier's immediate task was to break the perceived hold of the Malayan Communist Party (M. C. P.) had on labour movement at the time, replacing it with an anti-Communist and 'apolitical' leadership.⁷⁷⁹ Initially he had limited success with his moderated and pro-government unions which remained weak and isolated. However with time, he began a process of isolating non-government approved unions, excluding them from advisory bodies and as recognised representatives of the trade union movement.⁷⁸⁰ With the encouragement of the Governor of Malaya, Sir Edward Gent, Brazier helped increase repressive measures against independent trade unions. Unable to get the Federated Trade Unions (F. T. U.) to reform, or to replace them with pro-government F. T. U.'s, Brazier did not stand in the way of destructive restrictions being put in place by persons or organisations outwardly hostile to any semblance of worker solidarity.⁷⁸¹ By the late 1940s and well into the 1950s, persecution of

⁷⁷⁷ Charles Gamba, *The Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya: A Study in Colonial Labour Unrest*, (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press Ltd., 1962), p. 100.

⁷⁷⁸ Gamba, 1962, pp. 100-101.

⁷⁷⁹ Gamba, 1962, p. 100.

⁷⁸⁰ Stenson, 1970, pp. 192-193. Government controlled media portrayed the union movement as being apathetic. It lamented at the absence of 'proper' unions and condemned any independent ones as being the puppets of foreign forces: p. 194.

⁷⁸¹ Stenson, 1970, pp. 193-194.

supposed 'radical' or pro-Communist elements were used by colonial authorities to coerce independent union activity. With the onset of the 'Emergency', it was politically dangerous to be identified as a 'radical'.⁷⁸²

As part of his plan to initiate 'apolitical', pro-government unions, Brazier encouraged and actively recruited pro-British and anti-Communist elements within the Indian communities.⁷⁸³ Middle-class, English educated individuals such as P. P. Narayanan, M. P. Rajagopal and V. M. N. Menon were recruited to the cause, and by 1950 the Malayan Trade Union Council (M. T. U. C.) was registered as a society. By 1953, estate workers were drawn into the government fold with the establishment of the National Union of Plantation Workers (N. U. P. W.). A union covering all government employees was formed in 1957 with the formation of the Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Service.⁷⁸⁴

Members of the Indian Christian communities featured quite prominently. Men such as John Emmanuel was recruited by Brazier to head the pro-government N. U. P. W.,⁷⁸⁵ along with X. E. Nathan and Arokiasamy (M. T. U. C.), Jesudass (Malayan Technical Services Union) and John (Banking Employers Union), are just a small sample of prominent Indian Christians working within compliant, pro-British, anti-Communist trade unions.⁷⁸⁶ The unique social and political orientation of the middle-class Indian, and for the purpose of this study, the middle-class Indian Christian, suited the objectives of the colonial government.⁷⁸⁷ For example, John A. Thivy, the son of a prominent planter from Perak, Louis Thivy,⁷⁸⁸ illustrates this point well. Thivy had been a fervent nationalist and had been especially active under the auspices of the I. N. A. during the Japanese Occupation. Given his elitist background, he was relatively isolated from the estate worker communities, and was more inclined to be a

⁷⁸² Interview with Mr. Kathiah, (born 1930s), Petaling Jaya, 24 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁸³ The government were not keen to allow control of the union movement to Chinese elements. They feared it could become 'subversive' with time. Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 238.

⁷⁸⁴ Stenson, 1970, p. 237.

⁷⁸⁵ Stenson, 1980, p. 139. Stenson, 1970, p. 192.

⁷⁸⁶ Interview with Mr. Kathiah, (born 1930s), Petaling Jaya, 24 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁸⁷ Interview with Mr. V. David, (born 1932), Petaling Jaya, 27 Oct. 1997. Mr. David (former secretary of the M. T. U. C.) noted that the Indian Christians under P. P. Narayanan, often 'did not speak the truth ... they spoke of honesty. But they were not honest'. He saw these persons as 'yes-men' at Narayanan's bidding.

political activist for Indian independence and nationalism.⁷⁸⁹ Thivy was a staunch Christian and believed that the interest of capital and labour were open to negotiation, and with charity, even reconciled. He appeared to be strongly anti-Communist, harbouring little sympathy for its anti-colonial objectives.⁷⁹⁰ John A. Thivy was to later join the Indian Diplomatic Service.

The effectiveness of pro-government unions was a disappointment to the workers. While it did gain better wages and conditions, these unions worked within the defined limits set out by the employer-friendly colonial government.⁷⁹¹ Under the constraints of the 'Emergency', many of these unions actively shied away from any show of militancy. Many were supervised vigorously by the 'Registrar of Trade Unions' and the police. What gains they did get for its workers were generally seen as small, in relation to the profits made by employer groups.⁷⁹² These circumstances, orchestrated by the colonial British, help rebuild pre-war hierarchies existing within the Indian communities. Differences in class were maintained, with the influential middle-class often actively working against the interests of the poorer estate workers.⁷⁹³

By the 1950s, the politics of exclusion caught up with influential Indian Christian elements in leadership circles. With forthcoming independence, and the continued 'jockeying' for power in a future 'independent' Malaya, ethnic parameters were being redrawn. Elements in the Malayan Indian Congress (M. I. C.) found that by redefining 'Indian' ethnicity, it was possible to consolidate a greater grip on power. Consequently by the mid-1950s, Christian elements in the Malayan Indian Congress (M. I. C.) found themselves slowly but surely isolated. This was often done subtly. For example, a line was beginning to be drawn between Hindu and non-Hindu, and by the mid-1950s Indian Christian delegates were not allowed to officiate at Hindu functions.⁷⁹⁴ After independence in 1957, it was absolutely necessary for any serious candidate of the M.

⁷⁸⁸ "The "Indian" Personalities - 3: Mr. Louis Thivy, J. P., M.S.C.", in *The Indian*, Singapore, 4 (12), Mar. to Jun. 1932, pp. 19-20.

⁷⁸⁹ Interview with Mr. Kathiah, (born 1930s), Petaling Jaya, 24 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁹⁰ John A. Thivy, *Collected Papers, 1938-48*, (unpublished), Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Stenson, 1980, p. 147, citing the *Malayan Daily News*, 19 Apr. 1946.

⁷⁹¹ Interview with Mr. V. David, (born 1932), Petaling Jaya, 27 Oct. 1997.

⁷⁹² Stenson, 1970, pp. 238-239.

⁷⁹³ Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick, (born 1938), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997. Mr. Patrick was the Executive Secretary of the Rubber Research Institute Staff Union.

⁷⁹⁴ Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick, (born 1938), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997.

I. C. to be Hindu, ethnically Tamil, and Tamil-speaking. Indians belonging to sub-ethnic groups, Christians or Northern Indians were relegated to secondary roles.⁷⁹⁵

Conclusion

Dissent and collusion were expressed in a wide variety of ways. The politically constrained environment in both the urban and rural spheres forced many to express views in different ways. In most cases, 'subordinate resistance' was the preferred alternative. This was not necessarily a preemptive measure taken by members of the community, but more of a short-term exercise in coping with everyday problems.

Trade unionism and Indian nationalism also had an impact. The formation of Trade Unions in the 1930s, while officially being initiated by a small group of politically motivated persons, appeared to be based on a poor comprehension of how modern capitalism functioned and their places in it. Indians and Indian Christians were still largely dominated by the pre-capitalist or colonialist 'divide and rule' view of sectarian difference. Even within the 'educated' circles of the individual 'Indian Associations', despite the contradictions of colonial hierarchies, there appeared a strong degree of misapprehension with regards to the 'natural' construct of colonial society. An environment of political 'ambivalence' was allowed to fester, which was often complicated by contradictory ideologies and theories, often hostile and friendly to British colonial rule. It was only from a small element within the Methodist Church that such colonial contradictions were analyzed and challenged.

As with the unique circumstances existing within the editorial committee of the *Malaysia Message*; a sense of autonomy and encouragement was created outside that of the biased political agenda of British colonialism. This created an intellectual space where issues concerning Indian Christian communities were nurtured and discussed.⁷⁹⁶ By the beginning of the twentieth century, articles written by Indian Christian laity were beginning to appear. Most importantly, not just relating to Christianity but those relating to contemporary issues - matters important to both Christian Indians and non-Christian Indians. Hence for the first two to three decades

⁷⁹⁵ J. R. Daniel, *Indian Christians in Peninsular Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Tamil Annual Conference, 1992), p. 209.

⁷⁹⁶ By 1899 articles critiquing caste and religion were being reproduced in the periodical. One such

of the twentieth century, the majority of concerns were still strongly centred on India, Ceylon or with experiences in colonial society pertinent to 'Indian' community interests. Issues like British racism and problems relating to the image of the general Indian community were popular subjects.⁷⁹⁷ This orientation began to alter by the 1930s, with a stronger local emphasis, addressing not just the circumstances of the 'Indian' in Malaya, but from that of a more ethnically encompassing Malayan perspective.

The arguments utilised by the Indian Christians in the *Malaysia Message* may be described as liberal and categorized as using politically 'Left' discourses. Even well established colonial stereotypes such as that of the 'lazy' Malay were rejected by an 1925 editorial of the *Malaysia Message* on the basis that '(it's) scarcely just when we think of him in his proper environment', which was by far more liberal than the stands taken by their British colonial counterparts.⁷⁹⁸ Undoubtedly such liberal views inevitably had an effect on the viewpoints and outlook within the confines of the Church. This would have encouraged a degree of intellectual discourse among many of its ethnic South Indian parishioners.

In keeping with the strong growth of the independence movement in India, much of their argument was very heavily influenced by strong anti-colonial sentiments. Much of their writings, while heavily critical of the colonial regime, were also careful not to overstep certain boundaries. Several ploys (in keeping with James Scott's definition of 'subordinate' resistance) were used to expose these contradictions; firstly, to bolster ones' stand by quoting prominent and respected British/European figures, secondly, to draw parallels between discrimination in present-day colonial society mirrored against traditional 'conflicts' in Indian history, and lastly to relate critical hypothetical scenarios to highlight contradictions in the colonial regime. For example, while

article was 'Hinduism is only Caste', in *The Malaysia Message*, Aug. 1899, VII (11), p. 129.

⁷⁹⁷ 'Indian Labour in Malaya', in *The Malaysian Message*, Aug. 1917, 26 (11), p. 1. Fred David, 'Fire-walking and Pin-sticking', in *The Malaysia Message*, Jan. 1926, p. 6. S. S. Pakianathan, 'The Changing Asiatic Mind', in *The Malaysia Message*, Mar. 1926, 36 (6), pp. 3, 10-11. Mrs. E. V. Davies, 'Womens Education in South India', in *The Malaysia Message*, Jan. 1927, 37 (4), pp. 5-9. M. N. Charles, 'Progressive India', in *The Malaysia Message*, May 1927, 37 (8), p. 6. Mrs. E. V. Davies, 'A Fellowship of Reconciliation', in *The Malaysia Message*, June 1927, 37 (9), pp. 3, 15. 'Word "Kling" Abolished', in *The Malaysia Message*, Dec. 1927, 38 (3), p. 19. C. R. W. Chellapah, 'Easternisation of Christianity', in *The Malaysia Message*, Jan. 1928, 38 (1), pp. 3, 12. Mrs. C. Davies, 'Contributions of Christianity to Indian Life', in *The Malaysia Message*, 38 (4), pp. 10-11.

⁷⁹⁸ 'Mostly Malay', in *The Malaysia Message*, Jul. 1925, XXXVII (10), p. 79.

questioning European ('colourless') hegemony, Mrs. E. V. Davies' was quick to relate this back to the Indian experience of caste prejudice and especially the traditional rivalry that existed between the Southern and the Northern parts of the subcontinent. Davies condemnation of the caste system was used in tandem with colonial racism, not only to educate her Indian readership to presiding colonial contradictions but also as an effective ploy to placate objections from the politically conservative, pro-British elements.

Chapter 7

Relationships in Indian Christian communities

Introduction

No single model of colonialism or colonial behaviour was adopted en masse by colonialised subjects. The variety of kinship and gender ties, played a part in the formation of a social web within the Christian communities of colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements. The structures and ensuing expectations that existed, were brought about by both traditional and colonial influences. Relationships within Indian Christian communities were not necessarily a direct product of British colonialism but modified and adjusted to fit a workable social, economic and political mould within a colonial context.

As a belief system, Christianity had a limited effect on the overall outlook of these communities. Christian beliefs and Church practices were often subjugated or incorporated to the stronger influences of secular colonialism. Therefore religiosity had less effect on the outlook of the average Indian Christian than secular influences under colonialism. In Chapters Four and Five, colonial-induced influences which affected social, political and economic relationships in society were discussed in at length. Chapter Six examines more 'home grown' elements such as caste-related issues and gender relations. By and large, these influences played an arguably larger role to that of Christianity, although its influence cannot be denied outright.

Assimilation into colonial structures was more akin to a relationship of borrowing and difference.⁷⁹⁹ Life under colonialism was epitomised by the dual faces of repression and coercion. Colonialism used these elements in tandem, consciously excluding some groups while 'accepting' others.⁸⁰⁰ Such action directly contributed to the reshaping of conventional knowledge, often misrepresenting 'reality', and reordering it to its own benefit.⁸⁰¹ Such moves were used to isolate and thus control elements relating to gender - moves which were supported by what may be regarded as

⁷⁹⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 5.

⁸⁰⁰ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 31.

⁸⁰¹ Loomba, 1998, p. 57.

'oppressed' elements within colonised society. These oppressed elements in their own way had something to gain.

The first part of the chapter will examine the traditional 'Hindu' practice of caste within the Church communities. The modern capitalist system did more to change the caste system than any other social or political institution prevalent in colonial Malaya or the Straits Settlements at the time. Nevertheless while many changes undeniably did take hold, some traditional definitions of caste remained intact. For example, caste groups were endogamous, continued to maintain a hierarchy, upheld restrictions on commensality with rival groups and were mainly associated with certain occupations.

The chapter will examine how the new social, economic and political environment of British Malaya helped modify caste perceptions among their adherents. Such changes are explicitly obvious when age-old kinship ties are strained by the side effects of the colonial capitalist economy. This will be followed by an analysis of the interaction between laity and clergy, mainly looking at how the rural and urban-based communities interacted with the much respected, and in most cases, European clergy. Lastly the chapter will examine gender issues, such as the role of women, especially in the context of how power relations altered with the introduction of paid female employment in the rural sector.

Definition of caste

Beteille defined caste as being 'a small and named group of persons characterised by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system'. Susan Bayly notes how the caste system was very much an interwoven social web that facilitated the functioning of Indian Hindu society. One group was interdependent on another - be they high or low. Bayly also explains how colonial ethnographers and administrators portrayed India and the caste system as 'fractious and conflict-ridden social groupings'. This was a direct result of colonial policy. The colonial system of rule severed the ritual relationships and 'honour' systems with the emergence of the more 'rigid and

exclusive communal boundaries'.⁸⁰² As a result of the onset of British colonialism in India, economic relations between groups were redefined drastically. Capitalist and cash-based relationships were emphasised, which in turn, strongly de-emphasised or destroyed traditional -based divisions of labour and ensuing economic dependencies, particularly with regards to employment.

On the other hand, Louis Dumont sees caste on differing levels. Caste is viewed from two perspectives; as a grouping or as 'a state of mind'. To Dumont, caste expressed itself in the emergence of different categories, attitudes, relationships and behaviour which helped define the practise of 'caste'.⁸⁰³ However the definition that will be utilised for this study is that put forward by social anthropologist Celestin Bougle. Bougle defined caste as being a system which divides an entire society in hereditary groupings. This argument noted three prevailing characteristics; a separation of matters concerning indirect or direct contact and marriage, the division of labour and finally a hierarchy of rank differentiating from the superior from the inferior.⁸⁰⁴ This definition is also compatible with the circumstances existent in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Malaya and the Straits Settlements. In a similar vein, colonial society in Malaya and the Straits Settlements was segregated economically, socially (racially) and politically. Consequently this influenced a myriad of issues such as contact, division of labour and rank. As will be discussed later in this study caste differences in the new Malayan environment on one hand became less pronounced, while on the other exhibited an ability to amalgamate other castes into new endogamous groupings. This was especially common with related caste groupings, and were facilitated by socio-economic circumstances and developing capitalist trends. Hence we find caste differentiation primarily accentuated in issues of marriage, occupation and caste ranking.

⁸⁰² Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 459.

⁸⁰³ R. Ramasamy, *Caste Consciousness among Indian Tamils in Malaysia*, (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1984), p. 2.

⁸⁰⁴ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 2, citing Celestin Bougle, *Essays on the Caste System*, (Translation by D. F. Pocock), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 9.

Classic caste practices, of the 'varna'⁸⁰⁵ model, can be classified into the following categories: 'Brahmin', 'Kshatriya', 'Vaisyas' and 'Sudra'. The Brahmin was recognised as occupying the apex of the caste pyramid. Much of its status was based on ritual and religious functions as intermediaries between people and the divine. Next in line was the Kshatriya caste group. This group could be looked upon as the 'ruling class' and engaged themselves in things military. The Vaisya caste group dealt with things economic, being involved in trading activities. At the bottom rung of the 'varna' hierarchy was the Sudra caste. The Sudra groups made up the mainstay of the population and performed tasks in accordance with family traditions. Outside the boundaries of this 'varna' model were the 'Untouchables'. Their position outside the caste system confirmed their 'polluting' status, with all 'varna' caste groups regarding their physical presence as 'defiling'.⁸⁰⁶

However, caste categories in South India differed from that of that of the 'varna' model which predominated in North India. South Indian society did not have a Kshatriya⁸⁰⁷ and Vaisya caste. M. Srinavasa Aiyangar notes how the four 'varnas' never corresponded to the social structures of southern India. His observation, based on inscriptional evidence, noted how many Tamil kings had invited small bands of northern Brahmins into their areas of influence. According to Aiyangar, due to the already high level of 'civilisation' within the southern states, the Brahmins did not find it necessary to bring members of any warrior castes to impose their hegemony. This in turn left a wide gap between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins – thus non-Brahmins were later conveniently classified as Sudra.⁸⁰⁸

Caste and class: A precursor to emigration

By the nineteenth century, there were few opportunities for employment among the higher castes groups in India. Government jobs for the English-educated, largely dominated by the higher caste groups, were limited while employment in the industrial and private sector were unpopular. The new English-educated elites dominated these

⁸⁰⁵ 'Varna' is a Sanskrit term meaning colour or shade. Romila Thapar, *A History of India (vol. 1)*, (England: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 38. N. K. Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*, (Madurai: Koodal Publishers, 1980) p. 26. Ramasamy, 1984, p. 2.

⁸⁰⁶ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 2.

⁸⁰⁷ With the exception of the south-western state of Kerala.

⁸⁰⁸ Arooran, 1980, p. 26.

higher caste groups.⁸⁰⁹ Manual labour or industrial employment was viewed in a negative light. Similarly persons from lower caste⁸¹⁰ groups found it hard to maintain an acceptable standard of living. For example, while the price of foodstuffs increased from 80 per cent to 100 per cent between 1888 and 1908, wages of government employees rose only 30 per cent to 50 per cent.⁸¹¹

Caste played a strong determinant in employment and employability, therefore played an influential role in migration to Malaya and the Straits Settlements. In the state of Tamilnadu alone, the Brahmin castes monopolised the colonial administrative structure.⁸¹² The Brahmins, having a long scholarly tradition and the socio-political influence to assist them, were quick to dominate opportunities in the Indian civil service. This supremacy resulted in caste-based nepotism, often frustrating other non-Brahmin caste groups.⁸¹³ Therefore many educated non-Brahmins, upon finding limited opportunities in India, took to emigration to find suitable employment overseas.⁸¹⁴

Caste groupings and Christian denominations in South India

Christian conversion was largely a caste-based exercise, with some caste groups dominating particular Church denominations. Caste delineations were transferred into the new environment of Malaya and the Straits Settlements. In 1871, the four largest caste groupings in the Madras Presidency (see Table 1) were the Pariah (drummers, funeral conch-blowers, weavers, washers or hunters)⁸¹⁵ caste which numbered 161,531 or 33.9 per cent of the total Indian Christian population. The Pallan, Valangai

⁸⁰⁹ Lionel Caplan, 'Caste and Castelessness among South Indian Christians', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1980, 14 (2), p. 218.

⁸¹⁰ In the Malayan context, the 'high' groups were identified as Vellalar, Naidu, Chetty, Mudali, Mudaliyar and Agambadiar caste groups, and to a lesser extent, the Odaiyar/Vanniyar groups. The lower caste groups comprised the Shanar/Nadar, Maravar, Kammaler, Pariah, Pallar, Servai, Valangai, and the later Adi-Dravida. These 'higher' and 'lower' caste groups will be identified in the chapter.

⁸¹¹ K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 42.

⁸¹² Rajakrishnan Ramasamy, 'The Role of Caste in the Migration of Indian Tamils to Malaya', *Sarjana*, Kuala Lumpur, Dec. 1981, p. 98.

⁸¹³ Brahmin dominance might have been proportionately high, however the sheer size of the non-Brahmin caste groups still made them a force to be reckoned with. For example, the powerful non-Brahmin 'Nair' caste groups in the Kerala were perceived by many to have dominated the civil service in that state. Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 27 Jan. 1997.

⁸¹⁴ Rajakrishnan Ramasamy, Dec. 1981, p. 99.

⁸¹⁵ Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 6, (Madras: Government Press, 1909), pp. 78, 81. According to Ramasamy, the most Malayan Pariahs were originally agricultural labourers from the Tamilnadu region. Ramasamy, 1984, p. 100.

and Vanniyan⁸¹⁶ (agricultural labourer)⁸¹⁷ caste stood at 102,263 (21.4 per cent). The Shanars/Nadars (toddy producers) caste followed with 63,194 (13.2 per cent) and finally the Vellalars (farmers, landowners and merchants)⁸¹⁸ with 41,889 (8.8 per cent).

Of these caste groups, it is worth noting how the Protestant Shanar/Nadar grouping were the only one that actually outnumbered its large Roman Catholic counterparts. The Pariah caste⁸¹⁹ and other agricultural labourer groups dominated conversions to Christianity. The Vellalar⁸²⁰ castes grouping appear to be the dominant among the 'higher' caste Christian converts. The Paravar (fishermen)⁸²¹ caste was almost exclusively Roman Catholic. In Malaya and the Straits Settlements, the Paravar caste did not identify themselves as such, but by their linguistic classification, Malayalam. Large numbers began to migrate to the Malayan archipelago and especially Singapore, after the 1920s. Most of them were 'white-collar' workers.

Table 1
**Caste of Roman Catholic and Protestant Indian Christians
in the Madras Presidency, 1871**

<i>Caste</i>	<i>R. Catholics</i>	<i>Protestants</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total%^a</i>
Brahmins	3658 (98.9%)	39 (1.0%)	3697	0.7%
Kshatriyas	4535 (88.9%)	565 (11.1%)	5100	1.0%
Chetties	3444 (90.1%)	375 (9.8%)	3819	0.8%
Cultivating Castes (Vellalar)	35742 (85.3%)	6147 (14.6%)	41889	8.8%
Shepherd Castes	2462 (86.1%)	395 (13.8%)	2857	0.6%
Artisan Castes	5215 (92.8%)	399 (7.1%)	5614	1.1%

⁸¹⁶ The Vanniyan or Odaiyar caste (Reddiar, Naicker, Padaiyachi, Goundar, Muthurajah) were small scale landowners or agricultural labourers and claimed to hold Kshatriya status in former times. In Malaya and the Straits Settlements, they were ranked above the Pallan and Valangai caste groups. Ramasamy, 1984, pp. 99, 101. Thurston, *vol. 6*, 1909, p. 6.

⁸¹⁷ The Pallan/Pallar were traditionally field labourers to Vellalar landowners and rivals of the Pariah caste. Thurston, *vol. 6*, 1909, p. 6/*vol. 5*, pp. 472-5. The Pallan came from the Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madura, Tinnevely, and to a lesser extent Salem and Coimbatore. Large numbers of them immigrated to Malaya and Singapore. R. Ramasamy, 1984, p. 99.

⁸¹⁸ Thurston, *vol. 7*, pp. 373-4, 377. This caste group was subdivided in colonial Malaya, into three or four endogamous groups, 'Vellalar', the 'Mudaliyar', 'Mudali', and 'Agambadiar'.

⁸¹⁹ Thurston, *vol. 6*, 1909, pp. 78, 81. R. Ramasamy, 1984, p. 100.

⁸²⁰ Thurston, *vol. 7*, 1909, pp. 373-4, 377.

Writer Castes	143 (85.1%)	25 (14.8%)	168	0.03%
Weaver Castes	5027 (89.4%)	595 (10.5%)	5622	1.1%
Agricultural labour (Vunnias)	90852 (88.8%)	11411 (11.1%)	102263	21.4%
Potters	622 (84.9%)	110 (15.0%)	732	0.1%
Mixed Castes (Satani)	6861 (81.2%)	1586 (18.7%)	8447	1.7%
Fishermen (Paravar)	14459 (98.1%)	278 (1.8%)	14737	3.1%
Shanans (Nadar)	26724 (42.2%)	36470 (57.7%)	63194	13.2%
Barbers	906 (68.3%)	420 (31.6%)	1326	0.2%
Washermen	1840 (84.0%)	348 (15.9%)	2188	0.4%
Other Hindus	49389 (98.6%)	3369 (6.3%)	52758	11.0%
Pariahs	131367 (81.3%)	30164 (18.6%)	161531	33.9%

^a This figure is a percentage of the total of the R. Catholic and Protestant population.
Source: G. A. Oddie, *Religion in South Asia*, 1977, p. 68 citing *India, Census, 1871*, Madras, p. 112.

By the beginning of the twentieth century significant numbers converted to Christianity, and were mainly concentrated among lower castes groups. Dharma Kumar observes a drop in the Hindu population by 2.27 per cent between 1871 and 1881. This decline was especially conspicuous among the Pariah caste. He also attributes this to be the direct result of the 1876-1878 famine.⁸²² In a similar light, Forrester concurs with G. A. Oddie's conclusion that mass movement conversions primarily began with the economically independent and only spread to the less economically independent lower caste groups later on. Forrester also notes that evidence suggested group conversion seldom started among the most depressed castes, but usually at one stage higher. Conversion was tied in with the adoption of a religious understanding in keeping with their aspirations. He emphasised that such higher caste groups usually had the luxury of having 'more social room to manoeuvre than the most depressed' castes.⁸²³ S. Manickam also notes a drop in the Vellalar population between 1911 and 1921, due mainly to migration to Ceylon and Malaya.⁸²⁴ A similar drop in

⁸²¹ Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, p. 145.

⁸²² D. Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, (U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 59.

⁸²³ D. Forrester (Oddie, ed.), 1977, p. 44. Also see G. A. Oddie, 'Christian Conversion in Telugu Country, 1860-1900', in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XII, 1, Jan. - Mar. 1975, p. 65.

