

PENANG INSTITUTE  
**MONOGRAPHS**



# INDIAN YOUTHS IN PENANG: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

*Report from a project jointly conducted by  
Massey University (New Zealand) and  
Penang Institute.*

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## Acknowledgement

The aim of this study was to find out the opportunities, challenges faced by Indian youths in Penang; and the solutions that they seek. Under the CARE programme framework (which is explained later), the research team members were able to comprehend the daily experiences, challenges, opportunities and, if any, solutions of Indian Youths in Penang. A deeper understanding was formed of the youths, their aspirations, their character and their minds. For instance, there are youths who are of the view that everything begins from oneself; then, it gets extended to family and friends; and from there, it is subsequently projected onto society and the country. But for some, their transcendence begins from within the family and community, coping with the challenge of expectations and their fulfillment of them. Therefore, to understand more about Indian youths, without bias, we documented their opinions, experiences and suggestions. The youths are from various backgrounds and ideologies.

This study had been rewarding for our research team. The conversation with Penang Indians that took place during the course of the interviews had been fruitful, based on the varied themes we touched upon such as finances, education, employment and life's struggles. The recommendations, the cooperation and the encouragement by many persons and experts are deeply appreciated. The outcome of this study was only possible as the core group – the interviewees – shared deeply their thoughts and experiences. They captivated us with their strong passion to participate in the dialogue and willingness to be active participants. We remain most grateful to them for the trust they showed the research team during the interviews and at focus group discussions so that we could have this report on their opportunities, challenges and solutions.

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Office of Deputy Chief Minister II, Penang  
Penang Bar Committee  
Penang Education Council (PEC)  
Penang State Archery  
Penang Women's Development Corporation (PWDC)  
Penggerak Komuniti Muda Pulau Pinang (PEKA)  
Sidang Muda (Youth Parliament)  
Sikh Community  
Telugu Association of Malaysia (Penang Branch)  
The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Penang  
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It was a learning journey for all – thanks to the interviewees who gave us a peek into their lives and thoughts.

Braema Mathiapparanam  
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## Executive Summary

This study was aimed at exploring and documenting key aspects of an Indian youth's life and to hear their thoughts on a number of key thematic issues. Youths are a pivotal group in any society and country as they have the vitality and the inspiration to make changes for the betterment of society a reality. This part of the study assessed how Indian youths – the focused age band of 16 to 28 years – could work on solution-seeking approaches on some of the key matters that they raised in the discussions of “Opportunities, Challenges and Solutions”, the operative title of this Phase 1 study.

This study is a joint partnership effort between Penang Institute, Malaysia and Massey University, New Zealand under its CARE (Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation) Centre which focuses on participatory approaches and empowerment of the community involved in the study. The outcome of the study is for a report to be done, to share the findings and to involve the interviewees in the process and relevant partners, in Phase 2 of this study.

This Phase 1 study following CARE's framework was conducted in two parts – in-depth qualitative interviews, followed by focus group discussions. As such, the study in total had conducted 45 in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion. The input from the 45 formed the basis of the focus group discussion. The study sought the views of Indian youths on the state of treatment they experienced in Penang and in Malaysia.

From the interviews, marginalisation and deprivation of opportunities emerged as key underpinning principles to inequality and to being treated unfairly – directly and/or indirectly so. It showcased distinctive forms of marginalisation consistently faced by the Indian community perhaps not faced by the other ethnic groups. “Marginalisation” in this study is defined broadly as processes of social exclusions – that is, failure of society to provide certain individuals and groups with those rights and benefits normally available to its members in matters such as employment, adequate housing, health care, education and training. Marginalisation has taken place in the past, across many histories, and continues till today. It began when the Indians probably first came to this part of the world in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and later, in larger numbers, when the Malayan peninsula was colonised and they were brought in for work by the British. Since the 1969 racial riots, marginalisation has increased for Indians as well as other minority ethnic groups due to the provisions in the Federal Constitution that saw the setting up of the affirmative action Bumiputera policy which favours the Malays over other ethnic groups. The Indians and the Chinese continue to contribute though they are not seen as being on par with the Malays. It is worse off for the Indians, as many interviewed in the study saw themselves as being third in society, after the Malays and the Chinese; and in some instances fourth, coming after migrant workers.

This study revealed distinctive forms of challenges steadily faced by the Indian community which are perhaps not faced by the other ethnic groups at the same level of intensity. The youths revealed impacts on their lives in terms of education attainment, limited employment opportunities, coping with racism and the community, and some recalibrations on their culture and identity. These responses are featured in Chapter 3 of this study.

At an individual level, Indian youths did have the odds stacked against them, impacting harder those who had done well enough to get into government-paid education or to secure employment. Their range of coping mechanisms was visible in the interviews. Despite sharing openly the challenges they face, the youths were also focused on wanting to succeed and in securing their future. However, it needs to be said that many did not seem to have the “know-how” tools to set visions, goal-setting and planning for their future in a more determined manner. Perhaps they felt that it was of little use as they are very aware of the unpredictability in their future. Many were keen to handle individual responsibilities, to not disappoint their parents and to not antagonise anyone. They did ask for more courses on “soft skills” to arm themselves better for the job market. They also suggested solutions for how to make life easier for them and others.

But what was overwhelming to most was handling the expectations of their parents, the community and themselves. In many cases too, there was the intrusive, excessive management and governance that parents assert over their children. It did give rise to, in some youths, a nonchalance to engage in committing themselves to widening social circles or to pick up other learning opportunities as they knew their parents were not open minded enough, did not offer trust to them, and were weak in parent-child communications. This curtailed the development of some of the youths – a small number – to develop faster into more confident and street-smart adults. The study also unlocked societies' ails – it needs to mind its manners, be focused on building up its image as a multicultural society and to live without prejudice towards one another. The Indian youths today

have worked hard to bring change to their socio-economic status, but real and faster changes will only take place if this ethnic preference that continues to oppress their opportunities can be removed. This, and solution-mapping such as implementing more Vision Schools for harmonising interethnic relations in schools and having legislations through an anti-discrimination Act, are discussed in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the action plans proposed in this study are a bottom-up approach that needs a multi-stakeholder build-up across all ethnic groups.

Indian youths here have shown themselves to be determined. It is hoped that this journey for inclusivity is achieved and marginalisation is stopped so that Indian youths – and all youths – can lead more dignified lives.

## Table of Contents

Glossary .....	8
Chapter 1 - Introduction .....	12
1.1 Rationale for this Study.....	12
1.2 CARE (Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation - CCA).....	13
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	13
1.4 Scope and Methodology.....	14
1.4.1 Interview protocol .....	14
1.4.2 In-depth Interviews .....	15
1.4.3 Focus Group .....	15
1.4.4 Community Partners.....	16
1.5 Ethics .....	16
1.6 Limitations of Study .....	17
1.7 Outcome of the study .....	18
Chapter 2 Backgrounding.....	19
2.1 Studies on Indians in Penang.....	19
2.2 Multi-racial, Multi-cultural, Multi-religious Malaysia.....	19
2.3 Bumiputra Policy .....	20
2.4 Education Policies and Pathways .....	24
2.4.1 The Education System.....	24
2.5 Employment .....	26
2.6 Income by Ethnicity .....	27
2.7 Healthcare.....	28
2.7.1 Life expectancies .....	28
2.7.2 Diseases .....	28
2.7.3 Medical Costs .....	29
2.7.4 Mental Health.....	29
2.8 Housing.....	29
2.9 Crime Rates and Gangsterism.....	30
2.10 Migration .....	31
Chapter 3: Interviewees: Their Voices .....	32
3.1 The Interviewees .....	32
3.2 Indian Identity.....	33
3.2.1 Home-Based Values .....	34
3.2.2 Religion .....	35
3.2.3 Language .....	36
3.2.4 Community.....	36
3.2.5 Discrimination/Racism .....	38
3.2.6 Higher Authority .....	42
3.2.7 Gendered Experiences.....	44

3.2.8. Image of Indians .....	47
3.3 EDUCATION.....	48
3.3.1 The System.....	48
3.3.2 Information & Knowledge Gaps.....	49
3.3.3 Meritocracy, Quota & Placements.....	50
3.3.4 Education Funding.....	52
3.3.5 Racism & Bullies .....	53
3.4 Employment .....	53
3.4.1 Discrimination, Prejudice, Racism (Language & Ethnic Groups) .....	54
3.4.2 Human Resources.....	54
3.4.3 Government Jobs .....	55
3.4.4 Bribery .....	56
3.4.5 Entrepreneurship .....	56
3.5 Healthcare.....	57
3.5.1 Medical Condition.....	57
3.5.2 Medical Services.....	57
3.5.3 Medical Insurance.....	58
3.5.4 Health Maintenance .....	59
3.6 Housing.....	59
3.7 Money Matters .....	61
3.8 Role Models .....	62
Chapter 4: The Analysis: Marginalisation, Identity, Solutions.....	65
4.1 The Indian Youth.....	65
4.1.1 Awareness .....	65
4.2 ‘Othering’ - Displacement, Marginalisation, Indian Identity.....	67
4.2.1 Historical Displacement.....	67
4.2.2 Impact of Marginalisation on Indian Youths .....	68
4.3 Solutions.....	71
4.3.1 Raising the Next Generation .....	71
4.4 Recommendations .....	76
Chapter 5: Focus Group.....	78
5.1 Framework of Community-Based Advisory boards for Focus Group.....	78
5.2 First Focus Group .....	79
5.3 The Transcribing Team .....	80
Chapter 6 Phase 2 .....	82
Conclusion.....	83
References .....	84
Appendices .....	89
Appendix I: CCA-Based Approach to Designing Community-Placed Solution .....	89
Appendix II: Table 1: Population by District in Penang ('000), 2012 - 2016.....	90
Appendix III: Table 2: Population by Ethnicity and Age ('000), Penang 2016 .....	91

Appendix IV: Education Pathway in Malaysia .....	92
Appendix V: Table of Highest Level of Education Achieved by Ethnicity in Penang, 2010 .....	93
Appendix VI: Table of Labour Force by Sex and Ethnic Group, Malaysia, 2013 – 2017 .....	94
Appendix VII: Table of Broad Statistics of Labour Force by Industry ('000 Persons), Penang 2012 – 2016 ....	95
Appendix VIII: Table of Labour Force by State and Age Group in Malaysia, 2017 .....	96
Appendix IX: Table of Residential Prices by Type of Housing in Penang, 2018 .....	96
Appendix X: Table of Number of Non-Islam Worship House by District, Penang until 2016.....	98
Appendix XI: Matrix on Interviewees.....	99



## **Glossary**

ADUN	:	State Assemblyperson ( <i>Ahli Undangan Negeri</i> )
AES	:	Social Economic Agenda ( <i>Agenda Ekonomi Sosial</i> )
APEX	:	Accelerated Programme for Excellence
ASEAN	:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASNB	:	Amanah Saham Nasional Berhad
AJK	:	Committee Member ( <i>Ahli Jawatan Kuasa</i> )
BA	:	Bachelor of Art
BSc	:	Bachelor of Science
BR1M	:	1Malaysia People's Aids ( <i>Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia</i> )
BM	:	Malay language ( <i>Bahasa Melayu</i> )
BN	:	Barisan Nasional
CCRIS	:	Central Credit Reference Information System
CEO	:	Chief executive officer
CAP	:	Consumer Association Penang
CLP	:	Certificate in Legal Practice
CNN	:	Cable News Network
DAP	:	Democratic Action Party
DTSP	:	Tuanku Syed Putra Hall ( <i>Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra</i> )
EPF	:	Employee Provision Fund
EXCO	:	State Executive Council
Exco	:	Executive Committee
EWRF	:	Educational, Welfare and Research Foundation Malaysia
FB	:	Facebook
F&B	:	Food and beverage
GH	:	General Hospital
GPA	:	Grade Point Average
HR	:	Human Resource
HSC	:	High Secondary Certificate

ICERD : International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

ID : Identification Card

IPG : Teacher college (Institut Pendidikan Guru)

IPT : Higher level education institution (Institut Pengajian Tinggi)

IPTA : Public Institutions of Higher Education (Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Awam)

ISMP : Undergraduate education (Ijazah Sarjana Muda Pendidikan)

IT : Information Technology

JKKK : Village Security and Development Committee (Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung)

JKM : Welfare Department Malaysia (Jabatan Kebajikan Malaysia)

JPA : Public Service Department Malaysia (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam)

JPN : Registration Department Malaysia (Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara)

JPV : Veterinary Service Department (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Veterinar)

JKKK : Village Development and Security Department (Jabatan Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung)

KBKK : Critical and creative thinking skills (Kemahiran Berfikir Secara Kritis & Kreatif)

KDU : Damansara Utama College (Kolej Damansara Utama)

KL : Kuala Lumpur

KP41 : Management and professional grade 41 (Kumpulan Pengurusan dan Profesional Gred 41)

LLB : Bachelor of Laws

LRT : Light Rapid Transit

MARA : Council of Trust for the Bumiputra (Majlis Amanah Rakyat)

MBA : Master of Business Administration

MBPP : Penang Island City Council (Majlis Bandaraya Pulau Pinang)

MCA : Malaysian Chinese Associations

MIC : Malaysian Indian Congress

MIFA : Malaysian Indian Football Association

MO : Medical Official

MPU : General Studies (Mata Pelajaran Umum)

MPPP : Municipal Council of Penang

MPSP : Municipal Council of Seberang Perai

MRSM : Junior Science College (Maktab Rendah Sains)  
 MSN : State Sport Council (Majlis Sukan Negeri)  
 MYCSD: My Continuous Student Development  
 NEP : New Economic Policy  
 NGO : Non-governmental organization  
 NGOs : Non-governmental organizations  
 OKU : Disabled person (Orang Kurang Upaya)  
 PAS : Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se Malaysia)  
 PR1MA:1 Malaysia People's Housing Programme  
 PDC : Penang Development Corporation  
 PDRM : Royal Malaysia Police (*Polis Diraja Malaysia*)  
 PERKESO: Pertubuhan Keselamatan Sosial  
 PJJ : Pendidikan Jarak Jauh  
 PJKK : Childcare Centre by Penang Women's Development Corporation (Pusat Jagaan Kanak-kanak)  
 PK : Senior Assistant (Penolong Kanan)  
 PK HEM: Senior Assistant Student Affairs (Penolong Kanan Hal Ehwal Murid)  
 PMR : Penilaian Menengah Rendah  
 POL : Pupils Own Language  
 POV : Point of View  
 PSDC : Penang Skills Development Centre  
 PT3 : Form 3 Assessment (Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga)  
 PTPTN : National Higher Education Fund (Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional)  
 PWDC : Penang Women's Development Corporation  
 RELA : The People's Volunteer Corps (Jabatan Sukarelawan Malaysia)  
 RT : Neighbourhood (Rukun Tetangga)  
 RTM : Radio Televisyen Malaysia  
 SEED : A Special Secretariat for Empowerment of Indian Entrepreneurs  
 SEDIC : Socio Economic Development of Indian Community  
 SJK : Vernacular school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan)

SJK(C) : Vernacular Chinese school (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina)  
 SJK(T) : Vernacular Tamil School (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil)  
 SMK : National Secondary School (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan)  
 SK : National School (Sekolah Kebangsaan)  
 SOS : Shared Ownership Scheme  
 SP : Seberang Perai  
 SPA : Public Service Commission of Malaysia (Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam)  
 SPM : Malaysian Certificate of Education (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia)  
 STPM : Malaysian Certificate of Higher Education Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia  
 SUKMA: Malaysia Sport (Sukan Malaysia)  
 TARUC: Tunku Abdul Rahman University College  
 TESL : Teaching English as a Second Language  
 TNB : Tenaga Nasional Berhad  
 UKM : National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia)  
 UMS : University of Malaysia Sabah (Universiti Malaysia Sabah)  
 UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund  
 UNITAR: University Tun Abdul Razak  
 UPSI : Sultan Idris Education University  
 UPSR : Primary school evaluation test (Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah)  
 UPU : University center (Unit Pusat Universiti)  
 URB : Motorcycle Patrol Unit  
 USM : University Sains Malaysia  
 WHO : World Health Organization

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

There had been studies done on the Indian community in Penang. They were namely the Socio-economic Conditions among the Indian Community in Penang (1998) and the Socio-Economic Study of The Marginalized Indian Community in Penang (2015). This study is not a follow-up to the previous studies, but these two studies became a good backdrop and reference to assess how the Indian community, as a whole in Penang, were faring, giving insights into the progress and well-being of Indian youths. This study is titled Indian Youths: Opportunities, Challenges and Solutions. It is aimed at Indian females and males narrating their experiences and how they were working to achieve a sustainable liveability standard for themselves for the future. This study is a joint effort between Penang Institute, Malaysia and Massey University in New Zealand. It is a collaboration through the Centre for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University. CARE is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centred methodologies to develop community-driven communication solutions.

### 1.1 Rationale for this Study

Each age group in a society plays out a role and this is important as by demography and age; it helps governments to prepare well for the people and also tap into the services of people, seeing them as contributors to society.

Youths are the backbones of society – they are the agents for social, economic and political change, more than any other person in any age band in society. Youths are vibrant, energetic, engaged and discursive; they have social circles to influence and are also aware of many issues as they source and receive information through social media. This group is important because many in other age groups – younger children, the middle-aged and senior citizens – rely on youths, often expecting a lot from them, to lead and to make changes. Youths are an important age band to focus on in both today's society and for the future. They have a role to play, as the future of families, communities and the country lies in their hands. But there is also the other dimension: how are society, community and family enhancing the development and potential of the future of the country? Or perhaps, are these sectors hindering their progress and development?

The United Nations defines a youth to be between the ages of 15 and 35. But countries, non-governmental organisations and youth groups do pick different age bands to work with, to focus on and to bring them on board in many activities. Many institutions and organisations target to engage youths as they are aware that youths can revitalise, renew, refresh and add value to the current work being done in many areas. They are involved in leadership, innovation, technology, education, politics, society, efforts to reduce poverty and bringing a focus on peace in society. But it is important to bear in mind that youths too need to be inspired, maintained and nurtured so that they can develop strong value systems that feed their idealism; they possess an almost age-connected desire to enhance humanity, humankind and the environment.

So, youths are very important in any country; they are pivotal as they are an investment for the betterment of any nation as they hold the promise of high returns. In addition, they are enthusiastic in wanting to have a stake in developing futures for themselves, their families and for their country. They are at the peak of an idealism.

In Malaysia, the National Statistics Department states there are 14.6 million Malaysians aged between 15 and 39, or 45.4% of the population (2019 figures).<sup>1</sup> In a recent press statement on International Youth Day, the government affirmed that for decades to come, it would be the youths who would be managing businesses, infrastructure, systems and policies. In that statement, the Minister for Youth and Sports, said it would be young people who would start businesses, work in factories, build homes, take loans, study, become consumers of goods and services, and become the country's leaders.<sup>2</sup> Realising that, Malaysia had always invested in education, which accounted for over a fifth of the federal budget in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/malaysia-population/...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/11/25/the-young-ace-our-youth-and-sports-minister-wants-to-lead-a-generation-of-empowered-young-people-and/...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2018/08/399954/others-have-tech-we-have-our-youth...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

Based on the fact that youths are an important growth sector in any country, the focus for this study is on youths to find out how youths feel and how they are supported. The choice of focusing on Indian youths was based on the fact that there was already a certain level of disenchantment felt by them. The previous cited reports focused on a wide spectrum of Indians across all ages. The population of Malaysia at this time stands at, 32,262,903 people; 1.7 million people are in Penang, of which the Bumiputera population is around 712,000, the Chinese at 689,000, the Indians at 166,000 and others at 5,000. There are also 146,000 non-Malaysians in Penang. Of the total 1.7 million people there are 475,900 youths in Penang aged between 15 and 29 – an estimated 28%. Of them, the Indian youth population is 42,300,<sup>4</sup> about 8% of the youth population in Penang. Youths are a sizeable proportion in the state, and Indian youths are part of that. (see Appendix II for table of population by district in Penang; Appendix III for table of population by ethnicity and age in Penang.)

It is important to look at how Indian youths view their roles and what were their experiences. Much had been also placed on them – ideas of success, careers, family life – but what did they think and feel, and what were their views? For the purposes of this discussion, youths are considered to be at that stage in life of being young, with some transition into adulthood. As such, the youths for this study were aged between 16 and 28.

The approach Phase 1, following CARE's framework, was done in two parts: in-depth qualitative interviews, followed by focus group discussions.

## **1.2 CARE<sup>5</sup> (Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation – CCA)**

The CARE's Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CCA) framework functions firstly as a research approach and later in a participatory manner, with the interviewees as a community for them to take up approaches they had shared, to take them to the next level to deal with, handle and seek solution pathways on several matters that had been raised. For the first part, CCA is a qualitative approach of interviewing people in in-depth interview sessions. The second part is a series of focus group discussions that ought to lead to a solution-focused engagement. The goal is to harness interviewees to chart their own pathways as well as for society, the community, the family and the nation to ensure that they are given the opportunities and the environment for the interviewees and the communities to flourish. Thus, CCA offers a framework for the formation of community-based advisory boards that play instrumental roles in identifying problems and developing solutions. The CCA utilises community-based participatory strategies for building community-based communication infrastructures by emphasising the central role of the community in defining the problem and corresponding solutions. The methodological tools of the CCA are:

(a) listening

(b) dialogue

(c) participation; to generate key concepts and infrastructure-focused design solutions through conversations between communities and other key stakeholders.<sup>6</sup> As a process, the core elements of CCA involve the creation of spaces for knowledge sharing, collaboration and decision-making at the community level; building on the various resources (knowledge, communication spaces, technology, etc.) brought to the table through an academic-community partnership.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

- a. To understand the everyday experiences of Indian youths in Penang
- b. To identify the challenges to accessing structures of mobility

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Statistics, Malaysia, as cited in Penang in Numbers 2016 – 2017

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/colleges/college-business/school-of-communication-journalism-and-marketing/research/care/care\\_home.cfm...](http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/colleges/college-business/school-of-communication-journalism-and-marketing/research/care/care_home.cfm...) Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>6</sup> see Appendix I for the CCA-based Approach to Designing Community-Placed Solutions

- c. To identify the potential solutions to the challenges experienced
- d. To hear the voices of youths from their perspective
- e. To develop an approach to being participatory in the solution-seeking process

## 1.4 Scope and Methodology

This study's Phase 1 focused on in-depth interviews as part of the qualitative approach. The research process began with content analysis, followed by one-on-one interviews with the youth participant on a series of questions and focus group discussions. The fieldwork process took approximately one month, December 2018.

A total of 45 Indian youths were interviewed. The specific age group was chosen to include those who were still studying, had just started employment and those who had already been working for at least a year or so. The study was also very specific in ensuring that youths were legally single. The interviewees were spread across the island and the mainland to capture those who fall under the lower income belt. Interviewees were sourced through a series of approaches (see Section 1.4.2).

Each interview was conducted in a safe environment that ensured them of their privacy. Each interviewee was asked to declare their consent to being recorded and that the records will be used for official purposes of the study. When interviewees were aged below 18, parental consent was sought. All work in transcribing the interviews were done under declarations of confidentiality – ensuring anonymity in terms of names of the interviewees.

### 1.4.1 Interview Protocol

The questions for the in-depth interviews stemmed from fulfilling the objectives of this study and in consultation with the CARE programme adviser, Prof. Mohan Dutta<sup>7</sup> of Massey University.

The questions posed to each interviewee were:

The Opening Question:

1. Please describe your experiences as an Indian.
  - a) What challenges do you experience?
  - b) What solutions do you suggest?

The Thematic:

2. What challenges do you experience in education?  
What solutions do you suggest?
3. What challenges do you experience in your everyday life?  
What solutions do you suggest?
4. What challenges do you experience in finding employment?  
What solutions do you suggest?
5. What challenges do you experience in seeking healthcare?  
What solutions do you suggest?
6. What challenges do you experience in securing housing?  
What solutions do you suggest?

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/expertise/profile.cfm?stref=285450>

7. What challenges do you experience economically?  
What solutions do you suggest?
8. What challenges do you experience being an Indian female/Indian male?  
What solutions do you suggest?
9. What challenges do you experience in dealing with authority?  
What solutions do you suggest?
10. Please describe your experiences with racism.  
What solutions do you suggest?  
How are Indians treated as a race in Malaysia?  
What do you see as the underlying problems?  
What solutions do you suggest?
11. Who do you see as a good role model?  
Why?

### **1.4.2 In-depth Interviews**

The study in total had conducted 45 in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion. The initial set of interview questions was conducted to aid interviewees in sharing their views; thus, there were some intermediate questions to enable interviewees to understand the question. This happened primarily with the first question which was often re-phrased to: “When did you first know you are an Indian?”, which helped interviewees fathom the question and also created a safer environment for them to share their thoughts. Sometimes the word “challenges” needed an explanation, which happened for the younger interviewees. It must be noted that the depth of the interviews was dependent solely on the responsiveness of the interviewees. Further expansion of the interview questions and probing were conducted on a snowball basis – during the interview, with particular care taken not to direct the shape of the discussion. What was kept in mind throughout was a solidifying mantra to capture “their voice”.

All the interviews were conducted by a research team of two persons, both Tamil speakers, with one more fluent in Tamil than the other, as was thus recruited to bridge any language gap during the interviewing sessions. Both researchers were also fluent in English and Bahasa Melayu. Most interviewees spoke in English. Some broke in parts to speak in Tamil or Bahasa Melayu. The research team was adept in switching languages to make interviewees feel comfortable during their narrative. Six interviewees wanted to speak in Tamil and the interviews were conducted by the researcher who was more fluent in Tamil. In some conversations, all three languages were operating, posing a challenge to the transcription work. No interview time limit was set; however, each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Each of the interviews was then transcribed verbatim, resulting on average between 20 and 35 pages. Each transcription was checked by at least one researcher, if not both, to ensure accuracy. To increase comfort levels for the interviewees, the research team travelled around Penang to meet each of them at their own home ground or venues that were also away from their own homes. Interviewers, transcribers were all given training first, then supervised, before solo work began. This was done to ensure consistency in the field, important for any research, more so, for qualitative research.

### **1.4.3 Focus Group**

The purpose of this session was to give the interviewees an opportunity to be engaged in a conversational and participatory manner on the key challenges that were raised in the interview sessions, so that they could work out approaches on solutions that would be identified as core interest areas by the focus group participants.

Focus groups – the goal of the focus groups was to follow up on the findings of the interviews to discuss the resources and service needs of the community at the group level, thus creating a collaborative space for open



dialogue and discussion, bringing forth an open climate for knowledge sharing, developing collective understanding of problems faced by community members, and developing solutions for these problems. Focus group members were recruited by the advisory group, attending to the conceptual framework of the CCA, and therefore ensuring that the most marginalised voices from the community were represented.

There was one focus group session that was held in January. Many of the interviewees could not spare the time as many were moving into new schools, were studying or had their examinations, or had to focus on their jobs in the first month of the new year. The report on the focus group, which successfully fulfilled the purpose of it, can be read in Chapter 5. The second phase of the project which was not included in this study will be conducted through more focus group discussions, as part of an ongoing process.

#### **1.4.4 Community Partners**

Sourcing for interviews was done via a series of methods – personal contacts and primarily with the help of community partners. The study approached a total of 25 partners ranging from NGOs, colleges, Indian communities, state agencies and private individuals. The community partners and state agency contacts were essential in guiding us towards potential interviewees and arranging for interviewee sessions. The following is a list of partners the study had approached:

Advance Tertiary College  
Gujarati community  
Indian Association Penang (IA)  
Karpal Singh Penang Learning Centre  
Malayalee community  
Malaysia Hindu Sangam Penang State: Youth Bureau  
Malaysian Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Penang  
Malaysian Indian Youth Council  
Mr. Kumanan (State Education Department)  
Office of Deputy Chief Minister II, Penang  
Penang Bar  
Penang Brahmakumari  
Penang Hindu Endowments Board (PHEB)  
Penang Sports Club  
Penang State Archery  
Penang Women's Development Corporation (PWDC)  
Penang Youth Development Corporation (PYDC)  
Penggerak Komuniti Muda Pulau Pinang (PEKA)  
Sidang Muda (Youth Parliament)  
Sikh Community  
Tamil Youth Bell Club (Island)  
Tamil Youth Bell Club (Permatang Pauh)  
Telugu Association of Malaysia (Penang Branch)  
The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Penang  
Women's Centre for Change (WCC)

It was unfortunate that more potential interviewees emerged, with the help from the Penang Bar Committee and Malaysian Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, when the study team had already closed on the interviewing schedule to begin the focus group discussion process. We thank once again the communities and organisations, as listed under Acknowledgements, for all the help they gave.

#### **1.5 Ethics**

The recruiting of interviewees was based strictly on a volunteer basis. A written declaration of consent was

obtained from each interviewee prior to the interview which asked for their agreement to allow the interviews to be audio-recorded and that their interviews could be used for archival purposes of this study. For those below the age of 18, a consent form was obtained from a parent or legal guardian.

Before the interview began, each interviewee was briefed on the study's undertaking and the purpose of the discussions as well as the expected outcomes from the study. The interviewees were made aware that while all the discussions were audio recorded, the researcher would also take down notes.

The research team too had signed declaration of confidentiality forms to ensure that discretion is maintained. The team of transcribers also signed the declaration of confidentiality forms.

In all discussions made of this study, the interviewees remained anonymous. At some point in the one of the interviews, one interviewee shared one piece of information that he wanted to be kept confidential on the references made. That was followed through.

## **1.6 Limitations of Study**

This time-bound Phase 1 was a major challenge to fulfil as work began in December 2018 and was to be completed by January 2019. It was a difficult period as the year-end and beginning of the year are busy periods for many interviewees. Many tertiary students were also preparing for their examinations. Nevertheless, with the help of the community and the interviewees, we managed to have 45 interviewees – five short of meeting the target of 50 interviews.

It was a challenge to find independent entrepreneurs among the interviewees who were not working for their families. While there were some who knew enough to share the challenges that entrepreneurs faced, it was a small sampling. However, many youths who were working full-time or part-time shared their ideas and their wish to turn to business. While there was an overall balance in gender representation among students and workers, there was a lack of interviews with businesswomen.

Talking to youths in sports was also an important search, but the sampling size was small though the interviews were informative on this subject. Youths in the field of arts or youths with disabilities proved to be difficult terrain, so there are no representatives in this study. There were two interviewees who were growing up in a sheltered institution, having been abandoned by parents or were orphaned.

The research team that conducted the interviews would have their own subjectivities. However, the professional levels were maintained as there were conversations between the pair to share thoughts and exchange views to ensure that personal views or perspectives were kept at bay.

Many of the interviewees spoke in English. Some were more conversant in Bahasa Melayu or Tamil. So, interviewers adapted to meet the comfort levels of the interviewees. In some cases, interviewees interwove three languages, which was also received with unfailing support from the interviewers. Thus, the challenge remained that information, views and narratives were accurately documented, despite all the measures taken. Suffice to say that accuracy in this study is at a high level.

In the report of this study, racial groups are called “ethnic groups” or “ethnicities”. Phrases such as “marginalisation”, “prejudice”, “stereotypes”, “affirmative action” and “stigmatisation” were used. Each is a loaded word in itself. Some background of the terms is made in Chapter 2 and 4, but they are not exhaustive deliberations on theorising the terms; they are referenced, contextually, and are based on profiling the voices of the interviewees, giving due credence.

At the time of writing this study, there was a lack of data or reliable data – ethnic-based or by age – which made it difficult to find a trend for interviewee mapping or for analysis. Most of the data available is not segregated into ethnic grouping and much is not in public domain. Most of it is not in any public domain – and updated, at that.

The political system is currently a dynamic one. Any policy change to improve the conditions for the people in

Malaysia or focused on improving the lives of Indian youths would not have been captured at this point of writing of the study.

### **1.7 Outcome of the Study**

Interviewing fieldwork interviewees was completed in 26 days. Data collection, analysis and comparison for Phase 1 of the study was submitted on January 31, 2019, as required by the terms of the partnership agreement. The report was then finalised on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2019, based on the acceptance of the study by Massey University and Penang Institute.

This study was written with the aim of sharing the voices of the interviewees before the analysis was done. Effort was made to protect the identities of the interviewees as in some narratives, there were particular pieces of information that could reveal their identity. That cautionary approach has, in no way, detracted on what had been said or in any way limited the authenticity in reporting the content of the interviews.

## Chapter 2 Backgrounding

### 2.1 Studies on Indians in Penang

Two past studies gave an overview on the socio-economic backgrounds of Indians in Penang. They are the Socio-Economic Study of the Marginalised Indian Community in Penang, 2013 – 2014; and School-to-Work Transition of Young Malaysians, 2017.