⁸²⁴ N. E. Majoribanks and A. K. G. Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar, *Report on Indian Labour emigrating to Ceylon and Malaya*, (Madras: Government Press, 1917), p. 22.

the Pariah and Madhari (Adi-Dravida) caste groups were experienced in Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Coimbatore between 1921 and 1931.⁸²⁵

Redefining caste in Malaya and the Straits Settlements

The adherence of caste practices were strongly determined by the different policies of Churches in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Generally, the Roman Catholic Church, while not officially condoning the practice, did not outlaw it.⁸²⁶ The Anglican Church appeared to mirror the stance of the Roman Catholic Church.⁸²⁷ However in many Protestant Churches, especially among the Methodist, strong anti-caste sentiments were encouraged among parishioners.⁸²⁸

Caste affiliations, no matter how socially disruptive to the pluralist nature of Church congregations, were not discarded immediately. Conversion to Christianity in India largely occurred en-masse from village to village. Most of these villages were caste specific. Kinship ties therefore played an important role in determining the denomination a person converted to.⁸²⁹ Consequently many Church congregations found themselves dominated by particular caste groups,⁸³⁰ and where there were deviations from the norm, ensuing disputes usually saw the departure of incompatible caste groups to more caste-compatible Churches. By the first decade of the twentieth century, after large scale Indian labour immigration began to Malaya and the Straits Settlements, caste delineation had already reorganised itself along Church denominational lines. Hence we find in the smaller Methodist and Anglican Churches,

⁸²⁵ Sundararaj Manickam, *The Social Setting of Christian Conversion in South India: The impact of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries on the Trichy-Tanjore diocese with special reference to the Harijan communities of the mass movement area 1820-1947*, (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977), pp. 26, 28. Vellalar populations drop between 1911 to 1921 due to migration to Ceylon and Malaya. Tanjore 1911 (223,278) and 1921 (222,239), Trichinopoly 1911 (330,662) and 1921 (234,789), Coimbatore 1911 (639,557) and 1921 (694,906).

⁸²⁶ K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 6, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1940-5), p. 91. The Roman Catholic Church in India did not adopt any official line with regard to caste, some clergy recognised divisions while other preferred to ignore it. Generally the Church regarded caste as civil rather than a religious matter. This approach was maintained in Malaya and Singapore.

⁸²⁷ Duncan B. Forrester, 'Indian Christians' Attitudes to Caste in the Nineteenth Century', in *Indian Church History Review*, 8 (2), Dec. 1974. p. 132. Henriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), p. 45. Manickam, 1977, p. 52.

⁸²⁸ 'The Trinity of Evils [sic] in the Indian Church', in *The Malaysian Message*, Feb. 1903, XII (5), p. 48.

⁸²⁹ Manickam, 1977, p. 100.

the predominance of one or two caste groups. However within the much larger Roman Catholic congregations, the caste groups tended to be more diverse. Syrian Christian Churches were always ethnically exclusive, in keeping with their recognised position as a caste entity in South India.

To date no accurate caste breakdown has been made of Indian Christian communities in colonial Malaya and Singapore. Caste statistics were generally not officially maintained by local Churches. This ambivalence towards the collation (and recognition) of such caste information was made more difficult by existing caste prejudices within parishes and was seen as being problematic right up to the 1960's.⁸³¹ Clergy and laity alike therefore viewed the issue, within the context of the Church as a 'taboo' subject.⁸³² Duncan Forrester notes how the South Indian Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches were tolerant of caste practices while other Protestant Churches denounced it outright. In addition, if a cleric was an indigenous Indian, it was more likely that he/she be more sympathetic to caste practices. Among urban, 'white-collar' communities this idea was accentuated by negative criticisms of Hindu or Indian practices made by colonial British and European observers.⁸³³ The 'injustice' of caste was a popular target, and often used as an example of the 'degenerate' nature of 'Indian' culture and society.

Protestant groups from Britain and the United States of America, the Lutherans from Denmark and Germany,⁸³⁴ as well as various orders from the Roman Catholic Church, were the main players in Christian evangelism in South India during the nineteenth century. In Malaya and the Straits Settlements the groups were less varied - the main

⁸³⁰ Duncan Forrester, 'The Depressed classes and conversion to Christianity 1860-1960', in *Religion in South Asia: Religious conversion and revival movements in South Asia in medieval and modern times*, (London: Curzon Press, 1977), p. 53.

⁸³¹ Interview with Fr. Aloysius Doraisamy, (born 1935), Singapore, 20 Nov. 1996. Duncan B. Forrester, 'Indian Christians' Attitudes to Caste in the Nineteenth Century', in *Indian Church History Review*, 8 (2), Dec. 1974. p. 132. In general, most Protestant Churches did not tolerate caste practices while the Roman Catholic Churches tolerated it to a degree. Bugge, 1994, p. 45. Manickam, 1977, p. 52.

⁸³² Ramasamy, 1984, pp. 11-12. This attitude was also strongly prevalent among Hindu communities. Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick, (born 1938), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997. Interview with Emer. Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, (born 1909), Kuala Lumpur, 13 Sept. 1996. Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

⁸³³ Fred David, 'Fire-Walking and Pin-sticking', in *The Malaysia Message*, Feb. 1926, Singapore, pp. 6, 11.

⁸³⁴ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity 1800-1914*, vol. 6, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1940-45), p. 71.

groups (as mentioned in Chapter Two) were the United States-based Methodist Episcopal Church of America, the Church of England (Anglican) and the Roman Catholic Mission Etrangere de Paris (M. E. P.). All had prior experience with Indian congregations, and were therefore poised to continue their work within the South Indian communities overseas.⁸³⁵

The congregational population of each Church denomination reflected its relative size in South India. Labour immigration to Malaya and the Straits Settlements was not determined along religious lines, and recruitment was largely at the discretion of the immigrant or the recruiter. Thus a large majority of Indian Christians immigrating to the Malaya and the Straits Settlements were affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church, reflecting its dominance in South India at the time. Geoffrey Oddie estimated in the South Indian states of Trichinopoly and Tanjore, recognised as the primary source of Indian Christian immigration to the Malay archipelago,⁸³⁶ Roman Catholics outnumbered Protestants by a factor of eighteen to one in the former, and six to one in the latter.⁸³⁷

These circumstances also affected the social demographics of Indian Christian societies in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Particular caste groups dominated certain Churches. The caste makeup of these communities were therefore strongly tied to the size of its congregation. The Nadar (originally known as the Shanar) caste group predominated among the different Protestant Churches, especially the Methodist and Anglican Churches.⁸³⁸ In South India by the 1930s, 68 per cent of the Anglican Churches in Tinnevely were dominated by persons of Shanar/Nadar background. This figure is even higher in statistics provided by Robert Hardgrave, who asserts how 95 per cent of all Protestant Churches in district of Tinnevely were Shanar/Nadar in composition. In addition, out of ninety-two Protestant clergymen, seventy-five were

⁸³⁵ The German and Danish Lutheran missions were poorly represented in Malaya and the Straits Settlements.

⁸³⁶ J. R. Daniel, 1992, p. 47. The other district being Tirunelveli.

⁸³⁷ K. S. Latourette, 1940-5, vol. 6, p. 194. G. Oddie, *Hindu and Christian in Southeast India*, (Massachusetts: Curzon Press, 1991), p. 171.

⁸³⁸ Lionel Caplan, 'Caste and castelessness among South Indian Christians', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Jul. - Dec. 1980, 14 (2), p. 219.

Shanar/Nadar. Protestant missions in South India were often popularly referred to as the 'Shanar Church'.⁸³⁹

In South India, the Christian Shanar/Nadars came from the middle ranks of that caste grouping. Most of them were toddy-tappers by trade.⁸⁴⁰ They were described as being in a state of social limbo, 'somewhere between the Sudras and the outcaste untouchables'. As a 'half-polluting' caste group they were allowed access to most areas, including the Brahmin quarter. They were forbidden from entering temples and using public wells. However Shanar/Nadars enjoyed a strong degree of autonomy and were largely economically self-sufficient. These toddy-tapping or 'climber' groups, probably due to their level of autonomy, were more receptive to the overtures of Christian missionaries.⁸⁴¹ As a community, they experienced little opposition to conversion and therefore did not risk exclusion by the Hindu majority around them. The Shanar/Nadar were also an interesting case in point illustrating the social mobility made possible via religious conversion. While in South India, many advanced economically by turning to trade, often securing enough capital to buy their own land. Others also made similar purchases with financial assistance from Christian missions.⁸⁴²

With the establishment of Protestant Churches in Malaya and the Straits Settlements in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was these Shanar/Nadar converts who dominated the newly formed Indian parishes.⁸⁴³ Unfortunately no hard statistical

⁸³⁹ Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnadu*, (California: University of California Press, 1969), p. 47. By the 1890s, Shanar dominance appeared to be a point of conflict for many other caste groups. Many Pariah and Pulaya caste converts claimed that London Missionary Society (L. M. S.) favoured the Shanar/Nadar. By 1889, most Pariah and Pulaya left the L. M. S. to join the Salvation Army. Dick Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India: the London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the 19th Century*, (Columbia: South Asia Publications, 1989), p. 178. Edgar Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, p. 377.

⁸⁴⁰ Robert Hargraves, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1969), pp. 21-2. Little evangelical headway had been made among the lower 'Kalla' Shanar sub-groups.

⁸⁴¹ Hardgrave, 1969, pp. 48-9. Duncan Forrester, 'The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity, 1860-1960', in G. A. Oddie (ed.), *Religion in South Asia*, (London: Curzon Press, 1977), p. 48.

⁸⁴² Robert Hardgrave, 1969, p. 58. Kooiman, 1989, pp. 128-31. Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, p. 372. Such financial assistance was not unusual among Church groups. A prominent Singapore/Bangkok based Chinese business was established with the help of a loan from the Roman Catholic M. E. P. in 1879. 'Kiam Hoa Heng', *Sarasasana*, (translation from Thai), Bangkok, Assumption Press, no. 12, Dec. 1939.

⁸⁴³ Daniel, 1992, pp. 102-3.

evidence exists categorising caste delineations in the different Protestant Churches. Even the Roman Catholic Churches, while more accommodating to caste practices, did not officially maintain caste statistics. However helpful Church correspondence which coincidentally relate caste status have survived. These private communications were largely inquiries into the marital and baptismal status of individual parishioners. This information (which was mandatory for marriage or baptismal purposes in Malaya and the Straits Settlements) was sent out from its South Indian Roman Catholic Churches, on the request of its Malayan-based counterparts. The correspondence often stated the caste background of the person/s in question. From this information, this study has been able to reconstruct a cross-section of caste groups in a large colonial Malayan Roman Catholic Church.

Table 2

**Breakdown of Caste groups in the Church of St. Francis Xavier
(Roman Catholic), Penang, 1916-1931**

Agambadiar	2.6%	Odaiyer	2.6%
Adi-Dravida	0.9%	Pariah	6.1%
Brahmin	0.9%	Pallar	18.3%
Chetty	1.7%	Servai	1.7%
Kammaler	0.9%	Valangai	11.3%
Maravar	1.7%	Vannivar	4.3%
Mudali	2.6%	Vellalar	7.0%
Mudaliyar	2.6%	Unknown	13.9%
Shanar/Nadar	7.0%	Christiannative/ Notcategorised	13.9%

Total sample: 115 individuals

Source: Church of St. Francis Xavier (Penang); Untitled: Correspondence Baptism and Marriages in India (1916-1931).

In Table 1, the wide caste diversity of the Roman Catholic Church strongly differentiates it from its Protestant counterparts. The largest grouping is unmistakably

that of the Pallar caste (agricultural labourers),⁸⁴⁴ which stood at 18.2 per cent. This was followed by the Valangai (agricultural labourers)⁸⁴⁵ caste with 11.3 per cent and the Shanar/Nadar (toddy producers)⁸⁴⁶ caste with 6.9 per cent. The 'high' caste groups comprised of the Vellalar (landowners, farmers and merchants)⁸⁴⁷ (6.9 per cent) caste and its sub-groups - the Agambadiar (2.6 per cent), the Mudali (2.6 per cent) and the Mudaliyar (2.6 per cent). Included in this group were the Chettiars (money-lender or merchants)⁸⁴⁸ (1.7 per cent) and the different Odiyar/Vanniyar (small landowner/free agricultural labourers)⁸⁴⁹ caste (2.6 per cent). All 'high' caste groups remained individually minor in comparison to the Pallar, Valangai and Shanar/Nadar.⁸⁵⁰

Another notable aspect was the high level of non-disclosure of caste backgrounds. The 'Unknown' segment amounted to 13.9 per cent, and probably included persons (especially children) who had lost contact with parents or family for various reasons. Under these circumstances it became difficult to determine their origins or backgrounds. More interesting was the 'Christian native/Not categorised' group. It is assumed that people who preferred not to identify with any caste group did so under this heading. This heading was utilised by opponents to the caste system; especially parishioners originating from the Roman Catholic Tamil agricultural settlement of Soosay Paleam (presently known as Kampung Padre) in Bagan Serai, Perak. It is open to speculation as to the reason for their disavowal of caste. It could be argued, taking account of their 'poor' economic and educational backgrounds, that they mainly originated from the lower rungs of south Indian caste hierarchy. On the other hand, the isolation from wider caste-conscious Indian society may have fostered a desire to break away from the restrictions imposed by caste. This is open to speculation and this study has not been able to definitively pinpoint the reason for this reaction. According to a 1902 account, caste 'prejudices are recognised and not discouraged as long as they do not interfere with the teachings of the Christian religion'. It probably was the

⁸⁴⁴ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 99. Thurston, vol. 5, 1909, pp. 472-85.

⁸⁴⁵ Thurston, vol. 2, 1909, p. 329.

⁸⁴⁶ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 98. Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, p. 364. Hardgrave, 1969, p. 19.

⁸⁴⁷ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 101. Thurston, vol. 7, 1909, pp. 373-4.

⁸⁴⁸ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 96.

⁸⁴⁹ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 101. Thurston, vol. 5, 1909, p. 436/vol.7, p. 208. Thurston described this caste as being farmers and money-lenders.

⁸⁵⁰ Previous accounts had maintained that the Roman Catholic Churches comprised mainly of 'high' caste Vellalars, Odaiyars, Mudaliyars and the 'propertied classes of Indian society'. Daniel, 1992, pp. 59-60.

policy of the individual parish priest not to record a parishioner's caste background. This 'Christian native/Not categorised' group totalled 13.9 per cent.⁸⁵¹

Table 3
**Breakdown of Caste groups in the Church of St. Francis Xavier
 (Roman Catholic), Penang, 1935-1941**

Adi-Dravida	3.0%
Chetty	0.8%
Kammaler	1.7%
Mudali	2.6%
Mudaliyar	1.3%
Malayalam*	2.6%
Naidu	0.4%
Shanar/Nadar	1.7%
Christian native/ Not categorised	39.7%

Odaiyer	3.8%
Pariah	13.2%
Pallar	19.2%
Reddiar	2.1%
Valangai	2.6%
Vanniyar	0.9%
Vellalar	3.4%
Unknown	0.9%

Total sample: 234 individuals

* Malayali/Malayalam was not necessarily a caste, but a linguistic/ethnic group. They were predominantly sixteenth century converts to Catholicism by the Portuguese, and originated from the Paravar (fisher people) caste group. By the early twentieth century they were mainly 'white-collar' workers in Malaya and Singapore. Edgar Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, p. 145. Henriette Bugge, 1994, p. 43. Bugge states they were made up of the Parava and Mukkuva caste groups.

Source: Church of St. Francis Xavier (Penang); 'Marriages 1935-1941'.

In Table 2, we see that the Pallar caste group (agricultural labourers) was still the largest at this parish (19.2 per cent). However there is a notable rise in the number of persons affiliated to the Pariah (drummers, funeral conch-blowers, hunters,

⁸⁵¹ Fr. Fee (translated by Fr. Manikam), 'Kampung Padre: A Tamil Settlement near Bagan Serai, Perak', in *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, Singapore, XXXVI (1), May 1963, p. 180 citing G. E. Turner, 'A Perak coffee planter's report on the Tamil labourers in Malaya in 1902', in *The Malayan Historical Journal*, 2 (1), 1955, pp. 26-7.

agricultural labourers)⁸⁵² caste, which in this period jumps to 13.2 per cent. All other groups primarily remained minor in comparison.⁸⁵³

It is also worth noting how the Adi-Dravida grouping, which was not a traditional caste but a recent product of the Dravidian Nationalist movement in South India. This grouping more than doubled in size. Caste delineations, by this stage, appeared to be slowly dissipating. For example, a marriage between persons of the Servai⁸⁵⁴ and Mudali⁸⁵⁵ caste, and another union between a Velangai⁸⁵⁶ and Vellalar⁸⁵⁷ took place during this period.⁸⁵⁸

In comparison to Table 1, the 'Christian native/not categorised' section had grown significantly. In Table 2 ninety-three individuals, or 39.74 per cent preferred not to identify with any caste grouping. This was a sizable jump from the 13.9 per cent from the previous sample (Table 1).

The different standings of caste groups were always considered difficult to rank. For example, the differentiation of a sub-caste is very much a matter for individual preference.⁸⁵⁹ In addition, caste delineations were modified after migration to Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Inter-caste marriages, which did not occur under the traditional caste restrictions prevalent in South India, took place quite readily in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. For example, among the 'higher'⁸⁶⁰ caste groups, differences began to blur by the 1920s. Accounts of marriages between persons of the elitist Vellalar caste and the traditionally small landholder caste, the Odaiyer (in this case a Reddiar) became rather common.⁸⁶¹ A new emphasis was placed on the

⁸⁵² Ramasamy, 1984, p. 100. Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, pp. 78, 81.

⁸⁵³ Daniel, 1992, pp. 59-60. Daniel's assertion that the main caste groups in the Roman Catholic congregations were 'Vellalars, Udayars (Odaiyars), Muthaliyars', is therefore inaccurate.

⁸⁵⁴ Caste title used by the Agamudaiyan, Ambalakaran, Kallan, Maravar and Parivaram caste groups. Thurston, vol. 6, 1909, p. 362. Ramasamy, 1984, p. 97.

⁸⁵⁵ Caste title used by the Tondamadalam Vellalars from Chingleput and North Arcot. Thurston, vol. 7, 1909, p. 373.

⁸⁵⁶ The Velangai caste were field labourers. Thurston, vol. 7, 1909, p. 298/vol. 2, p. 329.

⁸⁵⁷ The Vellalar were a 'high' landowner, farming or merchant caste. Thurston, vol. 7, 1909, p. 373.

⁸⁵⁸ Untitled: Extracts for marriages between 1940-41, Church of St. Francis Xavier, Penang.

⁸⁵⁹ Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural labour in the Madras Presidency during the nineteenth century*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 55-6. Ramasamy, 1984, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁶⁰ Vellalar, Naidu, Chetty (Chettair), Mudali, Mudaliyar and Odaiyar/Vanniyar caste groups.

⁸⁶¹ Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel), (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997.

person's occupational, educational status and personal demeanour rather than traditional caste status.

By the 1920s and 1930s, modifications to caste rankings and exclusivity were becoming prevalent in many Christian Churches in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. The 'high'⁸⁶² castes such as the Vellalar, Naidu, Chetty, Mudali, Mudaliyar and Agambadiar caste groups, to an extent were endogamous and probably operated at times as a larger 'high' caste bloc. The slightly lower Odaiyar/Vanniyar groups were accepted into this 'high' caste fold, on the proviso that a suitable educational background, occupational status and the social suitability of the family had been met.

Maintaining differences among caste groupings

The parameters differentiating high and low castes groups, like the Brahmin from the Untouchable, were very clear. However difficulties arose when trying to construct a hierarchy for the 'middle' caste groups.⁸⁶³ The term 'caste' or 'jati', as argued by R. Ramasamy, could be interpreted in a myriad of ways. In the Tamil language it could be used to denote a race, a species or even a religion - hence many Indian Christians were often referred to as 'Kristuva jati'.⁸⁶⁴

The ambiguous and often confusing nature of the caste system was superceded by the growing influence of capitalist trends. Capitalism placed a stronger emphasis on meritocracy than it did on honorific standings. This made 'old-fashioned' caste hierarchies susceptible to change. Traditional caste hierarchies were generally segmented into three sections; high, low and untouchable. Brahmin caste immigration to Malaya and the Straits Settlements was extremely small, almost exclusively Hindu, and therefore not significant in any of the Churches.⁸⁶⁵ The majority of the 'high' caste groups mainly ranged from those from the 'high' Vellalar, Mudaliyar, to that of the more modest Odaiyer groups. Remainder groupings generally belonged to the 'low' or sometimes 'untouchable' category. With time, alliances were built

⁸⁶² From hereon, any references to 'high' caste groups would refer to that of the Vellalar, Naidu, Chetty (Chettair), Mudali, Mudaliyar and Odaiyar/Vanniyar caste groups.

⁸⁶³ Ramasamy, 1984, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁶⁴ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 9.

⁸⁶⁵ Ramasamy, 1984, p. 16.

particularly within the immediate rungs of a caste category. For example, many of the 'upper' sections of the 'high' caste groupings become endogamous. The same process would take place in the 'lower' groupings of the 'high' category.

As for the 'low'⁸⁶⁶ and 'untouchable' category, new alliances mirrored similar developments among the 'high' caste groups. However, there existed elements which worked against such developments. The vast majority of people in this category worked in the rural estate environment. Many of these estates or plantations were caste specific, hence re-establishing caste identities and rivalries.⁸⁶⁷ In addition, the concept of social mobility among estate labourer communities were almost non-existent. Estate labourers were not allowed to leave the estate to find better employment. Resignation notices were not accepted. All estates used a discharge ticket system. In order for a person to get employment at another estate, one had to have this permit.⁸⁶⁸ This curtailed social and economic mobility and interaction. This could be seen as the forerunner to the later identification of a two-fold (urban and rural) hierarchy. R. Ramasamy notes how contemporary definitions of caste are presently identified simply as 'Tamilar' (higher caste) and 'Paraiyar' or 'talntajati' (lower caste). In urban areas this is referred to as 'uyarntajati' (higher caste) and 'talntajati' (lower caste).⁸⁶⁹

Personal interviews conducted between 1996 to 1999 showed that in the 1930s there appeared a degree of confusion with regards to caste delineation and exclusivity. Even in India, caste delineations were often not exact or precise. It varied from area to area. Many caste terms/names had varying meanings, and names differed in different

⁸⁶⁶ These comprised of caste groups such as the Shanar/Nadar, Valangai, Pallan (Pallar), Pulaya, Pariah, Servai, Adi-Dravida and Paravar. All references to 'low' castes groups will refer to these groups specifically.

⁸⁶⁷ This was even prevalent in urban occupations, particularly involving that of the different governmental 'municipal' corporations. For example, among Singapore Municipality labourers, occupations were metted out according to caste. Anthony Walker (ed.), *New Place, Old Ways: Essays on Indian Society and Modern Singapore*, (Dehli: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1994), p. 37.

⁸⁶⁸ P. Ramasamy, *Malaysian Indians: the ethnic and class loyalties*, in *Kaum, kelas dan pembangunan*, (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia, 1984), p. 114. Colin Barlow, 'Changes of Economic Position of Workers on Rubber Estates and Smallholdings in Peninsular Malaysia', 1910-1985, in *The Underside of Malaysian History*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), p. 28.

⁸⁶⁹ Ramasamy, 1984, pp. 14-6. The prevalence of caste in rural, as opposed to urban environments, was also noted by A. Mani. A. Mani, 'The relevance of caste in the study of Singapore Indians', in *Review of Southeast Asian Studies*, Singapore, 5, 1975, p. 34.

languages.⁸⁷⁰ The practice of caste among the great variety of Christians in Malaya and the Straits Settlements were therefore not a precise exercise. In addition, rules of caste exclusivity were often orally relayed from generation to generation, and being a 'taboo' subject in most Churches, were either discretely relayed by instruction, or by subliminal and learnt behaviour. The traditionally 'low' standing of the majority of Indian Christian population seemed to make caste identification among these groups undesirable. Many preferred not to identify themselves with a caste group, claiming ignorance of their personal caste background. This was not specifically stated, but implied by various interviewees.⁸⁷¹

Even among the 'higher'⁸⁷² caste groups who were least likely to drop caste prejudices, many spoke of its declining importance.⁸⁷³ Consequently caste delineations for the many Indian Christians grew increasingly vague from generation to generation.

Caste modifications and hierarchy maintenance

Among the urban communities, there appeared to be several new elements along with caste delineations, which worked hand in hand to help identify a person's social standing. Educational and occupational backgrounds played new and significant roles in how individuals or communities were judged. For example, if a person from the Brahmin caste did not have suitable employment or an English-educational background, he or she was not viewed suitable for marriage even into a lower caste group, especially among the 'high' Vellalar groups.

These features were also largely upheld within the urban-based, middle-class segments of the Indian Christian communities. Exclusivity was maintained with the inclusion of a wider range of caste groups within a new familial network. However this 'pecking order' was still apparent within these larger endogamous groupings. It was common for in-laws or even husbands and wives of different caste groupings to

⁸⁷⁰ Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 56-7. Even in census gathering, there appeared to be great difficulties in the identification of specific caste groups. This is illustrated in a sample from 1871-1911 (table 2).

⁸⁷¹ Anonymous interview, 15 Oct. 1997, Ipoh. Anonymous interview, 18 Oct 1997, Kuala Lumpur. Mr. B. P. Alfred, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore, 1983.

⁸⁷² Vellalar, Naidu, Chetty (Chettair), Mudali, Mudaliyar and Odaiyar/Vanniyar caste groups.

⁸⁷³ Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

highlight caste ranking during domestic disputes. Most importantly, caste was transformed from that of a 'complimentary' system to that of a 'competitive' one.⁸⁷⁴

In the urban environment, the commensality of 'high' and 'low' caste groups was kept to a minimum. Familial and community networks were limited according to one's caste standing. These differences were policed with the convenient 'dove-tailing' of class-based prejudices with that of caste. Social and economic status (and its perpetuation) were tied in with access to wealth. It was not surprising to find that academic and occupational expectations were linked with a series of social advantages. More than half of all Christian Indians were originally from urban centres in India.⁸⁷⁵ Therefore it was primarily the more affluent 'high' caste groups, with access to mission schools, who had an early exposure to urban-based English language-based education in India. In turn occupations were determinate on the level or type of education a person had access to. We therefore find that most white-collar jobs were held by persons from so-called 'higher'⁸⁷⁶ caste backgrounds.

Other elements which became more prominent by the 1930s, were the growing association between race and personal ability in British Malaya and the Straits Settlements. These new ideas relegated the old-style honorific concepts of caste into the background. Consequently, many young people began identifying superiority and inferiority, not along caste lines but along racial ones.⁸⁷⁷ Among this new generation, we find the classical definitions of caste lifestyles deemphasised, and often replaced with the more modern concepts of racial superiority, educational snobbery, the adoption of 'western' styles of dressing and even the adoption of 'western' names. These acted as new symbols of respectability in colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements.⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁴ Mani, 1975, pp. 35-6.

⁸⁷⁵ G. Oddie, 'Christianity and Social Mobility in South India 1840-1920: A continuing debate', in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 1996, XIX, Special Edition, (Armidale: South Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1996), p. 153.

⁸⁷⁶ Vellalar, Naidu, Chetty (Chettair), Mudali, Mudaliyar and Odaiyar/Vanniyar caste groups.

⁸⁷⁷ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

⁸⁷⁸ Mani, Dec. 1975, p. 34. Leslie O'Brien, 'Education and Colonialism: The Case of Malaya', in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 16 (2), July 1980, p. 57. R. Raja Krishnan, *The*

The Relationships within the Church

Missionaries in Malaya and the Straits Settlements did not solely cater for the 'spiritual' needs of their congregations. Most parishioners and new converts often found the new social, economic and political landscape of colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements an imposing and daunting experience. Social structures, which provided a degree of stability in their native South India, were abandoned on leaving their village and family networks. Such social discontinuity uprooted many immigrants, and these problems were often not alleviated in the estates or in the urban environments. A heavier reliance and expectation to fulfill their social needs were therefore placed on local parishes. Many looked towards the Church to replace their social network. This social network was often mobile. Entry to one parish meant acceptance in all other affiliated parishes in Malaya or Singapore. This was particularly pertinent with the transience of many Indians and Indian Christians. Most depended on Churches for spiritual guidance, and in many cases, to act as an intermediary with the colonial establishment. The demands placed on one's local missionary was therefore quite varied. A missionary was expected to not only act as an intermediary of god, but as an administrator, accountant, school teacher, fund raiser, social worker and supervisor to the construction of Church and school buildings.

The physical layout of a 'native' parish in Malaya and the Straits Settlements, followed a particular standard in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It usually comprised of a Church building, a missionary or parish house with the catechist and servants quarters alongside. It was common for an orphanage, cemetery and school with accommodation for teaching staff, to be located on the premises as well. A living example of this can still be found at the Church of St. Francis Xavier (established 1857) in Penang. Although services at the Church have been scaled down, the original buildings for servants, catechists, schools, orphans and teachers still stand.⁸⁷⁹ Within these early communities, dramas of human interaction, social hierarchies, gossip, as well as formal and informal community networks unfolded. These new parishes

Jaffna Tamils in Prewar Malaya: the myth of the return, in *Sixth International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies*, (Petaling Jaya: Thirumagal Printers, 1987), p. 250.

⁸⁷⁹ Today most of the homes are rented to local parishioners, not necessarily employed by the Church.

formed a fresh social web of their own, in an otherwise new, hostile and alien colonial environment.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most missionaries of both Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches were European in origin. Indian clergy appeared more predominant in the Methodist Churches, although more non-European and Indian Roman Catholic priests did emerge by the 1920s and 1930s. They often lived within the Church compound. In addition they often took long trips into outlying congregations within their areas of responsibility. It was common for many of these priests and missionaries to be in charge of a large district.⁸⁸⁰ Such large areas often entailed the servicing of many isolated agricultural communities and their small Churches or chapels.⁸⁸¹ Accounts of priests, accompanied by Tamil-speaking catechists, making regular trips to outlying Churches are not uncommon. Most walked great distances to and from their destination several times a week. During the Japanese Occupation, Fr. Louis Guittat, then stationed in Klang, used to commute by bicycle through plantations, jungle and the seaside throughout his large district.

Rather prominent, especially among the Roman Catholic clergy, was their enthusiasm for evangelical 'adventure'. This trait appeared to be rather common among the younger priests of the M. E. P., who often showed an eagerness to help break new evangelical ground or simply pioneer new ventures in the name of the Church.⁸⁸² An example of this pioneering spirit was Father Francis Xavier Hab (M. E. P.) (1829-1890), along with a small band of Tamils, settled and established the Church of St. Francis Xavier⁸⁸³ (in a rural enclave of Penang) in 1857. This remains a primarily Tamil parish to this day.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸⁰ Untitled, in *The Malaysia Message*, June 1897, VL (9), Singapore, p. 107.

⁸⁸¹ C. E. Ferguson-Davie, *In Rubber Lands: An account of the Work of the Church of Malaya*, (Westminster: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1921), p. 53.

⁸⁸² Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. This trait was by no means the preserve of Roman Catholic (M. E. P.) clergy. There are numerous examples of Protestant missionaries doing the same, however mainly with Chinese, and especially with Malay and aboriginal conversion in mind.

⁸⁸³ St. Francis Xavier, the sixteenth century Basque Loyolist priest, was a popular figure among the Indian Christian communities. He had a strong connection with South India and was associated with early Catholic evangelisation in the archipelago. Latourette reported that many Christian Goanese immigrants preferred to travel on boats named after St Francis Xavier. K. S. Latourette, vol. 6, 1940-5, p. 208.

⁸⁸⁴ Fr. Rene Nicholas (Mission Etrangeres de Paris), 'A Chronology of the Catholic Church in Malaya and Singapore', (Singapore: unpublished, 1996), p. 11.

Another priest who endeavoured to create new Roman Catholic-based communities in the interiors of peninsular Malaya was Father Rene Michel Marie Fee (M. E. P.) (1856-1904). He had been strongly influenced and personally encouraged by Father Francis Xavier Hab.⁸⁸⁵ Fr. Fee believed that the strong migratory leaning of many Indians he had met,⁸⁸⁶ were not conducive to the maintenance of Christian faith. This led Fr. Fee to initiate the establishment of an agricultural colony 'where our Christians would till their fields and plant their rice as most of them are doing in India, a colony where the young generation would grow near their Church and where numerous pagans would come to find their salvation.'⁸⁸⁷ On the 19th of January 1882, 'ten men of goodwill accepted to embark on the adventure'. Two hundred acres of land was cleared with the intention of cultivating rice-fields. St. Joseph's Town or Soosay Paleam was officially founded in 1889.⁸⁸⁸ According to Fr. Louis Guittat, Soosay Paleam was never a total success as a settlement. He noted how many parishioners preferred to leave for more lucrative employment in the railways, government administration or rubber estates. He had himself served at the parish from 1936 to 1939. The Church, under Fr. Fee, took a \$4,000 loan from the Perak government, but appeared to be unable to repay it by 1901.⁸⁸⁹

In the 1920s, Father Louis Riboud (1890-1960), as part of his parish duties frequently travelled into the rural Kedah. He did so with the help of an old truck equipped with a portable toilet and a shrine dedicated to St. Theresa. Fr. Riboud had first come to Malaya around 1922 or 1923. He had served in the French army as a national servicemen during the First World War and apparently excelled in administrative tasks. He was supposed to have been the first Roman Catholic priest to reside in Sungei Petani and had managed to acquire some land to build a school in Kulim. He was particularly well-known for meticulously visiting rubber plantations under his

⁸⁸⁵ Fr. Michel Rene Marie Fee (1889), *Kampong Padre: A Tamil Settlement near Bagan Serai, Perak*, (Singapore: Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society, May 1963), p. 154.

⁸⁸⁶ Fr. Fee gave the example of an Indian Christian women he met, who had lived in Martinique, Mauritius and Penang, after the death of her husband in Metz. Fee (1889), May 1963, p. 154.

⁸⁸⁷ Fee (1889), May 1963, p. 154.

⁸⁸⁸ Fee (1889), May 1963, p. 153.

⁸⁸⁹ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. The Church under Fr. Fee took a \$4,000 loan from the Perak government, but appeared to be unable to repay it by 1901. 'Debt of Roman Catholic Tamil Mission at Bagan Serai', in *A Select list of files of the office of the High Commissioner for the Malay States held by Arkib Negara Malaysia 1897-1942*, 949/1901.

charge.⁸⁹⁰ On one of his long trips to Perlis, Fr. Riboud attempted to cross a poorly maintained wooden bridge. Realising the risk involved, he prayed to St. Theresa for guidance. As he drove safely to the other side of the bridge, it duly collapsed into the river below!⁸⁹¹

A lesser known rural-based priest of this period was Fr. Auve (1860-1924). Fr. Auve had served in South India where he had learnt the Tamil language. In Malaya, he built his house and a Church in Nibong Tebal (approximately 20 kilometres from Bagan Serai, Perak), and encouraged his fellow villagers and parishioners to build their homes around him. He was a trained medical assistant, veterinarian and school teacher.⁸⁹²

The relationship between Roman Catholic clergy and laity were not always congenial. Ultimately, it was the individual personality of the priest that determined his acceptance by parishioners. Many pre-war priests were often portrayed by their parishioners as being strict and domineering. It was common for some of the more severe priests to take attendance during the mandatory Sunday mass. According to one account, a particular priest would wait outside the front entrance of his Church to spot latecomers to Sunday mass, only to chide them if caught. If a person should miss a mass, the priest would personally question the family during one of his later home visits.⁸⁹³ The typical relationship between priest and laity in this early period was described by one parishioner as being, 'seen but not heard'. A priest was a formidable figure - not to be approached unless absolutely necessary. German priests, of which there were a handful before the Second World War, appeared to be especially notorious in this respect.

In addition the Latin-based Roman Catholic Mass often alienated many parishioners, particularly the children. Some interviewees noted how as children, due to the fact that

⁸⁹⁰ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

⁸⁹¹ *Bulletin de M. E.P.*, (M. E. P.), 1939, pp. 697-705. Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 October 1997. Interview with Fr. Rene Nicholas (M. E. P.), (born 1930), Singapore, June 1996.

⁸⁹² Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

⁸⁹³ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921), Singapore, 21 Nov. 1996.

the priest had his back to the congregation for most of the ceremony, 'tended to do anything they wanted'.⁸⁹⁴

The role of the clergy and Church

The priest of a Malayan Indian Christian congregation was not far different in their function from those in traditional South Indian communities. He acted as an arbiter, and at times, legislator of domestic disputes. He was the sole authority of the spiritual needs of his parish, able to bestow blessings recognised by God and (in the case of the Roman Catholic Church) the Vatican.⁸⁹⁵ He had the power to initiate persons into the Church, or even excommunicate them should the need arise. The Roman Catholic definition of 'sin' was based more on the willful defiance of the authority of the Church. The idea of the 'civilising' mission, where a colonialising entity claimed responsibility for inculcating compatible characteristics, was not so important in this context. All adherents could aspire for admission to Heaven – regardless of nationality, gender or race.⁸⁹⁶ Blessings bestowed on homes and other religious items (rosaries, holy-pictures, holy-water) were especially sought after by many Indian Roman Catholic families. In addition, many priests arranged pilgrimages and festivals and acted as the focal point for worship. They acted as arbiters between the material and the spiritual, the profane and the sacred.

Henriette Bugge noted how the French Roman Catholic missions in South India were often better than Protestant missions at engaging the dynamics and social network of Indian communities. This was facilitated by the fact that French priests were seen as outsiders by their parish charges, who therefore were willing to accept their authority. If the priest was Indian, caste and sub-ethnic differences were difficult obstacles to overcome.⁸⁹⁷ The Catholic missions were also keen to engage their new converts on their own ground, making the transition from Hinduism to Christianity as easy as possible. The Church encouraged the adoration of its saints along the same lines as that of traditional Hindu deities. In order for their Christian charges to permanently break off spiritual ties with their Hindu counterparts, it was important that their old

⁸⁹⁴ Interview with Mr. David Sebastian, (born 1931), Singapore, 9 Aug. 1996. This was limited, taking into account they were watched over by their parents.

⁸⁹⁵ Catholic priests were often bestowed with the power to perform religious rituals such as baptisms and 'extreme unction' (last rites). But this was clearly done as a proxy on behalf of his priest.

⁸⁹⁶ Bugge, 1994, p. 116.

Hindu ceremonies and festivals were replaced with Christian ones. This was still a problem in colonial Malaya. For example, Penang Indian Roman Catholics were disallowed from taking part in local 'Thaipusam' ceremony, but allowed to watch the fireworks and procession.⁸⁹⁸ Protestant Churches disallowed or ignore these 'problems'.⁸⁹⁹

The powerful impression British colonialism had on most parishioners made it much easier for many to follow the lead of a white-man than a fellow Indian. Even among Indian clergy, there was a strong tradition for many joining the priesthood to hail from a 'high' caste, or in the case of the Protestants, at least from the same caste background as their parishioners.⁹⁰⁰ This was especially prevalent before 1950s and 1960s. Most Indian Roman Catholic priests in Malaya and the Straits Settlements descended from 'high' caste groups. Even in South India, Henriette Bugge notes how it was a matter of policy among the French missions to recruit seminarians from the 'high' Vellalar or Mudaliyar caste groups throughout the nineteenth century.⁹⁰¹ In Malaya and the Straits Settlements, the emphasis on the racial background of one's priest, appeared slightly more watered down and did not appear to adversely effect the way parishioners interacted with them. The 'high' caste status of Indian Roman Catholic priests coupled with an acquired Christian religious authority, familiarity with the English language and European-style traditions, put them on a higher plain to their Indian parishioners who therefore afforded recognition arguably at par with other European priests.⁹⁰²

Bugge also notes a general tendency among French Roman Catholic priests not to adopt the British penchants for racial theorising. There was little mention of a 'national' or 'racial' faults of Indians. Traditionally the Catholic Church was, to a certain degree, (for exceptions to this rule, see 'Urban schools: The making of the

⁸⁹⁷ Bugge, 1994, p. 104.

⁸⁹⁸ 'Coutumier de l'Eglise St. Francois Xavier, Penang', (undated, probably around 1900), Church of St. Francis Xavier, Penang (translated from French).

⁸⁹⁹ Bugge, 1994, p. 46.

⁹⁰⁰ The large majority of Protestant clergy belonged to the Tinnelvely Shanar/Nadar caste group. Bugge, 1994, p. 85.

⁹⁰¹ Bugge, 1994, pp. 82, 87.

⁹⁰² The author did sight a confidential Roman Catholic Church document from the 1950s that recounted an incident between a prominent Indian priest and an ordinary Indian parishioner in Malaya.

'Black European' in Chapter Four), less inclined to be misled by colonial induced propaganda and concentrated on the spiritual care of its converts, without emphasising imperialist aspects.⁹⁰³ The French mission tended to explain circumstances in their communities along social lines.⁹⁰⁴ John Comaroff notes how South African Roman Catholic missionaries, working at the 'grass-roots' level, did not view their function in terms of the 'civilising mission', but more along the lines of dealing with bureaucratic regulations and state capitalism.⁹⁰⁵ This were the practice of most Roman Catholic priests in colonial Malaya and Straits Settlements.

On the other hand many European and especially British Protestant establishments by the late nineteenth century, began to adopt new anthropological and 'scientific' racial ideas which made strong correlations between physical and predetermined behavioural traits.⁹⁰⁶ The adoption of these ideas were facilitated by growing nationalism – patriotic British missionaries began viewing themselves as the moral conscience of British colonialism. This took two forms; to question the social and economic responsibilities of the British government owed to its 'native' colonial subjects,⁹⁰⁷ and to act as the moral protector of British interests and prestige.⁹⁰⁸ In contrast, French Roman Catholic clergy were primarily alien nationals working under the goodwill of the British crown. They had little enthusiasm for the British imperial cause, with much of their allegiance directed towards the survival of their parish, religious order and the Vatican.⁹⁰⁹

Within individual parishes, clergy utilised various methods to maintain social and political control. To keep track of their priestly duties, clergy were expected to

The priest accused the young man of stealing books, and ended with both men threatening to hit each other with their shoes!

⁹⁰³ Bugge, 1994, pp. 114-5. K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), pp. 447-8.

⁹⁰⁴ Bugge, 1994, pp. 112, 115.

⁹⁰⁵ John L. Comaroff, 'Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience', in A. L. Stoler and F. Cooper (ed.), *Tensions in Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 180.

⁹⁰⁶ H. L. E. Luering, *85th Annual Report, 1903, Malaysia*, in *Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 50. H. L. E. Luering, *83th Annual Report, 1901, Malaysia*, in *Missionary Reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 69.

⁹⁰⁷ 'The Demons of the Dark Places', in *The Cathedral Courier*, XXVI, Feb. 1939, Ven. Archdeacon Graham White, M. A. (ed.), pp. 24-7.

⁹⁰⁸ *Monthly Paper, St. Andrew's Cathedral*, (Singapore), F. G. Swindell (ed.), August 1915.

⁹⁰⁹ Interview with Fr. Loius Guitatt (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

maintain a database of the persons and families residing within their religious domain. A 'card-system' was used in Churches whereby a card would be allocated to one family unit or individual. These cards were divided alphabetically and contained information such as residential addresses, names of the head of the family (usually male), individual father's name, mother's name, place of birth, place of baptism, wife's name and a list of children and their birth dates. All these cards were held in an open top, partitioned wooden box (approximately 1 metre by 0.8 metre). It was up to the priest and catechist to keep the records up to date. The 'card-system' of Fr. Louis Riboud (1890-1960), was found still intact in late 1997.⁹¹⁰

In the Roman Catholic Church, acts of 'penance' were often used as a form of 'punishment' to an individual or group that may have broken a law of the Church. In more serious cases, this was done predominantly via exclusion from the receiving of the Sacraments or 'Holy Communion'. Only in extreme circumstances would 'excommunication' (expulsion) be resorted to. Willingness to arbitrate on domestic issues also varied from religious denomination to denomination. Generally, in the South Indian context, Roman Catholic missions were more involved in the arbitration of petty quarrels, familial, marital and property disputes and acts of theft.

Many of the Protestant Churches were not as willing to arbitrate over similar issues, seeing them as falling outside the circle of their jurisdiction.⁹¹¹ In 1907, Rev. J. A. Bethune Cook, a Singapore-based Anglican, observes how 'Protestants generally refuse to have anything to do with legal and police cases. They teach the people to do what is right before God, and to rely upon themselves.'⁹¹² This perceived lack of involvement on the part of many Protestant Churches fell short of their new status as spiritual and moral leaders. According to Bugge, disputes in Hindu society were traditionally handled by a caste 'panchayat' (judge). Although the status of this

⁹¹⁰ Emer. Dominic Vendargon described using a similar system - 'Visible Card System'. Interview with Emer. Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, (born 1909), Kuala Lumpur, 13 Sept. 1996.

⁹¹¹ Bugge, 1994, p. 119.

⁹¹² Rev. J. A. Bethune Cook, *Sunny Singapore: An Account of the Place and its People with a Sketch of the Results of Missionary Work*, (London: Elliot Stock, 1907), p. 135.

'panchayat' varied from caste to caste, they appeared to act as the primary form of arbitration in times of conflict.⁹¹³

The French Roman Catholic missions, in comparison, were more involved in the all aspects of parishioner life. For example, there are numerous written accounts of marriage breakups, disputes relating to separation of property, custody of children, domestic violence, accusations of assault, theft, adultery, disputes with in-laws, problems arising with the death of a defacto spouse, and the prevention of a non-Christian marriage involving a parishioner.⁹¹⁴ In most cases, correspondence were firstly directed to the parish priest or a copy of the document posted to him for his information. In all cases, the priest took it upon himself to intervene and act as mediator to the disputing parties, sometimes working in conjunction with local authorities.⁹¹⁵

The majority of disputes involved marital breakups. These breakups were either precipitated by domestic violence or accusations of adultery. Under these circumstances, the priest often appeared not to take the position of an impartial mediator but took the stance of a moral arbiter. Moral decisions and judgements would be made by the priest, and action would often be taken by himself and the Church against the 'guilty' perpetrator. This was accomplished by directly counselling the parties involved and arranging for pressure to be applied from within familial

⁹¹³ Bugge, 1994, p. 117. It is interesting to note that a 'Panchayat' was established within some Indian-dominated unions. Interview with Mr. Chinnapen, (born 1942), Bukit Rotan (Kuala Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁹¹⁴ 'Untitled letter from Fr. L. S. Norris to Fr. Riboud' dated 14 July 1947, 'Untitled letter from J. F. Regis to the Police Magistrate Penang' (copy to Fr. Riboud) dated 13 Oct. 1937, 'The Humble Petition of the Above named Anthoniamal from Anthoniamal c/o The Priest Roman Catholic Church to The Honourable Judge', High Court Penang dated 22 July 2602, 'Untitled Statement of Anthonisamy (driver) of Butterworth to the Senior Judge', Supreme Court Penang (copy to Fr. Riboud) dated 11 Oct. 1939, 'Untitled letter from Anthony Francis (P. Besar) to Fr. Riboud' dated 6 Nov. 1940, 'Untitled letter from Fr. Clement (Bagan Serai) to Fr. Riboud' dated 4 Dec. 2602, 'Untitled letter from Mr S. G. Pereira (Labour Office, Penang) to Fr. Riboud' dated 24 Nov. 1940, 'Note from Rev. S. M. Swaminathan (Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Mar. 1948, 'Untitled note from S. G. Pereira (Labour Office, Penang) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Sept. 2602, 'Untitled letter from Nagammal alias Papa d/o Govindasamy (Railway Quarters, Prai) to Fr. Riboud' dated 21 Jan. 1952.

⁹¹⁵ 'Notice of Meeting for Case Committee, Probation Office (Dept. of Social Welfare)' undated - probably late 1940s, 'Untitled note from Fr. Riboud to Magistrate District Court, Penang', dated 6 Dec. 1946, 'Notice from Burma/Siam Relief Fund, Dept. of Social Welfare, F. M. S., Kuala Lumpur, to Fr. Riboud' dated 18 Jan. 1954, 'Note "Poppy Day - 1927" from Mr. A. Sproule, Judge's Chambers, (Supreme Court, Penang) to Fr. Sausseau' dated October 1927.

circles. As a final step a person could be excluded from receiving the Sacraments or Communion or even excommunicated.

Apart from playing the role of moral arbiter, the priest often acted as an intermediary with local authorities. For example if one of the disputing parties were not able to read or write in the English language or not familiar with the workings of the justice system, the priest or catechist often took on the role of middle-man or interpreter. Decisions and plans of action were often made in conjunction with other priests in the area. In instances the Bishop/Archbishop would be consulted.⁹¹⁶ In one case, a woman who had been co-habiting with a recently deceased local doctor, to whom she bore a son, found herself 'cheated' of her share of her defacto husband's property by the deceased's two sons from a previous marriage. The woman, obviously from a poor background, was not able to read or write in the English language. In addition, she had been cast out from the house, and her only son taken away from her by his two half-brothers.⁹¹⁷

Under these circumstances, it is interesting to note that the involved priest did not take a purely moral stance with regards to the 'immoral' standing of the woman in question. She had been the unmarried companion to a man, which under normal circumstances would have put her in bad standing with the dictates of the Church. However the priest, seeing her desperate situation, made a conscious decision to overlook her past and help bring about an amicable solution to the problem. Therefore it can be deduced that issues of contemporary Christian morality were not the sole arbiter determining help from the Roman Catholic parishes.

⁹¹⁶ 'Untitled note from Rev. Colace to Fr. Riboud' dated 18 Oct. 1948, 'Untitled letter from Fr. Clement (Bagan Serai) to Fr. Riboud' dated 4 Dec. 1942, 'Untitled note from Fr. A. Arokianathen (Butterworth) to Fr. Riboud' dated 10 Jan. 1943, 'Untitled letter from Fr. D. Vendargon to Fr. Riboud' dated 17 Apr. 1947, 'Note from Fr. L. S. Norris (Church of Christ the King, Sungei Petani, Kedah) to Fr. Lourdes (copy to Fr. Riboud)' dated 19 Jun. 1952, 'Note from Rev. S. M. Swaminathan (Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Mar. 1948, 'Aerogramme from Fr. A. S. Durairaj (Tiruvaramam, India) to Fr. Riboud' dated 1 Feb. 1954, 'Note from Fr. L. S. Norris (Church of Christ the King, Sungei Petani, Kedah) to Fr. Riboud' dated 19 Mar. 1949, 'Note from Rev. D. Vendargon (St. Anthony's Church, Kuala Lumpur) to Fr. Riboud' dated 3 Dec. 1953, 'Untitled note from Fr. I. Aloysius (Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore) to Fr. Riboud' dated 27 Apr. 1953, 'Untitled letter from Rev. Eric Stott (St. Mark's Anglican Church, Butterworth) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Sept. 1941, 'Untitled letter from Mr. S. Colandasamy (Labour Office, Penang) to Rt. Rev. Devals, Bishop of Malacca, Singapore' dated 17 Jan. 1941, 'Untitled note from Bishop Devals (Singapore) to Fr. Riboud' dated 2 Feb. 1940, 'Untitled letter from Bishop S. Barrillon (Bishop's House, Singapore) to Fr. Sasseau' dated 28 Oct. 1927.

In view of the nature of labour immigration to Malaya and the Straits Settlements, the Roman Catholic Church were extremely aware of the impending moral dangers that faced many in its communities. This dilemma was sometimes referred to as 'Indians in Danger'.⁹¹⁸ This showed the Churches recognition of the predicament of most immigrants – arriving in Malaya and the Straits Settlements outside the moral influence of their family and traditional networks. Parishes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were predominantly male.⁹¹⁹ Families and women were therefore in the minority. A careful watch on the moral behaviour of parishioners were therefore made a priority by clergy. In some Roman Catholic Churches, priests appeared to have a network of informers who regularly provided information on the 'misdeeds' of others.⁹²⁰ This information was also used in tandem with clergy in neighbouring districts or states. By the late 1940s, wider surveillance was deemed necessary by the Roman Catholic Church. Immediately after the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), an organisation called the 'Catholic Action Society' was set up. Its primary aim was to act as the 'eyes and ears' of its parish priest with regards to activities in communities under its jurisdiction. Apart from the monitoring of rival Protestant evangelical activity, it also reported on the moral misdeeds of parishioners.⁹²¹ This organisation appeared to be primarily based in the rural estates.

Another area of importance related to the issue of marriage and baptisms. Parishes had the difficult task of attempting to ascertain the marital or baptismal status of their mainly immigrant parish. This was especially urgent when considering the many previously unknown persons intending to marry at their Church. Information therefore had to be sought from the parishioner's original parish in India; confirming their

⁹¹⁷ 'The Humble Petition of the above named Anthoniamal c/o The Priest Roman Catholic Church to The Honourable Judge', High Court Penang dated 22 July 2602.

⁹¹⁸ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. This was also implied to by Emer. Archbishop Dominic Vendargon. Interview with Emer. Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, (born 1909), Kuala Lumpur, 13 Sept. 1996.

⁹¹⁹ Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921), Singapore, 21 Nov. 1996. This trend only weakened by the 1930s and especially so after the Second World War.

⁹²⁰ 'Untitled letter from Mr. S. G. Pereira (Labour Office, Penang) to Fr. Riboud' dated 24 Nov. 1940, 'Untitled note from Mr. S. G. Pereira (Labour Office, Penang) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Sept. 2602.

⁹²¹ 'St. Francis Xavier's Church Catholic Action Society, Penang', Mar. 1948 - 19 May 1952. Helen Ong, 'Our Lady of Lourdes and the Indians', in *The Malayan Catholic News*, Singapore, 3 Feb. 1952, p. 3.

marital and religious status before a priest could proceed with the marriage.⁹²² In addition, all baptisms, communions, confirmations, marriages and funerals taking place at the parish were meticulously recorded in ledgers.

The role of catechist and other support groups

A priest did not see to the functions of all aspects of his parish by himself. Apart from Church different organisations which helped in the running of specified activities, a catechist was appointed effectively to act as the 'right-hand man' of the parish priest.⁹²³ In the Roman Catholic Church, there were two categories of catechist: the 'catéchistes sédentaires' and 'catéchistes ambulans' ('Ambulans' catechist were trainee priests). The category discussed here is that of the 'sédentaires' variety. Their duties entailed assembling the congregation for prayer, mediation in disputes, teaching catechism classes, commemoration of special feasts and religious occasions, admonishing 'sinners' and helping in overseeing the overall smooth functioning and unity of the parish. The catechist was officially employed by the Church and received a modest salary. This occupation was usually held by a married male or a widower. Accommodation was provided on Church property, usually situated in an annex to the parish house. A catechist was usually chosen by the parish priest from among prominent members of his parish. Roman Catholic catechists did not undergo official education or training for the position.

In the absence of the priest, catechists were able to baptize children and adults (especially those at their death beds) and to officiate over funerals.⁹²⁴ Casimir Pillay, the catechist from the Church of St. Francis Xavier in Penang, made regular visits to the Pulau Jerejak Quarantine station,⁹²⁵ scouting for newly arrived Roman Catholic immigrants - getting their names and final destinations.⁹²⁶ This information was then passed on to his parish priest, Fr. Riboud, who duly informed all corresponding

⁹²² Untitled correspondence of Fr. Louis Riboud, St. Francis Xavier's Church, Penang. Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997.

⁹²³ Interview with Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. Fr. Louis Riboud (1890-1960) of the Church of St. Francis Xavier (Penang) did not have a good command of the Tamil language. Casimir Pillay, his catechist, also acted as an interpreter.

⁹²⁴ Bugge, 1994, p. 80. Helen Ong, 'Our Lady of Lourdes and the Indians', in *The Malayan Catholic News*, Singapore, 3 Feb. 1952, p. 3.