The Socio-Economic Study of the Marginalised Indian Community in Penang was a study to assess how the 40 action plans had impacted the socio-economic lives of the Indian community, and especially those who were identified as marginalised. This study was a follow-up to the 1998 study which resulted in the 40 action plans that were drawn up.

The study gave a glimpse into the state of marginalisation of the Indian communities.<sup>8</sup> This study highlighted two main factors – low education attainment and insufficient income – that were entrapping the Indians in poverty, limiting their social mobility and freedom. Furthermore, from 1998 to 2014, the study showed significant improvements had happened among Indians for those with higher education attainment, increasing their household income and having better housing. Yet, it stated that Indians did not feel empowered as this was possibly due to their marginalisation, and the drastic rise of living costs in recent years which had also caused a squeeze on their disposable income. There was also a reminder that this phenomenon could be a similar experience for the poor across all different ethnic groups

The other study is a nation-wide education and labour market survey – School-to-Work Transition of Young Malaysians<sup>9</sup> – which highlighted the adverse environment that youths faced in Malaysia. In 2017, of the total 502,600 unemployed Malaysians, youths aged 15-24 years old accounted for 56.4% while those aged 25-29 years accounted for another 21.1%. The unemployment rate was 15.4% for those aged 15-19 years old and 9.6% for those aged 20-24 years old, as compared to the country's total unemployment rate of 3.4%. For those aged between 25-29 years, the unemployment rate was 3.9%. More females than males were unemployed, and by ethnic groups, Indian youths were ranked second highest in unemployment rates, the first highest being "others".<sup>10</sup>

Indian youths faced the highest youth unemployment rate compared to Bumiputeras and Chinese. While the media attributed the high youth unemployment rate to skills shortages and mismatches, that claim was not supported by the findings in this survey. The mismatch was evident: employers faced no difficulties in hiring their ideal talent regardless of the high youth unemployment rates. Youths were threatened by the thrust of foreigners taking up positions in higher paid jobs, leaving the lower-paying 3-D (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs to be filled up. Youths were also struggling with their own weak language proficiencies, inadequate academic qualifications, sometimes degrees that are irrelevant to the job market and insufficient soft skills.

Furthermore, the increase in use of online hiring platforms and informal recruitment methods used by employers made it difficult for poorer youths with limited access to internet and social networks, to be adept at job applications and getting a job.

While more details are yet to be unravelled on the challenges faced by all youths, that study clearly shows the need to look at these high levels of unemployability among Indian youths in Malaysia and in this case, Penang.

Hence, this qualitative study on Indian youths ought to be another step in understanding what ails and what could be done to improve the conditions for Indian youths, which could also be relevant to other youths.

### 2.2 Multiracial, Multicultural, Multireligious Malaysia

Malaysia, with a population of 32.4 million, is a multicultural society made up of three main ethnic groups – the

<sup>8</sup> Toh, K. W., & Ang, M. C. (2015). Socio-Economic Study of the Marginalized Indian Community in Penang, 2013 – 2014. Penang Institute.

<sup>9</sup> Khazanah Research Institute. (2018). School-to-Work Transition of Yong Malaysians (p. 7). Retrieved from [http://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/20181205\\_SWTS\\_Main%20Book.pdf...](http://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/20181205_SWTS_Main%20Book.pdf...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*; citing Department of Statistics data, pp 9.

Bumiputeras (69.1%), the Chinese (23%) and the Indians (6.9%).<sup>11</sup> The country also has multireligious groups – Muslims (63.7%), Buddhists (17.7%), Christians (9.4%), Hindus (6.0%) and others (3.2%).<sup>12</sup>

Multiculturalism is often referred to as the governance of the inter-ethnic relationship between the Bumiputera majority and the minority groups of Chinese and Indians.<sup>13</sup> During the colonial era, Chinese and Indians labourers were imported in big numbers to be the extra labour force. The British governed over the three ethnic groups through the “divide and rule” policy, which meant different economic responsibilities were given to each group. The Chinese worked in mining or in business; the Indians worked in rubber estates; and the Malays either worked as farmers or as fishermen in rural areas, or as government officials in the city. This artificial manipulation on labour division and living areas continue to lead to socio-economic inequalities among the three ethnic groups, though the gaps in the incomes amongst the Bumiputeras, the Chinese and the Indians, has narrowed.<sup>14</sup> Since Independence, the “social contract” between the Bumiputeras and the non-Bumiputeras (Chinese and Indians) was one of special privileges being given to the Bumiputeras to raise the socio-economic inequalities with affirmative action (see Section 2.3). This marked the beginning of a new discourse in multiculturalism in Malaysia among the ethnic groups.

But with globalisation, intense technological advances and the mushrooming of many new forms of industries and enterprises, any form of affirmative action and marginalisation of other ethnic groups in a multicultural, multiracial, multireligious country, can deepen any rift between the marginalised and those who are benefiting from the opportunities being given to them.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.3 Bumiputera Policy

What does the word “Bumiputera” mean? Some of the criticisms that have been put forth and continue to surface against the Bumiputera policy is the emphasis it places on Malays and not across all Malaysians. The word “Bumiputera” is derived from a Sanskrit term to mean “son of the land” or “son of the soil”. This gives the notion that only the Malays are the actual citizens of the land; the other ethnic communities are not.

In Malaysia the special place for Bumiputeras – in this case “people of the soil” – are identified to be the Malays<sup>16</sup> and natives of Sabah and Sarawak, by ethnic groups; of whom 69.1% are Bumiputera.<sup>17</sup> The concept of Bumiputera and the special position of the Malays are endorsed in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia – in Article 153. This Article states, “Reservation of quotas in respect of services, permits, etc., for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak”<sup>18</sup>, demarcating the approach that needed to be taken with regard to the position of the Malays as given in a number of specific areas in the Constitution through the authority of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong who may, in order to promote the purposes of Article 153, reserve such proportion as he deems reasonable. The provisions are:

- 153(1): “It shall be the responsibility of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities in accordance with the provisions of this Article”
- 153(2): “Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, but subject to the provisions of Article 40 and of this Article, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall exercise his functions under this Constitution and

<sup>11</sup> Department of Statistics, Malaysia. (2018). Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2017 – 2018. Retrieved from [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=155&bul\\_id=c1pqTnFjb29HSnNYNUpiTmNWZHArdz09&menu\\_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TihUUT09...](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=155&bul_id=c1pqTnFjb29HSnNYNUpiTmNWZHArdz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TihUUT09...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>12</sup> Malay Mail. (April 3, 2015). Study: By 2050, seven out of 10 Malaysians will be Muslims. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2015/04/03/study-by-2050-seven-out-of-10-malaysians-will-be-muslims/871679...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>13</sup> Ibrahim, R. (2007). Multiculturalism and Education in Malaysia. Culture and Religion, 8(2), 155 – 167. doi: 10.1080/14755610701424024

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2017/05/18/malaysias-system-of-racial-preferences-should-be-scrapped...> accessed, Feb 2019

<sup>15</sup> Taib, M. I. M. (n.d.). *The Future of Multiculturalism in Southeast Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.thereadinggroup.sg/Articles/The%20Future%20of%20Multiculturalism%20in%20Southeast%20Asia.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>16</sup> The Federal Constitution defines a “Malay” to be a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay custom.

<sup>17</sup> Repeating the information – the Chinese are at 23.0 %, the Indians at 6.9% and others at 1.0%; Population estimates as of 31 July 2018, Department of Statistics Malaysia.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/FC/Federal%20Consti%20\(BI%20text\).pdf...](http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/FC/Federal%20Consti%20(BI%20text).pdf...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

federal law in such manner as may be necessary to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and to ensure the reservation for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service (other than the public service of a State) and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal Government and, when any permit or licence for the operation of any trade or business is required by federal law, then, subject to the provisions of that law and this Article, of such permits and licences.

- 153(8) “Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, where by any federal law any permit or licence is required for the operation of any trade or business, that law may provide for the reservation of a proportion of such permits or licences for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak; but no such law shall for the purpose of ensuring such a reservation—...”
- 153(8)(a)(b)(c): “deprive or authorise the deprivation of any person of any right, privilege, permit or licence accrued to or enjoyed or held by him”; ...or authorise a refusal to renew to any person any such permit or licence or a refusal to grant to the heirs... where no permit or licence was previously required for the operation of the trade or business, authorise a refusal to grant a permit or licence...”
- As for the national language, it is enshrined under Article 152(2) that the national language be the Malay language and used for all official purposes as referred to the National Language Act 1963/1967.

In addition, Article 89 provides for Malay reservation lands. Such lands cannot be de-reserved except by a state law which had been approved by special majorities in both the State Assembly; Article 90 confers special protection on customary lands in Negeri Sembilan and Melaka and Malay holdings in Terengganu; under Article 8 it is permissible to restrict enlistment in the Malay Regiment to Malays; and under the Constitution of all the states except Melaka, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak, the Menteri Besar of the state must be a Malay and a Muslim. Similar requirement applies to the State Secretary except in Melaka, Penang, Perak, Sabah and Sarawak.<sup>19</sup> A “Malay”, by Article 160(2), needs to fulfil four criteria: profess the religion of Islam; habitually speak the Malay language; conform to Malay customs; and must have roots by descent or be born in Peninsula Malaysia or Singapore before or on day of Malaysia’s independence, August 31, 1957.<sup>20</sup>

It must be noted that the word “Bumiputera” does not appear in the Constitution. The word “Bumiputera” was first seen in the National Economic Policy (NEP)<sup>21</sup> in 1970, which is the national affirmative action programme that was launched by the Malaysian government under Tun Abdul Razak, the second prime minister of Malaysia. The initial discussions of Bumiputera came about as a response to the fear and insecurities that arose from the racial riots of May 13, 1969. The riots were mainly due to income inequalities and the lack of educational opportunities between the Bumiputera community and the other ethnic groups.<sup>22</sup> The NEP established a 20-year work plan to equalise on the provision of economic opportunities for all Malaysians. Policymakers in Malaysia intended for the NEP to attain this through a two-pronged strategy via affirmative action for the poorer Malays as an ethnic group.

Affirmative action is the practice of favouring certain groups known to have been discriminated against or overlooked, previously. The first affirmative action plan was to eliminate poverty in Malaysia by narrowing the economic gap between the Malays and the Chinese. Among other things, this affirmative action identified education as one of the key areas that could play a factor in restructuring the economic imbalance among the three ethnic groups. The Bumiputera policy comes with a whole range of economic benefits and tangible advantages. Quotas were imposed on various aspects, including university admissions, scholarships, housing, civil service, and business loans and licenses. In education, for example, the Bumiputera varsity quota addressed

<sup>19</sup> Shad Saleem Faruqi, *Affirmative Action Policies and the Constitution in The 'Bumiputera Policy' Dynamics and Dilemmas*; Volume 21, NO 1&2, 2003; *Guest Editors: Richard Mason and Ariffin S. M. Omar*; *University Sains Malaysian*; [http://web.usm.my/km/vol21\(1&2\)2003.html](http://web.usm.my/km/vol21(1&2)2003.html)... accessed 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; Professor Shad also stated that definition of Malay under Constitution 160(2) also has certain ambiguity that need to be ascertained. There were also discussions, as presented in the journal on who is a ‘bumiputra’ that can include all indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak but not the Orang Asli whose protection comes under Constitution’s Article 8(5); Richard Mason and Ariffin Omar: *The ‘Bumiputera Policy’: Dynamics and Dilemmas*, *University Sains Malaysia*; [http://web.usm.my/km/vol21\(1&2\)2003.html](http://web.usm.my/km/vol21(1&2)2003.html)... accessed 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019

<sup>21</sup> Mokhtar, K., Chan, A., & Jamir Singh, P. (2013). *The New Economic Policy (1970 – 1990) in Malaysia: The Economic and Political Perspectives*. *GSTF International Journal on Media & Communications(JMC)*, 1(1), 12-17.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad, Z. (2007). *The tragedy of May 13, 1969*. Retrieved from [http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/echoes\\_of\\_the\\_past/the\\_tragedy\\_of\\_may\\_13\\_1969.html](http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/echoes_of_the_past/the_tragedy_of_may_13_1969.html)... Accessed, Jan 31, 2019...accessed, Jan 31, 2019

the low university participation rate among those in the lower socio-economic bracket. University admission was set at a ratio of 55:45 Bumiputera to non-Bumiputera.<sup>23</sup> Second, the NEP was to restructure the socio-economic imbalances in society. So, the state government set a 30% Bumiputera quota allotment for each housing development project. This is in line with the Bumiputera Lot Quota Regulation introduced under the NEP for specific Bumiputera lots, for which they enjoyed discounts. Bumiputera lots can only be purchased and owned by Bumiputeras. The discount percentages differ from state to state, ranging between 5-15%.

The main controversy of this affirmative action is that it is based on racial identity – an ethnic group identity – rather than socio-economic status. Over the decades, slowly and steadily, ethnic group-based policies have become the norm. There is discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation. There are direct instances when Indians are told to “balik India” (go back to India) or Chinese told to “balik China” (go back to China).<sup>24</sup> This has resulted in dissatisfaction and unhappiness among the non-Bumiputeras. The Bumiputera policy has caused much resentment among those excluded, primarily the Chinese and Indians.<sup>25</sup> The wariness, fear and shortcomings have been expressed and documented by various actors in “Bumiputera policy” discussions. Even at that time, the first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, had reassured that there would not be any confiscation of enterprises from the Chinese businessmen to be handed to the Bumiputeras. The next prime minister, Tun Abdul Razak, also reassured in his official declaration of the NEP that “the government will ensure that no particular group or community will feel any sense of deprivation or loss or feel any sense of deprivation of his rights, privileges, income, job or opportunity”.<sup>26</sup>

To defray some of this constant resentment, the present prime minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said then that such affirmative action was not racist: “If we conduct a census of the number of students in the government and private universities, there are more non-Bumiputera students. That’s why we give attention and more places to Bumiputeras”.<sup>27</sup> So, in 2002, the government replaced the ethnic group-based affirmative admission with a merit-based admission criterion to prevent the “brain drain” of ethnic Chinese and Indians<sup>28</sup>. A year after the implementation of this merit-based admission, the representation of non-Bumiputera dropped from 45% during the Bumiputera-ethnic quota system to 31.1% while the Bumiputera took up 68.9% of the admission.<sup>29</sup> This move was criticised then and even now by both ruling and opposition parties, who keep questioning on the lack of transparency on the admission process.<sup>30</sup> The then Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA) Youth Chief Wee Ka Siong described it by saying: “It is called merit system in name, but it is actually a quota system, in fact more quota than quota”.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, a study in 2012 described the introduction of the meritocratic system in 2002 as an effort to pacify the public dissent on the Bumiputera varsity quota<sup>32</sup>. The NEP which was to expire in 1990 – 20 years later – revamped and its core objectives have been carried forward to the new National Development Policy and National Mission.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Lee, H. (2012). Affirmative action in Malaysia: Education and employment outcomes since the 1990s. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 42(2), 230 – 254. doi:10.1080/09500782.2012.668350

<sup>24</sup> This was seen in the Malaysia Parliament, when an Indian Senator, who is also a minister in the Prime Minister's Department (National Unity and Social Wellbeing) was told to ‘balik India’ by the opposition law makers when he was making a speech on ICERD. Many are in the opinion that Article 153 would eventually be abolished if ICERD was ratified, hence jeopardizing the special rights and position held by the Malays. Parliament has since given assurance that it will not be repealed.

<sup>25</sup> Kua, K. (2018). Never-ending bumi policy dashes hope for ‘New Malaysia’. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/458326...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>26</sup> Ariffin Omar, Origins and Development of The Affirmative Policy In Malaya And Malaysia: A Historical Overview School Of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia Penang; [Http://Web.Usm.My/Km/Km%2021,2003/21-1.Pdf](http://Web.Usm.My/Km/Km%2021,2003/21-1.Pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Malaysia Kini. (Dec 12, 2009). *Bumi Varsity Quota Not Racist, Says Dr M*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/119720...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>28</sup> Malaysia Kini. (May 6, 2001). *University Quotas for Races may be abolished: Dr M*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/2731...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>29</sup> Lim, K. S. (May 10, 2002). Time Has Come for the Parliament in June to Consider and Debate the Abolition of Quotas for Bumiputera Students for Public University Entry Following the Outstanding Success of Bumiputera Students This Year in the Selection System Based Completely on Merit. Retrieved from <https://www.limkitsiang.com/archive/2002/may02/lks1553.htm...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>30</sup> Malaysia Kini. (Dec 12, 2009). *Bumi Varsity Quota Not Racist, Says Dr M*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/119720...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>31</sup> Lee, W. L. (July 22, 2013). Wee: Varsity intake system ‘more quota than quota’. *Malaysia Kini*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/236426...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>32</sup> Lee, H. (2012). Affirmative action in Malaysia: Education and employment outcomes since the 1990s. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 42(2), 230 – 254. doi:10.1080/09500782.2012.668350

<sup>33</sup> The National Mission. Retrieved from <http://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=page&page=1702...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

The good news is that on May 9, 2018 the General Election saw the end of Barisan Nasional's 60-year rule as the government of Malaysia. Since then, the newly minted Economic Affairs Minister, Datuk Seri Azmin Ali, has said that the NEP would be reviewed to reflect needs-based policies instead of just ethnic group-based ones.<sup>34</sup> He said then: "We need to be fair to all Malaysians. This is because there are needs to be taken care of the Indian communities who live in estates and rural areas. The Chinese community also needs the attention, help and support of the government". Despite this announcement that the government would review the efficacy of NEP,<sup>35</sup> the ad-hoc expansion of 1,000 matriculation placements for outstanding Chinese students from the B40 income group had raised doubts on the commitment to a review and a reforming the NEP.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, this historic change in government is still being seen as one that would reevaluate and review the function of any affirmative action as it is part of the 12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025),<sup>37</sup> of which details are yet to be announced, though consultations are taking place, at the point of writing up this study.

The prime minister had initially pledged to ratify all remaining core UN instruments related to the protection of human rights,<sup>38</sup> a universal value. However, in November 2018 a statement was released by the Prime Minister's Office stating that the government would not be ratifying the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The statement also stated that the government would continue to uphold the Federal Constitution, which means that Article 153 would remain intact. The Malaysian Bar president, in turn, urged the government to ratify ICERD as it need not contradict Article 153 as ICERD allowed for "temporary special measures" to be in place to achieve equality.<sup>39</sup>

There is a debilitating quality in the governmental discussions on the Bumiputera policy. Be it the Pakatan Harapan government or opposition Barisan Nasional, the stance on ethnic-based affirmative action sways both ways most of the time. For instance, ex-prime minister Najib Razak's "1 Malaysia Government Transformation Programme" vowed to develop policies based on needs and merit in 2010.<sup>40</sup> However, in 2017 he told the Indian community that "the Indians will continue to be victimised if we continue to fully practice this meritocracy system."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the current prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged the Bumiputera community to be more independent and competitive; many opportunities had been given to the community, yet it remained in the lowest socio-economic status. He questioned the Bumiputera community: "The question remains, you can't, or you don't want? Opportunities (to change one's own life) are plenty, but at the end of the day, you can bring a horse to water, but you can't make it drink."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the prime minister wants an independent Bumiputera community. But when asked about the possibility of doing away with the ethnic group-based affirmative action, he answered by saying, "Why should I stop? We are trying to correct disparity in wealth between the Malays and others. We have to bring up the Malays to be as wealthy or well-off as others. That needs correction."<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, NEP started with the noble goal of bringing up ethnicities that had lower socio-economic status. Nonetheless, 48 years since its inception, the promise of equitable socio-economic standing among all three ethnic groups is yet to be fulfilled. The Pakatan Harapan government hopes to table the National Harmony Bill

<sup>34</sup> Sivanandam, H., & Rahim, R. (2018). NEP review to benefit all M'sians, says Azmin. The Star. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/07/25/nep-review-to-benefit-all-msians-says-azmin/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>35</sup> Straits Times. (July 25, 2018). *KL to review race-based New Economic Policy*. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/kl-to-review-race-based-new-economic-policy...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>36</sup> Leong, Y. S. (July 2, 2018). *Urges Minister of education Dr. Mazlee Malik to merge STPM with matriculation program and abolish racial quota in pre-university admission system*. Retrieved from <https://dapmalaysia.org/statements/2018/07/02/27363/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>37</sup> Shagar, L. (2018). Azmin: Govt to review NEP, NEM among major national policies. The Star. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/07/23/govt-to-review-nep-nem-among-major-national-policies-says-azmin/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>38</sup> Tun Dr Mahathir's speech at 73rd UN General Assembly

<sup>39</sup> Malaysian Bar: No contradiction between ICERD and Article 153 of the Federal Constitution - Nation | The Star Online. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/11/10/msian-bar-no-contradiction-between-icerd-and-article-153-of-federal-constitution/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>40</sup> Prime Minister Office. (2010). *1 Malaysia Government Transformation Programme: The Roadmap – Executive Summary*. Retrieved from [http://www.rurallink.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/5-GTP\\_Roadmap\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf...](http://www.rurallink.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/5-GTP_Roadmap_Executive_Summary.pdf...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>41</sup> The Sun Daily. (October 9, 2017). Meritocracy System Not Helping Indian students: Najib. Retrieved from <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/meritocracy-system-not-helping-indian-students-najib-BTARCH490831...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>42</sup> Rodzi, N. H. (September 1, 2018). Malaysia to train Bumiputera to be more competitive rather than spoon-feed them: Mahathir. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-to-train-bumiputera-to-be-more-competitive-rather-than-spoon-feed-them...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>43</sup> Straits Times. (October 2, 2018). *Malaysian PM Mahathir Says Affirmative Action Policy to Remain*. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysian-pm-mahathir-says-affirmative-action-policy-to-remain...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019



in early 2019. The Harmony Bill, which is said to comprise of three new Acts, could be the drive towards the government's efforts to enhance and strengthen ethnic relations among Malaysians.<sup>44</sup>

Should NEP be abolished or revamped? Its efficacy and effectiveness on tackling socio-economic inequity is certainly questionable, for it is an ethnic group-based affirmative action which has lasted beyond the initial 20 years, becoming “a temporary eternity.”<sup>45</sup>

## 2.4 Education Policies and Pathways

### 2.4.1 The Education System

Under the Malaysian education system, a child goes through six stages of education, with each stage having public or private options, be it pre-school, primary school, secondary school, pre-university level or tertiary level. There have been many reforms in the education system of Malaysia, moving away from rote learning. The education system went from the Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) in primary school and Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah (KBSM) in secondary school – with the focus on communication, interaction with society and personal development in 1988 – to the Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) and Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) respectively, which focus more on using school-based assessment (PBS) for better personal character development in 2017.<sup>46</sup> This system has been implemented in the school system of vernacular schools which are made up of Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (C) (Chinese school); Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (T) (Tamil school); Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) for primary level; and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) and Sekolah Kebangsaan for secondary level. Despite governmental efforts in moving away from having standardised exams, there is, nevertheless, little evidence of positive outcomes in de-stressing the grading and examination system as they become means to also beat the non-transparent quota criteria system, especially for the minority ethnic groups. There had been critical reviews on the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.<sup>47</sup>

#### 2.4.1.1. Schools and Process

When children are around the age of six to seven years old, their parents register them for primary school placements.<sup>48</sup> Due to pre-school education not being compulsory, only 77% of students are enrolled in some form of public or private pre-school programme – as mentioned in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.<sup>49</sup> Hence, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development set up a special body with executive powers of monitoring the implementation of early childhood education, streamlining provisions across all Malaysian states and supervising all early childhood education institutions in Malaysia, including provisions across all Ministries.<sup>50</sup>

From the ages of 6 onward, there is free education provided by the government for all students in the six years of primary school and five years of secondary school. All primary school students will be tested with Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR), which is a primary school evaluation test for all Standard 6 students. In these six years of primary school education, there will be no examinations from Year 1 to Year 3 to allow students to discover the joy of learning;<sup>51</sup> but examinations are imposed from Years 3 to 6. Although there are no

<sup>44</sup> Kushairi, A. (2018). National Harmony Bill to be tabled early next year. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/10/419929/national-harmony-bill-be-tabled-early-next-year...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>45</sup> The Economist. (May 18, 2017). *Race-based Affirmative Action Is Failing Poor Malaysians*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/asia/2017/05/18/race-based-affirmative-action-is-failing-poor-malaysians...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Education. (2012). Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025. Retrieved from [https://www.moe.gov.my/images/dasar-kpm/articlefile\\_file\\_003108.pdf...](https://www.moe.gov.my/images/dasar-kpm/articlefile_file_003108.pdf...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>47</sup> The Economist. (May 18, 2017). *Race-based Affirmative Action Is Failing Poor Malaysians*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/asia/2017/05/18/race-based-affirmative-action-is-failing-poor-malaysians...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Education (2019). Retrieved from: <https://public.moe.gov.my/...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>49</sup> The Star Online. (September 18, 2016). Improving Preschool Standards. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2016/09/18/improving-preschool-standards/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>50</sup> Department of Statistics, Malaysia. (Jan 14, 2019). Malaysia @ a Glance: Pulau Pinang. Retrieved from [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cone&menu\\_id=SEFobmo1N212cXc5TFILVTvXWUFZz09...](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cone&menu_id=SEFobmo1N212cXc5TFILVTvXWUFZz09...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>51</sup> New Straits Times. (December 19, 2018). No more mid-year, final exams for Year 1 – 3 pupils from 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/12/442165/no-more-mid-year-final-exams-year-1-3-pupils-2019...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

examinations around this period, there are classroom-based assessments that also focus on character building as well as an evaluation on the learning throughout the first three years.<sup>52</sup> While many are supportive of this change, some parents worry and remain sceptical about the adaptability of their children in handling examinations from Year 3, as they feel that it would be a new culture to them.<sup>53</sup>

Upon the completion of UPSR, students enter secondary school. Unless a request is made, all students from vernacular schools will be randomly assigned to SMK schools for their secondary education, while students from SK primary schools will continue to SK secondary schools. In secondary school, students used to prepare for Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR), or Lower Secondary Assessment, in their third year. However, since 2014 the Ministry of Education (MOE) shifted from the multiple-choice question examination mode of PMR to Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) to test complex thinking skills to align with the aims of the learning modules.<sup>54</sup> After PT3, it is a gateway to high school learning, where they sit for their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) or the Malaysian Certificate of Education.<sup>55</sup> The requirement in the primary and secondary school systems is that Malay be the primary medium of instruction, whereas English is a compulsory subject for all students.<sup>56</sup> Moral Ethics and Islamic Education are provided to non-Muslim and Muslim students respectively in all government and government-aided schools.

#### **2.4.1.2. Tertiary Institutions**

These SPM results become the ticket to enter a pre-university programme in government or private education institutions. Currently there is a vast variety of pre-university and university programmes. Individuals who opt for public universities would have to apply online through the Unit Pusat Universiti (UPU), whereas for private universities, students may directly apply to the university they are interested in, or if the university is interested in them. According to data from the Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA), there are currently a total of 36 public universities and more than double the number of private universities<sup>57</sup> in the whole of Malaysia. As such, students are currently often distracted by the choices they face – an overwhelming information load. Against the hefty costs of tertiary education – in public or private – almost all students may request for National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) loans, the amount determined by the levels of family income.<sup>58</sup> (Appendix IV for the full education pathway of the Malaysian national education system.)

University of Malaya (UM), a prestigious university in Malaysia, improved its QS ranking numbers from #167 in 2014 to #87 in 2019. In Penang, USM's QS ranking also improved from #355 in 2014 to #201 in 2019.<sup>59</sup> There is no doubt that tertiary education in Malaysia has risen in reputation and quality, both locally and internationally.<sup>60</sup> However, the black box application process for university allocation and course selection continues to receive much criticism.

With no official follow-up data available at time of writing, it would be interesting to note a BBC report that showed that the Bumiputera benefit scheme was abolished in 2002<sup>61</sup> when previously they were given, over other ethnic groups, entry into colleges and universities. At that time, the then deputy education minister cited that

<sup>52</sup> The Star Online. (November 19, 2018). Dr Wan Azizah: Govt Plans to Merge Early Childhood Education Institutions. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/11/19/dr-wan-azizah-govt-plans-to-merge-early-childhood-education-institutions/>... accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>53</sup> Menon, S., & Priya, S. S. (November 1, 2018). No exams for lower primary. *The Star Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/11/01/no-exams-for-lower-primary-maslee-it-will-be-replaced-with-more-objective-assessments/>... accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>54</sup> Yue-Yi, H. (2017). Saving our schools. *Penang Monthly*, 02.17.

<sup>55</sup> Department of Statistics, Malaysia (Jan 14, 2019). Malaysia @ a Glance: Pulau Pinang. Retrieved from [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cone&menu\\_id=SEFobmo1N212cXc5TFILVTVxWUFXZz09...](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cone&menu_id=SEFobmo1N212cXc5TFILVTVxWUFXZz09...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>56</sup> Law of Malaysia. Education Act 1996, as at 1 January 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/LOM/EN/Act%20550.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>57</sup> Malaysia Qualification Agency. (2019). Retrieved from <http://www2.mqa.gov.my/mqr/akrbyipta.cfm>; <https://www.studymalaysia.com/education/top-stories/list-of-universities-in-malaysia...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>58</sup> Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional, PTPTN. (2019). Loan Application. Retrieved from <https://www.ptptn.gov.my/permohonan-pinjaman-side...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>59</sup> Top University. (January 23, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.topuniversities.com/universities/universiti-sains-malaysia-usm...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>60</sup> Top University. (January 16, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.topuniversities.com/universities/universiti-malaya-um...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>61</sup> Pak, J. (2013). Is Malaysia university entry a level playing field? *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23841888...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

the acceptance rate for Malays, Chinese and Indians stood at 72%, 76% and 69% respectively, and claimed that such an accusation, in the report, was a perception problem<sup>14</sup> as Chinese students were the majority ethnic group. These contrarian views on the Bumiputera policy in the education system continue till today. In the next chapter, we will read what Indian youths have experienced. Even the new government's statements and the recent anti-ICERD protests (see Section 2.3) show that the Bumiputera policy still exists. Incidentally in Penang, in 2010, the number of Chinese with masters, degrees and diplomas was higher than the Malays; numbering the lowest were the Indians. Out of that ethnic group population for that year, about 4.6% Indians attained this level of education; 6.4% were Chinese and 5.1% were Malays. There is no comparative data to show if these students went through government or private institutions to achieve their degrees, though it is assumed that Malay students would have attained their degrees in government universities. (see Appendix V for the table on highest level of education achieved by ethnicity in Penang.) Overall, the trend of reduced places for Chinese and Indian students at the university level continues – the number of Indian and Chinese applicants for public university placements had dropped by a half and a third respectively.<sup>62</sup>

## 2.5 Employment

The labour participation rate of Malaysia increased from 67.3% in 2013 to 68.0% in 2018. The Chinese had the highest labour participation rates of 67.8%, the Bumiputeras figured at 65.1% and the Indians at 64.7%.<sup>63</sup> (see Appendix VI for Table of Labour Force by Sex and Ethnic Group in Malaysia.) Malaysia had an unemployment rate of 3.4% in 2017, but youth unemployment rates had been constantly high since 2015, peaking to its highest level of 10.8% in 2017.<sup>64</sup> Strong service and manufacturing sectors promised higher employment rates, but Penang's youth unemployment rate fluctuated at around 5% to 7% from 2011 to 2017.<sup>65</sup> (see Appendix VII for Table of Broad Statistics of Labour Force Industry in Penang.) In Penang youths aged between 25 and 29 form the biggest workforce at almost 18% and with those aged between 20 and 24, together they form 31% or 264,000 of the total of 839,500 employed persons in Penang. (see Appendix VIII for the Table of Labour Force by State and Age Group in Malaysia.)

In 2017, Indians, as an ethnic group, had a relatively higher unemployment rate of 4.7% than the Malays and the Chinese, which were 4.0% and 2.4% respectively. This is also supported by the School-to-Work Transition Survey,<sup>66</sup> which stated that Indians in Malaysia face a higher youth unemployment rate than the Malays and the Chinese – Indians in the age group of 20-24 years have an unemployment rate of 13.6% compared to 12.9% among Malays and 7.5% for the Chinese. Undeniably, students at this age might still be students, but the vast difference in youth unemployment rates through an ethnic group lens did show that Indian youths were facing greater risk in not landing a job, whereas Chinese had the lowest unemployment rate in Malaysia.