⁹²⁵ Pulau Jerejak or Jerejak Island is a small island lying off the south-eastern corner of the main island of Penang.

parishes throughout Malaya and the Straits Settlements of the impending arrival of their new parishioners.⁹²⁷ After the Japanese Occupation, the collation of census information was prioritised and it was these catechists, along with a small band of helpers, who went from house to house collecting particulars of all Roman Catholics in their district.⁹²⁸

One such catechist was Mr. Mathalaimony of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore. Mathalaimony was an immigrant from India. His father had also worked as a catechist in India. Mathalaimony had worked as a clerk with the 'United Engineers', prior to being laid off in the early 1930s. He and his brother went to Singapore in search of employment. In Singapore, Mathalaimony was offered a job as a catechist by the parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes. He was hesitant at first and turned down the initial offer, arguing that the pay would not be sufficient for himself and his family. The priest made the offer again promising appropriate remuneration. In addition, many of Mathalaimony's friends cautioned him that, 'whatever Father tells you to do you must do'. He took the job.⁹²⁹

The function of the catechist in many Protestant Churches did not differ greatly from the Roman Catholic Church.⁹³⁰ However, unlike the Roman Catholics, Protestant (Methodist) catechists were expected to undergo an education at a seminary or a special school.⁹³¹ In addition, in theory they could be ordained as a missionary after several years of service.⁹³² Included in this category were school teachers from local mission schools. They also oversaw the running of Sunday school classes.

⁹²⁶ Each newly recruited worker was issued a 'tin ticket', with a number on it. This number represented the estate he or she was being sent to. Arasaratnam, 1970, pp. 18-19. Sandhu, 1969, p. 95.

⁹²⁷ Interview with Emer. Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, (born 1909), Kuala Lumpur, 13 Sept. 1996.

⁹²⁸ Helen Ong, 3 Feb. 1952, p. 3. *St Francis Xavier's Parish Penang. Census A.D. 1949 (by order of the Bishop)*, (Penang: St. Joseph's Orphanage Press, 1949). Information collected was: Name, Address, Father's Name, Mother's Name, Place of birth, Place of baptism, Age, Occupation, Place of marriage, wife's name, Children (name, age, school or work), remarks. Information separated into areas and streets.

⁹²⁹ Ong, 3 Feb. 1952, p. 3.

⁹³⁰ Untitled, in *The Malaysia Message*, June 1897, VL (9), p. 107.

⁹³¹ 'The Tamil Pastors School, Malacca', in *The Malaysia Message*, 47 (10), Oct. 1937, p. 14.

⁹³² 'Ipoh Tamil Church', in *The Malaysia Message*, XVIII (7), Apr. 1909, p. 54. This article give examples of two men who gave up their government jobs, one as a compositor with the 'The Times of Malaya' and another a employee with the Sanitary Board, to take up positions within their Church.

Another group worthy of mention, were that of the Methodist 'Bible women'. These women had little to no formal education but did undergo religious training.⁹³³ They were used to gain access to local women in the domestic environment, which were out of bounds to male missionaries.⁹³⁴ They would either teach the English alphabet, simple reading skills or relate stories from the Bible. These Bible women were predominantly Chinese, with only a small number being South Indian in origin. In Malaya and the Straits Settlements their activities remained primarily confined to that of the Methodist Church, although they did (in small numbers) exist in the Anglican Churches. They worked in both rural and urban areas. In the Roman Catholic Church, the nuns from the local convents fulfilled this work - especially among the young, sick and in hospitals.⁹³⁵

Laity within the Church

Most Indian parishes were segregated along economic lines. By and large the majority of most parishes were made up of poor estate workers on one hand, and the urban-based 'middle-classes' on the other.⁹³⁶ This distinction varied from parish to parish.⁹³⁷ For example, between 1891 and 1950, more than 64 per cent of all marriages performed at the Roman Catholic Church of St. Anthony's (Kuala Lumpur) were between estate-based parishioners.⁹³⁸ However weekly Church attendance did not

⁹³³ A school for Bible women was originally located in Singapore, then moved to Melaka in March 1907. Emma E. Shellabear, *Bible Woman's Training School and Evangelistic Work*, in *Minutes of the Woman's Conference of Malaysia Mission held at Singapore, Dec 13th to 18th, 1907*, Singapore, American Mission Press, 1907, p. 82. Sophie Blackmore, *A Record of Forty Years of Woman's Work in Malaya, 1887-1927*, (Singapore Methodist Archives: unpublished, undated), p. 10. *Minutes of the Woman's Conference of Malaysia Mission held at Singapore*, Singapore, American Mission Press, 5-9 Feb. 1909, p. 73.

⁹³⁴ 'Woman's Work in Malaysia', in *The Malaysia Message*, 20 (9), June 1911, p. 67. C. E. Ferguson-Davie, *In Rubber Lands: An Account of the Work of the Church of Malaya*, (London: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1921), pp. 44, 61. A. Pykett, *Tamil Work*, in *Official Minutes of the Seventh Session of the Malaysian Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Penang, February 9-14, 1899*, Singapore American Mission Press, pp. 44-5. A. Dent, *Minutes of the Ninth Session of the Malaysia Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Singapore, February 21-27, 1901*, Singapore, American Mission Press, pp. 85-6.

⁹³⁵ Cook, 1907, p. 123.

⁹³⁶ The exception to the norm would be the small Syrian Christian denominations, whose makeup were primarily white-collar workers.

⁹³⁷ Betty L. Khoo, 'This Church is a replica of the one at Lourdes', in *New Nation*, Singapore, 14 Apr. 1972. At the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Singapore, the majority of the congregation was made up of 'merchants' and clerks, with a smaller proportion of labourers.

⁹³⁸ This is a conservative estimate. Estate (labourer) occupational status was usually indicated in Church records by the use of the term 'coolie'. In the vast majority of these cases, both men and women held a job. In a few cases some women did not - these exceptions have been left out of this count. 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral, (Kuala Lumpur) 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906'. 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, (Kuala Lumpur) 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'.

accurately reflect this congregational make-up. Many of the estate workers and even urban labourers found it difficult to commute weekly to and from Church. Even in the highly urbanised environment of Singapore, regular Church attendance was still a problem after the Second World War.⁹³⁹ In the larger and more rural Malay states, the proportion of blue-collar to white-collar workers grew correspondingly larger. However as in Singapore, many of these poorer workers found it difficult to overcome the weekly obstacles to attend Church - such as commuting long distances, the lack of transportation and employer hostility. It was therefore the responsibility of many priests and catechists to visit these isolated populations as often as possible.⁹⁴⁰

This problem was compounded by the fact that all Churches before the Second World War were segregated along ethnic and language lines.⁹⁴¹ This was Church policy at the time and practiced by both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches alike.⁹⁴² They believed such segregation helped facilitate the unique needs of individual congregations. Consequently, an Indian Roman Catholic in Singapore who lived a distance away from their stipulated 'Indian' Church was expected to attend that particular Church. This was in spite of the fact that another Church may have been located a short distance from one's home. By the 1930s and especially immediately after the Second World War, it became quite commonplace to find Indian families attending more conveniently located 'Chinese' or 'Eurasian' Churches. However, many of these 'interlopers' were often forced to occupy the back pews by the resident priests.⁹⁴³

⁹³⁹ After the Japanese Occupation (1941-45), most 'blue-collar' parishioners began moving to the Henderson Road area. A considerable distance from the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Ophir Road - approximately 10 kilometres away. Ong, 3 Feb. 1952, p. 3.

⁹⁴⁰ Nicholas 1996, p. 11. *Bulletin de M. E.*, (M. E. P.), 1939, pp. 697-705. Fr. Louis Guittat, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 October 1997. Interview with Fr. Rene Nicholas (M. E. P.), (born 1930), Singapore, June 1996. Interview with Emer. Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, (born 1909), Kuala Lumpur, 13 Sept. 1996. Ong, 3 Feb. 1952, p. 3.

⁹⁴¹ K. M. Williams, *The Church in West Malaysia and Singapore: A Study of the Catholic Church in West Malaysia and Singapore regarding her situation as an Indigenous Church*, (Katholieke Universiteit Te Leuven: Ph.D. thesis, 1976), p. 106. Khoo, 14 Apr. 1972.

⁹⁴² 'Tamil Diocesan Council, in Singapore Diocesan Magazine', Singapore, XXIV (87), Aug. 1932, p. 7. All Tamil/South Indian Anglican 'work' came under the jurisdiction of the Tamil Diocesan Council in 1923. Similarly, all Indian Methodist worshipped at their corresponding Tamil Methodist Church.

⁹⁴³ Interview with Mr. David Sebastian, (born 1931), Singapore, 9 Aug. 1996. Betty L. Khoo, 'This Church is a replica of the one at Lourdes', in *New Nation*, Singapore, 14 Apr. 1972.

As early as the 1880s, many Indian Roman Catholics did not enjoy a high standing among other Roman Catholic congregations.⁹⁴⁴ Although there were never outright confrontations between ethnic groups, there is evidence of friction between Chinese and Indian congregations; warranting mention by the Bishop in 1885.⁹⁴⁵ This was especially evident in the case of the Indian congregations who shared the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (Singapore) with its much larger China-born (Teochew) congregation.

There have been several references regarding the poor financial standing of the Indian Christian communities in comparison to the other more affluent Asian and especially Chinese Christian congregations.⁹⁴⁶ Although this may be superficially true, much of the 'affluence' exhibited by Chinese Christians, in particular that of its dominant Roman Catholic, China-born, Teochew urban congregation at the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (Singapore) appeared concentrated in the hands of several mercantile families and their business interests.⁹⁴⁷ For example, two late nineteenth century Church philanthropists were that of Mr. Jacob Low Khiok Chiang (1843-1911) and his business partner Mr. Joseph Chan Teck Hee (1845-1930). It was from their import-export business based in Bangkok, 'Kiam Hoa Heng'⁹⁴⁸ and 'Buan Hoa Seng'⁹⁴⁹ in Singapore, where part of the large amounts of capital needed for the construction of local Chinese parishes and mission schools in Singapore (and

⁹⁴⁴ Correspondence of Bishop Edward Garnier to Pean (M. E. P.), Paris, 2 Feb. 1885. Thanks to Fr. Rene Nicholas (MEP) for the translation.

⁹⁴⁵ Bishop Edward Garnier, 'A Report by Bishop Edward Garnier concerning an incident at Sts. Peter and Paul's between Chinese and Indians', Singapore, 4 Sept. 1885 (translation from French). It was a minor incident between a Chinese labourer working on the Church premises and one of the Tamil catechists. The Chinese man had reportedly hit the catechist's young daughter, with the catechist retaliating in kind. The catechist was dismissed. This appeared to have remained an isolated incident. Bishop Garnier did not mention any reactions from both congregations as result of this event. Thanks to Fr. Rene Nicholas (MEP) for the translation.

⁹⁴⁶ Sandhu, 1969, p. 234. Clement Liew, 'The Roman Catholic Church of Singapore 1819-1910: From Mission to Church', (National University of Singapore: Bachelor of Arts (Honours) thesis, 1993-4), p. 59.

⁹⁴⁷ Interview with Miss Teresa Goh Mui Imm (1913-1995), Singapore, May 1988. Mr. Stephen Cheng Chin Mong (born 1917), Singapore, 22 Jan. 1997. Interview with Ms. Winnie Chia, (born 1927), Bangkok, 27 Feb. 1997. 'Diary of Fr. Stephen Lee, (1896-1956), Church of St. Teresa (1929-1974)', Singapore, National Archives of Singapore. *Church of Sts. Peter and Paul Centenary Souvenir Magazine*, (Singapore: Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, 1970). The earliest mention of a Chinese Christian philanthropist was that of Mr. Pedro No Kea. I have been unable to determine his background or trace his descendents. Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984 [1921]), p. 253.

⁹⁴⁸ 'Kiam Hoa Heng', in *Sarasasana*, (translation from Thai), Bangkok, Assumption Press, no. 12, Dec. 1939. *The Singapore and Straits Directory 1904*, (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1904), p. 472. This firm was established in 1879.

Bangkok) came from.⁹⁵⁰ In the early twentieth century philanthropists like Mr. David Wee (Ng) Cheng Soon (1875-1944), a contractor and mine owner, contributed large amounts towards the building of new Churches and the expansion of mission school buildings.⁹⁵¹ Even non-Christian benefactors figured prominently in fundraising, especially with regards to educational facilities.⁹⁵² This wealthy patronage did not go unnoticed by some in the rival Protestant Churches. Rev. J. A. Bethune Cook accused the Roman Catholic Church in 1907 of conducting 'ordinary business houses in the name of Chinese traders and others.'⁹⁵³ In contrast, like their Indian Christian counterparts, the overwhelming majority of the Chinese congregations were financially poor.

The immigrant standing of Indian congregations often meant that many had financial obligations in India. This was the case for both the rural labourer and the more affluent urban white-collar worker. A working person would under normal circumstances be extremely prudent and save as much as possible. Many preferred to live in cramped, unhealthy conditions in order to maximise their capacity to save

⁹⁴⁹ *The Singapore and Straits Directory 1904*, 1904, p. 469. This firm was established in 1883.

⁹⁵⁰ The Bangkok-based 'Kiam Hoa Heng' was officially established by Mr. Jacob Low Khiok Chiang, Mr. Joseph Chan Teck Hee and Mr. Chua Lee Heng. The Singapore-based 'Buan Hoa Seng' was run by Mr. John Goh Ah Seng (1851-1916) and Mr. Heng Kiah Seng (?-1926), as assistant. Kiam Hoa Heng was a 'General Managing Partner' in Buan Hoa Seng. Mr. Low's eldest daughter, Veronica (from his second marriage), married one of Mr. Goh's sons, Andrew, in 1905. One of Mr. Chan's sons married Mr. Low's other daughter. The Low, Goh, Chan, Wee (Ng), and Heng families, intermarried from the late nineteenth century.

⁹⁵¹ Interview with Mr. Philip Wee Peng Leng (1904-1991), Singapore, Mar. 1982 (translation from Teochew). Charles Goh, *Catholics in Singapore*, (Singapore: Charles Goh Sin Chan, undated/probably early 1950s). *Solemnity of the Feast of St. Anthony and Golden Jubilee of the Establishment of the Christian Community, 1927-1977*, (Singapore: St. Anthony's Church, 1977). 'Diary of Fr. Stephen Lee, (1896-1956), Church of St. Teresa', Singapore, National Archives of Singapore.

⁹⁵² Information from Mr. Clement Liew. Prominent non-Roman Catholic business persons such as Mr. Tan Jiak Kim, Loke Yew, Tan Kheam Hock and Yan Keong Siak, made large contributions to St. Joseph's Institution (Singapore) around 1900. Tan Jiak Kim alone committed \$14,000. Funds for Tamil Methodist schools were also made by non-Christians. An early example of Hindu interests assisting Indian Christians was illustrated by the donation of \$2,000 by R. Durysamy Pillai, 'Hindu leader of the Tamil community in Selangor', towards the building of a Methodist school. S. Abraham, *Malaysia Message*, Oct. 1904, XIV (1), p. 4.

⁹⁵³ Cook, 1907, p. 134. This statement is difficult to confirm. The M. E. P. clergy did provide initial funds (or loans) to Mr. Jacob Low Khiok Chiang to start a business in Bangkok around 1873. Mr. Low, arriving in Singapore as a 16-year old in 1859, had originally worked as a cook, and later as a clerical assistant at the M. E. P. headquarters in Oxley Road, Singapore, from the 1850s. However there is no evidence to show if the Roman Catholic Church had a direct say in the use of Mr. Low's business profits. From interviews with descendents, it appears the reasons for doing so were totally personal. 'Kiam Hoa Heng', in *Sarasana*, (translation from Thai), Bangkok, Assumption Press, no. 12, Dec. 1939. Interview with Ms. Teresa Goh Mui Imm (1913-1995), Singapore, May 1988. Interview with Ms. Winnie Chia, (born 1927), Bangkok, 27 Feb. 1997.

financially.⁹⁵⁴ The more one saved, the shorter the need to stay in Malaya and the Straits Settlements, away from family and friends in India. The primary objective of employment was to support one's family or fulfilling financial obligations back in India. This money was usually sent as a postal 'remittance', often with the help of the parish priest.⁹⁵⁵ Surviving documentation shows a strong reliance on one's parish priest. Most of these people who relied on the services of the priest and catechist were illiterate estate workers, unable to handle the task of filling out forms at their local post-office. These 'remittances' were addressed to the 'parish priest' of the corresponding Roman Catholic parish in India, where the remitter's dependents resided. For example, at the Church of St. Francis Xavier in Penang, in 1913 a total of \$1,588 was sent out to various Indian parishes on behalf of approximately twenty-five workers. In 1915 this amount had jumped to \$2,378.87 for thirty workers, \$2,153.22 in 1916 for twenty-six workers, \$3,203.04 in 1917 for thirty-seven workers and then dropped to \$1,615.28 in 1917 for twenty workers.⁹⁵⁶

'Middle-class' interaction with the parish priest differed greatly from that of their estate-based worker counterparts. These groups were more self-reliant and (when they choose to) often tended to work more closely with the clergy in comparison to estate workers. They predominated in Church organisations such as the 'St. Francis Xavier's Association' (established 1915), 'Catholic Young Men's Association' (C. Y. M. A.) and the 'Legion of Mary'. After the Second World War, other groups like the 'St. Vincent de Paul Society', the 'Young Christian Workers' (Y. C. W.) and the 'Queen

⁹⁵⁴ Interview with Emer. Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, (born 1909), Kuala Lumpur, 13 Sept. 1996. Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921), Singapore, 21 Nov. 1996. There were many examples of urban-based individuals and families living in small, dark, dank, crowded rooms. This type of accommodation was cynically referred to by clergy and established laity as 'hotels'. Donald Nonini, 'Shifting Identities, Positioned Imaginaries: Transnational Traversals and Reversals by Malaysian Chinese' in Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (ed.), *Ungrounded Empires: The cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 218. The level of savings was often determined by the level of pay. Therefore in highly economically polarised communities like colonial Malaya and Singapore, levels of savings was strongly determined by the rate of pay.

⁹⁵⁵ Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997. Often a remittance may pass between several people before actually reaching its final destination.

⁹⁵⁶ 'Diaries of Fr. L. Perrichon' (parish priest, St. Francis Xavier's Church), Penang. 1913, 1915-8. The names of the remitter as well as names of parents, caste and benefactor were listed in these diaries. Caste groups represented appear to be approximately 75% Pallen, 15% Odaiyer, 5% Pariah. Other groups were also represented: 1 Velangai, 1 Reddiar, 1 Chettiar, 1 Pillay, 5 Shanar/Nadar, 1 Agambadier and 1 Maravar. Almost all receipts made out to the 'Parish Priest' in whatever city/town it is sent to in India. Some receipts were made out to businesses such as printing presses - they have been excluded from this list. A 1% post office commission is excluded from the figures.

Assumed to Heaven', came into prominence. These organisations varied in nature from that of the purely social to the strongly evangelical.

Religious conversion

Conversion via evangelicism, through family networks and loss of faith in one's religion, were common reasons for conversion to Christianity. Examples of such cases were recorded by Church publications such as the 'Malaysia Message'. An 1897 report told of how an elderly man was evangelicised by his young neighbour, a school-boy with the local Methodist school, who sang hymns and 'taught him catechism'.⁹⁵⁷ In a 1901 account, a young girl from Kuala Kangsar, having left her parents and travelled to Ipoh, where she supposedly 'led a bad life' – a euphemism for prostitution, eventually sort the help of a Mr. H. Bailey, the local Inspector of Police. Bailey put her under the charge of the local Methodist Church. She was taught to pray with the intention to conversion to Christianity.⁹⁵⁸ In a 1910 account a railway porter working in Lahat (Perak) converted to Christianity. He then wrote to his wife and children back in India about his conversion. His family followed suit.⁹⁵⁹ In another undated account, a dying Muslim Indian man in hospital gave his 'little daughter Mina, and asked a Methodist evangelist (Ms. Sophia Blackmore) to bring the child up in the Christian faith, as he had 'ceased to believe in the religion of Mohammed'.⁹⁶⁰

However reasons for conversion need not always be religious or spiritual in nature. Generally Hindus were not hostile to non-Hindu religions, and often viewed these religions like new 'dieties' - enriching ones own spiritual landscape.⁹⁶¹ In fact many

⁹⁵⁷ H. L. E. Lueling, 'Tamil Work in Perak', in *The Malaysia Message*, Dec. 1903, XIII (3), Singapore, p. 27. 'News of the Methodist Mission at Penang', in *The Malaysia Mission*, Oct. 1897, VII (1), Singapore, p. 2.

⁹⁵⁸ C. S. Paul, 'Ipoh Tamil', in *The Malaysia Message*, June 1901, X (9), Singapore, p. 114.

⁹⁵⁹ 'Tamil Work in Perak', in *The Malaysia Message*, March 1910, XIX (6), Singapore, p. 43. J. Gnanasihamoney, 'Tamil Work in Perak', in *The Malaysian Message*, Nov. 1908, XVII (2), Singapore, p. 11.

⁹⁶⁰ Sophia Blackmore, 'A Record of Forty Years of Women's Work in Malaya, 1887-1927', (Singapore: unpublished, Singapore Methodist Archives, undated), p. 11.

⁹⁶¹ K. M. Panikkar, 1953, pp. 445, 447. Panikkar notes how Hinduism was largely tolerant and sympathetic towards Christianity. He also points out Christianity's bloody-minded view of their own righteousness (all non-believers will be condemned), was in opposition to the 'openness' of Hinduism and Buddhism and alien to many an 'Asian' minds. G. D. James, *Missionary Tours in Malaya*, (Singapore: Malaya Evangelistic Fellowship, 1962), pp. 36, 40-1. *Straits Settlements Annual Report 1935*, (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 803-10. This report gave an account of how an illustration of 'Mickey Mouse' had been incorporated into a plantation-based Hindu shrine.

Hindus did not object to being preached to by Christians, but took offence when told that Jesus Christ was the only true god!⁹⁶²

In India, G. A. Oddie notes how the Brahmin or 'high' caste Christian converts were permanently ostracized by their communities. However co-existence between Hindu and Christian among the Untouchable groups continued unabated.⁹⁶³ There was obviously a stronger emphasis placed on ethnicity than religion. From an account made in the 1950s, G. D. James (an ethnic Indian Protestant missionary) noted how willingly Indian Roman Catholics introduced them to their fellow Indian Roman Catholic friends; 'not because we were Christian workers, but because Mr. Verghese and I were Indians.'⁹⁶⁴ If any reservations did exist, it was mainly seen in a political light, and was not religious.⁹⁶⁵

Religious conversion among persons of the Brahmin caste were extremely rare. Few people of this caste grouping ever migrated to Malaya and the Straits Settlements. However on the rare occasion of one converting to Christianity (in this case, in the Methodist Church), it was usually done so with a degree of 'ceremony'. To the mainly non-Brahmin Indian parish this might have implied caste favouritism.⁹⁶⁶ This attitude was usually facilitated by a European cleric, often deeming such occasions special. Bishop Oldham, a North American, personally officiated over one baptismal service, and proudly described the two new Brahmin catechumens to his large non-Brahmin Indian congregation as being members, 'of the priestly class that has long held India under its sway.' In comparison, Rev. S. Samuel, an ethnic Indian, two years earlier described a Brahmin conversion, in far less glowing terms - preferring to highlight the fact that the person in question had been a Hindu priest, 'practising all the black arts of his forefather's religion'.⁹⁶⁷ The non-Brahmin Indian congregation quite obviously

⁹⁶² G. D. James, 1962, p. 40. It was also noted that such assertions, by Christian missionaries, were commonly followed by a 'hot argument'.

⁹⁶³ G. A. Oddie, *Christian Conversion in Telugu Country, 1860-1900: A Case Study of one Protestant movement in the Godavery-Krishna Delta*, in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1975, 12 (1), p. 69.

⁹⁶⁴ James, 1962, p. 30.

⁹⁶⁵ James, 1962, pp. 36-7. There was a strong identification of Western consumer goods with European and Christianity by many people. pp. 38-9.

⁹⁶⁶ 'Tamil Baptism Service', in *The Malaysia Message*, May 1910, XIX (8), Singapore, p. 56. Kooiman, 1989, pp. 176-7.

⁹⁶⁷ S. Samuel, 'Tamil Work in Taipeng', in *The Malaysia Message*, Nov. 1907, XVII (2), Singapore, p. 11.

had a more cynical view of 'high' caste groups and were not prepared, in their new 'egalitarian' environment, to recognise or even appreciate such status.⁹⁶⁸

Religious conversion, especially to the Roman Catholic Church, has been strongly underestimated in the context of colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements. There is strong evidence to show how the rate of conversion among rural-based Indian Roman Catholics were high. There have been several assertions that most Indian Christian immigrants were converted in India.⁹⁶⁹ This may have been so for the urbanised middle-classes, but the high levels of estate-based conversions show that there were a considerable pool of non-Christian people in Malaya and the Straits Settlements who were receptive to conversion to Christianity. Out of the 1,339 marriages celebrated under the auspices of the large Indian congregation of the Church of St. Anthony (Kuala Lumpur)⁹⁷⁰ between 1891 and 1950, there were over 410 (30.62 per cent) individual examples of religious conversion to the Roman Catholic faith. The vast majority were the product of marriages between Christians and Hindus. However rivalries between Church groups were strong, especially between Roman Catholic and Protestant groups. Therefore, most social and religious interaction was frowned upon, by Roman Catholic and most Protestant clergy alike.⁹⁷¹ In Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, Roman Catholic conversions of Protestants were extremely low, with only four recorded accounts (three Methodists and one Anglican). There were three converts from Islam.⁹⁷² In Singapore the numbers were slightly higher with ten conversions from Protestantism between 1884 and 1895.⁹⁷³

⁹⁶⁸ It is also important to note that most Church denominations were often caste specific.

⁹⁶⁹ Daniel, 1992, p. 47. The states where Indian Christians predominated were also the same states where Indian labour to Malaya were actively recruited from. Sandhu, 1969, p. 82. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 15. Khoo, 14 Apr. 1972.

⁹⁷⁰ Before 1912, this was done under the auspices of St. John's Church (later Cathedral) in Kuala Lumpur.

⁹⁷¹ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Rev. J. A. Bethune Cook, 1907, pp. 134-5. The anti-Roman Catholic tone and mood of Rev. Cook's (Anglican) book illustrates the inherent rivalry between the Churches. However this attitude, seemed generally absent in surviving Methodist literature. Lionel Caplan, 'Caste and Castelessness among South Indian Christians', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1980, 14 (2), p. 221.

⁹⁷² 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral, (Kuala Lumpur) 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906'. 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, (Kuala Lumpur) 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'.

⁹⁷³ 'Baptisms, Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, 14 May 1884-15 Sept. 1895', Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore.

Inter and intra-racial marriages: Interplay of race and gender

Many young Christian men found the issue of matrimony a daunting prospect. In the nineteenth century, this was exacerbated by the gender imbalance in the local immigrant populations. New immigrants, be they Indian or Chinese, had either to take time away from employment and travel back to one's homeland. An expensive exercise,⁹⁷⁴ or failing which, one had to find an appropriate and willing female partner in Malaya. This was exacerbated by the low ratio of women to men, a problem not overcome till the 1930s.⁹⁷⁵ Competition for prospective wives was therefore extremely keen. In this clamour for marital domesticity, new solutions were sought. One answer lay in the local orphanage or girls' home. Many of these establishments were run by missionary organisations, which had no difficulty in finding poverty-stricken girls, abandoned and orphaned children, to take under their wing.

These homes and orphanages were not usually race-specific. On the request of the young man (with the permission of his parish priest), it was up to the resident convent nun to introduce him to suitably aged young ladies (popularly referred to as 'convent girls')⁹⁷⁶ from the orphanage. Under these circumstances, it is interesting to note that some young men were adventurous enough to choose girls not from the same ethnic background as themselves.⁹⁷⁷ Put it to 'whims of the heart' or 'flights of fancy'; it would be hard to determine what motivated these young men into making the choices they did. It is also noteworthy that arbitrary concepts of racial stereotypes and prejudices were not so ingrained as they would become in the twentieth century.

⁹⁷⁴ Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

⁹⁷⁵ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 69.

⁹⁷⁶ The term, 'convent girl' used in Roman Catholic Church records, were used to denote if a girl was from the local convent orphanage. 'Convent, Register of Births, Sept. 1893-Dec. 1894', 'Dec. 1894-Aug. 1895', 'Aug. 1895-Apr. 1896', 'May 1896-Nov. 1896', 'Nov. 1896-Sept. 1897', 'Aug. 1898-Feb. 1904', Assumption Cathedral, Penang. 'Baptisms, Church of St. Francis Xavier, Aug. 1890-28 Sept. 1891', '21 Jun. 1897-11 Jul. 1901', '28 Jan. 1912-Oct. 1914', Church of St. Francis Xavier, Penang. 'M, 2.4.1923 to 12.7.1936', (Marriages), St. Anthony's Church, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. 'Baptisms, Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, 14 May 1884-15 Sept. 1895', Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore.

⁹⁷⁷ According to Tan Beng Hui's study on colonial responses to prostitution, many male (in this case, Chinese) clientele 'knew no racial or class barrier'. It therefore can safely be assumed that many young men were well acquainted, at least on a sexual level, with concepts of the 'plural' society. Tan Beng Hui, 'Controlling Women's Bodies: The Use of Women and Girls' Protection Legislation in Colonial Malaya (c. 1860s-1940s)', (Kuala Lumpur: unpublished, 1999), p. 28.

Inter-racial marriages were extremely difficult to pick out with the sparse information provided in late nineteenth century Church records. It is difficult to determine the racial background of many of these 'convent girls'. Most of these girls were commonly referred to by only their first (Christian) name, and therefore ethnically unidentifiable. However several identifiable cases do appear. This was not an unknown, though relatively rare, occurrence among the Roman Catholic communities. There have been several identifiable cases among the Roman Catholic China-born Teochew congregation of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (Singapore), which is a good indication that such marriages were not frowned upon or discouraged by the Church.⁹⁷⁸

Accounts of racial inter-marriages remained relatively rare till the second or third decade of the twentieth century. Not all cases involved 'convent girls'. It is interesting to note that these early inter-racial couples were from solely urban areas, exclusively among the urban middle-class populations, and not among estate populations. Although capitalism in urban areas helped attenuate racial or cultural stereotyping, race/ethnicity or caste was used in estate social structures to intensify them, often to the benefit of capitalist production.⁹⁷⁹ The enclosed environment of plantation/estate life was by far more politically confined to that of urban areas. The plantation economy acted as a 'total institution'. Church records therefore show no examples of intermarriage among estate populations.⁹⁸⁰ Among a growing number, race and culture played a secondary role to the new parameters of the urban middle-classes – based on the English language, occupational and economic status. These early liaisons, in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, were common with members of the Luso-Malay (Melaka Eurasian) community and to a lesser extent with the Chinese⁹⁸¹ community.⁹⁸² However by the late 1930s and especially after the Second World War,

⁹⁷⁸ Several of these identifiable inter-marriages were sighted in the marriage records of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (Singapore), N. A. 033, National Archives of Singapore. In one case a young Teochew male married (2 Oct. 1876) an illegitimate sixteen year old Spanish/Javanese 'convent girl'. In another case, two Chinese males married two South Indian or maybe Melaka Eurasian 'convent girl' sisters. Interview with Ms. Teresa Goh Mui Imm (1913-1995), Singapore, May 1988.

⁹⁷⁹ Loomba, 1998, pp. 125, 127. Beneficial to the capitalist production in that a race/ethnicity conscious labour force was never able to unite for their own benefit.

⁹⁸⁰ The captive nature of estate employment, as well as the race and caste specificity of estate populations, were not conducive to inter-racial contact.

⁹⁸¹ No one Chinese dialect group predominated.

⁹⁸² 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral, (Kuala Lumpur) 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906'. 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, (Kuala Lumpur) 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'.

inter-marriages with members of the numerically larger Chinese community began to overtake that of the smaller Luso-Malay (Melaka Eurasian) community. In Singapore, all recorded Roman Catholic Indian (male) to Chinese (female) intermarriages took place after 1937,⁹⁸³ with seven instances taking place over a ten year period.

Intermarriages with members of the Eurasian and Luso-Malay (Melaka Eurasian) community occurred in fourteen instances between 1908 and 1948. Intermarriage with members from the Malay community was limited. There were also two marriages between local Indian Christians and converted Christian Malays.⁹⁸⁴ The limited number of Indian Christian and Malay marriages was probably due to the religious exclusivity of both Christianity and Islam. This discouraged intermarriages, unless one party converted to the other faith.

Racial relations prevalent in the Straits Settlements and the Malay states also dictated certain hypergamic features of inter-racial gender relationships. Dynamics in racial relations determined, to a strong degree, the level of gender and racial mix. For example in Singapore, where the mercantile Chinese community were perceived to be the dominant (and therefore superior) of the non-European communities, it is not surprising to note that Indian/Chinese couples were predominantly male Indian to female Chinese. Only one couple was Chinese male to Indian female. This was in keeping with the colonial inspired Asian racial hierarchies of the day; Chinese on top, Indians second, and Malays last. This racial hierarchy was interwoven with the patriarchal dominance of male over female. It was therefore not desirable for a 'superior' Chinese/'superior' male to marry down to an 'inferior' Indian/'inferior' female, but it was suitable for an 'inferior' Indian but 'superior' male to couple with a 'superior' Chinese but 'inferior' female - an equal match. Under such hypergamic circumstances an Indian male and Chinese female couple was a relatively 'acceptable' inter-racial match-up.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁸³ It is highly probably that such intermarriages did exist in Singapore prior to 1937. If they did, they were obviously not officiated under the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore. Several cases of Indian/Chinese marriages are documented at St. Anthony's Church (K. L.), dating back to the first decade of the twentieth century. These were usually urban-based liaisons.

⁹⁸⁴ 'Marriage: Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, 7 May 1884 - 27 Feb. 1922', '4 Sept. 1922 - 11 Sept. 1956', '9 Jan. 1941 - 7 Apr. 1947', '9 Jan. 1942- 12 Sept. 1942', Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore.

⁹⁸⁵ The practise of 'Muitsai', involved the buying of Chinese children by Indian families. According to this Tamil language newspaper, these children were brought up as part of the family and later married into the family. This was supposedly a popular among 'illiterate Tamils'. 'Chinese Children bought by Tamils', in *Tamil Murasu*, 16 Oct. 1952, Singapore. A correlation could be drawn between the desire

The relationship with the Eurasian and Luso-Malay (Melaka Eurasian) communities, were on much more equal terms. However, racial power structures were also in play here. Most of these marriages were with the Luso-Malay or members of the Melakan Eurasian communities. Although many preferred to call themselves 'Portuguese', they were obviously not that. Most, if not all, were predominantly racially Malay with varying mixtures of Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch and possibly British - but importantly most looked racially Malay or at least very 'Asian'. Even within these 'Eurasian' communities, there was a racial divide between the 'dark' and 'light' Eurasians.⁹⁸⁶ The 'darker' Eurasians were looked down upon by their 'lighter' counterparts, which was in keeping with the existing colonial racial hierarchies. It was therefore relatively uncommon to find Eurasians of the 'lighter' variety intermarrying with Indians, whereas a match up between a 'dark' Luso-Malay (Melaka) Eurasian and an Indian was socially palatable. The ratio of male to female was more equal between these two groups; eight Eurasian females to six Indian males.⁹⁸⁷ There appeared to be no intermarriages between Europeans and Indians during this period.

In Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, the ratio tips in favour of the Chinese and Eurasian communities. All Chinese/Indian marriages were Indian male to Chinese female and all Eurasian/Indian marriages were with Indian male to Eurasian female, which indicated a negative racial standing for the Indian community.⁹⁸⁸

Another important feature were the remote occurrences of intra-marriages between Indian sub-ethnic groupings. There were fewer examples of Malayali and Tamil, or Indian-Tamil and Ceylonese-Tamil marriages than there were inter-racial ones. This

for social mobility and Indian/Hindu concepts of 'varna' or colour. By marrying a 'fairer' Chinese, the next generation would not be condemned to endure the stigma of a dark complexion.

⁹⁸⁶ These so-called 'light' Eurasians were usually more recent additions to the 'Eurasian' communities. Many were descendants of immigrant Anglo-Indian clerical labour from India who filled the vacancies of the lower ranks of the civil service throughout much of the nineteenth century. Others were the illegitimate offspring of European liaisons with local women. These light/dark divisions showed signs of dissipation by the middle of the twentieth century.

⁹⁸⁷ 'Marriage: Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, 7 May 1884 - 27 Feb. 1922', '4 Sept. 1922 - 11 Sept. 1956', '9 Jan. 1941 - 7 Apr. 1947', '9 Jan. 1942- 12 Sept. 1942', Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore.

⁹⁸⁸ A larger proportion of 'poor' estate workers resided in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. This contributed to the poorer/weaker image of the Indian community among the other urban-based communities. 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral, (Kuala Lumpur) 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906'. 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, (Kuala Lumpur) 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'.

illustrated the strong rivalries and petty differences that existed between these groups. These differences were accentuated by the 'divide and rule' tactics of their colonial masters.

Women: Gender roles and relations

Indian Christian society in Malaya and Singapore was primarily male-dominated. At home and Church, women played a secondary role often in the shadow of their priests, husbands and sons. Even the colonial education system was highly patriarchal, preferring at the best of times to ignore its female charges.⁹⁸⁹ Patriarchal-based traditions, reinforced by colonialism, tied familial expectations of women to unpaid domestic responsibilities - working on the belief that domesticity was their exclusive obligation and responsibility.⁹⁹⁰ Issues relating to education and wage-earning were seen as a male responsibility.⁹⁹¹

It is particularly difficult to build a framework from which to analyse the position of women in Indian Christian society. In some cases, information was not as forthcoming from interviewees as it were from the men. Even when approached, some women were more inclined to downgrade their experiences, often claiming ignorance in comparison to their more 'worldly' male partners. In addition there have been few academic studies on Malayan-based immigrant women to date. Archival repositories and governmental resources did not place importance on the female portion of its population. This was compounded by overwhelming dominance of the immigrant male to that of the female populations right by to the 1920s and 1930s. The few available archival references often represented women as either domestic appendages of their families and husbands, or as prostitutes. Most government materials were often more indicative of the colonialist penchant for misogyny and racism than the actual standing of immigrant Asian women in British colonialist society.⁹⁹²

⁹⁸⁹ Leslie O'Brien, 'Education and Colonialism: The Case of Malaya', in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Melbourne, 16 (2), July 1980, p. 58. A. J. Amery, 'The Anglo-Tamil School, Singapore', in *The Malaysia Message*, Dec. 1905, XV (3), p. 25.

⁹⁹⁰ Tan Beng Hui, 'Indian Rubber Estate Workers in Malaya/West Malaysia: c.1880-c.1980 (with special emphasis on Indian women)', (University of Sydney: unpublished, 1991), p. 93.

⁹⁹¹ O'Brien, July 1980, p. 58. H. R. Cheeseman, 'Education in Malaya, 1900-1941', in *The Malayan Historical Journal*, Kuala Lumpur, Malayan Historical Society, 3 (1) May 1954-July 1956. p. 41. Tan, 1991, p. 96.

⁹⁹² 'Housing problem caused by "sly girls"', in *A Select list of files in the Selangor Secretariat 1875-1955*, 98/1927. 'Sly girls' were women working as sex workers from their residential homes. Police

Several sources note the strong imbalance in the gender ratio existent within Malaya and the Straits Settlements prior to the 1930s. According to Nala Tan, the 'immigrant population was largely male'. Arasaratnam also observes how a heavy gender imbalance 'affected family life' and often created 'unhealthy social effects'.⁹⁹³ Traditionally, colonial employers in Malaya and Singapore were not keen on encouraging female labour due to perceived shortcomings in their productivity. In addition, there were few unattached women, primarily due to the tendency of many Indian families to marry off the females as young children or during puberty. The protected position women and girls had in traditional Indian society were often an obstacle to migration. Women were not allowed outside of the confines of their family, that of their fathers, brothers or husbands. The extended-family system, so prevalent in India at the time, although providing a strong degree of familial 'protection' and 'stability', did not allow many women the freedom to immigrate to Malaya on their own. In order to encourage men to return to their homes in India, families tended to keep their wives and children in India in the hope that this would discourage the men from staying away from home too long.⁹⁹⁴

Important life-decisions, under these circumstances, were always made by the men. Generally decisions relating to religious conversion were often decided upon by the men with the women expected to follow suit, although there is some evidence illustrating strong female influences with regards to religious conversion. Oddie notes how the willingness of women to 'join with their husbands in baptism, or vice-versa, and the preservation of family and kinship ties provided individual non-Brahmans with much needed support and protection' and so facilitated in the process of

often were aware of their existence but this knowledge was not officially recorded. They tended to cater to the upper echelons of Asian and European clientele. 'Surgeon on filthy state of brothels', in *A Select list of files in the Selangor Secretariat 1875-1955*, 691/1885, 'Prosecutions in U. M. S. courts for enticing away married Indian women, in *A Select list of files of the office of the High Commissioner for the Malay States held by Arkib Negara Malaysia 1897-1942*, 39/1936. James F. Warren, 'Prostitution in Singapore Society and the Karayuki-san', in P. J. Rimmer and L. M. Allen (ed.), *The Underside of Malaysian History: Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), p. 173.

⁹⁹³ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 67. 'Indian Labour: XIV - How to Increase Efficiency', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (12), Kuala Lumpur, 29 Mar. 1929, p. 2. *Straits Settlements Annual Report 1935*, Singapore, pp. 802-4. C. E. Ferguson-Davie, *In Rubber Lands: An account of the Work of the Church of Malaya*, (London: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1921), p. 60. Nala Tan, 'Health and Welfare', in E. Chew and E. Lee (ed.), *A History of Singapore*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 340.

conversion.⁹⁹⁵ Authority figures in most Churches were often keen to portray the role of the female as that of a compliant subject - a person who received orders rather than giving them, to be seen but not necessarily heard.⁹⁹⁶

There were differences in the gender power-structures throughout the different levels of the caste system. G. A. Oddie noted that it was the women from the lower caste groups who tended to be much less sheltered and more knowledgeable than their high caste counterparts.⁹⁹⁷ Unlike the higher caste groups, women were accorded the right to mix relatively freely with males. Oddie also argued that female familial ties were one of the ways in which conversion were spread from village to village.⁹⁹⁸

Different caste groups usually had different gender dynamics. Some groups though generally patriarchal (male dominated) sometimes followed practises which allowed their female adherents varying degrees of freedom.⁹⁹⁹ Inheritance and succession among the Nayar (Nair) caste groups of the Malabar region were matrilineal. Although not classifiable as matriarchal, many of Nayar women had less subjugated lives in comparison to the majority of the world's communities.¹⁰⁰⁰ Some Ezhavas caste groups were also matrilineal. On the other hand the Shanar/Nadars caste groups were patrilineal (inheritance following male lines). To the south of Quilon (Travancore),

⁹⁹⁴ Sandhu, 1969, p. 98. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 32.

⁹⁹⁵ 'Tamil Work in the F. M. S. (South)', in *The Malaysia Message*, Aug. 1905, XIV (11), Singapore, p. 100. Emma Shellabear, 'Bible Woman's Training School and Evangelistic Work, Malacca', in *Minutes of the Woman's Conference of Malaysia Mission held at Singapore, Feb. 5th to 9th, 1909*, Singapore, American Mission Press, p. 74. Oddie, 1977, p. 83. Willingness of women to convert with husbands held together familial and kinship ties. Family contacts were cited as one of the ways religious conversion also took hold ie. spreading to different villages.

⁹⁹⁶ 'Editorial: Divorce', in *The Malaysia Message*, Feb. 1906, XV (5), Singapore, p. 47. This article described the antithesis of a 'good' wife, 'She does as she pleases. Goes out when she pleases, where she pleases, and with whom she pleases and comes back when she pleases.' Bishop Oldham, 'The Bishop's Response', in *The Malaysia Message*, XIV (7), Apr. 1905, p. 63. Bishop Oldham professed that Tamil women should 'stay with their husbands and make pure, clean, Christian homes.'

⁹⁹⁷ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, in his study of a late thirteenth and early fourteenth century French village, found rules governing pre-nuptial arrangements and sexual permissiveness relatively relaxed. This was particularly so for 'poor girls and maidservants' as well as widows. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village 1294-1324*, (London: Scholar Press, 1978), p. 190.

⁹⁹⁸ G. A. Oddie, 1977, pp. 82-3.

⁹⁹⁹ C. J. Fuller, *The Nayars Today*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 75-80, 146. Nayar women were allowed a strong degree of sexual freedom, within a recognised social framework. They also enjoyed an element of autonomy outside that of their 'husbands' authority. Women were allowed to have children by different fathers. This order began to change in the onslaught of patrilineal-based British colonialism influences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Fuller, 1976, pp. 5-6, 149.

Ezhavas practised half matrilineal, half patrilineal; where inheritance was split equally. The Pulaya caste groups had a similar system to that of the Ezhavas, while the Pariahs were patrilineal.¹⁰⁰¹ On the island of Ceylon, migration up to the thirteenth century from neighbouring Tamil states and the Malabar coast brought together an admixture of matrilineal (from the Malabar coast) and patrilineal (from the Tamil states) traditions.¹⁰⁰²

Apart from indigenous influences, by the twentieth century there were also new movements which had varying influences on the communities. These new influences would have been more prevalent in urban, middle-class communities. Influences from modern 'industrial' interpretations which equated concepts of employment and wage labour with 'independence' were particularly popular with patriarchal elements who found such ideas a bolster to their status as head of their household and helped pacify standing political discrepancies existent in colonial society.¹⁰⁰³

Other influences followed. By the 1930s, ideology relating to the politics of human reproduction began filtering into some Church circles. Mrs. Margaret Sanger and Mrs. Edith How-Martyn of the 'International Birth Control Centre' based in New York and London, made an official 'Indian and World Tour' between 1935 to 1936.¹⁰⁰⁴ By early February 1936, both representatives reached Penang and thus began a series of public meetings and governmental lobbying for the benefits of 'birth control' among local populations. Their definition of 'birth control' was based on Malthusian concepts of the inter-relation between overpopulation and limited resources; as Davin notes, 'neo-Malthusians recommended contraception as an artificial check on population and therefore a preventive of poverty.'¹⁰⁰⁵ It helped simplistically explain the reasons for the poor standing of colonialised nations where modern contraception and birth control was not popular. It used 'overpopulation' as the primary causes of poverty and unemployment, conveniently ignoring the one-sided socio-political and economically

¹⁰⁰¹ Kooiman, 1989, pp. 17-19.

¹⁰⁰² Ramasamy, 1988, pp. 12-13.

¹⁰⁰³ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, (London: Sage Publications, 1999), p. 62. Chatterjee, 1995, p. 130.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Letterhead; 'Indian and World Tour 1935-36', International Birth Control Centre, 17 West 16 Street, New York City, U. S. A., and Parliament Mansions, London, S. W. 1, England.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', in Ann Laura Stoler and F. Cooper (ed.), *Tensions in Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 87.

biased structure of colonialism. It ignored the underpinnings of exploitative capitalism, instead preferring to blame the poor for being poor. These new ideas were strongly interwoven with the 'eugenicist' movement which believed in the inherent superiority of one race/class over another and that selective breeding could isolate 'anti-social' and 'unproductive' elements in all societies. Examples quoted regularly reflected a racist slant – race being used as a reference point. Mr. Tan Sim Hong, local advocate of birth control and friend to Sanger and How-Martyn, said that among the, 'Chinese and Malays the birth rate in 1936 was 48.0 per thousand and 43.05 per thousand respectively, while among the Europeans it was 19.02 per thousand'. A correlation between population size, limited resources and access to wealth was strongly emphasised.¹⁰⁰⁶

Although there were no direct link between the Indian communities and this tour, a summary of Indian labour immigration and especially its estate component were found among the papers relating to the Malayan leg of Sanger and How-Martyn's visit.¹⁰⁰⁷ The duo received reasonable media coverage.¹⁰⁰⁸ The Anglican Church¹⁰⁰⁹ and the Methodist Episcopal Church (in the U. S. A.)¹⁰¹⁰ appeared to be most receptive to these ideas. However the Roman Catholic Church with its anti-contraception stance fought them 'tooth and nail'.¹⁰¹¹

These eugenicist ideas placed the British middle-class interpretation of 'motherhood' into the context of local Malayan communities, and judged them accordingly. Thus

¹⁰⁰⁶ 'Birth Control Clinics Advocated for Malaya: Misery Is Caused By Unrestricted Family Production', in *The Singapore Free Press*, 1 Aug. 1938, Singapore. The paper, presented by Mr. Tan, had been prepared by a Ms. Olive Johnson. 'Birth Control in Malaya', in *The New Generation*, (unknown), Oct. 1938, p. 116. N. A. B. 252, National Archives of Singapore.

¹⁰⁰⁷ 'Indian and World Tour 1935-36', International Birth Control Centre, N. A. B. 252, National Archives of Singapore.

¹⁰⁰⁸ 'If You Dislike Birth Control, Don't Read This', in *Sunday Gazette*, Penang, 9 Feb. 1936, pp. 16, 46. 'Birth Control Advocated for Malaya: Misery is Caused by Unrestricted Family Production', in *The Singapore Free Press*, Singapore, 1 Aug. 1938. 'Birth Control in Malaya', in *The New Generation*, (unknown), Oct. 1938, pp. 115-16. N. A. B. 252, National Archives of Singapore.

¹⁰⁰⁹ 'Birth Control and the Western Races', in *Chaplain's Report 1935*, undated, St. Andrew's Cathedral, Singapore, p. 2.

¹⁰¹⁰ 'If You Dislike Birth Control, Don't Read This', in *Sunday Gazette*, 9 Feb. 1936, Penang, p. 16.

¹⁰¹¹ 'Birth Control in Malaya, in *The New Generation*', (unknown), Oct. 1938, pp. 115-16, N. A. B. 252, National Archives of Singapore. 'Untitled letter from Mr. Tan Sim Hong to Mrs. How-Martyn', Singapore, 16 Aug. 1938, N. A. B. 252, National Archives of Singapore. Mr. Tan Sim Hong was the local representative of the International Birth Control Centre in Singapore. The Roman Catholic Church opposed the principle of 'eugenics', objected to its advocacy of Malthusian principles and especially artificial 'contraception'.

the role of the 'mother' was now centred around her children. It was the responsibility of the 'mother' to bring up the children, and mothers who sought employment were ignoring their natural instincts.¹⁰¹² These eugenicist ideas, also reinforced the common perception of Asian 'cultural' inferiority in relation to 'European' superiority, which repeatedly blamed the local populations for its own poor standing.

Thus through numerous channels, traditional female authority was diminished, to varying degrees, as a result of contact with British colonial influences and related interests.¹⁰¹³ Redefinitions of the work-ethic intensified the economic dependency of women on men.¹⁰¹⁴ Even in India, colonial governmental attitudes de-emphasised traditional female authority.¹⁰¹⁵ In addition colonial hierarchies disenfranchised many males in society, which contributed to an increasing level of tyrannical behaviour in the home. These males seized what little was left for him to control. The home and women became accentuated emblems of their culture, manliness and nationality.¹⁰¹⁶ Such anti-female influences were strong within Christian communities, added to by the clearly misogynist slant of Judeo-Christian Biblical writings.¹⁰¹⁷ Urbanisation and ensuing 'westernisation' brought many of these communities into line with the patrilineal-based culture of colonial Britain.

Indian Christian women in Malaya and the Straits Settlements

It is not possible to determine the gender makeup of the Indian Christian communities prior to the Second World War. No statistics were kept by governments of the day, with available figures only taking into account recruited female labour regardless of religious background. Immigration of Indian Christian women, particularly among the urban communities, had mainly been in tandem with the initial immigration of a male family member. Jacintha Stephen's study of Catholics of the Vellalar caste group,

¹⁰¹² Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', in Ann Laura Stoler and F. Cooper (ed.), *Tensions in Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 90-92.

¹⁰¹³ C. J. Fuller, *The Nayars Today*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 130.

¹⁰¹⁴ Dean Mitchell, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, (London: Sage Publications, 1999), p. 62.

¹⁰¹⁵ Fuller, 1976, p. 133.

¹⁰¹⁶ Loomba, 1998, p. 168. Chatterjee, 1995, pp. 130, 117.

¹⁰¹⁷ Loomba, 1998, p. 167. It would be difficult solely to blame European-based Christianity for having introduced male-dominated practices into the Indian communities. Hinduism itself has similarly repressive anti-female beliefs. However in Hinduism, the line between repression and adoration of

many of whom had worked in the civil service, also gives a good account of female immigration.¹⁰¹⁸ A catechist in the company of his Roman Catholic priest, decided they needed a woman to maintain their household. The catechist wrote to a widowed niece in Tanjore, requesting that she and her two children join them at their Church mission in Ipoh. The group arrived in 1887.¹⁰¹⁹

A more common route for female immigration was via marriage. This was particularly so among the urban middle-class communities. It was commonplace for males, and their families, to arrange a marriage with a girl from India. This could be the result of several reasons, firstly because there were a shortage of 'suitable' young women in Malaya and Singapore, or that they were simply utilising existing familial networks in India. This also reflected the exclusivity of some families who tended to be extremely caste-conscious. Upon settlement of a marriage between the two negotiating families, the bride, her mother, (and more often than not) siblings would accompany her to new husband's home in Malaya. Even if the bride was from India, it was commonplace for her mother to accompany her to her new Malayan home, at least till the birth and initial raising of her first child.¹⁰²⁰

The domain of the Indian Christian woman, were primarily centred in the home, marriage, child-bearing and the family. Unmarried (not widowed) women in many Indian Christian communities appeared to exist within a state of 'limbo'. Under these circumstances many of these women remained with their parents, in many cases taking responsibility for them in their old age. Many took on a career, an option not often open to her married counterparts. Among Roman Catholic families, the added option of becoming a nun was quite common.

various female dieties is unclear and often contradictory, allowing for a degree of 'space' for most women. Misogynist ideas are more clearly pronounced in the Old and New Testament.

¹⁰¹⁸ This was probably the earliest example of female Catholic Vellalar immigrating to Malaya. J. Stephens, 'Catholic Vellalar: Preserving a Special Identity' in *New Place, Old Ways: essays on Indian society and culture in modern Singapore*, (Dehli, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1984), p. 212.

¹⁰¹⁹ Stephens, 1984, p. 212. Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 September 1997.

¹⁰²⁰ Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick, (born 1938), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mrs. Mary Madeline Sebastian (nee Soosay), (born 1929), Singapore, Aug 1996. Interview with Mrs. Lily Sebastian (nee Ponnusamy), (1913-1989), Singapore, May 1988.