The same study also stipulated that high youth unemployment is a global issue faced by several countries, including Malaysia.<sup>67</sup> This concern prompted a focus on decent employment and well-being of youth to become part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to which Malaysia had also committed itself.<sup>67</sup> On that basis, Deputy Youth and Sports Minister Steven Sim stated that the government was determined to curb this pertinent issue by upskilling youths for better marketability.<sup>68</sup>

According to the Employment Act, employees in Malaysia are entitled<sup>69</sup> to a minimum wage of RM1,100.

<sup>62</sup> Mokhtar, K., Chan, A., & Jamir Singh, P. (2013). The New Economic Policy (1970 – 1990) in Malaysia: The Economic and Political Perspectives. *GSTF International Journal on Media & Communications(JMC)*, 1(1), 12-17

<sup>63</sup> Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2017). *Labour Force Survey Report 2017*.

<sup>64</sup> <sup>64</sup> Pak, J. (2013). Is Malaysia university entry a level playing field? *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23841888...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>65</sup> MIDF. (2017). Youth unemployment rate remains high as skills mismatch stay prevalent. *Economic Review:2017 Labour Market*. Retrieved from <http://www.midf.com.my/images/Downloads/Research/Econs-MSia-2017-Youth-UE-MIDF-030518.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>66</sup> Khazanah Research Institute. (2018). *School-to-Work Transition of Yong Malaysians* (p. 7). Retrieved from [http://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/20181205\\_SWTS\\_Main%20Book.pdf...](http://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/20181205_SWTS_Main%20Book.pdf...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>67</sup> United Nation. (2019). Sustainable Development Goals: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/economic-growth/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>68</sup> MalaysiaKini. (2018). Ministry to hold more programmes to address unemployment among youth. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/455738...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>69</sup> This is the current status at point of writing as there are calls that the government needs to offer more for people to meet sustainable living standards.

Employees contribute from their salaries a certain portion to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF), to the Social Security Organisation (SOCSSO) and to monthly income tax deductions or *potongan cukai bulanan* (PCB),<sup>70</sup> which are then computed to annual tax returns. Employers also make EPF contributions to employees too. Each employee has a minimum of eight days of annual leave and 14 days of sick leave entitlement per annum, with the length of annual leave increasing based on the number of years of service with the company or the status of the job. In cases where an employee is hospitalised, they have a total of 60 days of sick and hospitalisation leave per year. As for pregnant workers, mothers are given 60 consecutive days of maternity leave while there is no paternal leave.

## 2.6 Income by Ethnicity

From 1970 to 2014, the median monthly household income of Malaysians had increased by 7.8%, whereas Malaysian Indians' median monthly household income only increased by 7.5%. Although Malaysian Indians is the ethnic group with the second-highest median monthly household income in 2014, the growth rate of the Indians' median monthly household income was still lower than the average Malaysian. In 2014 Malaysian Indians earned a median monthly household income of RM4,627, whereas Bumiputeras and Malaysian Chinese earned RM4,214 and RM5,708 respectively. The table below shows the breakdown of mean monthly income by ethnicity and income groups in 2014.

Table: Mean Monthly Income by Ethnicity and Income Group in Malaysia, 2014						
Ethnic/Income Bracket	B40 <sup>71</sup>		M40		T20	
	Mean Monthly Income	Ethnic Proportion	Mean Monthly Income	Ethnic Proportion	Mean Monthly Income	Ethnic Proportion
Bumiputera	RM12,630	53.8%	RM5,190	64.2%	RM2,367	73.6%
Chinese	RM17,981	37.1%	RM7,049	26.4%	RM3,127	17.5%
Indian	RM14,604	8.8%	RM5,646	9.1%	RM2,672	8.5%
Total	N/A	100%	N/A	100%	N/A	100%
Source: Household Income Survey 2014, as cited in Malaysian Indian Blue Print 2017, page 33						

The table also shows that the mean monthly income of the Chinese was the highest, followed by the Indians and the Bumiputeras. Although the mean monthly income of Indians was higher than the Bumiputeras, this might not be totally representative as Bumiputeras consist of Malays and the marginalised indigenous ethnicities. Hence, the mean monthly income of the Bumiputeras might reflect an average figure as it would include the figures of the underprivileged indigenous community.

To understand the state of Indians in Malaysia, there were a total of 227,600 B40<sup>73</sup> Indian households (2014), with the majority of them working as plant and machine operators, production assemblers, and services and sales workers.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, 80% of Indian households were below the poverty income line of RM960 and were concentrated in urban areas. That amounted to 3,500 Indian households being labelled as poor, with another 22,700 Indian households earning about RM1, 000 a month, or less.<sup>75</sup> With the large number of marginalised Indians residing in urban areas, the Malaysia Indian Blueprint report in 2017 stated that the poverty issue faced by the Indians is an urban issue.

<sup>70</sup> Laws of Malaysia. (2012). Employment Act 1955, as at 30 April 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/LOM/EN/Act%20265%20-%20Employment%20Act%201955.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>71</sup> B20, M20 and T20 are the representations of the percentages of the countries' population of Bottom 40%, Middle 40% and Top 20% respectively

<sup>73</sup> B20, M20 and T20 are the representations of the percentages of the countries' population of Bottom 40%, Middle 40% and Top 20% respectively

<sup>74</sup> Household Income Survey 2014, as cited in Malaysia Indian Blueprint, page 33

<sup>75</sup> Malaysian Indian Blueprint 2017

The following table indicates the competency levels of Indians in the B40 group across Malaysia. Most are strong in Tamil but show the weakest proficiency in English. There was no age factor given for the individuals in the households, so it was difficult to gauge which age band suffered from weak language skills in Bahasa Melayu and in English. Under the education requirement, all schools must offer all three languages.

Table: Percentage of IB40 Respondents with “good” level of proficiency (self-reported) in Tamil, Bahasa Melayu and English				
	Conversational (%)	Comprehension (%)	Reading (%)	Composition (%)
English	29	32	29	27
Bahasa Melayu	64	64	49	46
Tamil	94	93	42	38

Note: Peninsular-wide face-to-face survey of IB40 undertaken by blueprint secretariat. N = 2,087. Over 75% of respondent were from households earning RM2,000 and below a month.

Source: *Malaysian Indian Blueprint 2017*, page 35

## 2.7 Healthcare

### 2.7.1 Life expectancies

The life expectancy at birth in Malaysia increased from 74.4 years in 2012 to 75.0 years in 2018 with females living 4.8 years longer than males.<sup>76</sup> This phenomenon, where females live longer than males, is a global trend, as males are seen to be more sensation-seeking and likely to engage in unhealthy lifestyle habits; whereas females are more health conscious and likely to be concerned with healthcare and engage in health-promoting behaviours.<sup>77</sup> Among all the states in Malaysia, Penang enjoys the third-highest life expectancy at birth, of 78.6 years. Despite improvements in life expectancy at birth since 2012, there is a difference on life expectancy at birth for the ethnicities – the Chinese have the highest life expectancy of 80.2 years followed by 76.4 years for Bumiputeras and 76.2 years for Indians.<sup>63</sup>

### 2.7.2 Diseases

In 2018 the Statistics on the Causes of Death in Malaysia 2018 report indicated that the top three causes of death are ischaemic heart disease (13.9%), pneumonia (12.7%) and cerebrovascular disease (7.1%) – all of which are non-communicable diseases.<sup>78</sup>

Although ischaemic heart disease is the primary cause of deaths in Malaysia, the incidence rates among the ethnic communities were (2018): Malays, 13.3%; Chinese, 13.2%; Indians, 19.5%. This shows that the Indians had and still have the highest risk of dying from heart attacks.<sup>63</sup> This could be attributed to the sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy eating habits, leading to these lifestyle diseases.<sup>79</sup> Another study on health showed that most people – based on 80% of participants’ responses – had only a moderate level of knowledge about obesity.<sup>80</sup> Hence, this showed that people were well aware of the significance of health-promoting behaviours, but were just not practising it; or healthcare administrations failed to follow through with the patients to ensure their commitment to frequent check-ups. In the next chapter, much of these findings would be shown to be true.

<sup>76</sup> Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2018). Abridged Life Tables, Malaysia, 2016 – 2018. Retrieved from [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=116&bul\\_id=aDV6TWxoU0NINVBYN1hXM1Y0L2Jadz09&menu\\_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09...](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=116&bul_id=aDV6TWxoU0NINVBYN1hXM1Y0L2Jadz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>77</sup> Assari, S. (2017). Why do women live longer than men? *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/why-do-women-live-longer-than-men...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>78</sup> Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2018). Statistics on Causes of Death, Malaysia, 2018. Retrieved from [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=401&bul\\_id=aWg2VjkZHHYcDdEM3JQSGloeTVIZz09&menu\\_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09...](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=401&bul_id=aWg2VjkZHHYcDdEM3JQSGloeTVIZz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>79</sup> Mansor, M., & Harun, N. Z. (2014). Health issues and awareness, and the significant of green space for health promotion in Malaysia. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 153, 209 – 220. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.055

<sup>80</sup> Baig, M. A. I., Sulaiman, S. A. S., Gillani, S. W., & Hariadha, E. (2013). A preliminary study on knowledge about obesity in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. *International Journal of Pharmacy & Life Sciences*, 4(6). Retrieved from <http://www.ijplsjournal.com/issues%20PDF%20files/june-2013/2.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

### 2.7.3 Medical costs

At an average rate of 12% per annum, insurance costs have risen exponentially to meet rising demands in healthcare and management of chronic lifestyle diseases, which are rising alarmingly in Malaysia.<sup>81</sup> As a result, many have stopped paying for their insurance premiums as it has become a high-cost item and is thus unaffordable.

To tackle these challenges in healthcare, the Malaysia government provided an affordable healthcare service with minimum charges<sup>82</sup> – as low as RM1 – on all outpatient visits.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, a National B40 Protection Scheme was launched on Jan 1, 2019, whereby medical expenditure on 36 critical illnesses would be covered to a maximum sum of RM8,000, and a pegged sum of RM50 per day or RM700 per annum as hospitalisation costs.<sup>84</sup> According to Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng, the launching of this scheme was aimed at lightening the citizens' burden by providing affordable social safety nets to cover their out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure.<sup>85</sup>

### 2.7.4 Mental health

Mental health has steadily become a rising issue. Mental health prevalence grew from 10.7% in 1996 to 29.2% in 2015 – an equivalent of one in three Malaysians was suffering from mental health problems and many others were at risk. Furthermore, people with mental illness were usually the young, poor and unemployed. In terms of ethnicity difference, the major ethnic groups with the highest risk of developing and suffering from mental illness stood at Indians (28.9%), Malays (28.2%) and the Chinese (24.2%).<sup>85</sup> While the Indian population is smaller, their risk factor was the highest. Indeed, mental illness, long suppressed and buried in most countries, is finally emerging as a medical concern as a result of the prevalence rates. However, despite this, academic writing shows that there are still remedial measures that have yet to be implemented.

## 2.8 Housing

With the change of government on May 9, 2018, the newly appointed Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin promised to complete 100,000 houses a year for 10 years to fulfil the Pakatan Harapan government's manifesto of a million affordable houses.<sup>86</sup> This promise was aimed to bridge the housing affordability gap in Malaysia. A higher price-to-income ratio meant lower affordability. Malaysia's housing affordability for the median household income in 2016 was already not enough as house price-to-income ratio stood at 6.17 times. Meanwhile, Penang came in at the second-highest house price-to-income ratio – at 6.32 times – among all the states.<sup>87</sup> This shows that houses in Malaysia or Penang have become severely unaffordable, given that house price-to-income ratio of 5.10 and above meant severely unaffordable as discussed in local news magazine, *The Edge*.<sup>72</sup>

In a similar report by *The Edge*, it pointed out that the affordable house price for Penang is RM118,000, RM230,000 and RM442,000 for B40, M40, and T20<sup>88</sup> respectively, whereas the actual price tag for all houses, terraced houses and high-rises stood at RM410,000, RM447,000 and RM340,000 respectively.<sup>72</sup> (see Appendix IX

<sup>81</sup> Yun, T. Z. (Sept 19, 2017). Insurance: Preparing for higher healthcare costs. *The Edge: Personal Wealth*. Retrieved from <http://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/insurance-preparing-higher-healthcare-costs...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>82</sup> The detail of affordable healthcare scheme maybe found in Fees (Medical) (Amendment) Order 2003, but attachment has been removed.

<sup>83</sup> Ministry of Health Malaysia. (2019). Outpatient Charges. Retrieved from <http://www.moh.gov.my/english.php/pages/view/674...> accessed Jan 31, 2019

<sup>84</sup> Tay, C. (December 28, 2018). National B40 Protection Scheme to start on Jan 1, 2019 – MoF. *The Edge Market*. Retrieved from <http://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/national-b40-protection-scheme-start-jan-1-2019-%E2%80%94-mof...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>85</sup> Lim, S. L. (2017). Bridging barriers: A report on improving access to mental healthcare in Malaysia. Penang Institute.

<sup>86</sup> Malay Mail. (November 27, 2018). Housing Ministry confident in achieving one million affordable homes in 10 years, says minister. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/11/27/housing-ministry-confident-in-achieving-one-million-affordable-homes-in-10/1697529...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>87</sup> The Edge Malaysia. (October 23, 2017). What's 'Affordable' Housing in Malaysia? Retrieved from <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/whats-affordable-housing-malaysia...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>88</sup> B20, M20 and T20 are the representations of the percentages of the countries' population of Bottom 40%, Middle 40% and Top 20% respectively

for Table of Residential Prices by Type of Housing in Penang.) A study by Bank Negara pointed out that this housing unaffordability was mainly due to the mismatch between the supply and demand chain of housing, rising prices of newly launched properties, and the out-paced growth of housing prices over the growth of household incomes.

Although the state and federal governments had reiterated their stand to provide affordable houses priced below RM250,000 in line with Bank Negara's<sup>89</sup> suggestions on affordable housing, this intervention was, nevertheless, questioned for its efficacy in solving the housing price issue. This measure by the bank, however, will not put a stop on the escalating land and construction prices, a result of aggressive expansions, both by private developers and the government whose housing scheme is to build and provide more affordable houses. In addition, the housing segment, amid very severe marketing competition, had saturated, discouraging private developers from furthering expansion.<sup>90</sup>

To make housing accessible and affordable to the public, the new Pakatan Harapan government made promises in their manifesto to do this. In it, they promised to build one million affordable houses across Malaysia over a time span of 10 years; and also create an innovative housing loan scheme tailored for youths and first-time buyers, subsidising maintenance cost of low-cost housings etc.<sup>91</sup>

## 2.9 Crime Rates and Gangsterism

The concept of “gangs” is a structured and hierarchical group which is guided by a leader to realise a pragmatic or pseudo-ideological cause, primarily using violence and illegal activities to assert an identity and for expenditures.<sup>92</sup> A report in 2017 showed that 71.75% of gangsters were of Indian origin, contributing 1.39% to the country's gangsterism issue, compared to Malays who contributed 0.01%, the Chinese (0.12%) and East Malaysians (0.03%).<sup>93</sup> A study revealed that people join gangs because of the misconception towards gangsterism – a longing for existential meaning in their lives, and to deviate from poor upbringing and troubled family environments, etc.<sup>94</sup> With Indians being one of the marginalised groups in Malaysia, perhaps it was the adverse environment that drove some of them to become members of a gang and later partake in gangsterism. Some do leave the gang; some stay on as they often do not know what else to do or become highly unemployable as they might have a criminal record. The table below shows police arrests by ethnic group and type of crime in 2015. Not all are gang-related criminal activities.

Table: Police Arrests by Ethnicity and Type of Crime, 2015				
	Bumiputera	Chinese	Indian	Others
Total	47,729	8,403	14,417	17,128
Violent Crimes	11,619	2,398	7,599	4,765
Non-violent Crimes	36,110	6,005	6,548	12,363
Source: <i>Malaysian Indian Blueprint 2017</i> , page 129				

<sup>89</sup> Cheah, Almeida, & Ho. (2017). Affordable housing: Challenges and the way forward. *BNM Quarterly Bulletin, Fourth Quarter 2017*. Retrieved from <http://www.bnm.gov.my/files/publication/qb/2017/Q4/p3ba1.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>90</sup> Ferlito, C. (2018). Affordable Housing and Cyclical Fluctuations: The Malaysian Property Market. *Policy Ideas*, 51. Retrieved from: [http://www.ideas.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/P151-AffordableHomes\\_web.pdf...](http://www.ideas.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/P151-AffordableHomes_web.pdf...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>91</sup> Pakatan Harapan. (2018). *Bukut Harapan: Rebuilding Our Nation, Fulfilling Our Hopes*. Retrieved from [http://kempen.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/Manifesto\\_text/Manifesto\\_PH\\_EN.pdf...](http://kempen.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/Manifesto_text/Manifesto_PH_EN.pdf...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>92</sup> Lemière, S. (2014). Gangsta and politics in Malaysia. *Misplaced Democracy: Malaysian Politics and People, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre Malaysia*, 91 – 108. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/79665947.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>93</sup> Kutty, R. R. (April 17, 2017). 71% of gangsters of Indian origin. *The Borneo Post*.

<sup>94</sup> Alagappar, P., Leng, C. W., George, M., Lee, A. S. H., & Wong, M. S. H. (2019). *Gangsterism among Teenagers in Malaysia*. Retrieved from <http://www.fp.utm.my/epusatsumber/listseminar/7.qram05/session2/100.ponmalaralagappar.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

There were not enough studies to source for further insights into the phenomenon of gangs and gangsterism among Indians in Penang.

## 2.10 Migration

According to *The Edge*, there were six million of migrant workers (2018) in Malaysia, with documented and undocumented workers at 1.76 million and 4.24 million respectively. Among all states, Penang had about 130,076 registered migrant workers, taking up 7.4 % of the total registered migrant workers.<sup>95</sup> However, this information proved to be inconsistent with the data disclosed by Penang State Executive Councillor Jagdeep Singh Deo, who cited a total of 93,000 of documented foreign workers and an estimated 200,000 undocumented foreign workers in Penang.<sup>96</sup> The purpose of including migrant workers in this discussion is that some Indians and others are finding it difficult to find a job or they are getting very lowly wages, or they are being supervised by foreign migrant workers for jobs that they feel they are well suited for.

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<sup>95</sup> The Edge Malaysia. (July 4, 2018). *Getting the 71% (UNDOCUMENTED) Foreign Workers Registered*. Retrieved from <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/getting-the-71-foreign-workers-registered...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>96</sup> Namblar, P. (August 13, 2018). Penang to build more first-class foreign workers' dorms. *Free Malaysia Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2018/08/13/penang-to-build-more-first-class-foreign-workers-dorms/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019



## Chapter 3: Interviewees: Their Voices

This chapter is a description of the interviewees' responses during the interview sessions and a summary discussion on the key thrusts in the conversations. It is impossible, as discussed in Limitations (see Section 1.6), to capture all the points raised, the direct comments made and to capture the nuances shown during the interview sessions. It needs to be said that there was much richness and an openness in the discussions and conversations during the interviews. This chapter is "Their Voices".

The underlying theme that cuts through all the discussions was the "quota" as was articulated often and the discrimination they faced as a direct and indirect result of it. The quota is an outcome of the Bumiputera policy based on provisions given in the Federal Constitution Article 153 (see Section 2.3). This recognition of "people of the soil" identifies Malays as the community that needs affirmative action to raise their socio-economic status and well-being in Malaysia. Most Malays are Muslims. So, as explained in Chapter 2, the affirmative action resulted in quotas being set for entry and on choices into education institutions (see Appendix IV for Education Pathway), in accessing scholarships, employment opportunities, funds for business start-ups, and land and housing rebates. The application of the Bumiputera policy is pervasive – across almost all aspects of living – which while it benefits one community, it is also discriminatory towards other ethnic groups, marginalising the ethnic groups seen as not "sons of the soil". Interviewees shared incidents in their narratives.

Another key element that emerged from interviewees was a self-reflection on the character of Indians as a whole in seeking their own path, aimed at the successful development of themselves as individuals and the community and the impact it has on them, as individuals.

Almost everyone was sceptical of politicians and trust levels were low, though they were very happy with the change in government in the recent general election.

An overall lack of information, easy means to seek counsel, struggle on monetary matters – especially for students – also emerged from the interviews. All youths displayed an aspiration to do better, to become independent, and were inspired by their role models.

Many interviewees shared how great their friends had been and stated how when their friends were from different ethnic groups, it was better and more fun. Some also shared instances of how wonderfully they had been treated by non-Indian doctors, teachers and employers. Some explained that when their opportunities had been dimmed though they were encouraged as deserving cases to apply for positions or scholarships, teachers offered consoling remarks.

The analysis of these many bytes from the interviewees is available in the next chapter of this study.

### 3.1 The Interviewees

There were 45 interviewees for this study (see Appendix XI: Matrix on Interviewees). Almost half of them (21 interviewees) were aged between 20-24; 14 were aged between 16 and 19; and 10 were between 25 and 28. There were more male interviewees among those aged 16 and 19 (nine of them), whereas in the other age bands, the sex ratio was even. Most were students doing their matriculation or in universities. All were singles; two of them were in relationships that would soon lead to marriage.

There were five community leaders among the interviewees, of whom two were females. One male was a student leader in his college and there was one female sportsperson.

Almost two thirds – 26 interviewees, 12 males and 14 females – were in the employment bracket. Four were seeking employment while seven males and seven females were working part-time. Four were running their own tuition businesses as part-time workers. Two others held professional jobs based on their specialist degree qualifications. Training to become a teacher was popular among the interviewees as they were on a diploma or degree programme with government-funded institutions. One interviewee was training to be a nurse. Only four of the interviewees – two males and two females – had scholarships. Eighteen out of a total of 35 interviewees were on diploma, degree, matriculation or foundation programmes, and had received grants/loans. Eleven of

them were females and seven were males. The most popular grant/loan form is the PTPN (see section 2.4.1.2).

Many said they were working and studying part-time on distance-learning courses or working in part-time jobs while waiting for full-time work. Those who had graduated – except for a handful – had found relevant jobs pertaining to their degrees, especially those who had studied engineering. But there were those who had attained degrees in business management or in agrarian-farming but were not working in these fields. One of them had gone into the retail industry as she could not land a job in agro-farming which she said she loved.

But interviewees were also either innately aware or were influenced by the various narratives they had heard, and were keen to let people in authority know that they knew they were not being treated fairly. Some shared their approach of dealing with people in authority when they felt that they were being targeted. (see Section 3.2.8)

Most of the interviewees were at the scrimping stage when it came to money matters. They put up with small allowances, work part-time and try their best to keep their expenditure to a minimum. Of course, some got more allowances from parents or siblings. Section 3.7 looks at Money Matters, showing that most had none or very little savings. Only 10 of them had savings of over RM3,000. Everyone aspired to own a condominium unit or a house, fully aware of the dismal forecast on housing prices – more on this matter in Section 2.8. On medical matters there was an overall lack of awareness, and among the interviewees it was mostly the men who had medical insurance coverage. Their views are shared in Section 2.7.3.

There were aspirations and an interesting array of role models who emerged in the discussions. There was almost an affinity – a connection to their own situation – that could have led interviewees to read up on their hero/heroines on Google/YouTube, as they often cited these as information sites. This is further discussed in Section 3.8.

All the interviewees were polite, knowledgeable on many matters especially on the political situation in the country, were keen followers of news bulletins and expressed – without any soliciting from the interviewers – that they had “no hate” against any ethnic group but wanted systemic changes and “fairness” and justice for all youths.

The next sections in this chapter deal with the key elements of the discussions and conversations that arose in the interviews.

## **3.2 Indian Identity**

Interviewing Indian youths aged between 16 and 28 threw out varied responses on what it meant to be an Indian and how they decided and diagnosed that they were “Indian”. All interviewees placed the “Indian” identity development on a few key factors – family, the language they speak, following the customary rituals at home and in places of worship such as temples, the different experiences of being made to feel Indian, and the public imaging of Indians. This awareness of their Indian-ness for many began from when they aged between three and 12, at various points of self-realisation; or when asked, at the young age of six or seven, to fill in the blanks on the description for “ethnicity/race” in the Primary 1 registration forms. As stated earlier in 2017 data, there were 165,000 Indians in the 1.7 million population of Penang.<sup>97</sup>

In this section, interviewees’ views are summarised and shared along these categories, based on their views on being “Indian”:

3.2.1 Home-based values

3.2.2 Religion

3.2.3 Language

3.2.4 Community

3.2.5 Discrimination

3.2.6 Higher authorities

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<sup>97</sup> Department of Statistics, Malaysia, as cited in Penang in Numbers 2016-2017

### 3.2.7 Gender-based

### 3.2.8 Image of Indians

## 3.2.1 Home-based values

Most of the Interviewees came from intact families – that is, they had both parents, with the father being the breadwinner and the mother, very often, the homemaker. Some fathers were working as managers, some were running small businesses, others worked as security officers. Three interviewees' fathers were working in Singapore. The mothers worked as supervisors, executives, in factories or as child-minders. There were three interviewees who came from single-parent families, growing up with their mother, a working woman. In all three cases there was almost no contact with the father, so it was their mother who was setting the tone and values in the family. What was dominant in almost all the cases was that their homes had strong values that were passed on to the children. The strong values at home were also closely tied to religious values, in some instances, to universal values of respect. Overall it was almost a mantra – *“live in harmony with others, “do not get into trouble”, “do not cause trouble”*. In the three cases where there was an absent parent, there was still guardianship. A 17-year-old youth who was already hanging out with “gang” members had an uncle appointed to watch over him as he was not listening to his father and often told lies to get out of the house to meet his friends. Two other interviewees were abandoned by their parents and were growing up in a sheltered home, with visits from relatives.

In one case, the 25-year-old interviewee's father, a temple priest who was widowed a year ago, became an exemplar to his son as he said his father lived within what Hinduism preached and imparted that to all his sons. This same interviewee was studying part-time for his masters at USM, but also gave part-time tuition to earn some cash though his rates were low to help poor children of different ethnic groups. He also offered free counselling on education courses and etc. for those who did not know the education system to chart their next approach. Interviewee 3 said: *“There can be a solution, it is like the parents the most common thing ... Parents are actually telling all the goodness, but from their perspective, they are thinking (from) influence of their friends ... Some do not even know how to read, so I feel pity for them also. Because you already trust me and come for tuition, so I have to give a very good quality service,”* adding that this was what his father and mother had taught all of them – to turn into action what Hinduism meant. He also cited his father as his role model as someone who practised what he preached (see section 3.8).

Of the 45 interviewees, only two were Christians while the rest were Hindus. All are practising followers and believers in their religion. One interviewee, a 25-year-old, said she found her identity as an Indian when she went through a series of self-reflections over a broken relationship, which helped her to value her Indian identity as a minority community.

There was also a prevalent attitude towards preservation of this part of being Indian – the young wanting to follow what they had been brought up on, ensuring that the rituals would continue. They spoke with zeal and commitment on the importance to pass on these values to their own children – generational value. What was also apparent was an unquestioning, unassailable belief in God, in the sanctity of the temples and the rituals, in the purity of what they did as Hindus, and a trust that their parents were teaching them the best way to live for their future.

The interviewees were very aware of how much their parents had given them, even if in some cases there was a relationship gulf between parents and children. They knew their parents would protect and stand up for them. Except for some cases – when it came to school-related discrimination and bullying (see sections 3.2.5 and 3.3.5) – most youths preferred to handle the matter themselves as they did not wish to “burden” their parents. Likewise, when it came to allowances that were insufficient to see them through daily expenses, especially during diploma or degree education, they coped and did not ask their parents – especially if money was tight at home.

Many parents, as gathered from the interviewees, had prepared their children early – as Malaysia is made up of different ethnic groups – that they needed to work harder and study harder because of the Bumiputera policy which meant fewer places for other ethnicities. Many interviewees spoke about how parents had given them opportunities, even when financially hard-pressed, and also constantly reminded them to work hard as Indians would always find it harder. Some parents, either busy working or were not interested in the national politics of the country, just kept advising their children to work hard. One interviewee shared how he had to tell one of his

parents to stop drumming into his head bad vibes on another ethnic group. Interviewee 2, who had himself been called derogatory names by other ethnic groups, shared: *“Yes, I have seen parents teaching their children to talk bad about other races; call the Chinese cina babi, address them in a very low way. They should stop that [and] start teaching them good things about the other races.”*

Some interviewees said their parents also gave more weight to values of acceptance, tolerance, humanitarianism and goal-setting, and that they also reinforced their values to becoming more open to diversity in the social environment.

Many interviewees received a decorum code on social behaviours with regards to the opposite sex. Some teenagers and young women were told by their parents what they could or could not wear (see Section 3.2.7). Many grow up fully aware that they were being observed by community members and that there was judgement and gossip that would eventually reach their parents – all part of being Indian, they shared.

What had been imparted to them too were duties – being responsible for the family, fulfilling family obligations – as part of the value system of being Indian.

### 3.2.2 Religion

Almost all placed an emphasis on religion as giving them an Indian identity. Interviewees learned how to sing devotional songs, attend teachings at temples and followed their parents’ actions in whatever they did as Hindus. Thaipusam was cited, in many instances, as an observation cum festival that brings the Hindu community together in this annual event that sees, annually, about a one million people taking part in the processions along the roads in Penang as they walk to the temples. Incidentally, Thaipusam featured more strongly than any other festivals observed or celebrated by Hindu Indians. It needs to be said that many from the Tamil-speaking Indian community cited Hinduism as the glue to being Indian, and that temples are the pivotal centre for the community.

Praying, fasting and performing prayers before leaving home were regarded as important to preserving one’s culture and being Indian. Interviewee 30, aged 27 and from a family of five siblings who were brought up by uneducated, literate in Tamil, parents, put it very neatly: *“My specification is that I will always pray before I eat. Then every Friday, Saturday and Tuesday, I go to the temple ... And when I go, I always wear traditional clothes.”*

In some instances, Hinduism also became a conduit for values of acceptance, tolerance and humanitarianism that underpinned their value-system as Indians. Some spoke strongly about equality as a tenet in the religion. Interviewee 10, aged 21, summed this up: *“I don’t think we are extremely religious, but my dad will normally tell us that every human being is the same ... I don’t take religion seriously because honesty and humanity comes first for me...”* He said his father, a businessman who had gone through tough times, prayed every morning and had also instilled in the children this practice.

What also arose – at least seven times in the interviews – were areas of concern. These were: the reasons and the need to build more temples; temple management committees were not doing enough to build up the Indian community by focusing on youths and their school-based needs, and equipping families with knowledge; and the need to raise more funds for temples. The frustration expressed was that the temple is a communal gathering place and there are halls/auditoriums that can be used for education. Many were fed up that the focus by the management committees was on the rituals and festivals. At least two interviewees cited the Sikh community’s (see Section 3.2.4) efforts in bringing people to the temple and working within the community for themselves and for others. That too many funds were going into temple building and temple maintenance when the community needed more attention was clearly expressed by 18-year-old Interviewee 26, who said: *“School, there’re many things ... Even there’s many ... sponsors right, there are many Indian sponsors ... they also can sponsor it. But they spend their money on temple. I also don’t know ... They are opening many temples. Yet there is no place for all Indians to gather? Actually, from my thoughts, if there is a place to gather, it is at the temples, so they can share their problems. Now they never mix with each other, so how they can solve the problem? How they can talk to each other. There is a mosque, there is a place for the Malays people to help each other as a community. But I feel like the temple – there is a main spot for Indians to gather.”*

### 3.2.3 Language

Another factor that came up often as an identity marker was the ability and need to speak any of the home-based languages used for communication at home and with others in the community. It is crucial, they said, to the preservation and regeneration of Indian culture. The majority of Indians<sup>98</sup> in Penang/Malaysia are Tamil-speaking people whose origins go back to South India from about three to five generations ago. There are also a many other home-based languages – Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Telugu, Malayalam, to name some – among the Indians.

There was a difference in how interviewees from the island and from the mainland viewed their home language. Those from the mainland often displayed a stronger rootedness to the language – in this case, Tamil. Thirteen interviewees who were educated in a Tamil primary school (SJKT), showed a strong appreciation for Tamil, placing it at a level of being cultured as an Indian. Many interviewees spoke of the “wonder” of Tamil in their lives in relation to being Indian. But one interviewee stood out when he encapsulated his learning when he was in primary school: the history and achievements of Indians. The 18-year-old (Interviewee 26), from a middle-income family living on mainland Penang, said: *“I feel proud to be an Indian ... At age 12 (I realised) I am so proud of (our) history ... many incidents or other examples when you (can) feel – I’m Indian. Sometimes positive. Sometimes negative.”* Many others were also intense in expressing their love and adoration for Tamil as a language and also in seeing it as an identity marker to be Indian.

In its own way, this spoken, unspoken admiration and adulation for Tamil also carried its own risk of internal ostracising by disregarding Indians who were non-Tamil Indian speakers or those who were weak in Tamil. This risk and reality was expressed by non-Tamil speakers of the Indian community. The Indians, whose ancestry lines are from northern India, did feel “left out”, “neglected” because of their non-Tamil speaking Indian background. They spoke of an internal discrimination among Indians<sup>99</sup> – against people like the Punjabis, Sindhis, Gujaratis – seeing them as different (see Section 3.2.5). In fact, this lack of acknowledgment on the non-acceptance was shared by one interviewee (Interviewee 37, aged 24) who said that she and her parents “were looked down upon” at a restaurant in Little India when they placed their orders in English as they could not speak Tamil. This case of internal discrimination was cited by others too even as some displayed a light-heartedness in their narratives on this issue.

In addition, there was also the state system that also gave some non-Tamil speaking Indians the category of “lain-lain” (others) in the official categorisation by ethnicity and in primary school, some teachers also advised the students to fill up “Others” in the “Race” category in Primary 1 registration.

### 3.2.4 Community

There was a strong connection among both Tamil and non-Tamil speaking interviewees to their own communities – much directed and influenced by religion, home values and cultural events.

There was a call for stronger more meaningful community activities. This call was made by many, asking for Hindu temple communities to build bonds among the people, just as how the Punjabi-Sikh community is doing it. This community had organised spiritual classes; extra classes for the students in their school subjects; talks and forums for students to gain knowledge; sports events, including an annual much-touted Malaysia versus Singapore sports competition; health education courses; and community activities for all Sikhs. Through that, they develop a strong attachment to the religion, to the community and to being Indian (see Section 3.2.2).

The other cited “models” were the Chinese community and the mosques. Interviewees said the Chinese gave support to each other: they would patronise newly opened Chinese shops to give business; they set up foundations to help students get scholarships; and they developed communal activities. The Malays, too – though they have the Bumiputera policy with its quota system advantage and funds from government, the

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<sup>98</sup> There is no available data in the official sources on the language use of different communities of Indians in Malaysia.

<sup>99</sup> Tamils, Telugus are descendants from Southern part of India. We had no interviewees with Malayalees despite the frequent contacts made.

mosque and donations through *zakat*<sup>100</sup> play a role in meeting the community's needs. It was a common feeling that the Indians have fewer such efforts from within the community.

Still, at the informal level, adverse conditions of needing to move on in life – at school, at work – had built up a camaraderie with fellow Indians. Many who went to non-Tamil schools have friends from different ethnic groups. However, some qualified that their pool of reliable friends were still mainly Indians as they could talk openly about what they had experienced or were feeling. Those who went to Tamil primary schools tended to move around more with Indians, plus their homes were located in housing estates that had a higher percentage of Indians living there. Every Tamil-speaking interviewee spoke or implied of the joy in having command of their native language and using it with friends. However, interviewees from Penang Island were more cosmopolitan in their thinking and were more comfortable in having communities of friends from different ethnic groups, mainly Chinese friends on the island.

The friendly Interviewee 20, aged 21, cited going through school with two best mates – a Chinese and a Malay – and they had good times and were still in touch. But at university he began to hang out with Indians as the Chinese cliqued together and also said, in Mandarin to each other – which they thought he did not know but he understood – *“Why is he joining our group? Why is he coming to us all the time?”* This was during necessary modular group work discussions. This interviewee, who had also grown up for 12 years in another state in Malaysia where there were no such cliques among the ethnic groups, said he *“had to navigate myself out of it ... (becoming) not close to his course mates.”* Thus began his journey to hang out with Indian friends who became his reliable buddies, though he remained cautious, he said, in sharing too much about himself or his ideas.

There was an overwhelming feeling from all interviewees that the community had to become a social mix of different ethnic groups as Malaysians. Two youths – Interviewee 13, aged 21 and Interviewee 14, aged 23 – who were studying to be lawyers, described themselves in separate interviews as bridge builders between the Malays and the Chinese as they spoke English and Malay and could act as go-betweens for both ethnic groups in social and group interaction settings. Both had many friends across the ethnic groups even though they had instances of being discriminated against for being Indian. Interviewee 4, aged 28, socialised with and had a mixed bunch of friends – Malays, Chinese, Indians, foreigners – as his home was also located within a Malay-strong location and he was teaching in an international school. Interviewee 23, aged 18, was passionate in articulating that despite a few setbacks of unequal treatment he had experienced, as a Malaysian, we must believe in a community of Malaysians with different ethnic groups. Others like him too wanted a mixed community of people as the base for a common Malaysia – *“Malaysia sama”*. Trainee teacher, Interviewee 24, aged 22; and student-nurse, Interviewee 41, aged 20; who went to Tamil kindergartens and primary schools, besides their loyalty for Tamil schools, also spoke of their ideal community – where all students could talk to each other in an environment of having a common culture of being Malaysians, perhaps only differentiated by socio-economic class and locations where families lived, and not by ethnic group.

But there were also critical remarks made on the community of Indians. Interviewee 14, aged 23, a law student who also worked part-time, said that Indians were a selfish lot and embraced a “crab mentality” or a crabs-in-a-bucket syndrome<sup>101</sup> (see Chapter 4). This reference meant that individuals from one community would hold each other down from various advancement opportunities, as interpreted through the metaphorical crabs caught in a bucket: “If I can’t have it, neither can you.” If the crab mentality/mindset was indeed as pervasive as claimed and particular to the Indian community, then it would be a serious “no-trust” hurdle to overcome, and to develop solidarity and a community among Indians. Others – 21-year-old, Interviewee 10, who also worked as a part-time café worker; and 21-year-old law student, Interviewee 13 – said, without using such labels of “crab”, that Indians did not show enough support, unlike the Chinese or the Malays. When asked for an example, both shared, in separate interviews, of little patronage given by Indians for a new café that had just been opened by an Indian businessman.

Overall, there was a call for greater support and for helping each other, citing the lack of a foundation for Indian entrepreneurs (Interviewee 4) or that there were too few scholarship funds set up by wealthy Indian philanthropists to help Indian students. Every interviewee said they had little faith in politicians to meet the

<sup>100</sup> Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam and an act of worship. The meaning of zakat is “to purify” and so to purify our own wealth all Muslims are obliged to pay a portion of one’s assets to help those in need. Zakat benefits the giver as well as the receiver.

<sup>101</sup> Vibes, J. (2015). “Crabs in A Bucket” As an Analogy for Modern Human Society. Retrieved from <http://www.trueactivist.com/crabs-in-a-bucket-as-an-analogy-for-modern-human-society/>... Accessed, Jan 31, 2019  
; Low, R. (2016). Good Intentions Are Not Enough: Why We Fail at Helping Others (pp. 104-107).

needs of the Indian community. Despite this lack of faith, they also hoped that the new government would focus on building up the Indian community.

### 3.2.5 Discrimination/Racism

When asked about the conceptual framing of racism, interviewees used the words “domination”, “control”, “taking away someone’s opportunity”, “being treated unequally”, “unjust”, “unfair”, “systems” and “quota”.

They cited examples of derogatory language such as “*pariah*”<sup>102</sup> (by the Malays), “*keling*”<sup>103</sup> (by the Chinese) used on them. They described what they had experienced, what they had heard and what had happened to relatives, friends and from the shared narratives at home, among themselves and seen through the lens of being victimised for being Indian.

There were moments of being alienated, isolated, ostracised, marginalised – simply put, “being left out.” But these moments, as seen through some interviewees, had a long-lasting impact as these words and incidents became their first item of recall.

Discrimination based on race, class and pre-set prejudices occur pervasively and systemically through legislation, policies, institutional systems<sup>104</sup> and organically, indirectly in the inter-relations in the community, in society and in the country. Much of this was shared in their narratives, as given below.

#### 3.2.5.1 Bullying, prejudice, stigmatisation, stereotyping, social exclusions

/name-calling

Those who moved into SK from Tamil primary schools cited some incidents of being bullied, beaten by Malay students, repeatedly. Parents complained to the school – the teachers and the principal. In one case, the punch-up was almost a weekly affair for two years until finally a teacher counselled the bullies outside of the classroom in a private session, and they stopped. It took two years for determined action, demerit points and advice to be given to the bullies. To share this painful story took a lot from Interviewee 28, aged 16, who was determined to share what had happened to him and another Indian Christian boy. He spoke in Malay, Tamil and English during the interview to get this point across.

Interviewee 34, now 20 years old, an only child, had no friends in primary school as a Chinese boy made sure that none befriended him. He kept pushing classmates away from him and used to torment him daily, with severe harassment and belittlement, at least, 2 to 3 times a week. There was only one other Indian boy in the class, but only this interviewee was targeted. He cried daily. “*It was a terrible experience,*” he said. He was scolded by his mother when he finally told her. Then later, she went to the school to tell the boy’s mother whose response was that her son would “*never do such a thing*” His father went to see the headmaster at least three times. The headmaster caned the boy – to no effect as he continued his ways. The impact on this only child was it made him keep very much to himself and lose his confidence; only at university did he lose this fear.

Sometimes the bullying can be from within one’s own ethnic group. Interviewee 44, aged 28, was bullied at the age of five by two boys and two girls from one Indian family; they would wait for her to emerge from the toilet during recess or gather round her during recess and “*point their fingers at her, scold her and say bad things to her*”. She was scared to leave the toilet. Finally, she told her parents, who moved her out of the kindergarten after confronting the family.

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<sup>102</sup> A word that refers to a low caste Indian or outcast based on an online dictionary, Merriam Webster.

<sup>103</sup> A derogatory word used to describe Indian, retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/a-keling-in-malaysia-and-proud-of-it-the-star-columnist...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>104</sup> <http://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-164...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

Verbal and social bullying is said to be on the rise in Malaysia,<sup>105</sup> and that teachers are ill-equipped to handle it, many untrained.

Interviewees also recited incidents of name-calling – on the mainland it was mainly Malays calling Indian children “*pariah*”<sup>106</sup> and on the island it was the Chinese calling them “*keling*”<sup>107</sup>. In two cases, vulgarities were used on the students. This happened in one incident when there was a class photo-taking session and an Indian student accidentally brushed against a Malay classmate, who turned around and shot him a volley of vulgarities, and also called him “*dirty*”, “*unhygienic*” and “*unclean*”. The teacher was around, it seemed, but did not intervene.

On the island the fair-complexioned Interviewee 7, aged 17, described how she was called names for being fairer-complexioned but still darker complexioned compared to the Chinese students in her class: “*I was frustrated ...*” when they called her names in school. It was so bad that she vomited in front of her teacher. As she grew older, when classmates had little clue that there could be fairer-complexioned and also non-Tamil speaking Indians, she would just quote “*Bollywood*” as the best way for her to be recognised as an Indian and to close the conversation.

In one case, the interviewee said his Indian friend who was of darker complexion was called “*keling*” by some Chinese teenagers at an eatery in a shopping mall, a hangout for this bunch of friends from different ethnic groups. Interviewee 10, aged 18, said: “*And that was an eye-opener for me. Teenagers with their parents sitting there*” He told the interviewer that the group’s response, including their Chinese friend, was to dismiss the boys for their “backward” thinking. “*Everything like that, we always try to take it as a joke and adjust, you know*”, he said.

### **3.2.5.1.1 Prejudice/Stigmatisation/Stereotyping**

Interviewee 23, aged 18, shared how he was stared at by a Chinese lady whom he was seated next to on the bus as a bunch of other Indian guys were making some noise at the back of the bus. “*I felt irritated too, by the Indian boys. It was a bit shameful to me because I’m Indian too,*” he said, but he was also embarrassed for himself as the Chinese lady would be thinking that he was the same as those boys, simply because he was also Indian.

Two other male interviewees said they would cross the road if they saw Chinese women walking on that pavement. Reason: they tend to shrink back and move their handbags to the front to clutch them tightly to their bodies.

Interviewee 42, aged 18, shared how he was served later than a Chinese at a food court though he had placed his order first. Interviewee 33, aged 25, shared how he was given a smaller discount when buying some furniture as he heard the salesperson tell his colleague, in Chinese, to give him a smaller discount. In both instances the interviewees raised the matter, received apologies and in the case of Interviewee 33, he got the right discount of RM10. For those Indians who needed to rent a place, they have been told that the room or flat is only for Chinese (Interviewee 13, aged 21).

For Interviewee 26, aged 18, who was admitted for an operation, it was a painful experience watching a Chinese lady who was visiting her relative on the next bed “*run back*” to the bedside as she was on the way to the toilet to pick up her handbag the moment she saw this Indian man walking into the ward. The Indian man was the interviewee’s father. “*See how they are. This is how they behave ... I feel like because now if you see in movie – Tamil movies – they show this: if he’s white, he’s good; if he’s black, he’s bad. Is this about colour?*”

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<sup>105</sup> Verbal, social bullying more common in Malaysia with lasting effects. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/02/04/verbal-social-bullying-more-common-in-malaysia-with-lasting-effects/1569201...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>106</sup> A word that refers to a low caste Indian or outcast based on an online dictionary, Merriam Webster.

<sup>107</sup> A derogatory word used to describe Indian, retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/a-keling-in-malaysia-and-proud-of-it-the-star-columnist...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019



Some encountered scenarios where they have been told to do a certain job just because they were Indians. One example shared by Interviewee 19, a 20-year-old accounting student as he observed around his own university was that most heavy and tough jobs were carried out by other Indians. This includes wiring, plumbing and heavy lifting. He said, *“Maybe since people have seen Indian males doing all the tough jobs, the heavy jobs, maybe they have this perspective that only Indian males can do this, and only Indian males should do this.”* He himself faced similar situations when he was the only Indian in the crowd – he would be told to carry chairs and tables during events at his university.

There’s class discrimination too. Interviewee 45, aged 19, was pursuing her diploma in a private college and was also working part time at a launderette to earn some pocket money. She said she felt judged whenever anyone asked her why she was working as a cleaner at a laundrette. She said the scope of the job fitted her daily schedule well as a college student and state athlete, and she did not need to spend money on transport as the job was right below her flat. She elaborated that those who have approached her seem to think that only older people worked as cleaners, and not teenagers like herself.

### **3.2.5.1.2 Social exclusions**

Interviewees on the island do face racist jokes from Chinese friends and an ostracisation through the use of Chinese that becomes the spoken language, even in the midst of other ethnic groups in the class or in group work discussions. Though they were all in schools with cohorts of students from different ethnic groups, often the Chinese students tended to band together and even in diverse company, tended to speak in Chinese – be it Mandarin or other dialects. Indian students said they felt left out like the Malay students, too. Hence many sought their own ethnic groups to mingle with. Even in group work discussions, the Chinese students, who form the majority on the island, were likely to have conversations on their own in Chinese even when there was an Indian in the group. These social coagulations continued into the workplace too, when socialising is very much along ethnicity lines (see Section 3.2.4).

### **3.2.5.2 Education**

There were also systemic forms of discrimination. Only a handful of those interviewed received one of their top three choices to pursue their tertiary education. When asked further, the interviewees identified the quota system<sup>108</sup> behind the failure in securing their top choices, though they said they had obtained the required points for the courses they had applied for. The quota system or the advancement of a majority ethnic group had been discussed earlier (see Section 2.3).

Though the racial quota has been announced as abolished, the quota is still in place and continues to function in a non-transparent manner (see Section 2.4). There were still instances that youths, families and communities in this study who believed that, based on their experiences and in their own documentation from fellow mates, the quota still existed. Interviewees gave examples of exclusions made to them in education. Some – eight interviewees (4, 7, 10, 13, 17, 18, 23, 28) – became strong examples of how they had been side-lined and marginalised through the quota system.

This happened when they or their family members had perfect to very high scores and did not get their course of choice in the state they wished to study in, and had trouble getting scholarships. What was painful in some instances was knowing that Bumiputeras with lesser scores had attained places on courses and also scholarships. To the interviewees, these were examples of being discriminated. Many detailed cases are elaborated on in Section 3.3.

Interviewees said they did not get their top courses in the list of 10 options they made in the online applications for admissions for university places – and ended up being offered much lower-ranked courses that they had put down. Interviewee 16, aged 20, who comes from a single-income family, was offered a seat in the state’s polytechnic school for food technologies, one of her lower ranked choices (“either a 9 or 10”). She eventually

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<sup>108</sup> See section 2.3

rejected the course because of a lack of interest and inadequate financial balances in the home and took up a teaching college offer in Kuala Lumpur, which came with allowances and no dependency on parents who were already financially struggling.

### **3.2.5.3 Leadership/Representation**

Some of the interviewees did take up leadership positions in schools and institutions of higher learning. Some said they could have become head prefects or prefects (Interviewees 7, 20, 23, aged 17, 21, 18 respectively) but eventually in two cases it was given to Malays or a Chinese to be head prefect. Interviewees said that teachers sympathised with them and told them that it was the way the system worked. Leadership also seemed to be racially mediated at the school and college levels. There was a case of the smearing of an interviewee's reputation who was the top gun running to become head prefect.

Another case was when Interviewee 23, aged 18, was vying to receive the Outstanding Student Award and who was also supported by teachers in his school. But it eventually was given to a Malay student.

Interviewee 9, aged 17, felt her teacher was biased in choosing a school representative for a competition when she was in Standard 6, as a 12 year old. She was not chosen over a Chinese student even though she was as qualified as the other student. The Chinese student who was selected was not even interested to represent the school in the first place.

Even when it came to booking rooms at university for events, things got quite hazy, depending on the leadership and on the society they represented. Interviewee 19, aged 20, a past community leader within the Indian Cultural Society, faced problems in booking spaces for their events. Though they followed the rules, there had been delays in getting the space; restrictions were placed and they had to cope, patiently, with the many different reasons given each year to the student representatives. The committee started to keep a record of this history to make it easier for the next committee as they were aware that the Chinese or Malay cultural societies did conduct many events without facing these problems.

Even when he was doing his National Service stint of three months, Interviewee 20, aged 20, who had been a leader in a few school-based activities such as commandant for Penang in a uniformed unit and a prefect, was not chosen to lead for Penang state. Neither was he chosen to be a platoon leader. Both positions were given to Malays.

### **3.2.5.4 Sports**

Many interviewees played games and took part in self-defence classes. Interviewee 42, aged 18, cited how football was popular with many Indian youths on the mainland, but they left when the coach opened the game to everyone and Malays were then selected for district representation. The coach said his powers were limited in the choices he could make.

In the case of Interviewee 18, a 20-year-old undergraduate who was training for state selection in football, lost that to what he said was a "lesser player" than him, a Malay undergraduate.

In the case of a talented sports girl, she had to deal with judges, in this case a Chinese judge who wanted his own state player, a Chinese, to be selected. So he, along with the other judges, wanted both players to play off again as they felt that this Indian player's arrow in archery had not "cut the line", though the coaches at the field felt that it had and hers was closer to the score-target of 10 on the board. When both competed again for the position to be selected for the national level, the other girl did better on the second round, and this Indian player took the bronze medal. The gold medallist then moved on to compete in the national championships.

*"The line come out already what, it is line, but then the judge come see. He said mine don't cut, hers cut. Then, we have to shoot off on one arrow, but everyone sitting there know already I am the one win. Because we cannot fight*

*back the judges, if they said one, that is all. If athlete means they can find out, you can fight and ask the judge see, but competition cannot. Only one judge says already, that is all. Coming back, I said, "shoot off", everyone like, "why shoot off?" I said my arrow didn't cut, her arrow cut. My coach is like, "it is okay, you just shoot". Then, we both shoot one arrow. Her arrow same score but her arrow near to 10, so she wins. She goes to another match, I got bronze. I feel like - My God!"* said Interviewee 45, a rare Indian woman in archery who was also footing her own bills, working as a part-time cleaner while also studying part-time.

### **3.2.5.5 Employment**

Employment opportunities were immersed in racist behaviours, emerging primarily from Chinese employers. Interviewees who were older have cited interviews where they have been asked if they could speak Mandarin (see Section 3.4). As some had gone to Chinese schools, they said they could speak Mandarin. Then they were told that the company only wanted Chinese persons. In some advertisements the company is allowed to state that they only wanted Chinese applicants. Many Indians did not bother applying, said some of the interviewees who were looking for work.

### **3.2.6 Higher authority**

Interviewees were asked how they responded to persons of authority – to name some, parents, teachers, principals, bosses, police officers, government officers, politicians and etc. A person of authority is someone who has some level of power, governance, direction and even jurisdiction over a person. Interviewees' narrated incidents of facing authoritative figures such as parents, grandmothers, teachers, policemen and politicians, both within their home and outside of it.

There is a high level of disdain and frustration levelled at Indian politicians, Indian community organisations and temple management committees. They said there were too many internal power-based political conflicts going on and their concerns were side-lined. On interviewee cited that funds were continually raised to build temples, for temple management and also extra funds for another chariot for Thaipusam. The 21-year-old Interviewee 10 said, with much exasperation: *"The Indians are caught between Malays and Chinese. Indians are stuck in between. They are scattered over both sides. Indians do help both sides to improve when asked. Then they have to also improve. The platform to go upwards is not there for Indians. MIC is only for themselves. There is no need to build more temples and to divide the people. Look at Thaipusam – why are there two chariots. It is dividing the people. They are fighting...Then all the money they collect to build more temples. Where is MIC? Where is Hindu Endowment Board (HEB)? The temple that Sindhis have built – the Krishna Temple in Penang Road – every year we give our donations to the HEB – for the last 5 years. We have leakages and when we ask for money to repair, HEB tells us to wait and to raise funds...Where is the unity approach to help each other and build us up? There must be mending. Youths are fed up of playing a role. When we get 'verbal' they throw us out. We are fed up. Either you join them, or they throw you out. Seniority in the temple is strong. Powerful. Hierarchical. 'You are not old enough'. This happens in a lot of Hindu temples. Humanity is the only way."*

The other common figures that emerged were parents – either the father or the mother. Some said that they could not retaliate against parents as they were strong and had power over them. One mother was always nit-picking on everything that the son did, to the extent that it eroded his confidence till he left home for further studies in another state and was able to rebuild himself. The 20-year-old Interviewee 34's narrative was how he was always scared to tell his parents his problems as they would be much shouting at him, by his mother. *"This took away my confidence,"* he said, adding that he ignored his mother, to survive but knew that it was not the way. *"Parents should be strict. But not to this extent of shouting. Children will fall short in their achievements. Parents should not scold them ... See them get up. Their confidence will grow"*.

Another interviewee, wary of his father, said, *"I shut up,"* though he valued his father's views and wisdom. However, he expressed that he wanted his father to fight more for their rights. He is *"diam sahaja"* (quiet only) even when authorities were not right.

School-based authority figures played a role in Interviewee 7's life. The 17-year-old had to face a disciplinary committee at her school over a charge that she had written a social media comment on a teacher at the school. She was devastated that there was really not much of a chance for her to explain herself during the disciplinary committee hearing. They took away her candidature to become head prefect and gave it to a Chinese girl for that year.

*"And I was... I felt wronged... Angry... I felt frustrated... But then... Because that was my dream since I was in form 1 to be the Head Prefect – 'cos I was a bit of a cocky person I kind of thought that this spot is mine. I got offended. I left the (prefectorial) board for two months. They told me to leave for three months. But by the end of the first month, the school wanted me back on the board again ...'Cos they couldn't function without me. So, I joined the board back again and then I tried... I ask the discipline teachers if they are being racist? And they said "No, we're not being racist, girl, it is just that you did something wrong'. And I'm like 'I didn't do anything wrong'. So then... On this year, I wasn't in line anymore for a Prefect, because I already (pause), you know. (pause) and then (pause) ... because I brought up the racist topic, they elected another girl (from my community) to make it look like everything was fine. But the thing is, is that the girl is really deserving?"* The interviewee added that disciplinary boards need to be multi-racial and need to listen and not judge even when facts are presented, but the charge was not removed.

Government officers remained a challenge. Interviewee 27, aged 24, was looking for a better job as despite having a degree, she was working as a clerk. She said she was scolded, in front of others, for submitting the application to the Jabatan Pembangunan Kemahiran (JPK) without ensuring that everything was accurately filled in. She countered by getting the officer a cake on the next visit. Interviewee 30, aged 27, had to negotiate hard with a government department as they had given the wrong-sized immunisation jab, meant for the matured animal, to the young one, on the farm that he was working at.. His approach was to challenge the officers – who refused to admit to the mistake – as he knew that they had done so. He had to spend his time looking out for after-effects on the young one through the double-dose of a jab.

There was an overall lack of trust when it came to policemen. Four of the interviewees, in particular, had encounters with the police. In all instances they said they were stopped on the roads, treated with much disdain and, in one case, one interviewee was asked to take his shirt off on the road, behind a police van, so that the policemen could check if he had tattoos.

When asked why he was stopped, Interviewee 38, aged 25, said: "Because we are Indians, you know? Indians." He said that was because the police were looking for tattoos and thought that it was good to search Indians as there were many gangs in Kuala Lumpur, where he was studying at that time. When asked how he felt about it, he said he was embarrassed as "their perception is that Indians are problematic... (Indians) all have this criminal attitude going on, they are planning on something right." His approach was to handle the situation with as much compliance as possible, despite the rudeness and his personal anger. He added that this happened often – as soon as the police see four Indian men in a car and in the late evening or at night, they would get stopped by the police for no real reason.

Interviewee 30 said he was stopped on the Federal Highway by some reserve police force. When he asked them if he had done something wrong, there was no clear answer. He told them he would like to be issued a summons. They decided to let him off. The interviewee felt that he was targeted as they knew he was doing a delivery as part of his family business. He handled it by being insistent on getting a summons for the alleged offence.

Interviewee 44, aged 28, whose shift duties in the retail industry include returning home late at night, was stopped by police and told to give her ID which she could not find, at that point in time, in her handbag. The policewoman shouted at her. And only when they saw her uniform of the retail outlet she was working at, they let her go and did not bother to even look at the ID that she had found by then. The interviewee asked them what offence they suspected her of committing, but there was no answer, just a wave to tell her to move on.

People in the sports arena have had it tough with coaches and judges. One coach could not tell directly that he had to choose more Malays for a district-level football and therefore, let go on the skilled Indian footballers. As stated earlier, most of the Indian footballers stopped playing.

A few interviewees said the best way to deal with adverse situations and being targeted was to improve communications skills, pick up negotiation and coping skills, and not to become aggressive.

### **3.2.7 Gendered experiences**

The Interviewees shared various views on how they saw their male and female roles within their families, in society and in Malaysia at large. Not many were aware of the concepts of being empowered and independent. Many were family-focused, meeting the expectations of parents, grandparents, the community and society at large. There is an overall resentment too, on the control their parents asserted over their personal lives. And one could sense an internal battle in some cases – their parents' control and impact on them versus loyalty, gratitude and duty towards them.

#### **3.2.7.1 Female experiences**

Among the 21 females who were interviewed, most of them complained about the roles that females had to take on. The younger female interviewees spoke more fervently on parents directing them on what clothes to wear or not to wear. Seventeen-year-old Interviewee 9, an only child, said: *"My parents don't let me wear anything short. The first rule... When they see any female, you know, watch movies, they get worried about me. Because they know that, you know, something might happen."* She concluded that if she were a boy, a male, it would be a different treatment.

Interviewees also bemoaned the lack of independence that parents were willing to give them, acknowledging though that they still trusted their parents and knew that it was based on good intentions. Some asserted their independence, wanting to complete their studies, get a job and be an income-earner without thinking of marriage or settling down. One of them, a 22-year-old student who came across in the interview as a woman with clear goals, said: *"I don't want to depend on any man in the future. And even my mom (has said) – like before you get married, you better have your own house."*

On friendships and relationships, most of the female interviewees found it difficult to do so. Their social hours were controlled by parents, who would ask them: what time they would return home; who they were meeting; displaying anxiety if the daughters did not return home on time. This was echoed by interviewees even in their mid-20s, not just the teenagers.

A few of them did have more liberal-minded parents who did not mind if their daughters hung out with boys. One of them, Interviewee 27, said she had no problems even if she was the "only girl in the outing." She admitted that sometimes among the boys she was "neglected". She felt that the boys did not listen to her – *"maybe my voice was softer"* – she explained, accommodatingly. The males also did not laugh at her jokes, but they expected her and all the others to laugh at the jokes they made as males. She concluded that she was "doing good" as she felt that she needed to break out from accepting roles that were prescribed to boys and girls.

Interviewee 12, a 23-year-old student, said she has lesbian and gay friends. She narrated that her mother was shocked at first, then unhappy. But the girl said as a daughter, she chatted with her mother and spoke of her friends as human beings and being different. She concluded by saying that: *"I think she doesn't mind. In some families they're like why are you friends with this kind of people."*

The stereotyping continues. Women drivers are teased on their assumed lack of ability to drive, even within the family. Interviewee 16, a 20-year-old student, said her younger brother would make fun of her driving as she tended to be cautious, following the rules. She said she had to build up her responses, to retort: *"...even if I drive slow I am driving it safely?"* asking, *"what do you people mean when (you) say 'girls are always like this...' what do you mean girls always like this?"*

### 3.2.7.2 Sexual harassment

There is a lack of trust in the socialising between females and males. There is still much teasing of girls – women on the mainland especially by male motorbike riders. Some of the interviewees have been teased by these men as they walked home from the bus stop. When asked, many of the females did not have coping skills other than to walk away, faster. In fact, there was an acceptance of the behaviour – a normality – that meant just to evade and avoid certain places or times of the day to walk home.

In two cases, the interviewees were sexually harassed. One of them, who was training to be a teacher (Interviewee 24), aged 22, said she was followed when she was 17 years -old by a male as she walked home from school. So, her aunt came to her rescue to drive her home. But it continued. In the beginning she did not wish to raise it to her father as *“I am frightened about my father – (he) will go and shout.”* Eventually she told her mother who knew that this “guy” was from their own neighbourhood. So, her mother walked over and told the mother to mind her son. The harassment stopped. Interviewee 24 has no conceptual understanding of harassment as she accepts that this is how men behave towards women, and so has not developed any coping, self-defence skills and seems oblivious to the fact that it was in her best interest to do so. Interviewee 44, a 28-year-old graduate who worked in the retail industry, used to ride home on her motorbike or drove home in the family car. But when she was on the bike, the male motorists tended to “come nearer and nearer” her motorbike. And when they noticed that she was alone driving back, they would “try to make an accident”. She also recited an incident when a male driver tried to cause an accident. *“Another one trying to make an accident because we are girls over there, hey, can do anything – they can rape us or whatever so. It’s more about ‘girl’ than an ‘Indian girl’,”* she said.

### 3.2.7.3 Marriage

With the older interviewees in their mid-20s, most of their deeper resentment was based on parents and society directing their social lives, which meant continually being asked about their marriage prospects and when that was going to happen. Girls and women frequently get asked about their marriage prospects.

Interviewee 44 felt it acutely as she was 28-years-old – by society’s standards, “getting on in age”. She said from two years ago, “people” started asking her, *“Why not yet get married?”* And then they will ask her parents, *“What happened to your daughter, why is she not married?”* She said she gets angry. Her response is, *“My mother never lets me have a boyfriend. I will blame my parents; so ask my parents, don’t ask me. It’s their responsibility, not mine – I just say like that. Just pointing finger to other people, that’s how I escape... I’m very embarrassed because they’re looking at us like we didn’t get sold on so long. Sold means didn’t get married,”* Interviewee 44 said despondently.

She was also cynical of the process as matchmakers for grooms had said they wanted brides who were working in the government sector. *“I don’t understand because maybe they want to live dependent with the girl that they marry. They are not talking about love, hey, (or) are (they) talking about financial and also job security.”* Fed-up and angry, she articulated: *“Because it’s like making us negative. People should love on our attitude, not on status or what else.”* She did not talk on the impact on her life but these were her final words on the subject: *“Because they never know what I’m facing. I know what I’m facing, what is my achievement. What certain people didn’t do but I did, what they didn’t get but I got; I still feel blessed as an Indian woman.”*

Another female, Interviewee 24, felt that society – the community – wanted to “dominate”, “conquer” her. She said: *“They control over me”* through marriage. She was a 22-year-old trainee teacher hoping to get a diploma. *“Like – I am not even stable. There is no stability. No job, no space to do what I want. They do not listen to us. We must listen to them and do what they want.”*

On interviewee, aged 26, who was working in the government sector, said that some parents did not want their daughters to study too much as they thought that the husband ought to have higher studies than the wife. So, her grandmother was worried about her as she had told her that it would be hard for them to get her married off.