Expectations of 'feminity'

In the urban areas, young girls who were educated in the mission school system were supposedly given similar opportunities as their brothers. Generally, apart from issues relating to gender stereotyping for girls and boys, there appeared to be no strong difference between the opportunities open to both.¹⁰²¹ However differences between boys and girls were accentuated as a child grew older. The choice of 'nicknames' denoted an attitude of infantilism towards girls and women. It is quite common to come across older Indian Christian women popularly referred to, in family and social circles, as 'Girlie' (because she was the only daughter) or 'Baby' (because she was the youngest). Even daily tasks were often allocated according to gender; with young girls expected to help their mothers in household chores. What 'freedoms' a young girl enjoyed changed drastically with the onset of puberty and menstruation.¹⁰²² Activity was curtailed greatly and from then on they would be under the watchful eye of both parents and brothers till her wedding day. Hassan surmised that such action came about because of the families fear of the girl's own sexual awakening and her ensuing interest in things sexual and the opposite sex.¹⁰²³ Although the vast majority of these young urban-based women were allowed to receive an education, a young girl's daily itinerary was strictly regulated between home and school.¹⁰²⁴ Consequently it was socially unusual to come across pubescent Indian girls (Christian or otherwise), with many boys from that era noting how, for example, cinema-going was primarily an all-male activity. If a young girl was spotted at the cinema, shopping or in restaurant, it was usually with her parents or close male members of her family.¹⁰²⁵ Within many Roman Catholic Churches, men and women were separated by gender - males on one side of the Church, females on the other.¹⁰²⁶

¹⁰²¹ Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel), (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997. Interview with Mrs. Lily Sebastian (nee Ponnusamy), (1913-1989), Singapore, May 1988. Interview with Ms. Margaret Joseph, (born 1926), Kuala Lumpur, 18 Oct. 1997.

¹⁰²² Interview with Mrs. Mary Madeline Sebastian (nee Soosay), (born 1929), Singapore, Aug. 1996.

¹⁰²³ Riaz Hassan, *Ethnicity, Culture and Fertility*, (Singapore: Chopmen, 1980), p. 95.

¹⁰²⁴ Interview with Mrs. Mary Madeline Sebastian (nee Soosay), (born 1929), Singapore, Aug 1996.

Interview with Mrs. Lily Sebastian (nee Ponnusamy), (1913-1989), Singapore, May 1988.

¹⁰²⁵ Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. Interview with Ms. Margaret Joseph, (born 1926), Kuala Lumpur, 18 Oct. 1997.

¹⁰²⁶ Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921), Singapore, 21 Nov. 1996. This was prevalent in the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (Singapore) right up to the 1970s.

A young girl's reputation was paramount. It was imperative that she not 'tarnish the good name' of herself or her family. It was 'taboo' to befriend a boy outside of one's familial circles, to have a boyfriend or be seen to be too friendly with male strangers. It was also undesirable for many to even contemplate marrying a non-Christian, especially a Hindu. This did not appear to be a social impediment in the estates/plantations. A great number of marriages involved former members of Hindu community, who would convert to Christianity just before marriage.¹⁰²⁷ The breaching of any of these rules not only tarnished the good reputation of the girl involved, but also her siblings and family.¹⁰²⁸ Sexual promiscuity was unacceptable in all Churches.¹⁰²⁹ Virginity was of paramount importance for unmarried women, but male promiscuity was hypocritically tolerated to an extent.¹⁰³⁰ Girls were generally expected not to possess any knowledge about sexual intercourse. This information was usually conveyed to the girl just before marriage, sometimes by an older woman¹⁰³¹ or informally during the engagement proceedings.¹⁰³² Indian Christians deviated little from traditional Hindu practices. For example, a pregnant woman in her seventh month, had to abstain from sexual intercourse. After birth, some women were not allowed to enter a Church for forty days, on which she was given a blessing. Abortion, while tolerated among Hindus before the second month of pregnancy, was viewed as sinful - especially for Roman Catholics.¹⁰³³

Gender roles were also associated with specific tasks. One of these roles was that of housework. This sort of work was always unpaid and seen as the responsibility of the wife and mother. Expectations differed in the urban and plantation-based households. The vast majority of urban-based married women worked solely as 'housewives'. For example, between 1873 to 1903, there were no female Indian Christians working in

¹⁰²⁷ 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral (Kuala Lumpur), 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906', 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church (Kuala Lumpur), 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'.

¹⁰²⁸ Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel), (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997.

¹⁰²⁹ Hassan, 1980, p. 101.

¹⁰³⁰ Hassan, 1980, pp. 102, 113.

¹⁰³¹ Hassan, 1980, p. 96. This person was usually not her mother but an older relative or close friend of the mother.

¹⁰³² Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. In this particular example, relatives of the young bride-to-be, was 'humorously' briefed by her older female relatives (on her wedding day) on what to expect on her wedding night. Such issues were never spoken about, let alone joked about, under any other circumstance.

¹⁰³³ Hassan, 1980, pp. 117, 122-23, 124. The eating of unripe pineapples was used as a natural contraceptive by many Indian Christian women. Interview with Mrs. Lily Sebastian (nee Ponnusamy), (1913-1989), Singapore, May 1988.

the civil services of the Straits Settlements. However after 1903, and especially after the Second World War, the number jumped from zero to 29 or 5.6 per cent of employed Indian Christians in the Straits Settlements civil service.¹⁰³⁴ This was in contrast to the estates where dual responsibilities were expected of the estate-based wife. She was expected to work and earn a wage sometimes working full-time on the estate, while also seeing to her domestic responsibilities at home.¹⁰³⁵

Social and cultural restrictions which limited female autonomy, power and movement were lessened as a women got older. Among post office or railway-based families, work demanded many male employees to travel long distances, often staying away from their families for days or weeks on end. Under these circumstances, the wife and mother single-handedly brought up the children and ran the household.¹⁰³⁶

Restrictions were relaxed further if a woman had children or past menopause. While a young girl found herself constrained by a myriad of taboos, the older woman was able to attain informal authority over her household, family or social network. A semblance of this growing 'freedom' were illustrated in the common practice of urban housewives 'going visiting'. Upon completion of daily home duties, usually in the afternoon, many housewives would congregate at a specific household in the neighbourhood. These informal social groups were primarily neighbourhood-based, and in keeping with the ethnic segregation of work communities, were usually race-specific.¹⁰³⁷ This specificity was exacerbated by the inability of many housewives, with the exception of local born women, to speak languages other than their own mother-tongue.¹⁰³⁸ These women were mainly South Indian in origin, regardless of religious background.¹⁰³⁹ Patha Chatterjee noted how colonialism influenced middle-class 'progressive' attitudes towards women. British colonialism readily characterized traditional Indian cultural practices as barbaric. These stances were especially

¹⁰³⁴ *Straits Settlements Blue Books*, Civil Establishments List, 1873-1946.

¹⁰³⁵ 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral (Kuala Lumpur), 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906', 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church (Kuala Lumpur), 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'. Tan, 1991, pp. 93-7.

¹⁰³⁶ Interview with Miss Subitra Rao, (born early 1930s), Penang, 5 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921), Singapore, 21 Nov. 1996.

¹⁰³⁷ This size of a person's social circle was limited during this period. Telephones, which facilitated social interaction over larger distances, were almost non-existent in local Asian households. Interview with Mr. Stephen Cheng Chin Mong, (born 1918), Singapore, 22 Jan. 1997.

¹⁰³⁸ Unlike their husbands, fathers or male relatives, many of these women had limited access to formal education. Few had regular contact with any other women, apart from those involving household duties (i.e. for marketing), outside of their families or neighbourhood.

accentuated with regards to the status and treatment of Indian women under Hinduism and other indigenous cultural practices. Consequently perceptions of 'progressiveness' became linked with a tokenistic sympathy for the lessening of traditional female bondage.¹⁰⁴⁰ Hence by the mid-1930s local male-dominated, urban-based Indian associations, were encouraging the formation of 'Ladies' Section' in the different associations. By March 1936, the Selangor Indian association newspaper had commenced a women's column called 'Our Woman's Corner'. They were mainly patronised by housewives and were social and recreational in nature.¹⁰⁴¹ There appeared to be little to no encouragement from the male-dominated club to incorporate women into its club leadership.

New parameters of 'femininity' were created - educational opportunities, made possible by the missionary school system, instilled the bourgeois disciplines of thrift, orderliness, cleanliness and personal responsibility. Even practical skills such as literacy and accounting were aimed at reinforcing a woman's role as housewife. Her exposure to education and the 'outside world' were only tolerated as long as it did not threaten her femininity. Partha Chatterjee noted that once accepted boundaries between home and external social interaction had been established, patriarchal-based control could then be relaxed. Consequently among Indian Christian communities, new markers of femininity were created. This were often epitomised in dress, social demeanor and even religiosity. For example, if a man wanted to convey a degree of modernity, progressiveness, social mobility and affluence, it were absolutely necessary to dress in a European-style suit. Such attire often constituted the use of a white coat and pants, a tie or bow-tie and shiny black leather shoes. This was obviously an extremely important decision on their part. The wearing of suit and tie in a humid tropical climate (averaging around 30 degree Celsius) was a very uncomfortable exercise indeed. Hair was always cut short and well groomed with liberal amounts of oil-based 'hair cream'. Women, on the other hand, were always expected to dress in what was referred to as the traditional Indian 'sari'. This constituted the use of a tight fitting short-sleeved blouse (usually exposing a small section of the stomach), a

¹⁰³⁹ Interview with Miss Margaret Joseph, (born 1926), Kuala Lumpur, 18 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. David Sebastian, (born 1931), Singapore, 9 Aug. 1996.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Chatterjee, 1995, pp. 117-118.

¹⁰⁴¹ 'Notes of the Week', in *The Indian*, Kuala Lumpur, no. 2, 4 Jan. 1936, p. 8. 'Our Women's Corner', in *The Indian*, 28 March 1936, Kuala Lumpur, p. 15.

petticoat, and the use of a long traditionally elaborately printed 'sari' material which was wrapped around as a long skirt and thrown over her one shoulder like a sash. Traditionally styled leather open-toe sandals (sometimes western-styled sandals) were worn as foot-ware along with traditional styled jewelery. Home wear differed slightly. The tight fitting blouse was retained, but the cumbersome 'sari' was replaced with a long skirt. Men usually reverted to the use of a traditional 'sarong', along with a white 'T-shirt' or singlet. Therefore we find gender roles being articulated in modes of dress. Males, who were expected to confront 'outside world' and the colonial world found it necessary to acquire the use of socially mobile or 'progressive' attire. On the other hand, women, as the allocated keepers of all things cultural, traditional and personal,¹⁰⁴² were relegated to maintain the cultural sincerity of Indian Christian society.¹⁰⁴³

Although the severity of adherence varied very much from family to family,¹⁰⁴⁴ the expectations of many women were extremely narrow in comparison to men. Most men could aspire towards attaining an education, pursuing a career, getting married and finally having children. Women, on the other hand, were only given limited access to such opportunities. For most women, they could aspire to a limited education (this was dependent on domestic circumstances),¹⁰⁴⁵ and in very few cases, a career. The 'crowning glory' of her life would be marriage and the raising of healthy children.

Gender in the estates: Roles in flux

If the responsibilities of the average urban housewife were dominated by unpaid domestic duties and child-bearing, her estate counterpart often had the added burden of taking on a job. Samples taken from two Selangor-based Roman Catholic parishes show how most plantation wives held jobs, alongside their husbands. Between 1892 to

¹⁰⁴² Chatterjee, 1995, p. 117.

¹⁰⁴³ It is interesting to note other subtleties of dress. For example, Chinese women married to Indian Christian males were not expected to always don Indian saris. Many continued wearing their traditional 'sam-fu' (side-buttoned blouse and long pants) attire. Only on official or important occasions did they wear saris. Malayali women, appeared to have a more relaxed attitude to traditional dress which may have indicated a more gender liberal environment. Many wore modest western-styled dresses, but only donned saris during official occasions. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Interview with Mrs. Mary Madeline Sebastian (nee Soosay), (born 1929), Singapore, Aug. 1996. Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel), (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel), (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997. Anonymous, (born 1930s), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

1910 and 1923 to 1950, there were 381 employed estate Indian Christian wives out of approximately 440 marriages involving estate-based labour employees.¹⁰⁴⁶ No governmental or Church figures on colonial Indian Christian estate populations exist, but estimates between 5 per cent to 15 per cent have been used in this study.¹⁰⁴⁷ Unemployed married women were in a minority, over the same period, with only 134 women either 'jobless' or with no stated occupation.¹⁰⁴⁸ Despite the small number of 'unemployed' women, there appear to be specific trends. For example, there were only 24 unemployed women between 1892 to 1910 and 1923 to 1931. This low number indicated the gender ratio prevalent in the estates which was only remedied after the 1930s.¹⁰⁴⁹ Between 1931 and 1943 alone, this category increased to 58, and 52 between 1943 and 1949.¹⁰⁵⁰

Female employment was viewed as supplementary to that of their husband's income. In 1938, the Controller of Labour noted that, 'Indian women seem to aim at monthly earnings between \$5 and \$7 by working not more than 15 to 20 days in a month.'¹⁰⁵¹ This shows most women were not willing to work 'full-time' if they could avoid it - the heavy demands of domestic responsibilities already taking up much of their energy. If employment was sought it was usually seen as supplementary to that of her working husband. Female employment was not viewed as greatly improving the personal financial position of the family, but as a necessary contribution to the already meagre familial income. The idea of female subordination was reinforced and encouraged by the upper echelons of the estate hierarchy. Tasks were delineated as 'skilled' and

¹⁰⁴⁶ Plantations/Estates and areas under the religious jurisdiction of St. Anthony's Church were: Kent Estate, Seminyeh Estate, Braemah Estate (Kajang), Sungei Banggan, Klang, Sungei Chow Estate, Behrang Estate (Tanjung Malim), Rawang, Ampang, Kepong, Batu Caves, Mount Estate, Puchong, Kerling Estate, Sungei Buloh, Serdang Estate, Serendah, Sentul, Petaling, Bangi, Penmore Estate, Isa Field Estate, Eliminah Estate, Bailey's Estate, Seremban and Coal Field Estate. *Marriage: St. John's Cathedral* (Kuala Lumpur), 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906, 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church (Kuala Lumpur), 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'. (Records for the years 1911 to 1923 were destroyed in bombing raids during the Second World War).

¹⁰⁴⁷ Interview with Fr. Louis Guitatt, (born 1910), Cheras, 25 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick, (born 1938), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997.

¹⁰⁴⁸ 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral (Kuala Lumpur), 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906', 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church (Kuala Lumpur), 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'. (Records for the years 1911 to 1923 were destroyed in bombing raids during the Second World War).

¹⁰⁴⁹ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 67. 'Indian Labour: XIV - How to Increase Efficiency', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (12), Kuala Lumpur, 29 Mar. 1929, p. 2. *Straits Settlements Annual Report 1935*, Singapore, pp. 802-4.

¹⁰⁵⁰ 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral (Kuala Lumpur), 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906', 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church (Kuala Lumpur), 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950'.

'unskilled'. Female and child labour were allocated as 'unskilled' labour and given supplementary tasks such as 'weeders'.¹⁰⁵²

In contrast to their urban-based middle-class counterparts, working estate women found themselves in a sexually charged situation. Sexual activity was rife in plantations, and this was exacerbated by heavy imbalance between the number of males to females - men greatly outnumbered women.¹⁰⁵³ Under such conditions, marital status and access to regular sexual contact became a highly prized 'commodity' for many men. Issues like homosexuality was not openly discussed, and therefore ignored by the community and most Churches. Male to male sexual relations, especially in the male dominated plantations of Malaya and the Straits Settlements, were common. Governmental sources had noted a small number of male children present at 'a few of the brothels for an unnatural purpose.'¹⁰⁵⁴ In the 1880s, the number of reported male cases of anal and rectal diseases rose (in comparison with the previous decade) at a Pauper Hospital in Singapore.¹⁰⁵⁵ Colonial authorities took a grave view of acts of 'sodomy'. In 1910 a Perak court charged an individual to 9 years of 'rigorous imprisonment'.¹⁰⁵⁶ The views of the different Churches on the issue of homosexuality mirrored the dictates of their Church hierarchies. Little to no contemporary references were made about male homosexuality within Indian Christian communities or the Church. Only one example of possible homosexual activity was sighted in the course of the research for this thesis. An orphanage employee in Penang, was sacked on account of 'misconduct' - his crime is not stated. The accused claimed, '(He) trusted the boys beyond the limit and I saw no one of arguing and pleading my cause. The nature of some of these boys are mean that they once start to say a thing against the master especially when the issue is from a cleverly

¹⁰⁵¹ Tan, 1991, p. 95 citing Straits Settlements, *Annual Departmental Reports for they year 1938*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁵² Amarjit Kaur, 'Tapper and Weeders: South Indian Plantation Workers in Peninsula Malaysia, 1880-1970', in *South Asia* (Armidale: South Asian Studies Association, 1998), p. 90. Tan, 1991, pp. 87-88.

¹⁰⁵³ Kaur, 1998, p. 86. Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 67. 'Indian Labour: XIV - How to Increase Efficiency', in *The Indian Pioneer*, 3 (12), Kuala Lumpur, 29 Mar. 1929, p. 2. *Straits Settlements Annual Report 1935*, Singapore, pp. 802-4.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Tan, 1999, p. 29, citing A. V. Cousins, *Registrar General*, Appendix O, 21 Nov. 1876, C. D. O. Committee Report in P. L. C. S. S. 1877, p. 1xiv.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Tan, 1999, p. 29, citing *Enclosure 4 in No. 21, Colonial Surgeon, Penang to Principal Medical Officer*, 3 Mar. 1887 in H. C. 347, Sept. 1887, p. 36.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Tan, 1999, p. 31, citing *Evidence NO. 33, Henry Charles Ridges, Acting Protector of Chinese, Perak* in P. F. C., F. M. S. 1909-10, C87.

planned sanrec [sic] they do not even hesitate to smear.' The person involved appeared to have been expelled from the Church and future correspondence ignored by the concerned parish priest. Request for a letter of recommendation for employment was also ignored.¹⁰⁵⁷ However, it appears attitudes towards male homosexuality varied. Reverend Shellabear, of the Methodist Church, maintained that it was better to allow same-sex male sexual relations than tolerate prostitution because it was 'more horrible for wicked men to ruin innocent young girls than ruin each other.'¹⁰⁵⁸ To date I have not come across any references, personal or governmental, to female related homosexual activity in the Indian Christian communities.

Women, who up to that point held very little sway in the male-dominated estate hierarchies, found new leverage from which to challenge the male-dominated status quo. For example, there were occasional instances of older women marrying men, often ten years their junior. This was not apparent in the urban communities.¹⁰⁵⁹ Consequently by shifting allegiances from one male to another, it often made it possible to better one's own social, economic or political standing. Such incidents were prevalent not only within the labourer community but also involved British estate managers. Examples of such incidents were relatively commonplace right up to the 1950s. Estate wives were often hired as domestic servants in the homes of the estate manager. In addition to their household duties, these women were also expected to cater to the sexual needs of their employer. In some cases, this one being in Port Dickson, three 'domestic' servants saw to the needs of one estate manager. Many of these women were married, their husbands working on the same estate. To help placate these husbands, estate managers often promoted them to the status of kangany. There appeared to be little to no overt stigmatization of these women. Many realising that by doing so, they could be severely reprimanded by the all-powerful British estate

¹⁰⁵⁷ 'Untitled letters from ----- to Fr. Riboud', dated 26 Jun., 27 Jul. and 2 Aug. 1939. Church of St. Francis Xavier, Penang. His 'crime' was not reported to the police, preferring to handle the situation on their own terms, probably due to embarrassment. In recent years, instances of physical abuse, sexual molestation and paedophilia within Church-based orphanages and schools have come to light, especially within the more 'open' environment of some western countries. However no information was available on this issue in colonial Malaya and Singapore.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Tan, 1999, p. 31, citing *Enclosure in No. 24, Report of the Committee appointed by the Governor of the S. S. to Enquire and Report on certain suggestions made by the Secretary of State for the Colonies as to measures to be adopted with regard to Contagious Diseases and Brothels, with a view to checking the spread of Venereal Disease*, 1898, Appendix E, 12 May 1898 in H. C. (523, 1899, p. 75.

manager. Relations were therefore 'cordial'. These 'relationships' often lasted between five to ten years. According to interviewees, few Christian Indians were involved in such liaisons.¹⁰⁶⁰

These circumstances were also aided by other developments. Despite the fact that female related employment and income were small and therefore deemed as supplementary, their financial contributions made up an important part of a family unit's meagre income. Therefore as wage earners, they were able to wield a greater degree of influence and clout within their families and community. For example, marriages between much older women and younger men, (in some cases a decade older) unheard of in the urban-based communities, took place occasionally in the estates.¹⁰⁶¹ This is also evident in the high number of female widow remarriages. Although lower than of their male estate counterparts, this was more than double the proportion for their urban female counterparts.

Domestic disputes were viewed so gravely in some estates, that management even authorised kangany to kill workers who engaged in premarital sexual liaisons.¹⁰⁶² Such disputes were often portrayed as a rural phenomenon, associated within the repressive confines of the estates. However evidence uncovered from local Church records shows this was not necessarily the case. Challengers to patriarchal authority were reasonably commonplace, though to a much lesser extent than in the estates, in urban-based communities. There were examples of urban-based, co-habitation outside of marriage, adultery, marital and domestic violence in urban communities, appeared to be more common place than first thought; and in a large proportion of the cases a female perpetrator was involved, often enforcing demands onto a male partner or family.¹⁰⁶³

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Marriages 2 Apr. 1923 – 12 Sept. 1936, Marriages 14 Sept. 1936 – 12 Feb. 1949*, St. Anthony's Church, Kuala Lumpur.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Interview with Mr. Robert, (born 1935), Bukit Rotan (Selangor), 19 Oct. 1997.

¹⁰⁶¹ There were several examples of these non-hegemonic marriages. One such marriage took place at the St. Anthony's Church (Kuala Lumpur) on the 18 August 1941. *Marriages: St. Anthony's Church* (Kuala Lumpur), 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950.

¹⁰⁶² P. Ramasamy, 'Labour Control and Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya', in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 19 (3-4), Malaysia, Apr./Jul. 1992, p. 99.

¹⁰⁶³ 'Untitled letter from Fr. L. S. Norris to Fr. Riboud' dated 14 July 1947, 'Untitled letter from J. F. Regis to the Police Magistrate Penang' (copy to Fr. Riboud) dated 13 Oct. 1937, 'The Humble Petition of the Above named Anthoniamal from Anthoniamal c/o The Priest Roman Catholic Church to The Honourable Judge', High Court Penang dated 22 July 2602, 'Untitled Statement of Anthonisamy

Education system

The educational system in Malaya and the Straits Settlements were characterised by a shortage of schools for all children. However taking into account the gender biased nature of colonial governments, the likelihood of a fair proportion of revenue being allocated for female education was close to non-existent.¹⁰⁶⁴ If a young girl was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to get an education, the limited array of subjects often mirrored the narrow gender roles expectant of British and Malayan colonial society.¹⁰⁶⁵ The European penchant for racism and misogyny, brought with it a new perspective which is well reflected in the literature of the day. Popular writing highlighted the supposed barbarity and repulsiveness of Oriental culture as well as the passivity of Oriental females - only to be rescued by a European male.¹⁰⁶⁶ Such views encouraged rejection of their own cultural practices,¹⁰⁶⁷ reaffirming their status as passive beings within the realm of colonialism. In addition, 'scientific' discourse, beginning in the nineteenth century, began to paint women as being intellectually inferior to men.¹⁰⁶⁸

Several Church groups did cater to female education, but these efforts were few and far between.¹⁰⁶⁹ In addition, traditional practices imposed on girls often had a detrimental affect on the educational opportunities of boys. In 1905, a Church paper reported that a number of the 'brightest young men' were often forced to leave school

(driver) of Butterworth to the Senior Judge', Supreme Court Penang (copy to Fr. Riboud) dated 11 Oct. 1939, 'Untitled letter from Anthony Francis (P. Besar) to Fr. Riboud' dated 6 Nov. 1940, 'Untitled letter from Fr. Clement (Bagan Serai) to Fr. Riboud' dated 4 Dec. 2602, 'Untitled letter from Mr S. G. Pereira (Labour Office, Penang) to Fr. Riboud' dated 24 Nov. 1940, 'Note from Rev. S. M. Swaminathan (Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Mar. 1948, 'Untitled note from S. G. Pereira (Labour Office, Penang) to Fr. Riboud' dated 15 Sept. 2602, 'Untitled letter from Nagammal alias Papa d/o Govindasamy (Railway Quarters, Prai) to Fr. Riboud' dated 21 Jan. 1952. James F. Warren made reference to disagreements between husbands and wives on matters such as migration, birth control, the position of women and standards of living, being relatively common. James F. Warren, 'Prostitution in Singapore Society and the Karayuki-san', in P. J. Rimmer and L. M. Allen (ed.), *The Underside of Malaysian History: Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers* ..., (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), p. 162.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Rev. S. S. Pakianathan, 'Our Responsibility in Malaya', in *The Indian*, 7 (1), Oct. 1925, R. B. Krishan and C. R. Menon (ed.), p. 149.

¹⁰⁶⁵ O'Brien, July 1980, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Loomba, 1998, pp. 153-4.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Chatterjee, 1995, p. 118.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Loomba, 1998, pp. 160-1.

¹⁰⁶⁹ 'The Anglo Tamil School, Singapore' in *The Malaysia Message*, XV (3), Dec. 1905, p. 25.

to find employment because of the dowry requirements of an unmarried sister.¹⁰⁷⁰

These dowry costs appeared to be the biggest impediment to female education.

Women, apart from being the 'most expensive item in the family', did not compensate the cost of an expensive education. The payment of the 'dowry' is another traditional practice, like caste, which was maintained with conversion to Christianity. It entailed the paying, by the bride's family, of a specified amount (usually in real estate, jewelry or cash) to the family of the groom. Amounts varied according to the affluence or traditional beliefs of the families involved. In fact, an education was often deemed as being a negative in the marriage stakes. Discriminatory stereotypes of the 'educated' women, devoid of womanly grace and modesty, were common.¹⁰⁷¹

Orphanages and homes

Most missions and their schools ran orphanages or homes for the young. Although these establishments were not very large, demand for places were strong.¹⁰⁷² Numbers varied from institution to institution and was heavily reliant on the size of the total population of the city or town. Consequently in 1900 at the Taiping convent, there were only nine children under the charge of resident nuns.¹⁰⁷³ At the Methodist-based 'Miss C. Nind Deaconess Home' in Singapore the number stood at 72 in 1905.¹⁰⁷⁴ At the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Penang, there were up to 400 children in its orphanage between the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰⁷⁵ These orphanages were generally non-gender or race specific.¹⁰⁷⁶ Most appeared to accept both boys and girls, although most

¹⁰⁷⁰ 'Tamil Wedding Dowries', in *The Malaysia Message*, XV (1), Oct. 1905, p. 2. This supposedly was common not only with the Hindu but the Christian boys as well.

¹⁰⁷¹ Mrs. E. V. Davies M. A., 'Women's Education in South India', in *The Malaysia Message*, 37 (4), Jan. 1927, p. 6. 'Our Women's Corner', in *The Indian*, 28 March 1936, Singapore, p. 15.

¹⁰⁷² "'Tamil Girls' Orphanage and Training School, Penang', in *The Malaysia Message*, XV (3), Dec. 1905, p. 30. 'Application from Roman Catholic Convent, Taiping, for aid towards maintenance of orphans', 12 Jan. 1900, High Commissioner 636/1900. (translation from French). Sophia Blackmore, 'Miss C. Nind Deaconess Home', in *The Malaysia Message*, Dec. 1905, XV (3), pp. 27-9.

¹⁰⁷³ 'Application from Roman Catholic Convent, Taiping, for aid towards maintenance of orphans', 12 Jan 1900, High Commissioner for Malay States 636/1900.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Blackmore, Dec. 1905, XV (3), p. 27.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Hwa Mei Shen, 'Bound by the covenant to care', in *Sunday Star*, 18 Aug. 1996, Kuala Lumpur, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷⁶ 'Application from Roman Catholic Convent, Taiping, for aid towards maintenance of orphans', 12 Jan 1900, High Commissioner for Malay States 636/1900. Emily Early Buchanan, 'Official Minutes of the Eighth Session of the Malaysia Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Singapore, February 17-22, 1900', Singapore, American Missionary Press, 1900, p. 50.

Most of their male and female charges tended to be in their infancy. It would be extremely unlikely for the convent to have accepted older boys into its fold.

orphanages did cater for boys or girls separately.¹⁰⁷⁷ Many of their young charges were educated to varying degrees.¹⁰⁷⁸

The main reason for a child being left to an orphanage was poverty. Numerous examples of family units, broken up by the death of a father, mother or both, were commonplace. For example, one 1899 account tells of a recently widowed mother, leaving her young daughter at an orphanage, only to die four days later herself. In 1900, a small girl was left at a Taiping convent by her homeless mother, who died several months later. Another account tells of an illegitimate boy, brought to the convent by his mother. She died six months later.¹⁰⁷⁹ Not all circumstances were this bad. One account told of how a former Madrasi barber, having left his four children at an orphanage, promised to take them back when he was financially able to do so.¹⁰⁸⁰ There were also several accounts of older girls, usually in their late teens to early twenties, being 'rescued' from prostitution. These orphanages were obviously seen by many women as a kind of refuge. A 1901 account told of how a young Ipoh-based Malayali female prostitute actually requested a police inspector send her 'to some convent'.¹⁰⁸¹ Under the 'Womens and Girls Protection Ordinance' (1887), colonial authorities were given the responsibility of placing all females prostitute under the age of 16 years into a refuge which allowed them, 'a moral course of life.'¹⁰⁸²

It is obvious that a considerable proportion of 'orphans' were often former prostitutes or sex workers.¹⁰⁸³ Many of these girls were often forced into this line of work, poverty giving many a young girl little option. Few women arrived in Malaya and the

¹⁰⁷⁷ For example, in Singapore, girls were taken care of by the sisters of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (C. H. I. J, Town Convent), while the boys were taken by the brothers of St. Joseph's Institution, across the road. In Penang, girls were taken in by the C. H. I. J., while boys were taken by the brothers of St. Xavier's Institution or by the orphanage situated at the Church of St. Francis Xavier.

¹⁰⁷⁸ As noted from Church marriage records, some orphans could sign their names while others could not.

¹⁰⁷⁹ 'Application from Roman Catholic Convent, Taiping, for aid towards maintenance of orphans', 12 Jan 1900, High Commissioner for Malay States 636/1900, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Emily Early Buchanan, *Official Minutes of the Eighth Session of the Malaysia Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Singapore, February 17-22, 1900*, Singapore, American Missionary Press, 1900, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸¹ Rev. C. S. Paul, 'Ipoh Tamil', in *The Malaysia Message*, June 1901, X (9), Singapore, p. 114. The young woman had gone to the police station, making the request.

¹⁰⁸² Tan, 1999, p. 9, citing *Colonial Secretary, Minutes, S. S. Legislative Council Meeting*, 28 Dec. 1886 in PLCSS 1886, B248.

Straits Settlements as sex workers/prostitutes. In the absence of statistics for the Indian community, figures pertaining to Chinese sex workers could give an accurate indication of the circumstances of the day. It was estimated that only 20 per cent had actually been prostitutes in China. The majority were forced into the profession due to abandonment or familial breakups.¹⁰⁸⁴ Working life, under such circumstances, was not pleasant. Brothel owners preyed on the precarious position of these young girls and women.¹⁰⁸⁵

In keeping with the authoritarian nature of colonial society, orphanages often took strong liberties with regards to 'sanitising' or 'protecting' girls from their own 'inappropriate' backgrounds. One interviewee told of how his mother and aunt, whose only surviving parent having died, had all accompanying documentation burnt in 1915. This unfortunately included valuable land title deeds. These Taiping-based nuns, at the time, explained that it was necessary to help prevent the possibility of their reversion to Hinduism.¹⁰⁸⁶ This appeared to be a common practice among orphanages in the region. Critical studies of Church-based orphanages operating in Western Australia at the time found a policy of cutting 'children off from their previous life, in order to make it "easier" for them to adjust', very common. No personal possessions were allowed, to the extent where even toothbrushes and underclothes had to be shared with other children.¹⁰⁸⁷ Discipline was severe and corporal punishment (along with physical abuse) was common.¹⁰⁸⁸ Life was extremely spartan and hard. An orphan's day began just before six in the morning, beginning with the compulsory attendance at prayers. This was followed by a combination of chores, school and Mass lasting until a quarter to four in the afternoon. Then it was back to chores, then bedtime. This regimen continued 6 days a week. The children were not allowed outside the convent and the gates were locked at night.¹⁰⁸⁹ Education was obviously not a priority for orphans. Similarly, many Singapore-based charges

¹⁰⁸³ Access to convent records (Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus, [Town Convent], Singapore) was denied on the basis that many of the girls were originally of 'disreputable' backgrounds, and that the release of such information could embarrass their descendents.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Tan, 1999, p. 13.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Tan, 1999, pp. 17-9.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Interview with Mr. A. J. Patrick, (born 1938), Kuala Lumpur, 16 Oct. 1997.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Philip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 112, 121.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Bean and Melville, 1989, pp. 20-21, 92, 114, 122-124. These examples also include incidences from boy's-only orphanages.

were educated to varying degrees, as observed from Church marriage records, many orphans could barely sign their names while others could not.

This authoritarian environment was exacerbated by the heavy financial demands involved in the running an orphanage. Maintenance of an orphanage was difficult, especially for an organisation with no regular sources of income.¹⁰⁹⁰ By the turn of the century, many orphanages, particularly those being run under the auspices of the various Roman Catholic orders, began to feel the pressure of growing demand for their services. Many of these orphanages ran 'Boarding schools' alongside their orphanage. Boarders paid for the privilege of living under the guidance of the school. This was usually a relatively expensive exercise, open mainly to the affluent and the 'middle-classes'.¹⁰⁹¹ Profits from paying boarders helped finance the costs of running the orphanage.¹⁰⁹² A detailed account of the finances of one such orphanage does exist. Despite exclusively catering to the needs of boys, it sheds light on the circumstances of such an establishment.

The St. Joseph's Orphanage, based on the premises of the Church of St. Francis Xavier (Penang) was opened around 1908, and catered primarily for its local Indian Christian community.¹⁰⁹³ Of the 25¹⁰⁹⁴ boys in 1921, 4 appear to list their parents as unknown. The rest appear to have at least one known parent, with a majority of thirteen boys with both parents known. By 1936 the number of boys had jumped to about 50. Of this number, 37 entries showed that at least one parent had died. The ages of the boys ranged between 7 to 14 years. It appears from 1929, all boys were sent to the nearby St. Xavier's Institution for their education.¹⁰⁹⁵

¹⁰⁸⁹ Bean and Melville, 1989, pp. 123-124.

¹⁰⁹⁰ 'Application from Roman Catholic Convent, Taiping, for aid towards maintenance of orphans', 12 Jan 1900, High Commissioner for Malay States 636/1900.

¹⁰⁹¹ Hwa, 18 Aug. 1996, p. 3. These boarders were separated into 'First class' and 'Second class' boarders.

¹⁰⁹² Sophia Blackmore, 'Miss C. Nind Deaconess Home', in *The Malaysia Message*, Dec. 1905, XV (3), p. 27. Second class boarders paid a monthly sum of \$5. *Cash Book: St. Xavier's Institution Boarding Department 1918-1928*, p. 25. The average boarder at S. X. I. paid around \$25 to \$30 per month (early to middle 1920s), depending on the cost incurred.

¹⁰⁹³ 'Orphanage Admission Book', Church of St. Francis Xavier, Penang, undated (probably around 1908). Orphan admissions date back to as early as 1908.

¹⁰⁹⁴ The number of boys in residence, over the years, appeared to be around twenty.

¹⁰⁹⁵ 'Orphanage Admission Book', undated.

Cost incurred by the orphanage was \$650.80 for the year 1921, \$791.90 (1922), \$930.40 (1925), \$1040.12 (1926), \$1037.52 (1927), \$999.17 (1928), \$1161.09 (1929), \$1066.32 (1930), \$895.27 (1934) and \$1521.30 (1936). From 1922, an annual contribution from the 'Catholic Mission' helped offset annual running cost. However annual assistance steadily declined over the years from \$360 in 1922 to \$72 in 1936. Cost were mainly from the payment of educational exercise books, laundry (Dhoby), food, the hire of a cook and maid (Ayah), firewood, coconuts, rice, sarongs, medicines, sewing of clothes, burials, soap, hospitalisation costs, school fees, mats, blankets, night soil charges, 'water rent', oil, massalé (spices) and haircuts. Average annual cost per head was \$50.60 in 1928 and \$92.72 in 1930. Governmental grants were miniscule and amounted to \$39 per month (\$468 per year), between the years 1924 to 1938.¹⁰⁹⁶ By the 1930s, new sources of income were sought, with a handful of local benefactors coming to the aid of the orphanage. Mr. Lim Hup Eng donated \$169 along with \$10 from a Mr. Watts. Orphan numbers jumped to seventy-four in 1938. Prior to the Second World War, all boys were Indian. However by the early 1950s, the odd Chinese boy began to appear on the orphanage roll.¹⁰⁹⁷

Orphanages also acted as hospitals for sick and unwanted children. The sheer number of sick and dying infants left to the care of convent nuns is indicated by their dominance in the registers of local Christian cemeteries. A close study of local cemetery burial records gives an interesting glimpse into this area. For example, between 30th June 1911 and 5th July 1911, at least 40 per cent (estimate: 2-4 a day) of all burials at the prominent Bidadari (Roman Catholic section) cemetery in Singapore were that of 'convent' or orphanage-based children. These children ranged between the ages of 1 week and 9 months.¹⁰⁹⁸ The high death rate should not be viewed in a suspicious light. Infant mortality was extremely high under the auspices of the colonial regime. Infant deaths numbered around 348.5 per 1,000 births in 1901, 232.2 in 1921, 191.3 in 1931 and 142.6 in 1940.¹⁰⁹⁹ This was undoubtedly augmented by shortcomings in medical developments available at the time, lack of funding and

¹⁰⁹⁶ 'Orphanage Admission Book', undated.

¹⁰⁹⁷ 'Orphanage Admission Book', undated.

¹⁰⁹⁸ 'Register Bidadari', (various dates), Singapore, E. C. C. 051, National Archives of Singapore. The different children were listed as dying from Bronchitis (1), Malaria (2), Convulsions (4) and Marasmus (malnutrition; lack of protein and carbohydrates) (1).

¹⁰⁹⁹ Nala Tan, *Health and Welfare*, in E. Chew and E. Lee, *A History of Singapore*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 340, 344.

exacerbated by prevailing religious-based nursing traditions. Judging by nursing practises prevalent in France during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the high mortality rate was not helped by the theologically fatalist approach of many religious orders. Many French-based orders often placed a greater emphasis on religious theology than simple pragmatism with regards to health care. Religious objectives and the 'salvation of the soul' were seen as being more important than the health of the body.¹¹⁰⁰ Therefore the preparation of the sick for deliverance into the next world was of utmost concern. This predicament was not enhanced by the Roman Catholic Church's zealous push for conversions to Catholicism. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that a closer scrutiny of Church statistics showed how most baptisms comprised of mainly dying persons!¹¹⁰¹ All incoming children and infants were baptised immediately, sometimes by a priest, otherwise by an authorised nun.

In keeping with the prevalent ideas of domestic female responsibilities,¹¹⁰² the orphanages particularly those of the Roman Catholic convents, encouraged many of their young charges, on reaching the age of fifteen or so, to get married. Many of their male suitors were members of the local Church, who upon recommendation by his parish priest, visited the convent and chose a wife, with the permission of the nuns in residence. This was a common among 'high' caste male Protestant converts in India. Many of these 'high' caste converts, converted as individuals and were therefore isolated from their mainly Hindu caste grouping. Many married outside of their caste circles, many being paired off with girls from the mission orphanage.¹¹⁰³ This was a common practice in Malaya and the Straits Settlements, especially in the nineteenth and probably well into the first decades of the twentieth century. Similar non-Christian organisations, such as the Chinese clan-based Po Lueng Kuk (Singapore) operated under similar circumstances from the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁰⁴ Young women were also given the option of joining the missionary organisation/order, were it decided she

¹¹⁰⁰ Colin Jones, *The Charitable Imperative: Hospitals and Nursing in Ancien Regime and Revolutionary France*, (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 67.

¹¹⁰¹ Williams, 1976, p. 103.

¹¹⁰² 'Application from Roman Catholic Convent, Taiping, for aid towards maintenance of orphans', 12 Jan 1900, High Commissioner for Malay States 636/1900. Sr. Marie refers to the convents duty to '... bring up these children and make good housewives and good Mothers of them', p. 2.

¹¹⁰³ Lionel Caplan, 'Caste and castelessness among South Indian Christians', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Jul. - Dec. 1980, 14 (2), pp. 218-19.

¹¹⁰⁴ Tan, 1999, p. 11.

was suitable. There were numerous examples of persons staying on as teachers, missionaries, school or Church helpers.¹¹⁰⁵

Match-making and Dowries

Match-making and the dowries were a recognised precursor to marriage and took many forms. Most marriages before the Second World War was 'arranged'.

'Arranged' in that the bride and groom did not have had a direct hand in officially initiating the proposal of marriage. This delicate procedure was often handled by an intermediary, usually a relative or a close friend.¹¹⁰⁶ In other circumstances relatives would write to family in India, who would then make arrangements in finding an appropriate girl.¹¹⁰⁷ Many of these matches were usually related by blood, some closely and others distantly (cross-cousin marriage, popular among Hindus, was generally frowned upon by Christians).¹¹⁰⁸ Kin-networks were often used to look for suitable marriage partners, probably explaining the extent to which many nineteenth century matches had been made in India, since few had a large familial network in Malaya and Singapore.¹¹⁰⁹ Caste differences played an important part in the negotiation of marriages. This was one of the rare scenarios where the 'taboo' subject of caste was actually discussed in the Indian Christian context, and only then within the closed circle of the two negotiating families.¹¹¹⁰

However, these negotiations were not necessarily initiated by the male or his intermediaries. In many cases, a father of a marriageable girl would initiate the process

¹¹⁰⁵ Sophia Blackmore, 'Miss C. Nind Deaconess Home', in *The Malaysia Message*, Dec. 1905, XV (3), pp. 27-9.

¹¹⁰⁶ Interview with Mr. David Sebastian, (born 1931), Singapore, 9 Aug. 1996. Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 24 Jan. 1997. Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson, (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997.

¹¹⁰⁷ In the event a Christian convert did not have access to a familial network, as in the case of people who had been disowned by their families and caste groups due to religious conversion, missionaries often acted as matchmakers. Lionel Caplan, Jul. - Dec. 1980, 14 (2), p. 219.

¹¹⁰⁸ Hassan, 1980, p. 108.

¹¹⁰⁹ Stephens, 1994, pp. 216-8. This issue was discussed in relation to the Roman Catholic Vellalar community. However, similar circumstances would have been commonplace with other caste groups in colonial Malaya and Singapore.

¹¹¹⁰ Interview with Fr. Aloysius Doraisamy, (born 1935), Singapore, 20 Nov. 1996. Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson, (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997. Interview with Mr. L. S. Rajoo, (born 1921) and Mr. Joseph John, (born 1939), Singapore, 21 Nov. 1996. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

by suggesting a match-up with a boy's family.¹¹¹¹ The use of the term 'arranged', as in a 'arranged marriage' has to be more specifically understood. The idea of free social interaction between the sexes was not conducive to social conventions of the day.

Unmarried persons, especially girls, were heavily discouraged from fraternising with boys.¹¹¹² The concept of 'falling in love', before marriage, was not an important issue. 'Love' was viewed as something developed during the process of living together as husband and wife. Relationships were based more on obligation than passion.

Under these circumstances, interests in the opposite sex was often conveyed through a neutral proxy or not at all.¹¹¹³ 'Arranged' marriages was often a 'fait accompli' - the couple were not supposed to question the decision of their 'arrangers', usually their parents.¹¹¹⁴ Under better circumstances, a couple who knew and liked each other, might initiate 'arrangements' through their family, provided they were deemed compatible by the families involved. Once both families had come to a nuptial agreement, both parties were bound to uphold it. The breaking or withdrawal of an offer was unheard of. Were it to happen, it usually reflected badly on the girl's family and would deeply damage her chances of finding another marriageable partner.

Damage to the reputation of the boy and his family was not usually as severe. This would still be the case even if it were the boy's family who initiated the breaking of the agreement.¹¹¹⁵

Dowry payments made from a bride's family to the groom's family were common among Indian Christians.¹¹¹⁶ A 1905 article noted the heavy financial burden imposed on many Indian Christian families as a result of debilitating 'dowry' payments.¹¹¹⁷ The amounts varied according to the wealth of the families involved, with some accounts from the 1940s and 1950s amounting to between \$10,000 and \$20,000! These

¹¹¹¹ Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 24 Jan. 1997.

¹¹¹² Interview with Ms. Margaret Joseph, (born 1926), Kuala Lumpur, 18 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson, (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997.

¹¹¹³ For example, 'love letters' was a common mode of communication, usually conveyed by a third party. Interview with Mrs. Mary Magdeline Sebastian (nee Soosay), (born 1929), Singapore, 9 Aug. 1996.

¹¹¹⁴ Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson, (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997. This was common before the Second World War. Couples, especially girls, began to challenge these arrangements after the war, with instances of girls rejecting their families preferred choice.

¹¹¹⁵ Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson, (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997.

¹¹¹⁶ Ravindra K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 145.

payments would often be given in the form of cash, gold/jewelery, household utensils or property.¹¹¹⁸ The payment of the dowry was quite an important part of the marriage proceedings. It entailed a large or sometimes token payment, by the bride's family, to the family of the groom. It was traditionally meant to be used for the upkeep of the bride should her new husband or family encounter financial problems. Research for this study could not definitively conclude if the large dowry payment gave a degree of power to wife in the marriage. Other conditions would have to be also examined in tandem with this, such as the relationship between the two 'marrying' families and community expectations. This varied from family to family.

Marriage and remarriage

Due to the unbalanced gender ratio in existence in colonial Malaya and Singapore, marriage prospects for many males were limited. In most cases prospective marriages were usually arranged with and took place in India. Many local brides and especially bridegrooms were often paired off with a mate in India, only to bring back their new marriage partner to Malaya after all the processes of the marriage ceremony had been completed.¹¹¹⁹ Financial circumstances dictated one's ability to marry. Due to the unbalanced gender ratio in Malaya and the Straits Settlements, such prospects were often out of the question. Expenses involved in marriage arrangements and travelling to India were often prohibitive. Consequently for many estate-based men, matrimony was postponed till after the completion of their employment contract and a suitable amount of money had been saved. By this time, most workers were ready to return to India anyway.

When local marriages were celebrated, several features differentiated it from that of their urban counterparts. Firstly, all matrimonial matches were made within the estates itself. Marriages between estate workers (referred to as 'coolies' in Church records) were often with other estate workers. Occasionally there were marriages between the higher ranking estate mandore or kangany and a worker - in these cases the worker was always female, while the mandore or kangany was male. In the vast majority of cases in the estate, all marriageable women were employed. Age differences were also

¹¹¹⁷ 'Tamil Wedding Dowries', in *The Malaysia Message*, XV (1), Oct. 1905, p. 2.

¹¹¹⁸ Interview with Ms. Margaret Joseph, (born 1926), Kuala Lumpur, 18 Oct. 1997. Jacintha Stephens, 1994, p. 228.

clearly characterised with the majority of males being on average between five to ten years older than the females.¹¹²⁰ However, taking into account the uneven gender ratio of the estate populations, there were examples of compromises being made. As noted earlier there were several cases of much older women (by at least a decade) marrying younger men, a practise unheard of among the urban middle-classes. However, religious conversion through marriage, which was a common occurrence among estate communities, did appear to highlight any gender bias. There appeared to be an equal split between both male and female conversions, in the majority of cases where the Hindu partner converted to Roman Catholicism.¹¹²¹

Widow and widower remarriage in Christian Churches were promoted by most missionaries in India. This was seen to help de-emphasise the traditional custom of child marriage. As a result, there was a higher occurrence of widow remarriage among the Christian communities. This was often in defiance of traditional practices, particularly among the higher caste groups, which disallowed widow remarriage.¹¹²² This practice was apparently carried over to Malaya and the Straits Settlements, with minor modifications. Remarriages (as a result of death of a spouse) amounted to 9.61 per cent of all marriages in the Roman Catholic parish of the Church of St. Anthony (Kuala Lumpur). Of these remarriages, 5.56 per cent was estate-based, while 4.07 per cent was urban-based. In the estates, 3.43 per cent of males, and 2.12 per cent of females were remarried. In the urban areas, 3.09 per cent of males and 0.97 per cent of all females were remarried.¹¹²³ Taking into account the much larger size of estate communities, they were still proportionally under-represented in the remarriage stakes. The number of male estate remarriages only amounted to 3.43 per cent and was comparable to their urban counterparts which stood at 3.09 per cent. This could be attributed to the affect of the high male to female ratio prevalent in the estates at

¹¹¹⁹ Interview with Mr. V. A. George, (born 1906), Singapore, 24 Jan. 1997.

¹¹²⁰ 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral, 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906'. St. John's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur. 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950', St. Anthony's Church, Kuala Lumpur. (Records between 1911 and 1923 were destroyed during bombing raids of the Second World War).

¹¹²¹ 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950', St. Anthony's Church, Kuala Lumpur.

¹¹²² G. A. Oddie, *Hindu and Christian in South India: Aspects of religious continuity and change, 1800-1900*, (London: Curzon Press, 1991), pp. 178-80

¹¹²³ 'Marriage: St. John's Cathedral, 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906'. St. John's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur. 'Marriages: St. Anthony's Church, 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950', St. Anthony's Church, Kuala Lumpur. This was from a total sample of 1339 marriages (2,678 individuals) between 1891 and 1906, 1923 and 1950 (records between 1911 and 1923 was destroyed during bombing raids of the Second World War).

the time, although by the 1930s the gender imbalance in the estates was closing.¹¹²⁴ Financial constraints hampered their chances of marrying. Among the urban-based middle-classes this would not have been as pressing a problem as it was in the estates. Urban middle-class males had the option of finding a female mate in their own community, or in most cases, had a marriage arranged through familial contacts in India.¹¹²⁵

The high rate of remarriage among urban communities is an interesting phenomenon. Oddie notes that remarriage in India was predominately practised by the 'lower' caste groups but frowned upon by the 'higher' castes.¹¹²⁶ Taking into account that most urbanised middle-class families were from 'higher' caste backgrounds, it appears that a major alteration to traditional practises had been made. Remarriage in these communities was predominantly male, with female remarriage being almost four times less prevalent in comparison to males. It appears that these new developments or privileges were confined to males, and that females were generally expected to maintain traditional practices.

Conclusion

Relationships within Indian Christian communities were not essentially a direct result of British colonialism. Relationships were adjusted and modified to fit into a workable social, economic and political colonial mould. Partha Chatterjee noted how no singular model of colonialism or colonial behaviour that could be adopted en masse by colonised subjects. Benedict Anderson also noted how communities 'imagined reality'. Discussed in this context, relevant social, political and economic issues were weaved into the fabric of the new emerging Indian Christian communities of Malaya and Singapore.¹¹²⁷ It was more akin to a relationship of borrowing and difference.¹¹²⁸ In the beginning of this chapter, an example of this was illustrated with caste, and how it was took on stronger economic traits which made itself more relevant to the new capitalist and racially plural environment of British colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Similarly, relationships within most non-British/non-colonial Church

¹¹²⁴ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 69.

¹¹²⁵ Interview with Mr. V. A. George (born 1906) and Mrs. George (born 1915), Singapore, 24 Jan. 1997. Interview with Mrs. Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel), (born 1931), Kuala Lumpur, 3 Mar. 1997.

¹¹²⁶ Oddie, 1991, p. 180.

¹¹²⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1996), p. 22.

compounds often mirrored colonial hierarchies. Capitalism dictated occupational and financial hierarchies and largely superseded, or at least dulled, the honorific status of caste. Likewise most priests were European, or if Indian, were often better educated, of a higher caste, or had a similar educational background to that of the 'white man'. They were persons to be looked up to and respected. In addition, a large portion of the mainly rural-based parishioners used these priests as a conduit to the 'outside' world; an unraveller of the maze of bureaucracy and mythologised governmental authority.

Similarly the issue of race and gender, often sharing similar dynamics, worked in tandem to affect the interaction or non-interaction of other races with the Indian Christian populations. The dynamics behind intermarriages were a classic example. Racial and gender hierarchies were interwoven to allow appropriate relational consensus. Hypergamous modifications of male over female, one race over another, were influenced by a series of interwoven colonial hierarchies and traditional gender stereotypes. The status of women also varied according to socio-economic conditions and locality. The unorthodox makeup of estate communities brought about unusual modifications to gender relationships. Women, due to low earnings, were often forced out of necessity to take on employment. Although such employment was primarily supplementary in nature, it gave them a degree of social and political leeway and status not afforded to many of their more affluent and unemployed female counterparts in the cities and towns. Estate women, due to their small numbers, also found themselves a valuable social and economic asset to men and were able to use this to their own benefit.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Dividing the Ruled: Accentuating and perpetuating 'Difference'

One of the primary points of this study has been to show the deliberate way in which the colonial British government purposefully redefined or perpetuated differences within communities under its rule. The Indian and its smaller Indian Christian communities were a typical case in point. The social, political and economic dynamics of individual groups were obviously taken into account by government authorities when decisions on labour (rural and urban) recruitment were made. Under these circumstances such 'differences' kept many colonised communities from uniting along class lines.¹¹²⁹ Consequently, under colonialism, we find specific occupations dominated by specific ethnic/sub-ethnic and caste groupings. This was particularly so with regards to labour recruitment for plantations and rubber estates. The different recruitment methods have been described in terms of directly serving the immediate interest of the profit-making agencies it served. However this study emphasises how such recruitment, like the 'kangany' system, helped perpetuate strong social delineators by way of isolating recruitment to particular communities and caste groups. The kangany, himself an established worker on the estate, was allowed to recruit labour from his native India – and in most cases did so in familiar ground; from his own family, village, caste group or among friends.¹¹³⁰ It was imperative that recruitment systems did not only efficiently service the immediate needs of business but also see to the maintenance of favorable social and political structures. 'Middle-class' recruitment had similar dynamics. Recruitment may not have been through official channels like that of the kangany, but via channels that were just as affective - familial and social networks.

These conditions allowed for a strong degree of class and ethnic homogeneity, which helped facilitate conditions conducive to the divisive policies of British colonialism. Consequently it was only necessary to put in place legislation or directives that

¹¹²⁹ Michael Stenson, *Class, Race & Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case*, (Queensland: University of Queensland, 1980), pp. 1-10.

¹¹³⁰ Sandhu, 1969, pp. 99-100.

facilitated recruitment of particular sections of a community. All that had to be done was to designate specific areas and occupations in which specific groups were to be concentrated. We therefore find a large number of Ceylonese-Tamils and Malayalis dominating the upper echelons of urban Indian communities, while mainland Tamils (and to a lesser extent Telugus) dominated the lower stratas of the rural estate hierarchies.