### 3.2.7.4 Male experiences

The marriage discussion also involved male interviewees. Males experience the marriage question at a later age – two years later than the female interviewees. They too faced repetitive questions from the community and parents. Interviewee 38, a 25-year-old engineer, itemised the slew of questions that were often asked by the older generation and others in the community: “...most people, you know, Indians, you know, once you complete, every time they meet you, they ask you what you are doing? Have you owned a house? Have you owned a car? Then you plan for your marriage? You know, this set of questions? Sometimes, it will be irritating, you know. You don't want people keep on asking the same set of questions every day. Other than that, I don't feel much challenges from you know. As an Indian, not much.” He was sure as a third generation Indian he would not repeat this behaviour – “Because how much irritated am I when someone asked the same question every time I meet them. You know? The same person will ask the same question, even you meet them next month.”

Interviewee 20, aged 21, a university leader and undergraduate, said it was annoying at weddings that his single mother attended, people would ask her to go back to her husband. “Hey, you're not with your husband, so how are you coping? You should just call him and try to be democratic and try to be with him again... Why you don't go and try to get back to your husband? You need him.” But what they had failed to realise was that being alone and as a single mother of three sons, she was coping well and did not need the father. He was aghast at how blind people were and were stuck to prescribed norms for everyone: must be married.

Male interviewees spoke of different pressures – the crux of it lay in the word “responsibility”. Almost all of them wanted to take care of their parents, their family. Many did repeat it often in the conversations on family and on gender. Interviewee 3, aged 25 a part-time tutor and a part-time student in a master's programme, said: “Indian Male, if you ask me from my own perspective, Indian's perspective is that male is the one that is responsible for the family. It is like the male has to take care of their family, of their fiancée's family and also their children to have a good name.” He was not alone as many males wanted to grow up and become “responsible” in caring for their parents as they grew older and to raise their own families. Women seldom featured in this setup as males tended to talk about this role as theirs alone. Yet, it needs to be pointed out that most of the mothers of the interviewees were homemakers, raising the family.

One law student – Interviewee 13, aged 21 – said that as the only son he was aware that he needed to take responsibility – be the “breadwinner” for his two sisters; care for his parents as they grew older; and watch over his father's illnesses of being diabetic and with high blood pressure. He said: “So, me being the only son in the family, I have to be the responsible one, again pressured. So, I don't mind being pressured because it's family.”

Another interviewee from a family of five children – three sons and two daughters – said that he could not understand why Indian females had to leave the family behind to move into the husband's family, and not give anything back to the parents' family. “The culture, after marry, you want to know more in their own family, change and become an immigrant to another family... (sister lives nearby) ... (now like) a visitor.”

Interviewee 19, a 20-year-old undergraduate and past community leader, said he saw the male role as one of being the person to carry chairs and tables and do the heavy lifting!

One 18-year-old – Interviewee 42 – who had a passion for motorbikes, said it was hard to be a male as other males kept challenging you to race and you have to respond: “Got to go for it... (or else) ... they come beside me and ramming their motors and if I want, I could speed up.” He was also at the cusp of beginning to be interested in girls but was finding it hard to work things out as the girls kept showing off their looks.

### 3.2.7.5 Leadership

When it came to leadership of women, some male interviewees said there was a pre-destined position when it came to student organisations of reserving the vice president leadership role for females. However, this was viewed differently by female interviewees.

A woman leader at her university, Interviewee 21, aged 21, also cited how the system of nominating general (“umum”) positions for women meant that women could only be in those positions. When she raised the desire

to run for a stronger decision-making role, she was told that *“as a woman, (you) she cannot withstand the pressure.”*

In fact, she said some men, even in this era, were still in the mindset that menstruation causes a woman to become unstable and that she *“cannot think properly, they can’t make a decision on time.”*

For Interviewee 1, who is in a temple youth committee as its vice-chairperson, said he became the vice-chair as they needed her help. She was working part-time, studying part-time and was financially strapped that she did not have time to do more. But she agreed to help, was learning a lot but did not like how the 18 committee members, of whom only five were women, did not speak up during the meetings but later would call her up to discuss their perspectives. She said she spoke up during meetings, planned and did make suggestions. But she found this behaviour time consuming and frustrating. She still felt that she needed to be a role model for youths – a responsibility that she would continue: *“A good leader is bringing up more leaders,”* she said.

For Interviewee 23, the 18-year-old could have become vice president of his matriculation college’s student council, but it was reserved for females. *“So I got really frustrated at that time because all the hard work and everything,”* he said. But surprisingly in this case, it aided his leadership progress as he became the general secretary instead, helping him to attend more student discussions at the national level. *“I was actually thankful to God cause imagine if I took up vice president – when I went to Melaka I wouldn’t even have been part of that higher council cause it only consists of the presidents and the secretaries,”* he concluded; the vice president position had fewer decision-making powers as the president and the general secretary were the nerve-centres in the council.

Interviewee 7, who is 17 years old, had expressed her aspirations to become a politician and had said so, openly, to relatives and friends. She said she had seen people supporting a man who wanted to become a politician, but not so for a woman. She had been told by girls and women in the community and among her multi-ethnic friends that it was a *“no-go dream”*. One told her: *“You can marry the prime minister but don’t be the minister. You know it is like I am confined to the spaces of a kitchen. Then they(males) belong to the garage. You know it is just offensive.”* Her mother, a single parent, remained supportive of her.

### **3.2.8. Image of Indians**

The majority of the interviewees said that many have this image that Indians were gangsters, cheats, thieves and that they tended to *“fight back”*. Many interviewees were contemptuous of gangsters and were ashamed of this bad reputation that Indians have. There was also an expressed wish by Indian parents that their children did not mix with other Indians who were in gangs.

When some interviewees were asked what it meant to be a gangster, there was a hesitation in defining what it was. Often it led to describing the symptoms and describing the behaviours. One interviewee attempted to give a reason: Interviewee 30, aged 27, said that there was this tension among Indians in the culture *“to fight”*. He felt that it was this tension between thinking one was *“courageous”* when it was actually the *“ego”* of the person who did not wish to let the matter go, and therefore must *“fight”*. He felt that too many of the Indian films showed this kind of *“ego”* gangs and that the culture had to change.

Interviewee 14, a 23-year-old law student, was vehement in his statements on Indian gangsterism. He said: *“So, this is where you see that Indians are getting involved in the gangsterism and alcoholics, and more to crime rate increasing because of that. Even the government, the PDRM also made press statement, release reports, saying that Indians are the ones always getting involved in all these. So, what I feel is that not all Indians tend to do that, but even though higher rates of the percentage of Indian is doing that. So, it spoils the whole image of Indians, so because of that other Indians who are not involved always have to work harder. We have to work harder to prove that we are worth of this position, or worth of this salary that we are also worth to be treated equally.”* The interviewee also later expressed that there was much stereotyping, but Indians also needed to focus on improving themselves, to dress better and to socialise with other ethnic groups.

Interviewee 31, aged 17, who did not share information about his parents and was living with an uncle and his family, spoke about how useful it was to be with a *“gang”*: *“... keep them as friends as I face any problem then they*



*will be helpful. They will always be there for me. The situation you and I are in is different. For example, if we have any problem we cannot go to help from those at home. They are the ones who would help. For example, if someone wants to whack me up; do you (think) the people at home will help me out first or them? Anyhow, they are the ones who will help to solve it. They will call their other friends for help. It will either be solved or be in more trouble. If you ask those at home, they will stop you as they fear it becomes a police case. I might as well go this route: if I call these fellows, they will be there in a short while.*" There seemed to be a need to be protected by gangs too as they are part of the "brotherhood" phenomenon, mainly in societies where people feel deprived, as was in the narrative of this interviewee who spoke more through evasions, stumbles and pauses.

There were earlier stated cases of stereotyping Indians to be criminals and they were described in Section 3.2.5.1. There is also a stereotyping that Indians are bad workers. Interviewee 10 and Interviewee 5 shared what an employer told him about Indian workers, seeing them as being lazy, keen on taking on medical certificates and being late for work (see Section 3.4.5).

### 3.3 EDUCATION

Forty-two of the 45 interviewees had completed their secondary education (Form 5) under the national schooling system and three would be sitting for their SPM examination in 2019. Of these, 24 were undergraduates or graduates and one was a postgraduate. Thirteen of the other interviewees had either pursued or were currently pursuing matriculation, STPM, foundation courses or diplomas, while eight of them were either still in secondary school or had recently completed their secondary education. It is also interesting to note that there was a high number of interviewees – 13 – from the mainland who received their primary education in Tamil vernacular schools.

#### 3.3.1 The system

Based on the interviews it could be said that the current education system with its myriad pathways (see Appendix IV) was confusing and the quality was not up to par with students' expectations. Under the current education system, one goes through six stages of education, with each stage having options to public or private education. Private education is a solution that is not within reach for the whole population. Students face examinations from ages nine (Year 3) to 17 (SPM), which was also their entry ticket to university. The only time a child does not face examinations and have classroom-based and character-building assessments are during Years 1 (7 years old) to 3 (see Section 2.4).

As such, the younger interviewees who had recently graduated from the public school system and those who were still in the system said they prefer a system that is more interactive and not confined to books alone. They were also seeking education outside the confines of the classroom: *"Everyone says that education is the best solution; I agree to that until a certain extent but education out of classroom is also as important,"* said Interviewee 10, aged 21.

This interviewee was not alone. Other interviewees ranging from ages 17 to 25 also advocated for soft skills to be taught as he believed that sooner or later, diplomas and degrees alone would not be sufficient. Interviewee 8, aged 18, said the education system should not be based on books. Too much time was now spent on reading instead of understanding the subjects. He also said that students were adept at searching for information on Google, and what was more important was for the classroom to become a place for discussions.

There were issues raised on the quality of teaching. Interviewee 17, aged 17, found the teaching approaches ineffective. He said group presentations needed closer monitoring by teachers as students could just be reiterating what was already in the textbooks with no new thoughts or information. As the school's top scorer, he had also been asked by his teachers to teach the class, with a few teachers saying to him, *"You are a smart student."* One teacher, he said, was either "lazy" or "too tired" and would often ask him to teach the class.

There were also good examples of teachers. Interviewee 26, aged 18, had a Malay teacher whom he was fond of because she was good at advising. He also found the teacher to be sharp and willing to provide him and others

with advice.

Currently there are no higher secondary Tamil-medium schools in Penang,<sup>109</sup> unlike Chinese students who can continue their secondary school in Chinese schools. As such, the interviewees who had attended Tamil primary schools moved onto national secondary schools, where the Bahasa Melayu is the main language medium. This transition caused anxiety and difficulties to students as it was a period of adjustment, a cultural shock to be in class with students from other ethnic groups; the language command was weak, and thus communication was a stumbling block to developing new friendships.

One of them expressed how he was teased by his schoolmates because of the way he spoke Malay. Interviewee 29, aged 16, was teased for the way he spoke Malay when he entered secondary school. As a Tamil school student, he had little opportunity to mix with students from other backgrounds. He lived in mainland Penang, in a predominantly Indian neighbourhood. As such, he was not exposed to speaking Malay even colloquially during his primary school days. He said he was teased up to Form 2, till he could speak Malay formally. He eventually learnt the local Penang Malay dialect but would still on occasion get teased by his friends.

But 20-year-old Interviewee 41, who also found the language transition difficult, made an effort to mix with other students from different ethnic groups. When asked for her point of view in group discussions, they found her contributions useful, even when she shared in weak Malay or English. What helped her much, she said, was that her parents sent her to private tuition classes where most of the students were Chinese. They became friends from primary school, sharing tips and notes to do well in examinations. That gave her the confidence to speak out and to communicate with Malay and Chinese students in the class. The same sentiments were shared by Interviewee 16, aged 20, who was thrust into speaking English and for the first time saw Chinese students in the same class. Likewise, Interviewee 18, a 20-year-old undergraduate, found it difficult, so he went silent. But it was his classmates who persuaded him to answer questions and to talk, and slowly he became more confident in speaking Malay and English. He gave his younger brother this advice: *“Because when I entered, I was so shy to talk to people. So people approached me first... don't wait for people to approach you, so you have to approach people first.”*

Many were not that well-prepared to move to national secondary schools and the subjects they had to study. Some expressed difficulty in studying Mathematics as well as the languages, especially when they came from Tamil-medium primary schools. Most said there was no orientation or any useful ones. Neither did teachers give advice on the demands of secondary school. Some were not even prepared for what they would discover – Interviewee 26, 18 years old, for example, was in for a surprise when he entered a government school for Form 1. That was the first time he heard Islamic hymns being played on the speaker at school. He thought the situation was strange and unfair as the school had students of other ethnicities too. On top of it, the year he was to sit for SPM he found out, accidentally, that there were extra classes being given to Chinese and Malay students outside of school hours every Thursday. The subjects taught were Geography, History, Mathematics and Science. He was not too sure exactly how long the classes had been going on or the exact arrangements of them. He approached his teacher about it and was told the classes were being funded by someone – sponsored classes. However, the teacher told him the same could not be done for the Indian students as they had no sponsor even though they are the majority group in this semi government-aided school.

Systemically, there are inconsistencies within the education system, even between what goes on, on the mainland and on the island of Penang.

### 3.3.2 Information and knowledge gaps

The interviewees collectively echoed to limited or no knowledge or guidance as to their path after SPM (see Appendix IV, on Education Pathways).

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<sup>109</sup> The Sun Daily. (2018). Penang to propose establishment of Tamil vernacular secondary schools. Retrieved from <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/penang-propose-establishment-tamil-vernacular-secondary-schools-EUARCH548749> ... accessed, Jan 31, 2019

*“Once I finished SPM, I don't have any guidance. After SPM, I am really blanked. I don't know how to apply for the matriculation. I don't know how to apply for polytechnic. I didn't apply for anything.”* (Interviewee 21, aged 21)

Even though they might have family support and guidance, what they lacked was advice on the changing realities of learning and getting equipped to fit into the future as digitisation has changed education systems. Interviewee 8, aged 18, acknowledged the necessity for teachers to attend computer and e-training classes on teaching methodologies. He had also said, as stated in the last section, that students could search for much information on the web and yet teaching methods were behind time. In the case of Interviewee 21, aged 21, this lack of awareness led him to doing STPM, where though they admittedly gained better exposure on their interests and future career paths, they also faced some difficulties when it came to choice courses for university. This was echoed by Interviewee 4, aged 28, who had been told that priorities were said to be given to those who were from the matriculation system for public university entrance. He felt that, in a way, this was marginalisation of those who studied under STPM or other different systems. In addition, there was disparity – Interviewee 4 added that Malay friends of his, who did less favourably than him in SPM, were offered matriculation. These interviewees said that information needed to be clear as students made choices for their future and websites needed to state clearly what criteria<sup>110</sup> were needed.

The lack of knowledge did not surface from all applicants. Some interviewees mentioned that they were exposed to talks and roadshows on what to do after SPM. These came from teachers, seniors and family members. Some attended roadshows, seminars and talks which were organised specifically to target school leavers. However, Interviewee 22, aged 26, said the roadshows or talks were too focused on high achievers, and were not conducive for average students and those who preferred vocational or skill trainings. The interviewee did not find any useful clarification as her confusion remained. She urged for equal concentration in courses for students who might not all be aiming to attend university and prefer more vocational skills-based courses for the market. Interviewee 3, aged 25, said the information was gearing in reaching lower-income families or parents who lack awareness on where to go to get the information. He was giving time as a volunteer-advisor on education pathways. *“I become like an educational counsellor for them to choose the correct pathway, because I have survived. I have sufferings; I don't want them to suffer the same thing,”* he said.

The online application for university placements still saw many interviewees struggling. Interviewee 21, aged 21, did not know how to apply for polytechnic or matriculation. She did not meet the due date. On the second round, she tried to purchase a pin number to apply online and was told the numbers had been sold out. She said she had no guidance of this from her family as her brother had stopped studying after Form 5.

Many, as previously mentioned, lost track on the types of courses they applied for. Interviewee 16, aged 20, said, *“... you can apply for like 10 or 12 courses,”* and she had forgotten what ranking the option was when the final course was offered to her.

### 3.3.3 Meritocracy, quota and placements

Only a handful of those interviewed received one of their top three choices to pursue their tertiary education. When asked further, the interviewees identified the quota system behind their failure to secure their top choices since they had obtained the required pointers for the courses they had applied for. The quota system, with its reservation on entry spaces for Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak, continues to be applied in education and impacts the Indians and the Chinese, the minority ethnic groups, for allotment places into university, on choice of courses and on where they study (see section 2.3).

Despite the racial quota being abolished, the belief, as explained earlier, remains that the quota was still in place (see Section 2.4). *One case cited was by Interviewee 10, whose sister had scored the best grade of 10As for her SPM in all 10 subjects and was not able to secure a scholarship to study dentistry – the cheaper choice compared to*

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<sup>110</sup> The official portal for Student Admission Division, Higher Education Department Ministry of Education Malaysia (UPU Online) showed the minimum general qualification for application for both STPM and matriculation is set at CGPA 2.00, the pass rate; Portal Rasmi Bahagian Pengurusan Kemasukan Pelajar (UPU) - Permohonan, Semakan dan Rayuan Kemasukan Pelajar Ke IPTA, Politeknik, METRo dan ILKA Secara Online. Retrieved from <http://upu.moe.gov.my/web/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

*medicine. She appealed to many sources for funds. Her parents had to sell their home to get her into a dentistry course overseas. The interviewee's sister found when she was studying in India that other Malaysian students with lower grades had received JPA scholarships while she could not even get one. "And they were given an allowance of 250 USD every month while here my parents were struggling sometimes to even send money. So, you see, I don't know whether to feel angry or to feel sad,"* said Interviewee 10. The family was still living in a rented property as the parents are focused on providing for the younger children's education.

Interviewee 34, aged 20, an only child, is currently studying electronics in Sabah privately. He had failed to secure a scholarship or even a sponsorship despite scoring 7As in SPM. He had applied four times for a scholarship with a reputed bank. However, he was not even called for one interview and the claim made by the bank was that his submission was not received due to a technical glitch.

Interviewee 15 explicitly shared how unfair she felt when she was not offered a seat in the matriculation programme. The 23-year-old saw students with 2As and 3As of Malay and Chinese ethnic groups being offered a seat against her 7As. She then questioned the proportion of seat allocation for Indians under this programme. She had to eventually forgo her ambition of becoming a biologist and instead took up teaching in a government teachers' training institute.

Interviewees who finally got the course that they opted for in the line-up of choices found themselves moving further away from their home state. An interviewee shared how he was the second-highest scorer in his whole school – a well-established one – and yet he and the top scorer (a Chinese) did not get into furthering their education in Penang in some of the well-established government matriculation schools. His friend went into private education and this Indian youth went to another state to do his matriculation there, in a whole new environment. Now he comes home only once every three months as the bus fare alone is RM40 for an eight-hour journey, back to home-cooked food and to catch up with family – a decision that he takes in his stride yet a tough acclimatisation journey for a teenager who has scored highly in the examinations and whose parents would have found it difficult to pay for private matriculation.

Interviewee 16, aged 20, from a single-income family, was offered a place in the state's polytechnic school for food technologies. She said that was one of her lower ranked choices. She eventually rejected the course due to lack of interest coupled with monetary factors and took up the teaching college offer in Kuala Lumpur instead. Even then, in the teachers' training college she did not receive the course that she had applied for, which was to teach in Tamil schools, and instead was offered English.

It was also common to see the youths from the mainland coming over to the island for further studies. They did not see it as troublesome as it was still within the state after all. Besides the states mentioned above, some of the interviewees have gone as far as Pahang, Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur for their studies. Many of them said that their grades were good enough to enter university in Penang.

One outlier interviewee experience was from Interviewee 21, aged 21, who received her first option of studying at a university in Penang since she saw Universiti Sains Malaysia as an APEX university. She was from Rawang, Selangor.

Another differing account came from Interviewee 5, aged 26. The interviewee was offered a course she wanted in a public university in Kedah right after her SPM. She refused to take up the offer as her previous experience at a three-month camp in Kedah made her feel that it was remote and also because the teacher training course would be in Malay, which meant double time for preparation work. So she decided to take a RM24,000 PTPTN loan for her diploma at a private teachers' training college instead of a government-sponsored course.

However, many interviewees reiterated that it was important to accept whichever course that had been offered. They feared that if they were to appeal the offer, they might not be able to register for their course in time. Interviewee 22, aged 26, was willing to undergo a year of a course she had no interest in as she had hoped to change course within her university after her first year of studies. She was offered a place in a public university in Sabah. She eventually continued with the course and now works in a related field. Said 22-year-old Interviewee 11: *"Because in this time, if I don't go out with a degree, I feel like I have so much less opportunities than people who are out there already with so much experience in their hands. So, I do feel like Indian community especially like, education, it should be our priority. Because they are not stupid, believe me, Indians are very smart. One of the smartest communities, I will say."*

Apart from quotas to gain entrance into universities and courses of choice, this policy application permeates to even awards (see Section 3.2.5), whereby one interviewee lost the Outstanding Student Award to a Malay classmate when he was the top choice.

There is much anxiety over the application processes and in looking for funds.<sup>111</sup> Collectively, the interviewees said the quota system should be done away with as it was a limitation on their capacity and capability. There should be a “quality not quantity” approach and that it ought to be merit-based.

### 3.3.4 Education funding

The knowledge gap was not only limited to types of education to be obtained but to funding, sponsorships and scholarships. Funding also emerged as one of the biggest challenges faced by Indian youths in accessing education. Some said they were unaware of scholarships solely available for Indians. Some said that the Malays have MARA and asked, directly, if the Indians had such goodschemes. Of the 22 that had disclosed their education funding, 18 of them were funding for their education via a loan; four had scholarships. Only one of the interviewees had applied for funds from Yayasan Selangor.<sup>112</sup> Two of the interviewees, Interviewee 19, aged 20 and Interviewee 41, aged 20, were on full scholarships. It must be noted two of those who had PTPTN loans also had year-to-year scholarship grants. For example: Interviewee 22, who was on loan, applied for a scholarship based on her first-year grades for her studies later on; and Interviewee 20 received a scholarship in his second year, and had received a loan from the outset to cover expenses such as food and transport as he did not wish to be a “burden” to his single mother and he wanted to defray costs in the home as there was also a younger sibling who was still in secondary school.

As for those who did not get into the university of their choice, some decided to try private higher education. However, private higher education comes at a higher price – a PTPTN loan alone would not be enough as students no longer get a full 100% loan; they needed to fund themselves. Interviewee 18, aged 20, who was currently pursuing his degree in Applied Chemistry, had received RM24,000 on his PTPTN loan. Each semester, after paying the course fee, about RM1,500 was all he had as pocket money to survive for the semester, which was about four to five months. He tried to manage his expenses within that bracket and did not seek help from his family as he did not want to burden them. On the days when money was tight, he skipped either breakfast or dinner to stretch his depleting funds. On this, he said, he was not alone and there were other students in similar situations too (see Section on 3.7).

There are also some cases where the interviewees applied for PTPTN loans twice – once for pre-U or diploma level, and then again for their degrees. The amount of the loan depended on the financial standing of the family. Interviewee 6, aged 21 and Interviewee 14, aged 23, applied for their loans twice – once for diploma and the second for their current degree. Interviewee 14, aged 23, for example, would be RM100,000 in debt when he graduates with a law degree.

Even if they were to apply for a scholarship or sponsorship, the aid scheme does not come in immediately. In most cases, they still had to fund themselves upfront before they got their reimbursements. The initial thought of finding seed money alone remained a big challenge as it directed if they could do or continue with their studies. Interviewee 19, aged 20, tried very hard to secure funding the moment he received his university placement by looking for financial assistance as he knew that the approval of PTPTN was not immediate. Insufficient funds caused some interviewees to work full-time and study part-time, or vice-versa. This eased the financial burden on the family and themselves. Part-time study is long and hard, but they saw it as a necessary sacrifice to reach their end goal and not overburden the family on finances. Of the 14 who said they had worked part-time, nine of them were still students at the period of being interviewed.

In the case of Interviewee 38, aged 25, whose parents were financially sound, he expressed disappointment at not being accepted into public universities. He went to a private university and found that his Malay friends from secondary school who had scored less well than him had been accepted into public universities. He said his Malay friends too agreed that the system must become fair and equal. The same interviewee also narrated the

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<sup>111</sup> See mental health

<sup>112</sup> Yayasan Selangor – a state fund from Selangor

pressure his friend went through in order to have his PTPTN repayment waived under this specific clause – that if the *“borrower had obtained first class honours”*, his loan repayment would be waived. The friend did not get any scholarship despite scoring 9As and came from a low socio-economic background. The friend’s hard work paid off – first class honours and no loan to repay.

There are also instances where extreme measures were taken to fund one’s education. For instance, the case of Interviewee 10’s elder sister who did not receive any scholarship, the family, as described earlier, sold the house they were living in to fund her education.

### 3.3.5 Racism & Bullies

Racism has come up frequently throughout the study in various aspects of the interviewees’ lives. This has been discussed in detail in Section 3.2.5 and it is a good reminder to know that much had happened in school and continues to happen.

## 3.4 Employment

Employment emerged as one of the more important challenges faced by the Indian youths. According to the School to Work Transition Survey, Indian youths between the ages of 20-24, had an unemployment rate of 13.6% compared to 12.9% in Malays and 7.5% in Chinese (see Section 2.4). This turned out to be true to the experiences of the Indians youths in this study who were aged between 16 and 28. In this study, not everyone interviewed was working full-time; they were spread across being employed full-time, unemployed and part-timers as they were still studying.

One thing in common with both the part-time and full-time employee interviewees was that almost all found some sort of difficulty in obtaining employment. Interviewee 37, aged 24 and Interviewee 33, aged 25 were the exceptions as both said that they did not face much of a challenge, time-wise, to secure employment. On average, based on the input of the interviewees, it took five to eight months of job hunting before they could get a job offer. Some applied more than once to the same company before they were called in for an interview. There were also some among those interviewed who had been trying to secure employment for more than two years. Interviewee 3, aged 28 and a Business Administration degree holder, went through almost 50 interviews and was not offered a job yet. Likewise, Interviewee 38, a 25-year-old engineer, only received two to three interview invites out of the 140 applications. Interviewee 5, aged 26, for one had attended over 50 interviews over the course of two years and still had not secured a full-time job until she became a trainee teacher in a private institution.

In two cases, the interviewees found jobs but left them as they felt they were being judged as Indians (see Section 3.3). Interviewee 32, aged 19, left his job as a patient assistant in a private hospital when he felt that the supervisor was asking him to do more of the harder work compared to the Chinese and Malay employees. He had also grown to not like the job anymore. Interviewee 43, aged 27, left her job due to the stereotyping of her as a female, an Indian female, and then for being Indian. She said her employer was concerned if as a woman she could carry heavy items, then it was if she could work at night, and finally it was the report given to her by her Chinese employer. In her words: *“Like in generally, let’s say they are going to come out with an Indian society, of course, the first priority they will think to get engage as much as guys they need, because they need all the guys to do this work. But then what happened is that they do not consult with certain group of females, whether they are willing or not, meaning that there is no first opinion is being consented, but there is perception being set before they actually asked... For me, yes, during my first employment, I did face that, but before it gets really severe, I left the job. Back then, when I was working in my group, I was the only Indian, so I was surrounded by a Chinese group. My manager was Chinese, so mostly what happened is that in that organisation, we have like feedback, one-to-one session. This is what going to determine your opportunities like based on the feedback from the manager, itself, whether they are going to like promote you or they are going to give you extra bonus everything. My Chinese manager, she was like no. She called it comfortable or she is like more attached towards that Chinese group. Meaning that the opportunity is stucked there, because you have to be in a good term with her, because her report, what you consider the final report for the management to consider you.”*

### 3.4.1 Discrimination, prejudice, racism (language and ethnic groups)

One pertaining factor that kept reappearing was the language requirement or a specific ethnic group which appears in most job advertisements (see Section 3.3). Many of the interviewees said they were put off from looking for a job as job advertisements asked for Mandarin speakers or for Chinese to apply. As shared by Interviewee 5, aged 26, such requirements made the applicant feel “*unwanted*”. Interviewee 27, aged 18, was of the opinion that the language requirement is used by the employers to only hire a specific ethnic group. “... *If the Indians who know Mandarin apply for job also, they didn't want to accept it. They want Chinese only, because there is one of my friends. She knows Mandarin, she applied for the job, but the person-in-charge said, "Sorry we are seeking for Chinese only." She said, "It is okay, I know Mandarin." He said, "No, if you also know Mandarin, there is no point. We are seeking for Chinese only,"*” said, Interviewee 27.

There were some who said they faced difficulties in obtaining employment due to the perception left behind by other Indians. Case in point would be when Interviewee 14, a second-year law student aged 23, walked in to a first-aid and emergency service provider for an interview to become a volunteer, he was told, “*I saw your name XXX, I thought you are a Chinese. To be honest, it is a bit difficult to deal with Indian*”. Similarly, Interviewee 5, a part-time tutor aged 26, too, experienced this when her boss was continually focused on her work over others, expecting her to do more work. She told her boss if she continued to treat her as such, she would file a complaint with the then Ministry of Labour. When they reconciled, the boss admitted and apologised that she treated her lesser as she had a previous unpleasant working experience with an Indian. Similarly, Interviewee 29, aged 16 too was shouted at by a Chinese employer when he went for a one-off street cleaning job. The employer shouted at him even though he had used his own initiative to sweep more areas than he had been assigned to, when the employer found an area that had not been swept well by another worker and assumed it was his shoddiness.

One interviewee gave a detailed description of what happened at his interview for a vacation job: “Yes. My boss actually told the story why they don't actually always hire Indians. Because she said that she was the GM from the beginning up until now, and during that time, she had seen 10 Indians she hired, and those who could actually work were only five. The other five always had excuses, they don't come to work, don't give MCs – compared to other races,” said Interviewee 10, aged 21, who also said he could understand their position if that were their experiences, as they were running a service business. He continued: “So, I did not take that as a racist thing but sometimes we have to understand from their part also... Sometimes it's not that they want to look at race or religion but because they already had bad experiences with that one type, so that's why they thoroughly interview you... During my interview, they thoroughly interviewed me and she said, ‘Are you sure you're not going to take MC? Are you sure you're not gonna leave halfway?’” ending that as a law student, he had read up on the law and was aware that this was not acceptable behaviour.

Nevertheless, there are some instances where these young Indians had been given employment opportunities by the Chinese. Interviewee 16, aged 20, was looking for a job after she had completed her SPM. She tried her luck and walked into a Chinese restaurant for a waitress position. The owner was said to be initially hesitant as he had never employed an Indian at his restaurant. Eventually, he hired Interviewee 16 as he wanted his restaurant to be inclusive, be it customers or workers. Interviewee 11, aged 22, too was given an opportunity to work as a receptionist at a hotel on the island by a Chinese boss. She described her boss as someone who practised tough love and was fair to all. She further added it was exactly the type of life experience she needed after finishing her A-Levels.

### 3.4.2 Human resources

A few shortcomings were raised by the interviewees when it came to human resource practices. A first was the disappointing matter that job applicants were left waiting on the status of their applications as they did not hear back from the companies. They remained in limbo and at conflict with the length of time they had to wait as they also applied for other jobs or went for interviews. Interviewee 27, aged 24, suggested for company management be more responsive in replying job applicants. The distance learning student, who had been applying for full-time positions, said the least the company could do was to let the job applicant know the outcome of their applications. This helped applicants to know that they need to plan their next course of action instead of “*hoping*” to get the job. Interviewee 32, aged 19 too, was in a similar situation as the high school leaver had applied for jobs with some local factories. Even when he called, they were unable to give him a definitive

answer, which left him much in limbo.

The interviewees expressed frustration at the “*experience*” requirement during interviews. Many were applying as rookies into the market and some had internships, but human resource personnel did not ask about the internship or note that they had just completed studying and would ask them for their experience for the position they had applied for. Interviewee 43, a 27-year-old business administration degree holder, found it “*disheartening*” when she saw an advertisement welcoming fresh graduates but at the same time, when it came to the interview session, they only concentrated on those who had two to three years’ work experience. Besides that, she also found it ironic when they stated that “*if you don't have this experience, please do not apply*”, but in the advertisements they asked for fresh graduates to apply. She added that the stated requirement was more of a corporate culture, not an error in the advertisement.

Interviewee 27, aged 24, on the other hand, said that for fresh graduates, such requirements seemed unfair to those who have just graduated. From the employers’ perspective she said she understood why they require an experienced employee as they might not have the time and resources to invest in training. However, she also argued that fresh graduates need to be given a chance too. After all, she added, most companies had a probation period for new employees, whereby a company could terminate the contract if the new employee could not fulfil the company’s requirement.

Some of the interviewees had also experienced insecurity in sustaining their employment. This came about due to them being made “contract staff”, said Interviewee 25, aged 25, who has been a government contract employee for the last four years. The situation, she said, made some aspects of her life difficult. She had to drop a long-distance study offer from a local university as she was not accorded study leave that permanent staff had. As a contract staff, she only had 20 days, which were also used for her studies. As a contract staff she was not entitled to government loans or approvals from private banks for housing loans as they do not recognise contract staff. She would continue to live in a wooden house, though as the eldest child she was keen to help her family move into a better home. She would continue to help out with utility bills as her father’s salary of RM1,000 was not enough to run the household.

Some interviewees who had not been able to secure full-time employment were surviving on part-time jobs. They worked as graphic designers, insurance agents and commonly as tuition teachers. Out of the 21 who had shared that they are working, 14 were in part-time employment. Three of the part-timers also had full-time jobs, but they needed the extra income. Interviewee 22, aged 26, and Interviewee 25, aged 25 said the extra income was to help out with the family expenses every month. Interviewee 37, a 24-year-old accounts assistant on the other hand converted her previous e-commerce business into side income while being in full-time work in an NGO.

Twenty-one-year-old Interviewee 10, 20-year-old Interviewee 34, 25-year-old Interviewee 33 and 18-year-old Interviewee 23 all believed that the way to secure openings to jobs and to secure employment was to rely on contact-building and networking. Interviewee 10 also stated that working in a multi-ethnic company was the best way to break down barriers. He hoped to become a politician in the future. “*I'm not going to say it's an easy path, but I think a lot comes down to networking... None of them actually looked at race and religion... Look at you as an individual whether you are capable or not,*” he said.

### **3.4.3 Government jobs**

Getting into government jobs seemed to be important among the qualified interviewees. Two interviewees from the study were working in the government sector whereas two more had been applying for the longest time for a government job, without success.

Interviewee 25, aged 25, applied for her current job through the SPA’s online portal and was offered the job within five months of being called for an interview. She started applying for government positions right after she completed her foundation in management at a private university. Interviewee 22, aged 26, was offered two government jobs – she first worked as a clerk as a government officer and then, at the point of interview, was working as a horticulturist based on the degree she had. Interviewee 22 said she chose to accept the clerk position despite having a degree as she followed the advice given to her by a teacher: “*It's very hard to enter to*



*government sector. But once you enter, you know what opportunity you have.”*

In contrast, Interviewee 44, aged 28, with a degree in Agro-Science, had failed to secure a government job despite attending a few interviews and undergoing medical and physical check-ups for jobs, as was asked of her. Since 2014, she had been applying for positions at the state and federal levels. She would continue to do so as she wants to practice agro-farming based on her degree, and so move away from the retail industry that she was working in.

### **3.4.4 Bribery**

One shocking account that was presented was given by an interviewee, who had harboured the ambition of joining the police force.. Upon graduation he applied to become a police officer. During an interview he was asked to give a significant amount of money<sup>113</sup> To become a police trainee. Even though the family was willing to take a loan to foot the amount asked, this interviewee was outraged and disheartened. He eventually let go of his ambition.

### **3.4.5 Entrepreneurship**

Some interviewees were bursting with ideas and a desire to start their own businesses. Some wished to start one while still holding onto full-time jobs or part-time studies. It was also a way to step out of the market to find employment and become more independent.

Currently pursuing his MBA at a local university, Interviewee 3, aged 25, was providing tuition classes to students from various backgrounds to support his daily expenses. He said his tuition prices were below the market price. Despite struggling, he wished to provide free tuition to Indian students who were sitting for their UPSR or PT3 soon as he had found some Indian families who were unable to cope with the RM40 required for a subject. Besides tuition, this interviewee too had some innovative ideas on how to manage water wastage using a “poka yoke” system, which focuses on any mechanism that enables an equipment operator to avoid mistakes – a “mistake-proofing” device. He was lost on how to go forward with this idea as he did not know the right outlets to share his idea with.

Interviewee 37, aged 24, was encouraged by her father to consider starting her own business even before she had the chance to think about employment. The father intended for the daughter to take a gap year and to have some life experience. He even provided her with money to start her natural health products business online. She had the business running for three years as a full-time businesswoman before deciding she needed a full-time job while also continuing with e-commerce as a home-based business, and be more personal in convincing her customers about the products.

Interviewee 4, a 28-year-old teacher, shared an incident when he prepared a joint business proposal for his Indian friend alongside another Malay friend who was submitting his business plan. They applied to TEKUN<sup>114</sup> for funding. His Indian friend and himself requested for RM45,000. His Bumiputera friend applied for around RM70,000. As they were all friends, they prepared all the proposals together, helping each other, and even submitted together. However, his Indian friend received only RM18,000 out of the RM45,000, while the Bumiputera friend received the full amount. It is to be noted, though, the project proposals were on two different industries.

Interviewee 30, aged 27, shared many dreams of making the family dairy milk business grow. But his struggles included getting the halal certificate for his milk product so that he could sell it to Malay customers. He had

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<sup>113</sup> Malaysian Anti-Corruption Act 2009 (MACC Act 2009), Section 16 & 17(a); It is an offence under Malaysian Anti-Corruption Act 2009 (MACC Act 2009) to solicit and receive bribes

<sup>114</sup> TEKUN Nasional, is the national Entrepreneurial Group Economic Fund. It is a lending method provided by the Malaysian government for Bumiputera entrepreneurs to carry out or expand their businesses. The method adopted facilitates small entrepreneurs to get loans with easy repayment schemes. Separately, under the Indian Community Entrepreneurs Development Scheme, RM50 million allocation was announced for Indian entrepreneurs under Budget 2018.

applied and had been waiting for the certificate for the past six months. Meanwhile, he shared that a Malay distributor is selling his milk products to Malay customers without a halal certificate for his products. He said Malays and Indians were the majority of customers, and he was finding it difficult to tap into the Malay customers without the halal certification. He said he would continue to call the department until he received the certificate. The young entrepreneur's future plans include expanding into poultry farming. For now, his brother was willing to provide him with some financial support to help grow the farm, but he preferred getting approval for a loan.

### 3.5 Healthcare

#### 3.5.1 Medical condition

Among the 45 interviewees, parents with diabetes appeared frequently, where there were five interviewees' parents with diagnosed diabetes. Due to both parents' diabetes and the mother's amputated diabetes leg, Interviewee 25, aged 25, was worried and cautious about his health. Interviewee 25 said: *"If both the parents have it, then the children will too. So, have to take precaution."*

Aside from concern about diabetes, Indian youths also worried over their parents' heart condition. Interviewee 40, aged 20, said: *"He (my father) always say I have pain here. Maybe he work. He work in house so kind of pain here. So, I'm worried about attack."* Indeed, the Indian youths' concerns for their parents' health was understandable as Indians have the highest risk of dying from heart attacks, at a 19.5% incidence rate – the highest among all ethnicities in Malaysia<sup>115</sup> (see Section 2.6.2). Among all the interviewees, there was only one interviewee who expressed difficulties in taking care of his parents, one of whom is diabetic and the other has chronic blood pressure problems. Interviewee 18, aged 20, said that: *"So, it's very hard, inside we might think we should take care of them but particularly, realistically sometimes we can't because we have our own lives as well. We have to earn money, so I felt bad."*

Many other interviewees also shared ailments that their parents were having and the most common one was diabetes. There were concerns for long-term care but there was also, generally, a lack in conceptually, comprehending the impact on them or their parents.

#### 3.5.2 Medical services

When it came to medical services, the interviewees showed a preference for government healthcare service either because it was more affordable, or because it was within easy reach. Interviewee 10, aged 20, said: *"I think, we're quite blessed I would say. Malaysia, with the government hospitals giving you, treating you with just one ringgit and sometimes in major operations, they don't actually charge you a bomb; it could be quite affordable. And even if you could not afford it, you could always appeal..."* Interviewee 35, aged 16, mentioned that when you asked for an ambulance they would always take the person to the nearest hospital to their home, which made it easier for visits by the family members.

But there was an acknowledgement that going to private clinics and hospitals meant faster services – *"If you want express, you have to go private. There is no choice. Then, you need to spend more money,"* said Interviewee 22, aged 26, who is working as a horticulturalist, adding that since most people prefer the government hospitals, it is best that they be *"multiplied"*.

Although government healthcare services seemed favourable among the interviewees, the service quality was also commented upon during the interviews – the long waiting time, lack of experienced doctors and poor customer service to patients and families. Interviewee 39, aged 17, said: *"Got. Need to wait very (five times more) long. Even though my hand break need to wait like one hour or one and a half hours. I don't know why. You just need to take the token and wait very long."* Interviewee 12, aged 23, who reflected on his experience, shared: *"The*

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<sup>115</sup> Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2018). Statistics on Causes of Death, Malaysia, 2018. Retrieved from [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=401&bul\\_id=aWg2VjkZHhYcDdEM3JQSGloeTVIZz09&menu\\_id=LOpheU43NWJwRWVSZkIWdzQ4TlhUUT09...](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=401&bul_id=aWg2VjkZHhYcDdEM3JQSGloeTVIZz09&menu_id=LOpheU43NWJwRWVSZkIWdzQ4TlhUUT09...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

*system is so bad. The (ear)drops that the government hospital gave me, made my ear infection even worse. I had even worse pain. And the washout that the clinic did to me – the ear wash out – that also made my infection worse. So, then I (decided to come) to town side, I went to Gleneagles (private hospital) for the problem. I think they solved my problem within a week. Their service was much better...”*

Customer service by front-line staff was also lacking in quality. Interviewee 26, aged 18, said he was shouted at by staff the Penang Government Hospital for trying to ask for directions to a clinic. He said: *“I asked where is the direction? They say you go and search – shout at me – I feel like there’s something wrong.”* Public healthcare should improve its facilities, management and standardisation of service quality in medical clinics and hospitals to increase accessibility to the public to consistent quality healthcare – that was the overall conclusion from the interviewees when asked about solutions.

But there were also good reviews about government healthcare services as well, as noted also by Interviewee 26, who had been shouted at when he was at the front counter on another occasion. He praised his Malay doctor for the operation and the information that she gave. *“The lady who operate on me is a Malay lady. She is a doctor. She is talking very nice. She is so chatty. She is a good person. One of the good persons I see in my life.”* And Interviewee 24, aged 22, undergoing a teacher training diploma course, recited how the hospital had showed her parents a video on how to care for the diabetic condition of her father, educating them on nutrition, daily care and etc. She said: *“They tell us and also, we watch videos at the hospital. They have shown us how to do the testing”*. Eighteen-year-old Interviewee 26 says, *“I feel like going to government hospital is good. I’m good now. But because of some employees – they are the reason why the public hospitals become bad.”*

Apart from private healthcare, traditional healthcare is another alternative to public healthcare for the Indians. Interviewee 9, aged 17, suffers from sinusitis. She mentioned that *“I took three courses of antibiotics and it still didn’t go away and I have to go for traditional treatment.”* Often when public healthcare fails, the interviewees, said they seek private healthcare.

The interviewees were not particular on who treated them, but one did make known a preference for Indian doctors. Interviewee 11, aged 22, said: *“I feel like, honestly, I am more comfortable with an Indian doctor, because tend to know my family and my dietary is, rather than Chinese and Malay.”* Moreover, Interviewee 7, aged 17, claimed that there is an uneven distribution of Malay, Chinese and Indian doctors across public and private healthcare. Interviewee 7 said: *“Because like if I go to public clinic, I see Malay doctors everywhere and I will be very lucky to see one Indian nurse or one Indian doctor... And then, like in private clinics sometimes you see Indian doctors and Chinese doctors...”* Another interviewee felt that government hospitals were filled with inexperienced doctors. Interviewee 12, aged 23, said: *“It’s very rare to see an elderly doctor or a more experienced doctor there. Most of the time I see are all young graduate doctors.”* As a solution, she suggested that more experienced doctors be sent to the public sector to boost the quality of the medical profession there.

What was more important was the level and quality of language that doctors and nurses use when talking to the patients they are seeing. There was a doctor-patient language barrier as shared by Interviewee 24, aged 22, whose father was working as a guard and mother was a homemaker. She talked about the struggles to communicate effectively with the healthcare administration and professionals. She said: *“This is especially with older people, who don’t know how to express themselves and talk about their ailments and the doctor also may not understand what they are saying.”* She said, upon further probing, that it was best to have in-house training for employed staff in healthcare to translate for patients, in a language that both patients and staff could speak, so that the doctor’s or pharmacist’s instructions were clear to older patients.

### **3.5.3 Medical insurance**

In this study, 30 out of 45 youths were aware of the necessity to have medical insurance. More males – nine compared to six females – were covered by medical insurance. Most interviewees only indicated that they would get it when they started working. For instance, Interviewee 15, aged 23, unemployed said decisively: *“I think it is necessary for everyone to take, because anything can happen anytime.”*

Only 15 from among the 45 – a third – interviewed had medical insurance policy in the family. Explaining this trend, 28-year-old Interviewee 44 said that many among the Indians did feel that *“paying or taking insurance for*

*medical is like wasting money...*

Some were also rather laid back or complacent in comprehending the worth of getting a medical insurance for themselves. An example was from 21-year-old Interviewee 20, who was not keen at all in getting an insurance or even in thinking about it “No, I never,” was his answer. Some were ignorant on the necessity for a medical insurance, just seeing it as a cost item for the family.

### 3.5.4 Health maintenance

When it came to the personal healthcare, some Indian youths in this study mentioned that Indians as a whole needed to focus more on diet and exercise in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Interviewee 30, aged 27, described bluntly: *“You can see in the residential area, the exercise stuff, first few days, full crowded. We see all Chinese and Indians. After few months, Indians all gone.”*

On keeping a control on diabetes, Interviewee 43, aged 27, said: “I think even whether it is among the Malays or Indians, it is a common thing, because we have this habit of the need to drink tea three times of a day. We have that kind of practice, so I think definitely should be high.” More than half of the interviewees were participating in sport activities, implying that there could be a shift among youths for a healthier lifestyle.

Education and information sharing, said everyone, was important. Interviewee 24, aged 22, explained that she was concerned over the medication for her parents: *“Yes, because I must get the right medical names, correct food, must get the right balanced diet, and give the right dosage on the medicine...”* Another, Interviewee 28, aged 16, shared how he learnt to draw blood to test his father’s blood-sugar levels for diabetes *“by myself”*. He added, in his own way, that the lack of education on health awareness and home-based care meant that more help was needed to provide appropriate and correct knowledge about family and personal health. Health education could improve the quality of personal and home-based care, as well as minimise the uncertainty or fear people have towards their personal health.

As the interviews revealed, some Indians were both afraid and worried about the impact of poor health on their future. Interviewee 45, aged 19, shared about her fear of receiving her blood test results. She was afraid that it might end her archery journey, stating that: *“I don’t want to go see the result, I am scared, I don’t want to see.”*

When asked for a solution, Interviewee 38, a 25-year-old male, answered: *“I think it is time for them to promote all this healthcare. Very important...”* adding that as religion played a big part in an Indian’s daily life, the temple could become an ideal community gathering space to build up healthcare for Indians.

Similarly, the adverse environment could be said to taking a toll on some Indian youths’ health, as depicted through Interviewee 27, aged 24, who was working as a clerk, who told the doctor, *“I’m stressed because of the job, I didn’t get any job to do so actually I am very easily get stressed”*. Another, Interviewee 13, aged 21, while feeling relieved about the dad’s diabetes condition, said, *“No, he is fine now, for now. So, me being the only son in the family, I have to be the responsible one, again pressured. So, I don’t mind also being pressured because it’s family. So, it’s okay, that’s why I am traveling, commuting and everything.”* Despite the rare disclosure on mental health, the state of interviewees’ mental health did surface in the minds of the interviewers, as words such as “pressure” and “stressed” were mentioned, unconsciously, often throughout some of the interviews.

The impact of mental illness had taken a friend away from Interviewee 26, aged 18, who said: “Actually, he’s so committed suicide. He smokes and drinks... Then he was caught, and I think this time the teacher wanted to tell his parents. He did not tell his parents. He was so scared he committed suicide.” Perhaps the intense fear of authority figures such as parents drove Interviewee 26’s friend to committing suicide.

### 3.6 Housing

All interviewees cited that getting a house was out of their league, not only for them, but also for many others in Penang. It was a dream. The challenges faced by Indian youths in getting a house were mainly the

unaffordability of the houses in Penang. This was often reflected by interviewees, such as Interviewee 18, aged 20, who said: *"The price, the price nowadays is very high, I can't afford now, so let's imagine after 10 years how".* This was also echoed by Interviewee 42, aged 18, who said: *"Number 1 ... apparently there is the salary very less. So, they cannot afford to get their own house. Some of them renting also very hard for them (to) pay up."* This comment on hefty house prices came more from interviewees who live on Penang Island rather than those on the mainland. In fact, Interviewee 14, a law student, aged 23, said: *"So, if you want to get a house (that) is more expensive... with the (same) amount of the money ... you can actually buy (a) triple storey house in mainland or somewhere else."*

The unaffordability of housing units' price was often attributed to foreign investments and rapid development in Penang. Interviewee 4, a teacher, aged 28, said: *"So, there are a lot of houses where it's like basically just a bush there, there is no one living. Those cost million so I mean the lands' price has gone up so much. For me, mainly I feel developers now are not targeting the locals, the target is the foreigners".* This interviewee added that Indians were impacted more as they usually had lower income levels than the other ethnic groups. Interviewee 45, aged 19, said: *"Because Chinese, normally we know Chinese is the richest. Normally, the Chinese looks simple, they really rich. Malay, no problem, because they can find a way, because they got a lot of support, because Bumiputera what. Indians, they have to work hard for it. It is really difficult."*

Because of the cost, most had pushed this out of their minds as houses, condominium units and flats in Penang have high sale prices. In a report by *The Edge*, the affordable house price for Penang was pegged at RM118 000, RM230 000 and RM442,000 respectively for the different tiered income levels of B40, M40, and T20,<sup>116</sup> whereas the actual price tag for all houses, terraced houses and high-rises were standing at RM410,000, RM447,000, and RM340,000 respectively.<sup>117</sup>

Interviewee 3, aged 22, a part-time student and tutor, said: *"So, what is the plan that I have been put off? By the age of 25 until today, I don't even have a house, because I am unemployed. So, I don't even have the money to open (my own) house. When you see a low-cost house also, you can't, even apply for any bank loans".* Interviewee 14, a law student, aged 23, said: *"Not yet, because I think I am not even done with my career yet. I have to get a permanent job and complete my studies. So, to think about that, where to buy a house and which house to buy, I think it is quite out of my league now."*

Some were lost and clueless when asked about their plan for housing. For instance, 24-year-old Interviewee 24's answer to whether there was a plan for housing, said: *"We have not started planning. We have no focus on this as yet. No focus as yet. We have not started thinking. Never think about it."* Moreover, when asked about the plan for housing, place to stay and knowledge on housing, 19-year-old student Interviewee 36's answer was: *"Nope... Nope... Nothing,"* despite knowing that sooner or later she would have to leave the orphanage and either go back to relatives or find a place of her own.

There were some interviewees who had visualisedowning a property. Interviewee 28, aged 16, who shared about his plan for having a big house, said: *"In a new house that we build by ourselves we can have a garden, with the land, in Penang."* Despite not owning a house, Interviewee 41, aged 20, was already planning with the help of her father. The student-nurse who was saving constantly (see Section 3.7), said: *"In future. Buying house, buying car..."*

Suggestions made by interviewees to make housing affordable to youths included asking governments to make known the schemes and to increase governance on developers. As Interviewee 4, aged 28, a teacher, said: *"There is catch there, which they do not publicly tell, when you get the lot you will be happy. Okay, I've got the RM72,000 then later on when you proceed with developer, he will tell you another story. It's only the house RM72,000, not inclusive of parking. So, when we ask about parking, extra another RM28,000 to RM30,000 and they called it a package."*

Another interviewee, Interviewee 9, aged 17, suggested the government should segregate the applications more so that first-time applicants are given priority. *"Like applicants who have applied more (times) single mothers ...*

<sup>116</sup> B20, M20 and T20 are the representations of the percentages of the countries' population of Bottom 40%, Middle 40% and Top 20% respectively

<sup>117</sup> The Edge Malaysia. (October 23, 2017). What's 'Affordable' Housing in Malaysia? Retrieved from <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/whats-affordable-housing-malaysia...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

*they should segregate like the people who already have houses and are applying for that. They should put them at the back of the waiting list. They should prioritise certain people.”* Student-leader, Interviewee 21, aged 21, also suggested reducing the amount of down payment to make the purchasing of a house easier for them. *“Maybe we can help the lower-income people to get a house. They can apply for that so sure they will get. Maybe the initial payment lower, RM1,000 or something, so we can introduce a project like that.”*

Affordability of houses – needed. Reforms – needed. Interviewees’ common call.

Aside from housing unaffordability, interviewees identified that there were incidents of racial discrimination towards the Indians when they are seeking to rent a house (see Section 2.7). This is supported by Interviewee 11, aged 22: *“...there is always a biasness, even like renting houses, I know someone, my friend who wants to rent out. They can’t, because they want a Chinese like tenant and all that and it is quite hard in Penang for Indian community.”* Interviewee 13 also faced similar challenges when he needed to rent a room to continue his studies in Penang, having come from Kedah. These experiences were also similar to what software engineer, Interviewee 33, aged 25, shared. When faced with the situation, his response was: *“So, then he asked me, ‘Hey if you don’t mind, can I ask you something?’ I knew what was the question already. So, instead of answering ‘Yes, anything,’ I just told him and said, ‘This is my full name, this is my race, I worked here, and this is the thing...’ His reply was, ‘Yes, this is what the owner wanted to ask you.’ So I said, ‘Yes, this is very much expected.’”* Interviewee 33 went on and asked his Chinese friend to inquire and he said, *“Purchase price was at least about RM50,000 difference and rental price was about RM450 difference.”* To eradicate racial discrimination in housing sector, interviewees suggested that the government should legislate and enforce anti-racial discrimination law to prevent the use of skin colour as a requirement for renting and purchasing of houses.

### 3.7 Money Matters

Money matters, in this context, are about the expenses and savings of the 45 interviewees who were interviewed. Out of the 45, 43 said they had expenses every month. The average expenditure of an Indian youth was about RM500 a month. Twenty-five of them cited this figure, of whom 11 were females while four were males. The bulk of their expenses would go to food, petrol and phone bills. Of the 43 who cited expenditure figures, two were unaware of the expenses or were not willing to disclose. One was fully supported by her parents and the other, aged 16, was in an orphanage, unaware of budgets, savings or expenses. The other girl, aged 19, in the same orphanage and in higher school, who was interviewed, was more aware of her daily expenditure as they were given daily pocket money for food and transportation.

On savings, 26 of the 45 interviewees had savings, with the lowest amount being RM20 and the highest being RM25,000. 16 of them have savings below RM3 000, of whom 10 are males and 6 are females. Ten had savings above RM3,000. Many worked part-time while studying or during vacation breaks. Their motivation was for their families, to buy a motorcycle, a car, a house or to further their studies. Eight of them – 4 males and 4 females – had explicitly shared that they did not have savings, while the other nine interviewees could not ascertain if they had or did not have any. Often when asked about savings, there were pauses or explanations on how they had little or no extra money left from the allowances they were given, or that their expenses were already too high.

The interviewees spoke at length on the need to plan and to be frugal. For example, Interviewee 18, aged 20, was getting a monthly allowance of RM250 from the government for his matriculation. To cover his daily expenses with the allowance given, he used to eat Maggi cup noodles and would, occasionally, skip meals (see Section 3.3). He said that he did that as he had too little money to maintain himself and did not want to ask his parents, who were already working hard and were already financially stressed. And therefore, what more was left to save, was his point!

In contrast, Interviewee 24, aged 22, a college student, portrayed herself as someone who was totally clueless on budgets. She was one of the nine who were unsure. She kept saying on savings. She admitted that she had lots of expenses, and no financial plan for anything at present. She was already a young adult but was still very dependent on her elder sister for advice and wary of disobeying her parents. What is interesting is how this 22-year-old – Interviewee 24 – came across as someone who was lost. Though she understood that savings were important, she was clueless on her own finances, considering her position to be too weak to put any effort into a

financial plan for the moment or for the future. She seemed afraid to toy with this idea and was just waiting for her job as a full-time teacher to begin to consider any future planning. It needs to be said that she was not the only one who was clueless as some had already assumed that planning came only at the moment when there was enough money. Yet, most of the interviewees proved themselves to be survivors, working even on small allowances to sustain their daily expenses so that they did not have to ask their parents for any “extras”. Interviewee 7, aged 17, did not have any savings, but she did not ask her single mother for more money either, on top of the RM300 she receives monthly. She had recently completed her SPM examinations and would be joining a private college to continue her A-levels and was already aware that expenses would rise. It might be important to note as well that the younger interviewees had expressed that they didn’t simply spend their cash. Interviewee 9, a 17-year-old, too said she did not fancy hanging out with her peers even when she was at the peak of her teenage years as that would mean more expenditure, and she did not wish to go beyond the RM210 per month as her parents were not well to do.

Some others had been taught to plan and save from whatever one could. Interviewee 38, aged 25, had already planned for his future and had placed a down payment for his condominium unit. His case was an exception among all the interviewees. His approach, which he emphasised, was, “*Must have vision!*” His views were similar to that of 18-year-old Interviewee 23, who highlighted the significance of future planning and having a vision for the future. Both saw it as a pathway to having control over money, securing a future and realising their life’s goals. Both interviewees, despite their wide age gap, were fused in this concept, having a vision and plan. Family backgrounds of both were similar - parents who worked professionally and in business who also strongly inculcated values of savings and planning.

Interviewee 5, a diploma holder aged 26, had saved about RM10,000 in a period of two years by just working as a part-time tutor; while Interviewee 12, aged 23, too had RM10,000 in a fixed deposit account. The first-year law student said she was encouraged by her father to put her savings that were sitting idle into the account that she had been saving in since small. There was also a case of a father planning for his daughter, Interviewee 41, aged 20. Her father was making sure that her nursing allowance of RM550 was going into her savings for her too buy her own home while he still gave her a monthly allowance of RM300.

But for 21-year-old Interviewee 1 – the planner and the doer was herself. Her RM380 monthly spending included her medical insurance premium. The family was headed only by her mother who worked as a babysitter. Her two siblings were working elsewhere – in Singapore and in another state in Malaysia. Parents were divorced; no maintenance from the father. They were living on mainland Penang. The family’s financial situation had become a tight balancing act even though she was already working as part-time as a kindergarten teacher, helping her mother in her baby-sitting job and was studying part-time. And she still managed to save RM1,500 to buy a motorbike to get to her classes on the island.

Many said savings had to start from young – daily, between RM0.50 and RM1 from pocket money given to them. Interviewee 34, aged 20 and Interviewee 42, aged 18 were encouraged to save since they were young by their mothers. Interviewee 42 said he saved RM0.50 out of the RM2 he was given when he was in primary school. This habit has followed him ever since; currently, while his monthly allowance was RM300, he saves RM50. Interviewee 34, on the other hand, who was studying in college, was also taught by his mother when he was in primary school to save daily from the RM10 given to him.

With the rise in cost of living, expenditures remained high – on average around RM500. Some needed to commute to their homes in other states or come back to Penang from other states, which added to their expenditures. But there were high spenders too – Interviewee 12, a 23-year-old law student, whose monthly expenditure was already RM1,000 spent primarily on entertainment, socialising and grooming. She was one of six; some of them were using their loans to also pay for their cars, rent at university and groceries. Others were contributing to the family, like Interviewee 37, aged 24, who decided to take up part of the family obligation by paying for groceries and the rental of their home; likewise for Interviewee 38, aged 25, an engineer working in a multinational corporation and picking up the utility bills at home.

### **3.8 Role Models**

Almost all 45 interviewees, when asked, shared their role models who they looked up to. Based on the

interviewees' responses as a whole, many interviewees – 17 of them – placed their parents as role models. Mothers were seen as interviewees' most favoured role model for the nine who chose parents as their top choice.

Interviewees saw their mothers as being exemplary in their generosity and patience – figures of strength. The sons among the interviewees especially appreciated their mothers for the stoicism they had shown, especially when they faced financial difficulties. Interviewee 13, a 21-year-old law student, said: *"She is a woman with the vision to make son and daughters success."* His mum is willing to sell *Thali Lipur*<sup>118</sup> just to cover Interviewee 13's and his sister's tuition fees. Female Interviewee 15, aged 23, a fresh graduate whose father was working in Singapore, said she recognised the hard work of her mother, the way she contributed to the family, and made sure that all was managed without asking relatives for any help. Another female interviewee spoke of her mother as a friend who always said "It can happen" to make everyone feel less troubled over anything that caused unease.

Amongst the eight interviewees who chose their father, they valued their father for guiding them and for leaving options to the children to make their choices. Interviewee 3, aged 21, appreciated his father for encouraging him and telling him not to give up as the son was facing a challenging time studying for his MBA. He said: *"My dad is one of my best friends because he is the only one who would motivate me."* Another son, Interviewee 10, a 21-year-old male law student, said he did not do well in his secondary school and was at first intending to continue his degree in business but because of his father's support, tolerance, guidance, and belief in him, Interviewee 10 was confident of giving up on his business course to study law.

It needs to be pointed out that some interviewees looked up to both their parents as they appreciated what their parents had contributed to them and how they had guided them through the tough times. Parents had shown patience in pointing out the errors and faults of interviewees, and also reprimanded them.

Some others valued their relatives – Interviewee 12, aged 23, idolised her aunt as she was from her generation and both comprehended what they were each experiencing. Her aunt would think hard and long before advising her on actions that the interviewee could take. She was so close to her aunt that her mother would say: *"You're not my daughter, you're her daughter,"* to which Interviewee 12 will laugh and agree. Others look to their sisters for inspiration. This was especially true with Interviewee 11, a full-time 22-year-old law student who valued her sister's maturity. Although her sister suffered from depression, she was steely, facing it head on. *"She is handling it in a very mature way... She is growing up, counselling all that. She did all that and I feel like for someone of her age to do that is very inspiring."*

Celebrities are admired. Seven interviewees see them as role models. Names that popped up include actors like Emma Watson; Dwayne Johnson was viewed as someone who came from a difficult background to become a successful person and is still focused on helping others. Interviewee 20, aged 21, appreciates him as a person who inspires in strength and spirit to overcome difficulties and to succeed. For example, he is impressed and follows his idol's routine of starting work at 4am in the morning, such as exercise – as he put it, 'Hard work is his industry'. Watson is admired by Interviewee 37, aged 24, a female who has also become an entrepreneur. She said that Watson is inspiring as she is a feminist thinker and is a believer of equal rights for women and men.

Established business people and leaders were also admired. One of which was Sundar Pichai, Google's CEO. Interviewee 26, aged 18, was impressed (by his "Cockroach Theory"<sup>119</sup>). Interviewee 26, an STPM holder, was amazed by the way Pichai conducted himself in the United States Congress. He compared his icon with Facebook CEO's Mark Zuckerberg and he complimented him on the way he answered all the questions put to him, unlike Mark Zuckerberg, who was not forthright. Malaysian entrepreneurs too such as Ananda Krishnan and Tony Fernandez were named by Interviewee 20. These are figureheads that had made a name for themselves in their respective fields and industries.

Teachers and politicians were also seen as role models – six interviewees said so. Teachers were role models because they showed strength during hard times; they taught students about equality and treated them equally

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<sup>118</sup> This holy thread definitely symbolises the real meaning and concept of a Hindu marriage. The thali is not an ordinary ornament. ... The thali is a mark of respect, love and dignity which is presented to the wife by her husband during the auspicious hour of the marriage day. It is a revered symbol of Hindu marriage; <http://www.astroulagam.com.my/lifestyle/article/51991/why-do-hindu-women-wear-thali...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>119</sup> It is a theory which advice an individual to be calm in life. Analyze the surroundings before responding. Never just react to an incident or jump to conclusion.



no matter who they were. This was the case with Interviewee 45, aged 19, who credited her coaches for treating her better than her relatives did. Even though her coaches were of two ethnic groups, they were able to come together to train her. Furthermore, Interviewee 45 said: *"My Malay coach also learns Tamil. They do everything together, for me."* Her coaches, she said, were breaking boundaries, training Indian women in archery. Interviewee felt more attached to her coaches as she has no parents and no relatives to rely on while she continues with her work in the sport.

Politicians too like Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Indira Gandhi, Barack Obama and Singapore's Foreign Minister, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, were also held as role models. Malaysia's prime minister was revered despite the mistakes they acknowledged he had made, as he had returned to correct and to do right on the wrongs of his past, and to make the changes that were much needed for Malaysia. Indira was valued by Interviewee 25, aged 25, as she inspired her to contribute to society as Indira did. Interviewee 18, aged 20, found inspiration in Obama, the first African-American president of the US. Coming from a family where they are Indians and living in Malaysia, a multiracial society, he hoped that one day, he could make the changes he had made and embrace him for his views on equality. Interviewee 23, aged 18, admired Dr Balakrishnan for his eloquence, intelligence and diplomacy.