Incorporating old and new prejudices

Most aspects of colonial 'divide and rule' tactics were used across the board against all 'native' communities. Alongside the development of 'scientific racism' and its pseudo-theories of 'Aryanism' and 'white' supremacy, a corresponding discourse hostile to non-'Aryan' Dravidian South India was also developing. These theories presumed an ancient 'Aryan' migratory process of the Indian subcontinent. As these groups migrated further south of the sub-continent, they came into contact with inferior non-Aryan Dravidians.¹¹³¹ Within Indian circles in Malaya or Straits Settlements, such negative information, interwoven with other anti non-Aryan racial myths became common knowledge among South Indians, especially those educated in colonial education system. During the course of research, it was revealed that many interviewees were aware of their non-Aryan/Dravidian status, and were often embarrassed about it. Even traditional Hindu beliefs bolstered these ideas, with some higher caste groups claiming some ancestral link to a northern Indian heritage. For example the Vellalar caste group, claimed to be descendents of northerners.¹¹³² This north-south hostility made the exclusive Brahmin caste groups one of the chief targets of the 'anti-Aryan' Dravidian Nationalist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scientific racial theories from Europe unfortunately dovetailed well with traditional Hindu concepts of 'varna' (loosely translated as 'colour') and colonial imposed race/colour-based theories of superiority and inferiority. A. Mani defined the concept of varna as being 'associated with a symbolic colour, ... the Brahmins, Kshatriya and Vaisya are called white or twice-born castes in contrast with

¹¹³¹ Dravidian and Turanian are actually language groups, however in keeping with the British preoccupation with biological and racial linkages both groups were analysed as such. Dravidian was the major language grouping of South India, while the Turanian was loosely used to describe the speakers of non-Aryan, non-Semitic languages, of the Ural-Altaiic derivation. T. Metcalf, 1994, p. 83.

¹¹³² Jacinta Stephens, 'Catholic Vellalar: Preserving a Special Identity', in A. Walker (ed.), *New Place, Old Ways: Essays on Indian Society & Modern Culture in Singapore*, (Dehli: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1994), p. 198.

the Sudras or black caste who are excluded from ritual privileges belonging to the twice-born'.¹¹³³ Throughout the process of research for this study, interviewees often made reference to 'fairness' of complexion, making associations between beauty and a 'good' (usually denoting 'high' caste) background. The concept of caste was strongly tied into this traditional line of thought. The lower the caste grouping, the lower down the 'varna' level - the less 'Aryan' one was. However it is important to note that such traditional Hindu bias was not racially based. It was largely viewed within a religious context. With the introduction of British colonialism, this changed with the introduction of scientific racial theories by nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Learning subservience

Colonial authorities helped perpetuate, and in most cases accentuated, differences between ethnic, sub-ethnic, caste and class divisions. Academically based theories of British/Northern European superiority were directly or indirectly conveyed, either through the colonial education system or via the heavy-handed colonial power structures. It is interesting to note that examples of such theories remained in local textbooks long after they had been scientifically discredited.¹¹³⁴

Up to this point, much of what has been discussed can be done so within the general sphere of South Indian communities, regardless of religious backgrounds. Within the minority middle-class and urban-based elites, the Indian Christian communities made up a considerably higher proportion in comparison to its Hindu counterparts.

Unfortunately colonial authorities did not keep statistics on the size of the 'educated' Indian populations in Malaya and the Straits Settlements.¹¹³⁵ However this study has ascertained the populations varied from Church to Church, with the overall proportion of 'middle-class' to estate worker being higher in comparison to Hindu communities. For example, in the largest Indian Roman Catholic Church in the Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding rural districts, only 64 per cent of all marriage celebrants between 1891 to 1906 and 1923 to 1950 were estate-based labourers. One could then assume

¹¹³³ A. Mani, 'The Relevance of Caste in the Study of Singapore Indians', in *Review of Southeast Asian Studies (Nanyang Quarterly)*, V (1-4), South Seas Society (Singapore), Dec. 1975, p. 35.

¹¹³⁴ P. Rich, *Race & Empire in British Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 103-4. For example, W. S. Morgan's textbook 'Story of Malaya', published up to the 1950s, utilised anthropometrical methods that had been discredited as early as 1895. W. S. Morgan, *Story of Malaya*, (Singapore: Malayan Publishing House, 1956 [9th edition]), p. 7.

¹¹³⁵ Arasaratnam, 1970, p. 33.

that approximately 30 per cent of the population were either urban-based, 'middle-class' or both.¹¹³⁶ By no means is this study trying to ascertain that English-educated 'middle-class' immigration ever numerically challenged that of unskilled labour immigration. However within the Christian communities, the proportion of unskilled to skilled labour were considerable. This fact is further bolstered by the relative size of Indian Christian representation among the educated urban-classes in India¹¹³⁷ and within the civil service establishments in Malaya and the Straits Settlements.

Within the civil service establishments, both South Indians and Christian South Indians were over-represented in relation to their population size. The total percentage of the Indian component in the Straits Settlements civil service (1873-1933) was 48.82 per cent. Indian Christians made up 7.95 per cent of the workforce over the cumulative period. This point should take into account that in 1931 Indian Christians only made up approximately 5.9 per cent of the entire Indian population.¹¹³⁸ The Roman Catholic Indian population, calculated for the purposes of this study made up more than three-quarters of the Indian Christian populace, stood at 3.95 per cent (18,580) in 1922, 4.94 per cent (30,750) in 1931, and 6.09 per cent (36,525) in 1947 of the overall Indian population. The attributed figure of a 7.95 per cent presence in the S. S. civil service is quite considerable.

This higher concentration of Indian Christians in urban centres gave them easier access to educational facilities, particularly that of the English language-based Christian missionary school system. As discussed in Chapter Four, the colonial authorities were fully aware of the propensity to influence and manipulate compliance to the colonial status quo. Control of school authorities were exercised via governmental grants, authorised syllabi, and sometimes, political intimidation. This

¹¹³⁶ This is a conservative estimate. Estate (labourer) occupational status was usually indicated in Church records by the use of the term 'coolie'. In the vast majority of cases, both men and women held a job. In a few cases some women did not - these exceptions were left out of this estimate. *Marriage: St. John's Cathedral*, (Kuala Lumpur) 6 Apr. 1891 - 29 Jan. 1906. *Marriages: St. Anthony's Church*, (Kuala Lumpur) 2 Apr. 1923 - 28 Jan. 1950. Michael Stenson notes that as much as 80 per cent of all Indians in Malaya spoke the Tamil language. However this number was much smaller in towns and urban centres. Michael Stenson,

¹¹³⁶ Sandhu *Class, Race & Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case*, (Queensland: University of Queensland, 1980), p. 28.

¹¹³⁷ Geoffrey Oddie, 'Christianity & Social Mobility in South India 1840-1920: A continuing debate', in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, XIX (Special Edition), (1996): p. 153.

¹¹³⁸ Sandhu, 1969, p. 233. 1931 estimate of 5.9 per cent. W. G. Huff, 1994, p. 165.

brought the urban-based educational system into line with the aims and objectives of the colonial government. The high proportion of urban Indian Christians, resulted in a correspondingly high level of support for British and colonialist sentiments.

By the 1930's the middle-classes were beginning to become isolated from growing anti-colonial sentiments and ideologies that played a strong role in the nationalist movement in India and overseas. This was primarily a result of action on the part of the colonial government to hem in anti-colonial opinion. Colonial authorities actively censored literature and scrutinized visitors arriving from India. The local born population had become so isolated from external influences that by the early 1930's an observer commented how most Malayan Indians were superficial, apathetic and lethargic even in regards to their own welfare.¹¹³⁹

The colonial government utilised the education system, police and the press to manipulate public opinion and support for their own legitimacy to rule. Issues such as employment, threats of retrenchments or sackings, poor wages, ethnic divisions, the education system and government censorship collectively played a role in moulding the outlooks and attitudes of these communities.¹¹⁴⁰

The education system was a typical example of how the concepts of security and discipline was imposed and justified.¹¹⁴¹ Among working adult immigrants outside the direct influence of colonial authorities or the dictates of the education system, governmental institutions such as that relating to health and welfare helped maintain government hegemony. Most government employees relied on government supplies, loans, medical benefits¹¹⁴² and accommodation.¹¹⁴³ Retrenchments, sackings and low

¹¹³⁹ Arasaratnam, 1970, pp. 82-3, citing B. K. Chengapa's article in *The Selangor Indian*, January 1932, p. 7. Khoo Kay Kim, 'The 'Indian Association Movement' in Peninsular Malaysia: The Early Years', in *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, LXI (2), Dec. 1992, p. 10 citing Rev. Raju Naidu's inaugural speech of the Penang Indian Association on 2nd April 1906. Reported in *The Pinang Gazette*, April 24, 1928 and *The Malaya Tribune*, April 26, 1928. Sandhu, 1969, p. 147.

¹¹⁴⁰ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, (London: Sage, 1999), pp. 2, 15.

¹¹⁴¹ Dean, 199, p. 20.

¹¹⁴² For example, Singapore Municipal employees were not billed more than 30 per cent of their income (while in hospital). Any excess amount was charged to the 'Municipal Fund'. Singapore Municipality, *Sundry Rules & Regulations*, Singapore, 1936, p. 20.

¹¹⁴³ Subordinate staff were allotted either unfurnished terraces, semi-detached or tenements. Rent was calculated at 8 per cent of an employee's salary. Labourers were given free housing - if this was not

wages were commonplace, even in times of plenty.¹¹⁴⁴ The internalising of cultural self-denial and self-hatred resulted in a strong degree of confusion for many in the Indian Christian communities. While being conscious of their own cultural background,¹¹⁴⁵ they were continually reminded by the 'rational' government authorities and structures how 'inferior' they were. This element of collective insecurity became so entrenched, that it was still common to find many groups unable to articulate clear demands after the Second World War. These communities were unwilling to accept paternal and arbitrary rule but were unable to express their desire for better conditions.¹¹⁴⁶

Resistance

Different levels of direct and indirect resistance were prevalent in pockets of the Indian communities. Within the urban Indian Christian communities, forms of direct resistance were only prevalent within the Methodist Churches. Often such resistance was often too obscure to be deemed challenging. Stronger forms of direct resistance were more prevalent in the estate frontier than it was in the urban centres. Concepts of colonial benevolence were almost non-existent among estate populations, and there was little emphasis on the part of British managerial staff to inculcate pro-colonial attitudes in its workers. Conditions were blatant, with issues of poverty, abuse and death being frequent. Strikes in December 1912, at the Rantau Panjang-Sungei Tinggi estate and another at the Escot estate, Tanjung Malim, and again in 1915 involving labourers from the Sipantas estate were examples of direct confrontation between Indian estate workers and its managerial hierarchies.¹¹⁴⁷ This level of resistance did not develop in urban environments till well into the late 1930s and early 1940s, and

possible, an allowance of \$1.20 a month was given. Singapore Municipality, *Sundry Rules & Regulations*, Singapore, 1936, p. 25.

¹¹⁴⁴ Jomo Kwame Sundaram & Patricia Todd, *Trade Unions & the State in Peninsular Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 59-60. For example, by 1934 the price of rural produce had risen substantially. However employers were still unwilling to pass on the benefits to its workers several years on.

¹¹⁴⁵ Interview with Mr. Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Interview with Mr. V. David, (born 1932), Petaling Jaya, 27 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. B. Norman Nathan (born 1940), Petaling Jaya, 22 Oct. 1997. Interview with Mr. James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999. R. Raja Krishnan, *The Jaffna Tamils in Prewar Malaya: The Myth of the Return*, in *Sixth International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies*, (Petaling Jaya: Thirumagal Printers, 1987), p. 251.

¹¹⁴⁶ Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 91, 95.

¹¹⁴⁷ P. Ramasamy, 'Labour Control & Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya', in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 19 (3-4), Malaysia, Apr./Jul. 1992, pp. 101-102.

even then mainly with the more labour related occupations of the mining industry and public transport.

Overview

This study has concentrated largely on urban, middle-class communities. This was done so because to date, little to no work has covered this area of study, and that a sizeable proportion of the Indian Christian communities (in comparison to the Hindu communities) were from this background. One of the features of the 'middle-classes' was their exposure to British lifestyles, sentiments and knowledge. The appropriation of colonial western 'culture', popularly referred to as 'westernisation' was acknowledged by most interviewees, and then only seen as a temporary influence. According to these sources, the adoption of western dress, manner and lifestyle practices were primarily superficial. This was deemed to be mainly a means from which to cope with the rigours and expectations of working under British colonialism. After retirement, most 'westernised' subjects supposedly reverted back to their 'Indian' backgrounds.¹¹⁴⁸

Another point that should be noted was the thorough and almost infinite level rivalries between different ethnic, sub-ethnic, gender, religious and educational backgrounds were manipulated or created by colonial authorities. Many interviewees genuinely believed their British employers favoured compatriots from other racial backgrounds. For example, many Indian Christian interviewees believed Chinese and especially Eurasians were often meted out privileged treatment. Similarly, Hindus felt discriminated because their Christian counterparts were favoured by their 'Christian' British superiors. In turn, the Chinese and Tamil-educated felt disenfranchised by the dominant role played by the English language, and therefore despised their English educated compatriots. And all groups felt discriminated by colonial favouritism for ethnic Malay communities! This was the real 'triumph' which lay behind the foundations of British colonial rule in archipelago - the success at which petty rivalries were manufactured and used to divide entire communities and the inability of such communities to recognise these artificial divisions.¹¹⁴⁹ This was aided and abetted by a

¹¹⁴⁸ Interview with Gabriel Lourdes, (born 1925), Singapore, 1 Sept. 1997. Interview with James Sebastian, (born 1933), Sydney, Jan. 1999.

¹¹⁴⁹ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 17.

culturally fragmented and uselessly competitive educational policy, as well as through the creation of scare-mongering racial stereotypes. These tactics did not stop with Malaysian independence from colonial rule in 1957, or Singapore in 1965. Little has changed with regards to condescending governmental views towards its populace. 'Independence' superficially deleted a rung from the colonial hierarchical order. The colonial British were replaced by 'native' elites whose practices and attitudes differed little from their former British masters. Racial policy, similar to that used by the colonial British, is still utilised by Singapore's authoritarian People's Action Party (P. A. P) government¹¹⁵⁰ and Malaysia's Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition. Malaysia's longest serving Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad is the author of the infamous *The Malay Dilemma* which helped justify elitist minority political and economic ascendancy by using colonialist stereotypes of the 'lazy' Malay native. Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and his political 'sidekicks' have systematically portrayed the island republic as a 'Chinese' entity in 'hostile' Malay region. Lee Kuan Yew is well-known for his deep-seated beliefs in racial and gender stereotyping, which have been incorporated into eugenic government policy. Both Malaysian and Singaporean governments use and emphasise racial divisions on a micro and macro level.¹¹⁵¹

This clearly illustrates the direct influence oppressive British colonialism has had on fundamental attitudes of indigenous political leaders and their compliant populations. It echoes the anti-democratic and racial 'scare-mongering' views of Sir Hugh Clifford, who noted in 1927;

¹¹⁵⁰ Lily Rahim, 1998, p. 55, citing the *Straits Times* (Singapore), 22 June 1991.

¹¹⁵¹ Mahathir is head of the United Malay Nationalist Organisation (UMNO), which has described as a political cum business network. Edmund Terence Gomez *Money Politics in the Barisan Nasional*, (Petaling Jaya: Forum, 1991), p. 104. The family and political cronies of Lee Kuan Yew dominate the mainly state-controlled economic structure of Singapore. Lee heads the secretive government-funded \$120 billion Singapore Government Investment Corporation (SGIC), his son Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong controls the Monetary Authority of Singapore (the Singaporean version of a Central Bank). Other relatives are strategically placed in government controlled public companies such as Singapore Telecom, Singapore Technologies, Sembawang Corporation and Vickers & Ballas. Chee Soon Juan, *Your Future, My Faith, Our Freedom: A democratic blueprint for Singapore*, (Singapore: O. S. C., 2001), pp. 55-60. Assif Shameen, 'Big and getting bigger: Expect mega-deals in post-crisis Singapore', in *Asiaweek*, 1 Oct. 1999. <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw99/91001aw.htm>. Assif Shameen, 'Vickers Ballas issue: Other suitors are waiting', in *Asiaweek*, 30 June 2000, <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw00/000630aw.htm>. Assif Shameen, 'SingTel wins one at last: It's Lee vs. Li in the battle for Malaysia's Time dotcom', in *Asiaweek*, 7 Apr. 2000, <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw00/000407a1.htm>.

the utter inapplicability of any form of democratic or popular government to the circumstances of these States. The adoption of any kind of government by majority would forthwith entail the complete submersion of the indigenous population, who would find themselves hopelessly outnumbered by the folk of other races.¹¹⁵²

This study is first and foremost a history of a small but arguably important part of the Indian community. It also examines the adaptation of the South Indian Christian communities to artificial colonial structures of Malaya and the Straits Settlements. It highlights the interaction of the state, perceptions of ethnicity, religious culture and whether incentives existed to dictate particular socio-economic or political patterns in aspiration or lifestyle. It is hoped this study helps shed some light on the state of mind, attitude and rationale of the colonised and politically oppressed subject - contributing towards a better understanding of the artificial tensions, which still loom large over the collective psyche of both modern Malaysians and Singaporeans. A legacy left to us by British colonialism.

¹¹⁵² Michael Stenson, *Class, Race & Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case*, (Queensland: University of Queensland, 1980), p. 37.

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4. Rev. Dr. S. Batumalai, (born 1940s), Oct. 1997, Ipoh.
5. Mr. Stephen Cheng Chin Mong (born 1917), Jan. 1997, Singapore.
6. Ms. Winnie Chia, (born 1927), Feb. 1997, Bangkok.
7. Mr. Chinnapen (born 1920's), Oct. 1997, Bukit Rotan, Selangor. (In Tamil)
8. Ms. Salome Daniel (born 1950s), Oct. 1997, Penang.
9. Dr. V. David (born 1932), Oct. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.
10. Mrs. Josephine Dawson (nee Manuel), (born 1931), Mar. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.
11. Fr. Aloysius Doraisamy (born 1935), Sept. 1996, Singapore.
12. Fr. Albert Fortier (M. E. P.) (born 1920), Nov. 1996, Singapore.
13. Mr. Francis, (born 1950s), Oct. 1997, Selangor. (In Tamil).
14. Mr. and Mrs. V. A. George (born 1906), Jan. 1997, Singapore.
15. Mr. G. A. George (born 1919), Jan. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.
16. Miss Teresa Goh Mui Imm (1913-1995), May 1988, Singapore.

17. Fr. Louis Guittat (M. E. P.) (born 1910), Oct. 1997, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.
18. Mrs. H. P. Josiah (born 1926), Sept. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.
19. Mr. Kathiah, (born 1930s), Oct. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.
20. Mr. Samuel Krishnan, (born 1950s), Oct. 1997, Selangor. (In Tamil)
21. Dr. Lily Kong, Nov. 1996, Singapore.
22. Mr. Gabriel Lourdes (born 1925), Sept. 1997, Singapore.
23. Fr. Devadass Madalamuthu (born 1958), Oct. 1997, Merlimau, Melaka.
24. Fr. Rene Nicholas (born 1929), Jun. 1996, Singapore.
25. Mr. Pandian (born 1922), Oct. 1997, Selangor. (In Tamil)
26. Mr. A. J. Patrick (born 1938), Oct. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.
27. Mrs. Elsie Ponnuthuray (nee Chacko) (born 1947), Oct. 1997, Selangor.
28. Mr. Rajoo (born 1910), Oct. 1997, Melaka. (In Tamil)
29. Mr. L. S. Rajoo (born 1921), Nov. 1996, Singapore.
30. Miss Subitra Rao (late 1920s), Oct. 1997, Penang.
31. Mr. Robert (born 1935), Oct. 1997, Bukit Rotan, Selangor.
32. Mr. Saverimuthu (born 1925), Oct. 1997, Merlimau, Melaka. (In Tamil)
33. Mr. David Sebastian (born 1931), Aug. 1996, Singapore.
34. Mr. James Sebastian (born 1933), Jan. 1999, Sydney.
35. Mrs. Lily Sebastian (nee Ponnusamy) (1913-1989), May 1988, Singapore.
36. Mrs. Mary Madeline Sebastian (nee Soosay) (born 1929), Aug. 1996, Singapore.
37. Mr. Ernest Talallar (born 1917), Oct. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.
38. Mr. S. P. Velusamy (born early 1920s), Nov. 1997, Kuala Lumpur. (In Tamil)
39. Archbishop Emeritus Dominic Vendargon (born 1909), Sept. 1996, Kuala Lumpur.
40. Rev Victor J. Vethamani, (born 1940s), Oct. 1997, Penang.
41. Mr. Philip Wee Peng Leng (1904-1991), Mar. 1982, Singapore. (In Teochew and English)
42. Miss Lily Yesudian (born 1932), Oct. 1997, Kuala Lumpur.

Primary Resources

Methodist Church Archives, Singapore:

The Methodist Church was officially established in Malaya and Singapore in the late 1880s. And since its inception, it has consistently run a monthly newsletter (along with other related documentation).

The relevance of this collection to this thesis is obvious. It not only chronicled articles by the clergy, but also laypersons from different parishes therefore highlighting issues which concerned them in anyone period. For example, the first two decades of the twentieth century, there appeared a reasonable amount of interests in issues of caste discrimination and to an extent illustrated a concerns very akin to 'Dravidian Nationalism' which was popular in India at the time. By the 1920s, issues questioning of racism and colonialism began to arise.

In conclusion, the Methodist Church archive gives as accurate a picture of a cross-section of South Indian-based parishes as can be procured. Apart from showing the issues important to the community of the day, it also gives glimpses into circumstances of religious conversion, living conditions, gender relations, denominational rivalry, class differentiation as well as attitudes to British colonialism.

b. National Archives of Singapore

The above-mentioned repository had several listings directly related to Church matters. The majority of which associated to the Anglican Church of Singapore - the Anglican 'St Andrew's Cathedral Monthly' and the 'Cathedral Courier' being the two more prevalent ones. Both date back from the First World War and the 1930s respectively and report of issues of concern of the day. Unlike the Methodist periodicals, it was largely written not written by laity, but by the clergy.

Apart from this, there were several governmental appointed committees investigating conditions of 'destitution' in the Straits Settlements which also gives a glimpse into the standard of living of the day. A number of interviews were also sourced from the National Archives Oral History Section.

On the whole, the N.A.S. were in possession of material related to the topic, however much was related indirectly. Transcripts of oral interviews, with recollections dating back to the 1920s, were indispensable.

c. Arkib Negara, Malaysia

Much of the available information from the Malaysian Arkib Negara were mainly from three sources - files from the 'Selangor Secretariat', the 'High Commissioner for the Malay States', and the Public Records Office 'CO 273'. Most of which related to governmental dealings with the Indian Christian (or general Indian) communities. Especially interesting were petitions, from the CO 273 selection, which highlighted circumstances surrounding employment, in this case, among Indian Christians.

d. De La Salle Provincialate Archives, Petaling Jaya

Documentation from the 'Christian Brothers Schools' of the De La Salle Order. This Roman Catholic order ran the largest non-governmental educational establishment in colonial Malaya and the Straits Settlements. Much of the material is from individual schools and cover registration statistics, community concerns, educational reports and government legislation.

e. National Library of Singapore

Most newspapers from the period are kept at the National Library. However there was limited material relating to Indian Christians in mainstream newspapers. Periodicals such as 'The Indian' and the 'Indian Pioneer', publications of the local Indian Associations and Indian-language newspapers respectively, were available. Like the Methodist Churches' 'Malaysia Message', they highlight the concerns of the Indian communities of the day. Not surprisingly, many of their contributors were regular contributors to the Methodist periodicals. Issues and concerns brought to light in the Methodist 'Malaysia Message' are reiterated here, showing that these issues were common to all Hindu and Christian Indian communities.

f. National University of Singapore, Central Library

Much of the material here was secondary in nature. Several good academic exercises/papers (one on creative writing) and several thesis' were assessed from this collection.

g. Mission Estrangers de Paris (M.E.P.) House, Singapore

Repository of the French-language 'Compte Rendu' Roman Catholic bulletin of the Mission Estrangers de Paris. Mainly accounts by priest on the status and progress of their individual parishes.

h. Catholic Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

(only secondary sources available)

i. Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya

Primarily post-1963 material. Archival material kept in University of Malaya and the Arkib Negara.

j. Seminari Theologi Malaysia, Petaling Jaya

Mainly secondary sources only.

k St. Xavier's Institution, Penang

Limited to sources on the foundation of school in the late nineteenth century.

l. Catholic News Office, Singapore

The official paper of the Roman Catholic Church. The 'Malayan Catholic Leader' was established in 1935. However archival material is only available from the 1940s. The paper is still in circulation and continues to be distributed throughout the archipelago.

m. Methodist Headquarters, Petaling Jaya, Selangor

Most material from here related to statistics and population of the Methodist communities from the 1890s to the 1950s.

n. Various Church archives:**i. Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Singapore (Roman Catholic)**

Compiled information from Marriage Registers between 1884-1947 ie. occupations, age, marital status, ethnicity.

ii. Church of St Joseph, Bukit Timah Singapore (Roman Catholic)

Primarily a Chinese parish, but priests did oversee nearby Indian (Malayali) parishes in the nearby Naval Base. Most were included in the records of Church of Our Lady of Lourdes.

iii. Assumption Cathedral, Penang (Roman Catholic)

A handful of Indian Christians did exist according to these Church records that date back to the 1770s.

iv. St. John's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Roman Catholic)

Church records begin after 1885, which catered for entire Catholic communities in Kuala Lumpur until the establishment of the Tamil parish of St Anthony's in 1911.

v. Church of St. Anthony, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Roman Catholic)

Compiled information from Marriage Registers between 1892-1950 ie. occupation, caste, age, marital status, ethnicity.

vi. Church of St Francis Xavier, Penang (Roman Catholic)

Compiled information from Baptism Registers (Marriage Registers from the period having been lost) between 1890-1914 ie. marital status, age, conversion, caste, ethnicity. Also collated information from the surviving records of Fr. Louis Riboud (1892-1960) who worked at the parish from the early 1920s.

vii. Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Penang (Roman Catholic)

Traditionally a Chinese parish. Most records for local Penang Churches are located here.

viii. St. George's Church, Penang (Anglican)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

ix. St. Mark's Church, Butterworth (Anglican)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

x. St. Thomas' Church, Banting, Selangor (Anglican)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

xi. Church of St. John the Divine, Ipoh, Perak (Anglican)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

xii. Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ipoh, Perak (Roman Catholic)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

xiii. Bukit Rotan Methodist Church, Selangor (Methodist)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

xiv. Bangi-Seminyeh Methodist Outreach Work, Selangor (Methodist)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

xv. Diocese of West Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Anglican)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

xvi. Church of St. Francis Xavier, Malacca (Roman Catholic)

Completed interviews with parishioners.

xvii. Penang Methodist Church, Penang

Completed interviews with parishioners.

Appendix 1

Number of Assisted and Non-Assisted labour into Malaya, 1867-1913

<i>Year</i>	<i>Assisted labour</i>	<i>Non-assisted labour*</i>
1867	5294	1000
1868	5849	1000
1869	8013	1000
1870	4000	1000
1871	4000	1000
1872	5000	1000
1873	4500	1000
1874	4500	1000
1875	4700	1000
1876	4700	1000
1877	4700	1000
1878	4675	1000
1879	4353	500
1880	4691	200
1881	4691	200
1882	4252	3800
1883	4250	4500
1884	5039	8800
1885	5442	12000
1886	6548	10000
1887	8536	6600
1888	8484	9000
1889	6547	8700
1890	6760	8700
1891	5443	16000
1892	3628	10000
1893	4106	10000
1894	3688	8000
1895	3549	8800
1896	4652	11000
1897	4405	12000
1898	4424	10000
1899	7894	7000
1900	15667	13000
1901	6761	10000
1902	4525	11000
1903	3052	15000
1904	6697	16000
1905	13009	17000
1906	24389	18000
1907	29120	19000

1908	26005	17000
1909	24908	15000
1910	59025	17000
1911	78356	18000
1912	73671	20000
1913	91236	17000

* government estimates

Source: K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 1969, p304.