Footballers were role models as well. Four interviewees identified superstars like Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Thibaut Courtois. This was so as these footballers grew up in poor families. Interviewees admired them for their determination, hard work and focus. Interviewee 42, aged 18, was motivated by Messi as he has a small-sized body, like Interviewee 42, yet he has achieved great things. As both are of similar size, this convinced Interviewee 42 to stick to his passion and continue with football in the Penang Malaysia Indian Football Club, part of the Malaysia Indian Football Association (MIFA). On the contrary, Interviewee 29, aged 16, was star-struck by Courtois, who he felt is a more accomplished player than Ronaldo, though both came from poor backgrounds. This has resulted in Interviewee 29 saving around RM4,000, at the age of 16 to plan for his future and to grab opportunities for improvement when they came.

Two interviewees found Swami Vivekananda inspirational. Interviewee 16, aged 20, looked up to Vivekananda because he trusted youngsters and that they can contribute to society as well.

However, the most intriguing among the lot would have to be 17-years-old Interviewee 7. A middle-class girl preparing for her A-levels, she created a composite picture of all the role models whose qualities she admired and wanted those for herself too. From her mother – her resilience and strength. From Michelle Obama – the ability to ignore racial slurs and stay focused on equality. From Joan of Arc – when people told her that as a woman, she could not do something, the more she wanted to do it to prove them wrong. From Malala – education for all. From Mulan – bring glory to the whole country. An almost flawless mix was Interviewee 7's aspirations for her future.

## Chapter 4: The Analysis: Marginalisation, Identity, Solutions

### 4.1 The Indian Youth

#### 4.1.1 Awareness

What was striking was how aware the interviewees were as they responded to various questions. They were analytical from the perspective of viewing the context of their situations as being largely shaped by the political structuring in Malaysia, primarily in terms of the Bumiputera policy – provisions resulting from the NEP as given through the Malaysian Constitution's Article 153 (see Section 2.3). There were scrutineers of the system, the environment and the socio-cultural contexts to make assessments on their challenges and to also think about the changes they wish to see. Many were politically sensitised to what was going on in Malaysia, keeping up with the news, knowing the names of politicians. They were also very hopeful that the new government would bring about changes to make "Malaysia Baru" (New Malaysia) a reality – for all people to be equal, to be a One-Nation.

There was also a level of loyalty and patriotism for the country. Nevertheless, they were also deeply conscious that equality for all could just end as an aspiration, a dream – with no reality on the ground. They were conscious of their rights, articulating the value of the Constitution as a legislation that held up equality for all citizens. But many were aware that there were disparities and that affirmative action had resulted in good outcomes as well as privilege<sup>120</sup> of the Bumiputera and marginalisation<sup>121</sup> of the other ethnic groups.

Many were aware of affirmation action and the benefits to elevate the status of one ethnic group – in this case, the Malays – to higher levels and narrow the disparity among the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians, economically, socially and educationally. They were also aware of the impact of prolonged affirmative action and/or systemic discrimination and/or supremacy in some societies.

South Africa had a brutal, institutionalised systemic racial segregation known as apartheid.<sup>122</sup> Due to the derogatory nature of apartheid, it gave rise to the African National Congress (ANC), led by the then president Nelson Mandela to end the apartheid ruling government. The political struggle to end apartheid had put South Africa through years of internal unrest and international condemnation for its draconian ruling.<sup>123</sup> People died. The world responded. Mandela was released, and the long-awaited demolition of apartheid happened in 1994, leading to democracy. As a result of colonialism and apartheid, the political liberation of South Africa did bring freedom and prosperity tarred with deep-seated socio-economic disparities and corruption,<sup>124</sup> leaving the country with worsening unemployment rate of 28% while the national wealth was controlled predominantly by the whites. The demolition of apartheid was supposed to be a beginning; instead, it has left the marginalised 55 million – or three-fourth – of South Africans living from shack to shack.<sup>125</sup> The final outcome a weak and corrupt government.

In America, severe marginalisation led the civil rights movement – a struggle for equality and liberty – on a bumpy road. Nobel Prize winner Martin Luther King Jr.,<sup>126</sup> in his well-known "I Have a Dream" speech,<sup>127</sup> spoke

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<sup>120</sup> <https://www.usc.edu.au/connect/work-at-usc/staff/cultural-diversity/cultural-diversity-and-inclusive-practice-toolkit/race-power-and-privilege...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019, definition: Privilege, in its simplest definition, is understood to be those rights, benefits and advantages enjoyed by a person or body of persons beyond the advantages of other individuals [https://courses.lumenlearning.com/atd-bmcc-sociology/chapter/what-is-a-system-of-privilege/...](https://courses.lumenlearning.com/atd-bmcc-sociology/chapter/what-is-a-system-of-privilege/) accessed, Jan 31, 2019, The concept of privilege refers to any advantage that is unearned, exclusive, and socially conferred eg when it comes to being randomly stopped and frisked by police, anyone identified as 'white' has an advantage they did not earn and that is exclusive to whites. It is socially conferred in the sense that it depends on them being perceived in a particular way by the police—as 'white'—before the advantage is given to them in the form of the assumption that they are not criminals.

<sup>121</sup> <https://elliott.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2141/f/World%20Fair%20Trade%20Organization.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019, "Marginalization is both a condition and a process that prevents individuals and groups from full participation in social, economic, and political life enjoyed by the wider society"; [https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Columbia-Youth-Report-FINAL\\_26-July-2014.pdf](https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Columbia-Youth-Report-FINAL_26-July-2014.pdf), "Youths are also likely to face marginalization due to their membership in excluded demographic groups, including: women, indigenous, disabled, LGBTQI, refugee, ethnic minority, migrant, and economically impoverished...age;

<sup>122</sup> Adonis, C. K. (2017). Generational victimhood in post-apartheid South Africa. *International Review of Victimology*, 24(1), 47 – 65. doi: 10.1177/0269758017732175

<sup>123</sup> US Department of State. (2001). Archive: The End of Apartheid. Retrieved from <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/pcw/98678.htm...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>124</sup> Goodman, P. S. (October 24, 2017). End of Apartheid in South Africa? Not in Economic Terms. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/business/south-africa-economy-apartheid.html...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> The Nobel Prize. (2019). Biographical: Martin Luther King Jr. Retrieved from <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/biographical/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

of equality and of One America. Years of fighting for freedom and equality has rewarded the Americans today with protection in their Constitution.<sup>128</sup> America has also ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and faces questions for lack of reports and on disclosure narratives on the racial difference<sup>129</sup>. There is undeniably improvement in the quality of life of African-Americans evident through the early years of affirmative action. For the African-Americans, the high school graduate rate increased from 54.5% in 1968 to 92.3% in 2018; the median household income increased from US\$28,066 in 1968 to US\$40,065 in 2016; the poverty rate has decreased from 34.7% to 21.8%.<sup>130</sup> While African-Americans are living in a much better state than in the past, they are no way equal or better than white Americans – black unemployment rate is roughly twice the white unemployment rate in 2017; they were 2.5 times more likely than white Americans to be in poverty; and the black incarceration rate is six times more than the whites.<sup>131</sup> For the last few decades, the US has achieved the formal form of equality by combating discrimination of all forms, but the imbedded interracial socio-economic inequalities continue to keep the African-Americans a marginalised community.

In affirmative action, sometimes the very party that ought to be elevated is not – such as the Cypriots and India's Dalits ("Untouchables") – but the opportunities to rise and move on have been made. However, there was also a strong advocacy from the youths that can be summed up as "How long more?" as they too feel their own vulnerability and marginalisation through the affirmative Bumiputera policy.

Despite the knowledge and astuteness even among the younger interviewees, two things stood out – hope and a commitment to move up, to "move on", to get over the hurdles and to achieve something, especially in the fields of education, career, family life, owning a home, a car and etc. – no different from any youth, any person, regardless of colour or ethnicity. What came across was the stoicism that came through in the interviews – especially more deeply visible when the narratives were painful renditions of stigmatisation, bullying, ridicule, name-calling and that "double whammy" of accepting that hard work, good grades and etc. did not bring the opportunities that they wanted. What stood out was, for better or for worse, accepting the realities of the "unchangeable" in what they had been served, while still hoping for the best; living in hope that faith, goodwill, prayers and the determination to "move on" would lead them someplace to continue their lives. And they kept saying they felt "no hate" for any ethnic group but wanted changes in the system.

There is acceptance of the helplessness to change things against the mammoth opaqueness and non-transparency within the system. What surfaced was a tale of options – a Plan B to replace the failed Plan A, with a Plan C in the holding bay in case there was another failure. There were the unspoken plans – no one was just cruising, even for one interviewee who was caught up in a gang for peer support. That was his plan – to survive. Obviously, he was in some trouble. He was astute, knowing why he needed the friendship of gang members who also wanted him. He had worked it out for himself that when others – people from different ethnic groups or Indians – attacked him, who else would be there to protect him from these "others" but gang members. Not lauding gangs, but recognising from his point of view, there's a role that gangs take on – protection, exploiting and bonding over common feelings of aimlessness and anger: the "hood" of being in a familiar territory of shared experiences and fear, that also gives some level of kinship and identity<sup>132</sup>.

<sup>127</sup> Jr, M. L. K. (1963). "I Have a Dream ...". Retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>128</sup> As the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, section 1, states that "... nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws"; National Archives. (1868). Amendment XIV, Section 1. *America's Founding Documents*. Retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>129</sup> Harris, H. (2008). Race across borders: The US and ICERD. *Harvard Blackletter Law Journal*, 24, 61 – 67. Retrieved from <http://harvardblackletter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/vol24/Harris.pdf...> Accessed, Jan 31, 2019... accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>130</sup> As the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, section 1, states that "... nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws"; National Archives. (1868). Amendment XIV, Section

<sup>131</sup> Jones, J., Schmitt, J., & Wilson V. (2018). 50 years after the Kerner Commission: African Americans are better off in many ways but are still disadvantaged by racial inequality. *Economic Policy Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/publication/50-years-after-the-kerner-commission/>... accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>132</sup> <https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2018/09/11/what-is-the-hood-in-neighbourhood/>

#### 4.1.2 Killing dreams?

This study is on youths – close to a third of the population in Malaysia: people with dreams, people who wish to make changes, who can be driven to make society a better place as they are most poised at that age to work with other youths, be innovative and build up communities. These Indian youths are no different from other youths in Malaysia except that they struggle against more deep-rooted and stated-endorsed marginalisation, even as they “move on” closer to and do seize the opportunities made available. They are the “Other”,<sup>133</sup> holding either third or fourth<sup>134</sup> place in Penang and Malaysia. Often, for unexplained reasons, despite the good scores and high marketability, there is discrimination – a racialisation of the situation premised on ethnicity to ensure that provisions of proportionality in favour of Malays under the Bumiputera policy are not compromised. Even when interviewees may not know the language to this discourse of the undermined, or the “Other”, they mentioned often words such as being “under control” or “dominated over by another” in relationships at school, in the community, in the workforce, in their everyday lives, in society, in Penang and in Malaysia. Stating what is not right does not mean that one is asking for entitlements or a censuring or justice. The often-cited phrase among the interviewees were: “feel lowly”, “angry”, “disappointed”, “less”, “unjust” and “unfair”. But despite these feelings of despair, some, as stated earlier, expressed no hard feelings, “no hatred” against the Malays or the Chinese; just anger at the system and the Bumiputera policies. This language of “feeling low”, learning to cope with anger, the fear of rejection and the importance of surviving begins at an early age – not only for Indians alone, but definitely more frequently and more intensely for anyone who is seen to be different, an “alien”, the “Other”.

The “Othering” also confuses, unravelling the complexities, a disorientation on who one is – an Indian? A Malaysian? A Bahasa Melayu/Tamil/other Indian languages/English speaker? Which culture? Or becoming, when there is marginalisation and exclusions, less equal.

## 4.2 “Othering” – Displacement, Marginalisation, Indian Identity

### 4.2.1 Historical displacement

There are various histories on how the Indians came to the Malayan peninsula. In the eleventh century the Chola Kingdom, the only Asian empire in overseas expansion, conquered Sri Lanka, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, parts of South-east Asia – the islands of Sumatra, Java and Bali, and the southern part of the Malay peninsula.<sup>135</sup> Indians came to these countries in a process which lasted over 400 years. The second group of Indians who came this part of South-east Asia/Indochina and the Malayan Peninsula were the merchants, traders and workers with the East India Company, also formally called the English East India Company (1600–1708). Trade then was in spices, and the sea route was the Straits of Malacca; the countries en route for trade included the Malayan Peninsula.<sup>136</sup> Then during British colonisation of the Malayan peninsula, many Indians were brought in to work on railway tracks, in tea plantations and in rubber estates. Many were also on contract terms and left back for India once the term of employment had come to an end. There was also the migration of Indians who ventured out to look for work. Indians organised themselves and were organised by the British. Most were isolated and deprived of opportunities other than to work. This continued till schools were built in the estates and those in urban areas gained access through steps taken by the Catholic mission to open schools for the poor and the orphans.

This isolation, deprivation, lack of freedom, societal conditions and the physical setup of living conditions, as experienced in the past, led to conservatism and a focus on the preservation of culture, which meant an inward

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<sup>133</sup> <https://tidsskrift.dk/qual/article/download/5510/4825/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019;

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/the-other...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019; a person, group, or entity perceived as being the opposite of or completely separate from or alien to oneself or one's group;

<https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/08/us-vs-them-the-sinister-techniques-of-othering-and-how-to-avoid-them...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019;

<sup>134</sup> Almost all said that Indians were Number 3 in the country, after the Malays and the Chinese. One said Indians were Number 4, after migrant workers and shared how his Malaysian mother's supervisor was a Bangladeshi, who watched over her cleaning work that she did part-time. These narratives were discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/travel-the-lost-empire-explored-the-cholas-once-had-great-power-but-the-world-has-forgotten-them-2321900.html>; 1993... accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>136</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/East-India-Company...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

cohesion among Indians. Adding to this, Indians have multiple identities – by caste, by class, by religion, by language, by innate cultural habits, by ancestral lines into Malaysia. Unlike the Chinese and the Malays, Indians preserve their multiple identities, even among themselves, to the point of exclusions within and among themselves. This is both a strength and a weakness.

What is most remembered, however, is the racial riots of 1969 – proof of the fault lines among the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia. Add to that the Bumiputera policy (see Section 2.3) as an affirmative action plan for Malays. So, against such a backdrop, the Indians remain marginalised in a society – historically, constitutionally, through policy and within their own homes with their parents, from society, and through agendas of the government in its policies. The Bumiputera policy envelops a community into a state of being “The Other”, a displacement from an equal platform with everyone else. This was often articulated as “discrimination” and “racism” in the interviews, which we cannot just isolate to 45 persons as these experiences must be similar with other Indian youths in other states and to all youths, including Bumiputeras, who are in lower socio-economic backgrounds, with less or uneducated parents, in various grades of similarity. The Bumiputera policy is one of racialising<sup>137</sup> people into a divisive society in this long-running affirmative action plan. It has even gone past the stage of affirmation into a state of creating the privileged and the marginalised.

#### **4.2.2 Impact of marginalisation on Indian youths**

Marginalisation is defined broadly as processes of social exclusions – that is, failure of society to provide certain individuals and groups with those rights and benefits normally available to its members in matters such as employment, adequate housing, health care, education and training. Marginalisation, in its conceptual framing of being excluded, breeds a peer kinship, a solidarity that tightens the community among those who become kindred spirits in being excluded or side-lined or receiving benefits after the rest. The available data already shows lower rates in education, income, employment, home ownership – usually the third position after the Chinese and the Malays.

##### **4.2.2.1 Bonds of religion**

Religion is a bond, an identity-marker of being Indian. Few questioned what Hinduism means. But what is the language of worship? Is it a liberal and philosophical expression of Hinduism that binds the community “to humanitarianism and equality” (as said by one interviewee), and a search into the inner self to reach some form of ultimate spirituality? Or is it more focused on temple rituals and festivals? Is there also a following of the nationalistic Hinduism that is rising in India? Finding stickiness for solidarity can result in, even within one’s beliefs, a glue with different premises for coming together. Yet there is also a common call made for temple management committees to plan more community-oriented work to help the marginalised progress, to set up funds for education and to teach Hinduism. An opinion writer raised this recently: “Most houses of worship are expensive. Extremely expensive... Does God need to take shelter from the rain? So, who are these huge edifices for? For man. For a vain man who says his faith is better than that of another.”<sup>138</sup>

##### **4.2.2.2 Language and culture bind**

Most of the interviewees were fourth or fifth generation Malaysians. Despite a love for the country, there is also much pride in being able to speak the language and be within their own community. This communalism is based on the languages spoken – Tamil, Gujarati, Hindi, Telugu – and the pride one has in the community organisations. In some cases, there is an in-bred glory and isolation too – that if one’s operational language is Tamil, it becomes the bastion to cope with marginalisation – moving around and speaking with youths who

<sup>137</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racialism...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019, a theory that race determines human traits and capacities; <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/racialising...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019 , An emphasis on race or racial considerations, as in determining policy or interpreting events

<sup>138</sup> Tajuddin Rasdi, “In Malaysia, is religion truly for God?”, 12th Jan 2019 in Free Malaysia Today.

believe in emboldening the Indian culture, making their environment into a place of solace and solidarity. Very similar traits to what African-American communities also did, and still do: “brotherhood” through language, religion, prejudices faced – an identity. Of course, it can also be that one wishes to improve on the language, the culture. But it can also become a “walling-in”, a preservation of solidarity and a self-imposed response to the alienation. This was prevalent among interviewees from mainland Penang who had gone to SJK(T) and struggled in national schools. They had to cross a cultural and linguistic gulf, forcing many to look further inwards into the community. Is this a subversive protest – a solidarity of sending their children to SJK(T) or SJK(C) as there is marginalisation in national schools, and the isolation deepens especially for Indian students?

But because the minority Indians – be they Punjabi-Sikh Gujarati, Telugus – are a minority within a minority, perhaps, their acute marginalisation becomes also a great source for looking out for each other and a build-up of higher adaptability levels to fit into any context, survive and improve. Smaller Indian communities have their own “temple” that they go to, their own community get-togethers and their own language. There is “alienation within alienation” among the Indians – with each feeling that they are not Indian enough for the other – to be a community of just Indians in Penang. There are both positive and negative elements in this phenomenon of being a minority – and a marginalised community at that.

#### **4.2.2.3 Building bridges with diverse social circles**

Yet for those with multi-ethnic groups of friends, the marginalisation was less acute. They displayed more liberal attitudes to their own sense of dealing with marginalisation. Even when name-calling took place in the midst of adverse company, the solidarity among a mix of friends of different ethnic groups lent a lot of weight to being accepted and being part of society. If it was a group of Indian friends who were name-called, the reaction would be different as it would be felt as a group slur and a challenge. However, to develop this mix of friends is very much dependent on what kind of sports and activities youths take up, and the bridging role the school and teachers give to the process of reducing exclusions.

Schools are grounds for isolating students into ethnic groups and language circles, and this continues into the workplace. Chinese speak to each other in Chinese, Malays speak to each other in Malay and Indians speak to each other in Tamil, leaving the non-Tamil speaking members, a small number of the Indian community, to be the most marginalised. Narratives of Malays teachers giving tips to only Malay students or Indian teachers doing a “watch over” of Indian students, knowing that they have more hurdles to clear. They entrench circles of marginalisation and isolations when paradoxically everyone already has a common bind, at least in Bahasa Melayu and English; and in being citizens. And this is the fourth or fifth generation of Malaysians. The Bumiputera policy has affirmed one ethnic group and isolated every other ethnic group into its own ethnic bind, leaving behind fewer choices for anyone who prefers to chart their lives for the future, growing older with friends from all ethnic groups, just as the pioneer generation of Malaysians had experienced.

#### **4.2.2.4 Re-eneration**

The majority of Indians come from lower middle-income homes or middle-income socio-economic backgrounds. There are 227,600 B40 Indian households and 22,700 households that earn less than RM1,000 a month (see Section 2.5). Youth unemployment rate peaked at 10.8% in 2017; Indian youths face the highest unemployment rate of 4.7%, compared to the Malays and the Chinese. Indian youths in the School-to-Work transition survey faced a higher unemployment rate of 13.6% compared to the Malays at 12.9% and the Chinese at 7.5 % for the age band of 20 to 24 years old (see Section 2.4). No one spoke in-depth on dismal family situations but often the words “responsibility”, “duty”, “do not wish to be a burden to my parents” cropped up. The expectation, as usual, is that the next generation needs to move higher up and be the model – the breaker – into another zone in achievement for the family and even caste, neighbourhood and community.

These are high-end goals to achieve: ensuring that discrimination at school, at the workplace, in society can be managed; incomes can be earned; there would be enough to sustain themselves; and also be shared with parents. Not unlike what many other youths are also facing, except with the overt, indirect and pervasive discrimination that Indian youths face, the third or fourth ranked ethnic group.

There many tricks and skills that interviewees in their 20s shared – learning a new language to help them in the job market; developing an endurance to apply for jobs that specifically asked for Chinese applicants; being resolute even after being repeatedly rejected and submitting many, many applications; scrimping to just survive another day and not ask parents for any money as they continue their studies; while carrying the burden of knowing that the future means also looking after parents and younger siblings through the same cycle of what their parents had gone through, with some marginal improvement. The view can be bleak – a fatalism and also an endurance that seems to carry them through.

But there is also a cavalier attitude towards financial planning, setting visions or goals. Perhaps the dice remains unpredictable by the quota system and much is left for the latter part of development. However, those who seemed to have secured a more promising head start – despite the fall backs they faced too – are those who had made plans, who saved a “wee” bit every day, who stayed abreast on the information and knowledge curve, who built up networks. As one interviewee said, there cannot be any let up and the downside, he said, was that discrimination and marginalisation made one “competitive”, sometimes “conniving” and “secretive” as opportunities are limited.

#### **4.2.2.5 Gendered positions**

Historical displacement or dislocation. Pervasive marginalisation through policies and from society. Education and jobs are the hope pathways. But when we look at the gendered roles of Indian youths, there are ascribed roles for men and for women within the home, in the community. Education elevates the status of Indian women, both through compulsory education and an appreciation that girls and women ought to be educated. But, at present, women are also seen as income-earners – a deliverer of income to the household, a contributor to the family and the one that she marries into. But many still face much control within the community and are discriminated against based on their sex.

This does not mean that the men are not experiencing their own prescribed roles – they are the breadwinners, the “stars” in the family and they have to carry the responsibility to care for their parents and siblings. And unconditioning harassment of females when it is a normative practice is an important aspect that needs a focus on sexual relationships, body imaging and sexuality for males and females.

This is multi-track marginalisation that can happen, with much pressure and control, arising from within the homes and the community.

#### **4.2.2.6 “Crab mindset”**

Interviewees also spoke about a phenomenon called the “Crab mindset”. This has been identified as a practice that crabs in a tub would pull the other crab down to crawl over them and to get out of the bucket they have been put into. Essentially, the metaphor summarises, “If I can’t have it, neither can you.” This is one theory some of the Indian youths have taken on board, rather pessimistically, to explain why Indians, from their point of view, are not helping each other. They made this comparison as they compared themselves to the Chinese, other minority Indian communities, the community at the mosque and wonder why the Indians are not helping and supporting each other as much. And to rationalise this perceived lack of a community or friendship bind, a few introduced this crab mindset, which was coined by Filipino writer and feminist activist Ninotchka Rosca.<sup>139</sup> It is an issue of survival under exceptionally difficult circumstances. Perhaps it is a harsh description to describe an inertia amid many struggles and setbacks. This is a hard one to unpick. Yet there were instances among the interviewees who helped each other, sharing information on courses and. – not unlike the behaviour of baby turtles that help each other out of the pile they were born into so that more will survive. They do this by climbing on and pushing each other up to help the one that is closest to the top to escape. The process might

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<sup>139</sup> Vibes, J. (2015). “Crabs in A Bucket” As an Analogy for Modern Human Society. Retrieved from <http://www.trueactivist.com/crabs-in-a-bucket-as-an-analogy-for-modern-human-society/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

take a longer time, but the core idea is that no turtle is left behind.<sup>140</sup>

Perhaps what goes on is part of what marginalised communities with hard-won opportunities, do go through. One interviewee kept repeating the words “competitive”, “cunning”; another narrated how his ideas had been used by others – across ethnic groups – at university that he stopped sharing his ideas. Are these traits so peculiar to the Indian community or does a survivor’s course mean to “outwit”, “outplay” and “outlast”, to get out of the bucket and to live? This easy and careless use of the “crab mindset” stalls the Indian community and needs to be debunked.

#### **4.2.2.7 Mental health**

One interviewee who faces tremendous home-related and self-imposed pressure to succeed said that he just “keeps silent” and isolates himself as he cannot deal with more setbacks. He also finds it easier to have Malay and Chinese friends at his private university course as there are no ethnicity and solidarity pressures.

Indian women feel the pressure to get married even if they are not ready, not keen and do not wish to. Men too feel the building up of this pressure, though it comes two years later.

Indian youths also have expectations they place on themselves, families have expectations of them, the community has expectations and they all wish to show that Indians are not behind, in Penang, in Malaysia.

There is also a steep increase in = mental health prevalence rates from 10.7% in 1996 to 29.2% in 2015, with Indians (28.9%) having the highest prevalence rate compared to the Malays (28.2%) and the Chinese (24.2%)<sup>141</sup> – a worrying trend.

### **4.3 Solutions**

#### **4.3.1 Raising the Next Generation**

All interviewees were quick on the draw to offer solutions on de-marginalisation and improvements to bring about equality and well-being for all people. Those solutions are shared and elaborated further.

##### **4.3.3.1 Youth struggles**

They asked for more conversations with youths on their challenges, their aspirations and to create opportunities for them to become a community of youths to participate and partake in various discourses on issues that interest them.

Youths are at a stage where they have doubts, and feel uncertain and dissatisfied of their own self-identities. This phase is also known as the quarter-life crisis.<sup>142</sup> Quarter-life crisis has been a pertinent issue faced by youths in Malaysia, with one-third of Malaysian youths (32% male and 29% female) experiencing quarter-life crisis<sup>143</sup>. The societal pressure on youths to thrive in their careers, handle romantic relationships and cope with expectations have driven many in their early 20s into anxiety, over-achieving outcomes.<sup>144</sup> According to one study, young

<sup>140</sup> Low, R. (2016). Good Intentions Are Not Enough: Why We Fail at Helping Others (pp. 104-107).

<sup>141</sup> Lim, S. L. (2017). Bridging barriers: A report on improving access to mental healthcare in Malaysia.

<sup>142</sup> Stapleton, A. (2012). Coaching clients through the quarter life crisis: What works? *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, Special Issue 6*, 130–145. Retrieved from <http://ijebcm.brookes.ac.uk/documents/special06-paper-10.pdf...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>143</sup> Rakin, E. (April 23, 2018). One-third of young Malaysians are experiencing a quarter-life crisis due to personal and professional pressures: Survey. *Business Insider Malaysia*. Retrieved from [https://www.businessinsider.my/malaysians-quarter-life-crisis-linkedln/...](https://www.businessinsider.my/malaysians-quarter-life-crisis-linkedln/) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>144</sup> Rajaendram, R. (May 20, 2018). Quarter life crisis hits. *The Star Online*. Retrieved from [https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2018/05/20/quarter-life-crisis-hits/...](https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2018/05/20/quarter-life-crisis-hits/) accessed, Jan 31, 2019



adults are facing this crisis during their emerging adulthood because of the vast opportunities that arise from the technological boom and the affluent environment they are growing up in. This leaves many young adults in dilemma of their own identities and future progression.<sup>145</sup> Add to that: if youths were marginalised because of their ethnic group, their gender, their class, their education levels, then their anxiety levels would be higher.

#### 4.3.3.2 Parenting style

The quarter-life crisis faced by youths in Malaysia is perhaps a product of the Malaysian parenting style. The excessive engagement, control and governance of children is known as helicopter parenting and it is one of the most practised parenting styles in Asia.<sup>146</sup> Similar to authoritative parenting, these excessive parenting styles exert high pressure on children to fulfil their unrealistic expectations, exposing them to high mental health risks and diminishing their self-esteem.<sup>147</sup> A study revealed that helicopter parenting disrupts adolescents' mental health and negatively impacts children's self-efficacy towards learning. Hence, the dominating presence and intrusive intervention in the development of children have made it harder for youths to grow into independent and adaptive adults for the future. In the case of Indian females, in this study there was an overbearing protection and control over them; it almost seemed as though many would grow up in their parents' home and then continue the same pattern of being controlled in their in-law's homes. Furthermore, there were interviewees who did not talk to their parents; they just listened; others had been shouted at. Some had lovely relationships with their parents.

In fact, in some instances, there was a "leave-it", nonchalant attitude – preferring almost to remain ignorant over their own finances, savings or in planning for their future. This happened mainly with female interviewees from the mainland. To tackle this, the interviewees suggested providing parental education to improve the parent-child communication and parenting knowledge to foster their parent-child relationship. They wanted their parents to be more open-minded and understanding when communicating with them. Many wanted conversations with their parents, and for them to be trustful of their children, the youths.

#### 4.3.3.3 Employment matters

Higher levels of unemployment rates occur more among those who are higher educated as shown in a 2017 report,<sup>148</sup> as cited earlier, on mismatches on skills and the labour market. Missed matches refer to the fact that there are job seekers whose skill sets do fit the vacancies, whereas mismatches refer to the lack of required skill set of the job applicant, and is a cause for concern in Penang too.<sup>149</sup>

This skill gap between employer and employee found some resonance with the interviewees. In Malaysia, the media had attributed this mismatch to the failure of universities in developing students with critical skills for the labour market, especially in English proficiency and the soft skills of negotiation, targeted communication, leadership etc.<sup>150</sup> As supported by the interviewees' experiences, they felt that they needed to be trained in more soft skills, such as leadership and negotiation, to build up their confidence for the newer job markets. At the government level, there could be more public-private collaboration to provide these leadership and soft skills courses for youths to become marketable in the labour market. On top of this, as Malaysia is multicultural nation, it is equally important for these programmes to have inter-ethnic communication skills, social etiquette and multi-culturalism to foster social cohesion and interactivity among the various ethnic groups.

<sup>145</sup> Atwood, J. D., & Scholtz, C. (2008). The quarter-life time period: An age of indulgence, crisis or both? *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 30(4), 233 – 250. doi: 10.1007/s10591-008-9066-2

<sup>146</sup> Ganaprakasam, C., Davaidass, K. S., & Muniandy, S. C. (2018). Helicopter parenting and psychological consequences among adolescent. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publication*, 8(6), 378 – 382. doi: 10.29322/IJSRP.8.6.2018.p7849

<sup>147</sup> Badarudin, N. (January 24, 2017). Are you over parenting? *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2017/01/206890/are-you-over-parenting...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>148</sup> Khazanah Research Institute. (2018). *The State of Households 2018: Different Realities*. Retrieved from [http://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/FullReport\\_KRI\\_SOH\\_2018.pdf...](http://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/FullReport_KRI_SOH_2018.pdf...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>149</sup> Ong, W. L. (2017). The skills gap remains Penang's big challenge. *Penang Institute*. Retrieved from <https://penanginstitute.org/publications/issues/976-the-skills-gap-remains-penang-s-big-challenge/...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>150</sup> Aziz, H. (October 3, 2018). Graduate skills gap. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/education/2018/10/417327/graduate-skills-gap...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

Interviewees suggested that each student could also receive training in setting visions, goals to motivate themselves into overcoming any challenges as shared in Chapter 3, and remain focused on outcomes.

Article 8(1) and (2) of the Federal Constitution<sup>151</sup> states discrimination against a person or class of persons and gender is prohibited unless there is a rational basis for such discrimination. As such, employers may use a loophole under this and argue that there is no discrimination as they are merely advertising for knowledge of a specific language. It is not until at the point of interview that one realises the meaning behind such requirements. Many among the interviewees acknowledged that this language requirement needs to be realised within the hiring company. Those in authoritative positions such as the chief executive officer and human resource manager should be more considerate and be more all-encompassing with their job advertisements.

So, what remained core were the discriminatory advertisements and discrimination from employers. Wanting only Chinese persons – advertising as starkly as that and telling Indian youths during interviews that they were not wanted – need to be stopped. It is discriminatory and racist. The suggestion was to have more governance, enforcement and evaluation of employers and human resource practitioners. All forms of direct and indirect discrimination at the workplace and in hiring processes must be abolished. This direct stipulation on language and ethnic group preference is a violation and exploitation.

The government should strictly review job requirement stipulations in the labour market and punish those companies that put up unreasonable and discriminating job requirements. It is hoped that through standardising and reviewing the hiring process, the discrimination against different ethnic groups will be abolished.

Human resource personnel, said one interviewee, could learn from multi-national companies to conduct interviews more professionally and not ask new graduates, for example, what their work experience was but to ask them about their internships or pose them a challenge related to the job. They are still caught in the old methods and new training is needed for human resource practitioners.

#### **4.3.3.4 Education**

There were calls made for transparency on the matriculation and university admission allotments of places. This transparency is about sharing the criteria and the ethnic-based quota allocation for admissions so that all is fair for all applicants. As pointed out by the interviewees, they were frustrated and disappointed with the black-box functioning and the ethnic group preference of the allocation of university placements. Despite a BBC report stating that the Bumiputera benefit scheme was abolished in 2002,<sup>152</sup> the interviewees indicated that the quota-based on ethnicity continues, instead of merit-based evaluation.

There were enough narratives during the interviews that spelt out how certain college or university mates had lower grades and were on scholarships or were studying the course of their choice.

More governance over teachers and schools as it is not possible to have teachers being late for classes, not keen to teach, sharing examination tips and taking on divisive roles, instead of uniting the school's students and building up an ethos of values. This kind of approach cannot be left to the better schools or the vernacular schools – it has to cut across to all schools.

Mandatory transitional and orientation programmes are needed for all students who enter the national secondary school systems, especially if they come from the vernacular schools of SKJ(T) or SJK(C).

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<sup>151</sup> Federal Constitution, Reprint. Part II, Article 8 (1) and (2) (2010).

<sup>152</sup> Pak, J. (2013). Is Malaysia university entry a level playing field? *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23841888>... accessed, Jan 31, 2019

#### **4.3.3.5 Sports**

Sports is the perfect way for different people to interact and play games for fun, for competition, to become representatives. But there were also incidents of how this was also happening in sports. Criteria and judgement processes need to become transparent.

Measures to make sports an entity in all schools and in all communities – along inter-ethnic lines – will be the best way to build up multi-racial culture, was the strongest suggestion given by an interviewee from mainland, who left playing games as she became frustrated over the opacity of decisions made.

#### **4.3.3.6 Leadership**

Transparency and non-interference by adults has to become the norm when students elect their presidents, chairpersons. Girls and women ought to be encouraged to vie for challenging leadership positions too, not the quieter roles. Authorities should not meddle in this system at the level of students so that democracy can thrive, and leadership need not be a quota-influence for Malays to be elected. It ought to become free and open choices.

Tired of this constant re-adjustment and adaptation to these circumstances that offer no answers and show up unjust ways, interviewees urged for fairer, more transparent and standardised evaluation in the education and sports system, as well as enforcement in implementation of a merit-based system.

#### **4.3.3.7 Funds**

There was a call for more scholarships for just Indian students. There are web-based information portals for scholarships<sup>153</sup> that are applicable to all ethnic groups as well as the recently announced scholarship fund of RM290,000 offered by India for 55 Malaysian-Indian students under the Indian Scholarship & Trust Fund (ISTF).<sup>154</sup> There was also the Penang Hindu Endowment Board's Education Aid, Penang government's Higher Education cash aid and the Penang state education loan which is also available for distance learning.

It is estimated that 14.3% of Malaysian Indians are entrepreneurs.<sup>155</sup> There are organisations to help Indian entrepreneurs, such as the Malaysian Indian Chamber of Commerce and or any other loans specifically available for Indian entrepreneurs.<sup>156</sup> Malaysian Indian Network of Entrepreneurs (1MINE)<sup>157</sup> and the Malaysian Indian Entrepreneurs Cooperative (MIEC).<sup>158</sup>

Their visibility and outreach programmes into youth groups and the Indian community need higher levels of focus and commitment.

#### **4.3.3.8 Social cohesion and social interactions**

Malaysia's richness is its multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-racial spectrum of people, their

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<sup>153</sup> <https://www.wemakescholars.com/scholarships-for-indian-students-to-study-in-malaysia...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019; a

<sup>154</sup> <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/11/434798/indian-scholarships-worth-rm290000-55-malaysian-indian-tertiary-students...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019

<sup>155</sup> Malaysian Indian Blueprint Secretariat, 2017; Putrajaya.

<sup>156</sup> There are loans and grants available for Indian entrepreneurs under Tekun (4% interest rate), Sedic (now Malaysian Indian Transformation (Mitra) and for Penangites- Skim Pinjaman Harapan.

<sup>157</sup> [https://web.facebook.com/pg/1MalaysianIndianNetworkofEntrepreneurs/about/?ref=page\\_internal...](https://web.facebook.com/pg/1MalaysianIndianNetworkofEntrepreneurs/about/?ref=page_internal...) accessed, Jan 31, 2019; Malaysian Indian Network of Entrepreneurs or known as 1MINE was formed in 2011. The primary objective of 1MINE is to assist Indians in all sectors of commerce.

<sup>158</sup> <http://www.kuimb.com/perdana-yiea.html...> accessed, Jan 31, 2019; MIEC is an organisation established by like-minded individuals to uplift the socio-economic status of Malaysian Indian community and as a cooperative it is registered under the Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism.

lifestyles, food types, architecture and art. But all these can fall short and just be for the tourist market if there is no impetus to begin the process of talking, discussing, sharing and inculcating a multiculturalist and interfaith attitude, as Penang's and Malaysia's social fabric. That too has to become a vision for Penang2030<sup>159</sup> as a more concerted and concrete effort to build up people's software and approach to each other, without the prejudice-based diatribe through name-calling and blatant discrimination. It has to become the heritage of the Penangite's DNA beyond the world of food, heritage, arts and cultural festivals.

One interviewee suggested that Moral Education should be made compulsory for all students in school and that inter-culturalism, interfaith, equality and discrimination could be discussed to bring society closer and more appreciative of each other's way of life. The lack of community and governmental initiatives has widened the inter-ethnic gap, increasing the polarities. Hence interviewees suggested that social cohesion become a way of life and, as one interviewee said, "not by campaign", but through social programmes in school, in society, in the community, and to include parents, teachers in the training programme.

Teachers need renewed courses in this field of multi-culturalism, respect, human rights and to build up cohesion in the classrooms, in sports, in activities and in everyday living, become role models themselves. Parents and working adults too need some immersion courses in multi-cultural environments to build up the fabric of Penang's society.

In 2003 the government implemented the Vision School programme – an integrated primary school concept consisting of SK, SJK (C), and SJK (T) schools to facilitate inter-ethnic relationship building and to promote national unity.<sup>160</sup> Vision School aims to reduce barriers across different ethnicities and also make the environment a learning place for multi-cultural education. But the lack of focus on multi-cultural education has led to its discontinuation as primary schools did not achieve in ethnic harmonisation and integration.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, the short-term impact of this social innovation is evident, but improvement is needed for effective implementation and execution in the long run.

#### **4.3.3.9 Society and community**

The Indian community seems to be caught in a time warp in controlling the youths on what they can wear, who they should meet, by what time they need to come home, what to study, where to go and who to visit. All needed but in moderation. The internet has changed the world and some parents are totally lost. They need courses to bring them up to speed in tracking information on the web and to also not let the internet or cinema rule their lives and that of their children.

The community seems overly keen on sharing information with the parents on what the children – older teenagers and young adults in their 20s – are doing. "A village brings up a child", but what is the level of being watchful over each other's children as they grow older and are adults? There is an infringement into the privacy of the families. The applied pressure through "marriage talk", as applied to young adults, seems pervasive amid the expectations that they need to build up their careers and complete their studies. The youths also self-inflict many of these expectations on themselves as it has also become a norm in the Indian community. The family and community could focus more on the constructive work that they are doing and build on the programmes to help the students and adults.

Likewise, there are formal programmes that interviewees as Hindus follow and as said, not much on the spirituality of religion and on Hinduism. There are already 266 Hindu temples (see Appendix X for Table of Number of Non-Islam Worship House by District in Penang) in Penang, for a population of 165,700 Indians of whom a majority are Hindus, averaging at 622 persons per temple.

Interviewees want society, the community, the parents to give them space and have suggested greater in-depth and open discussions among Indians on what values are needed within the society and how to build up the

<sup>159</sup> [http://www.worldcitysummit.com.sg/sites/default/files/Penang\\_Case\\_Study.pdf](http://www.worldcitysummit.com.sg/sites/default/files/Penang_Case_Study.pdf)

<sup>160</sup> The Sun Daily. (June 8, 2016). No Negative Response, Vision School Goals Achieved: Education Ministry. Retrieved from <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/1830957-BSARCH372611...> accessed Jan 31, 2019

<sup>161</sup> Malaklolunthu, S., & Rengasamy, N. C. (2011). School redesign for fostering multiculturalism in Malaysia: Augmenting the 'Vision School'. *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 15, 84 – 88. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.03.056

confidence of the daughters and their sons, and to also deal with expectations placed on sons to take up the role of becoming the breadwinners. Gendered discussions need to take place as these are the fourth and fifth generations in Malaysia in a vastly changing world of dual incomes, equality between the sexes and respect for equal roles in raising families.

The community needs to work with the right authorities to develop more focus among Indian youths in gang activities. Less blame, more rehabilitation, more role-modelling, more direction in the early stages are better ways to prevent youths from deepening their roots into gangs.

#### **4.3.3.10 Individual responsibility**

While no interviewee mentioned this directly, there were criticisms raised during the interviews to say that Indians themselves must have an eagerness to search for information, attend talks, pick up knowledge on healthcare, exercise and not keep hoping that their children or someone will keep giving them the information.

There are also roadshows and talks at various locations. While some better organising can increase accessibility for more persons, some effort is also needed to attend and learn.

Currently, there are lacunae in medical health, medical insurance, financial planning and vision-setting.

#### **4.3.3.11 Legislation**

There is ungoverned discrimination in how job advertisements and recruitment for work, takes place. There is social stigmatisation against Indians. There is still an archaic and outmoded approach of name-calling in the schools and in public places. And interviewees gave many solutions on how to limit these practices, if not eradicate them altogether. These include legislation for equality and anti-discrimination and an end to the Bumiputera era, and to ratify ICERD<sup>162</sup>.

Eradicate discrimination from the country by legislating for an anti-discrimination act, ensuring that the affirmative action through the Bumiputera policy is given an end-date and ratifying the International Convention on the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which can be done with reservations to maintain the Malaysian Constitution. Legislation of this act means that those who violate the law will be prosecuted for acting with discrimination. Putting an end to the Bumiputera policy means that Malaysia is ready to treat every person equally and that the more Malays have succeeded in rising to higher levels both in the urban and rural environments. The ICERD – even with reservations – will make Malaysia a global player in fulfilling the rights of the people, besides enhancing its approach to level the playing field.

Overall the Indian youth, when asked, did say that many other youths too face problems. The difference lies in the fact that Indians are viewed as third class and that there is no shaming of those who are racist and racist against Indians. Solution – even the easier ones – will help to elevate the community.

## **4.4 Recommendations**

This is a summary on the key recommendations made:

- Have a timeline to phase out the Bumiputera policy and restructure it into a needs-based, merit-oriented policy for all, and executed with transparency on an income-based benefit structure for implementation

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<sup>162</sup> International Convention on the Eradication of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, a United Nations treaty. The convention was adopted and opened for signature by the United Nations General Assembly on 21 December 1965 and entered into force on 4 January 1969. As of January 2018, it has 88 signatories and 179 parties.

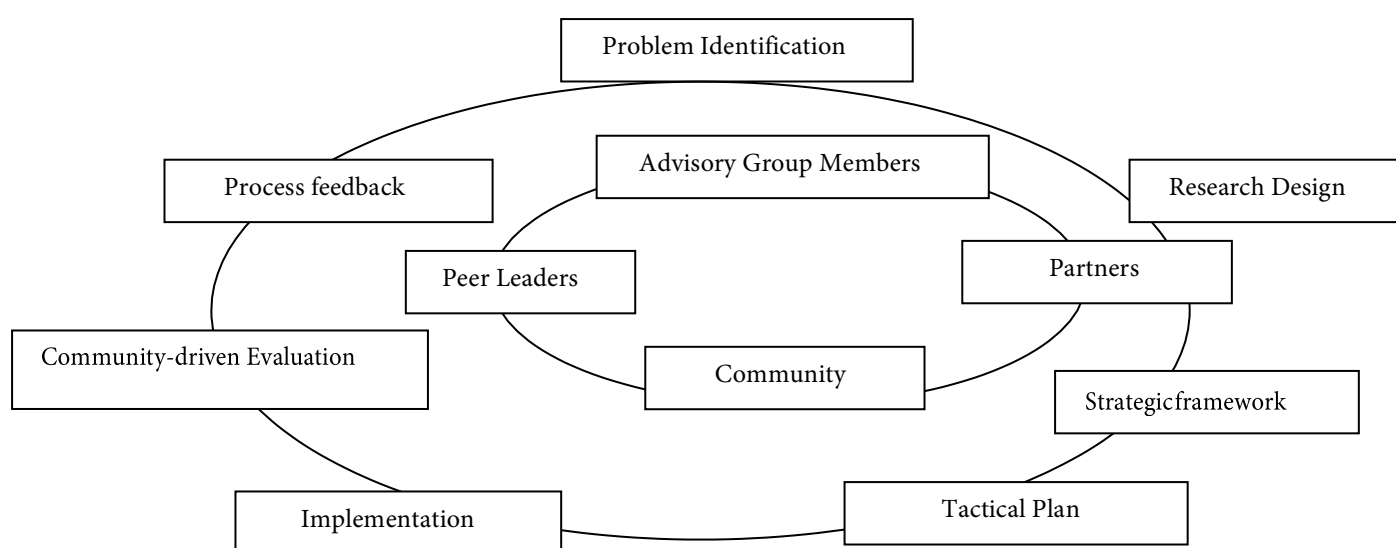
- Increase transparency on the quota system and the processes till the re-structuring on Bumiputera policy, is effected
- Build up a social fabric model - a social cohesion ethos – as Penang’s core values for greater interactions across the ethnic groups as a norm of daily living practices, building up peaceful relationships based on respect and dignity
- Put an end to the vicious cycle of racism, prejudice, discrimination, bullying, name-calling
- Build up respect for each other as an ethos in Penang
- Legislate anti-discrimination
- Have a timeline to ratify ICERD as a first step, with reservations on provisions as given in the Federal Constitution Article 153.
- Train all people in society to be inclusive – to have a culture of acceptance of living in a multi-cultural, multi-faith, multi-racial environment in Penang, Malaysia
- Train police officers to avoid any form of prejudicial behaviour
- Train teachers and principals in developing mechanisms to deal with school-based bullying, gang-build ups and on values of appreciating multi-culturalism as a way of life in Malaysia
- Revise curriculum in schools – making Moral Education and interactive and open learning platform for students. Increase governance over schools on mainland and teachers who do not come to class or are unprepared, ought not to continue in the teaching profession.
- Make schools and social service providers, the important forefront to bring communities together
- Facilitate courses for parents on globalisation, multi-culturalism, parenting, negotiation, inclusivity
- Ensure gender-sensitisation courses are made available to parents, teachers, faith-based leaders, youths
- More affordable courses to build up the “soft skill package” and other relevant skills for the labour market
- Build up the Sports, outdoor activities, the Arts – from young till post retirement - as the social glue for multi-ethnic groups to come together for fun, for togetherness, for competitions, for Malaysia
- Take Youths Seriously – confer and develop consult structures with them. No Patronising them
- Penang 2030’s focus has to be on building people with social graces, inclusivity for all to become the leading state in Malaysia

## Chapter 5: Focus Group

### 5.1 Framework of Community-based Advisory Boards for Focus Group

The CCA offers a framework for the formation of community-based advisory boards that play instrumental roots in identifying problems and developing solutions. Figure 1 illustrates the community driven framework of the CCA. The CCA utilizes community-based participatory strategies for building community-based communication infrastructures by emphasizing the central role of the community in defining the problem and corresponding solutions. The methodological tools of the CCA, (a) listening, (b) dialogue, and (c) participation generate key concepts and infrastructure design solutions through the conversations between communities and other key stakeholders.

Figure 1: CCA-based Approach to Designing Community-Placed Solutions



The CCA employs the methods of (a) participation and (b) dialogue that facilitate the participation of the local community in the definition of problems and solutions. The core elements of the CCA involve the creation of spaces for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and decision making at the community level, building on the various resources (knowledge, communication spaces, technology etc.) brought to the table by the academic-community partnership. With an emphasis on local participation, CCA methods involve cyclical, iterative and dynamic communication processes that include:

1. Identifying and selecting community partners;
2. Developing communication processes for participation, collaboration and decision making that emphasise local decision-making;
3. Identification of community specific needs and corresponding research problems guided by community participation;
4. Developing the communication processes, resources, and strategies for creating community-specific solutions through the involvement of community members and through their leadership in the decision-making processes;
5. Developing research methodology built upon community and academic partnership;

6. Implementing the community-based, community-driven solutions;
7. Analyzing and interpreting data through collaboration between academic and community partners;
8. Developing the design and community resource mapping;
9. Establishing community structures and processes for sustaining the CCA-based solutions.

Local community participation fosters a dynamic and interactive relationship among structure, culture, and agency. Structure refers to the overarching framework of organizing that limits and enables access to resources. Culture is conceptualized as the contextually situated framework of meaning making that offers the template for everyday action. Agency reflects the participation of individuals, households, and communities in making sense of the structures and in simultaneously negotiating them. Community participation strengthens individual and community efficacy in problem solving. Moreover, the CCA suggests that the creation of participatory spaces catalyzes the participation of community members in a range of community activities, in solving problems, and in community efforts seeking to develop health solutions.

## 5.2 First Focus Group

A moderated-focus group discussion began with five Indians of different ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds turning up, after work or studies for the three-hour discussion.

They got off onto a bumpy start when they were trying to focus on challenges during the discussion. With a quick structural approach introduced by a focus group member, they progressed quickly and had consensus on the concept of an Indian identity. Their understanding on an Indian identity is defined by one's birth certificate, their parents' origins, language, attire and the culture that they practise.

While discussing the Indian identity, they discovered that perhaps there is an identity crisis – what it means to be an “Indian”. Perhaps it is the intensity and sensitivity over this topic that everyone became silent for a short while. Then someone broke the ice and shared her experiences. This identity crisis is caused by the conflict between their ethnic identity and national identity, as well as the “coloured” and prejudicial public image of Indians, as an ethnic.

Soon, after this shared experience the discussion continued with greater enthusiasm. To some of them, they questioned the need to uphold the Indian identity while thinking about the significance of building a Malaysian identity for national unity. On the other hand, they think that the media coverage of Indians, as an ethnic had conditioned public to associate Indians with alcoholism, violence and domestic abuse, which subsequently distorted the youths' mind-sets and public imaging of Indian, as a whole. Such conflicts between the national and ethnic identity left the group ending on a collective sigh.

Moving on to prioritising the challenges, the discussion led to more confusion as they found the task, overwhelming. A participant took over leading the discussion and gave a rough structure by listing the challenges on the flip chart. Through that it became easier to identify the challenges that needed prioritising. The topics that were decided were racism, dealing with authority and the community, followed by employment and education. Racism was identified, as the top of their priority list for it was seen to be rooted deep and one that most of the participants identified with. Whatever the challenge that was being discussed – be it authority, community, employment, education – a voice emerged from the focus group, to influence and direct the discussion.

With the emergence of a leader-like figure, the dynamics of the focus group discussion changed as everyone began to be laid back and more willing to disclose and share. Of all issues, gangsterism was the most discussed, after racism. Participants identified gangsterism as a product of dysfunctional family upbringing and from deprived environments, which require parental education and community assistance, to motivate and transform the poor-performing students. Despite the assertions participants were making on ‘gangsterism’ it was a collaborative discussion among focus group members under the guidance of an emerging leader.



Soon after the discussions progressed spontaneously to the brainstorming of possible interventions, as they called for the organisation to help the poor-performing students. They agreed that organisations should help to identify their career interests, develop their soft and focused skills to prevent them from becoming wayward and off-track. Besides that, education on social etiquette was also suggested to reshape the image of Indians, as an ethnic. It was hoped that by reshaping the public image on Indians, the stereotype and racism can be eradicated.

The topic of language requirement in the hiring process echoed the strongest from the leader, who had experienced this challenge. Using his law background, he asked, passionately and assertively, for legislation of anti-racism act, which, he advocated, will reform the education and employment system. Breaking from the silence, a reserved member became the devil's advocate and questioned the feasibility of mobilizing such legislation. Her question brought about around round of discussions, with sharing from those who had similar ostracizing experiences whilst many listened. Indeed, one said knowing Mandarin was a benefit, as it is an extra language. However, they perceived that the language requirement was being exploited as a way for employers to articulate who they wished to employ – their racial preference for their own kind, a Chinese.

Moving on from the legislation of anti-racism act solution, a focus group member urged for implementing quality public education to equip students with soft skills, critical thinking and a deeper understanding on multiculturalism. Agreement was reached within the group that public education was a tool to enhance inter-ethnic understanding and promote national unity. This person shared her experience in initiating similar interventions which led to people having higher confidence levels and efficacy in the proposed intervention and to gain support from other group members.

In terms of authority and community, although rigid moral values and intrusive parenting were highlighted as challenges that pushed some of the Indian youths into rebellious behaviour or even enjoy the freedom within gangs and so engage in gangsterism. While some claimed there was no solution, one participant stood up against this view. She suggested that it is the public education that is needed to provide parenting lessons to parents from all backgrounds to improve parent-children communication. "Sometimes the parents are in their own world", said one member. She went on to convince others who doubted the intervention's efficacy by urging for public education to address parents' lack of awareness of their mistakes and a lack of understanding of their children.

Another focus group member suggested that government should incorporate "game theory" in developing better governance and legislation. That participant thought that this would prevent people from discriminating each other, as there would be self-inflicted negative consequences that discourage them from doing so.

The discussions on the feasibility of the proposed intervention was mainly driven by three members. Perhaps it is the assertiveness of the key members or the lack of domain knowledge, the other two were relatively reserved in sharing their views. As a result, the focus group broke the ice between the participants and ended with them exchanging their mobile phone numbers and setting up a group chat for further discussion among themselves.

### **5.3 The Transcribing Team**

It was asked of the five members of the transcribing team to share their input on what they heard and what they recorded. They were all Chinese youths aged between 22 and 25. They had all completed their studies, except for one member. Four questions were posed to them:

- Were you surprised as you listened? What surprised you the most, based on what the Indian youths had shared about their challenges?
- What is your view in how Indians are treated in Penang and in Malaysia?
- From the interviews, was there anything that inspired you? If so what is it? Why?
- From the interviews, were you offended or disturbed by anything that was shared? If yes, why?

All of them, except for one team member, said that they knew that Indians were being treated unequally, more so, than the Chinese. One of them was astonished at the level of discrimination shown by Chinese employers in their hiring processes. There is a "tinge of arrogance" that perhaps the Chinese do not realise, is what was

written in the questionnaire. One felt that there was some notion of “entitlement” and “victimisation” in a few of the interviews. The person who felt differently said that Indians “are treated fairly” and cited how they were attended to equally, “like any other” at the General Hospital or having breakfast in a dim sum joint.

The rest were aware of discriminatory behaviour towards Indians but not aware on how different it was compared to what the Chinese had experienced. One was taken by surprise at the level of corruption and systemic discrimination. They also mentioned the stereotypes on Indians – “gangsterism”, criminal activities. But they were surprised at the level of focus in wanting to improve themselves and move on, in life. One of them said what surprised him most was their determination and creativity – “not discouraged by being mistreated or even if they come from a poor family background”. Another appreciated the strong community bonding that the Indians have and hoped that the community would work together to find solutions – that’s “a very valuable quality as a human being”. Another was impressed by the level of patriotism to Malaysia despite being discriminated.

None of them were offended by any of the remarks made, appreciating them as views. One was surprised on how openly the interviewees spoke and shared. One of them was surprised by the lack of quality in education being given on the mainland versus the higher quality that islanders enjoyed. They too hoped that with the new government, changes will take place.

What is important through these views that any part of the multi-stakeholder focus group discussions need to ensure that multi-ethnic groups are also part of the participatory process. And only through common and open discussions and processes, can there be solutions found as a group of multi-ethnic individuals. It is an individual growth process.

## Chapter 6 Phase 2

This will be a longer-term project. It is primarily participatory and empowering to the participants who wish to move beyond giving a contextual backgrounding and analysis on their experiences, into becoming a participant to engage on a pathway to make change possible.

So, the next phase focus will be as follows:

- Engagement with other fellow interviewees and identify their theme interest areas
- Developing a network by the CCA framework for widening the circle and building up a community
- To move from contextualising their challenges to focus on solution-seeking pathways for change
- A person learning journey
- Reassessment on the context that was shared in Phase 1 and to map progress and failures.

Physically it will be series of discussions leading to organizational structures to achieve the objectives of the participants. What will be documented as research will be the process of how youths are engaged in mastering the change they wish to achieve. The work and achievements will belong to the participants. CARE team will function as facilitators.

In this next phase being flexible is important but it is also a growth process for the individuals as they will understand deeper their own limits and become aware of diverse groups. This guideline also includes developing perseverance and tolerance for discouragement, particularly when things do not go according to plan. It is also a process of doing things, democratically. This recognition, in tandem with an understanding of common goals, including belief in the worthiness of the project; dedication to conduct the research in a scientifically rigorous and ethical manner while maintaining cultural congruence; and a sense of altruism, will once again keep the project moving as it did in Phase 1. This project was grounded in a commitment to social change.

The CCA framework will be the one that will be used. That other ethnicities become partners and the project moves beyond an ethnic-bound to a common-bound issue will be the answer that we are looking forward to.

## Conclusion

This study was an enlightening and fulfilling experience that led almost everyone to value what was being shared and to admire the determination of the youths to overcome their obstacles. What remains as an enduring memory is the daily diligence to go to educational institutions where you are wondering if one would get inflamed by inconsequential events, words that undermine. The landscape is nowhere close to what goes on in some countries where the prejudice, the unequal treatment, the harsh treatment of persons considered to be the “Other”. There are no targeted killings, no pre-meditated incidents of extreme violations. But for a country that speaks highly of valuing its people, especially youths as they are seen as the change makers, it is at an odd-ball stage, if the new government were not to even out the field for this age range of people and so begin its next phase of people development, equality commitment and leadership build-up.

Yes, marginalisation affects many others as well as those in the Indian community. Universally, human rights must be the same everywhere for everyone by virtue that every person is entitled to inalienable rights and freedoms<sup>163</sup>. The most marginalised – as the third ranked in society, said so, without fail, can only reflect that the actions are so – spoke, at length and in depth. Through this study we are sharing their views, their challenges and their solutions, a key factor in knowing that they wish to participate for that change creation.

The aims as spelt out in Chapter 1 have been realised. The process of developing an approach in being participatory in the solution-seeking process is part of the continuation of this Phase 1 study, as discussed in Chapter 6.

We have to suspend judgement when we hear people’s voices. The consistency in what each person said, is borne out again by the next. These voices cannot be relegated to just a Penang phenomenon and that other Indian youths in other states have a different diagnosis on their experiences. It will also not differ that much if one were to conduct this study with Chinese youths, socio-economically disenfranchised Malay youths or Orang Asli youths. The shades will vary but the core elements will remain as the core in the system of Malaysia remains and has grown stronger over the past decades. It is a pervasive culture at the levels of school, society, community, country. Surely it cannot be so.

Homes of children is a hot bed for inculcating values for humanitarianism, for equality, for standing up for the “Other” when there is wrong and unjust act. In effect, no Malaysian citizen ought to face discrimination or any community be given privileges beyond a time-sensitive affirmative action as the Bumiputera policy was initially set to be. In addition, the constant historical resurrection of the ethnic riots overrides more eventful tragedies caused by acts of modern-day terrorism that are also targeted at various communities. Errors were made. A solution too – the right call for affirmative action – cannot also become permanent, to the detriment of others, especially the young who have that quality of hope and idealism, more than any other age group.

To change, to make changes, takes courage.

But we owe it as a duty and an obligation on the part of every person who is older to do that for better harmony, stronger sharing of common space as each person is entitled to that, as a human being. That faith we need to give to our young, anywhere, whoever you are. If not, we are betraying them

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<sup>163</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights - All human beings are born free and equal in dignity ( Article 1) and also in Malaysia’s Constitution Article 8(1) which states: “All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law” but there are provisions for Article 8(2) it states “Except as expressly authorized by this Constitution...” which allows for Article 153 to be enacted to effect special provisions under the bumiputra policy that came into effect.

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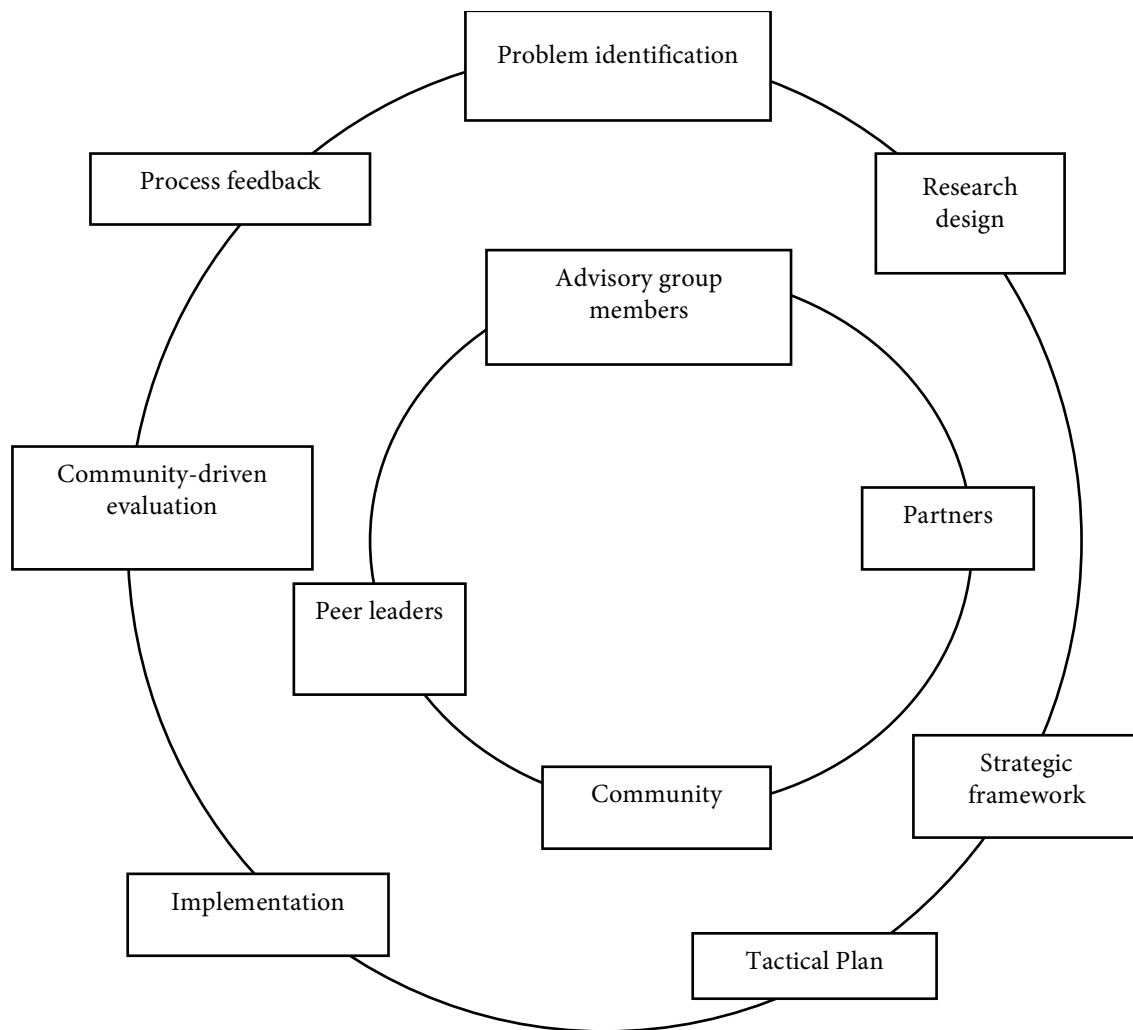
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## Appendices

### Appendix I: CCA-Based Approach to Designing Community-Placed Solution

#### CCA-based Approach to Designing Community-Placed Solutions



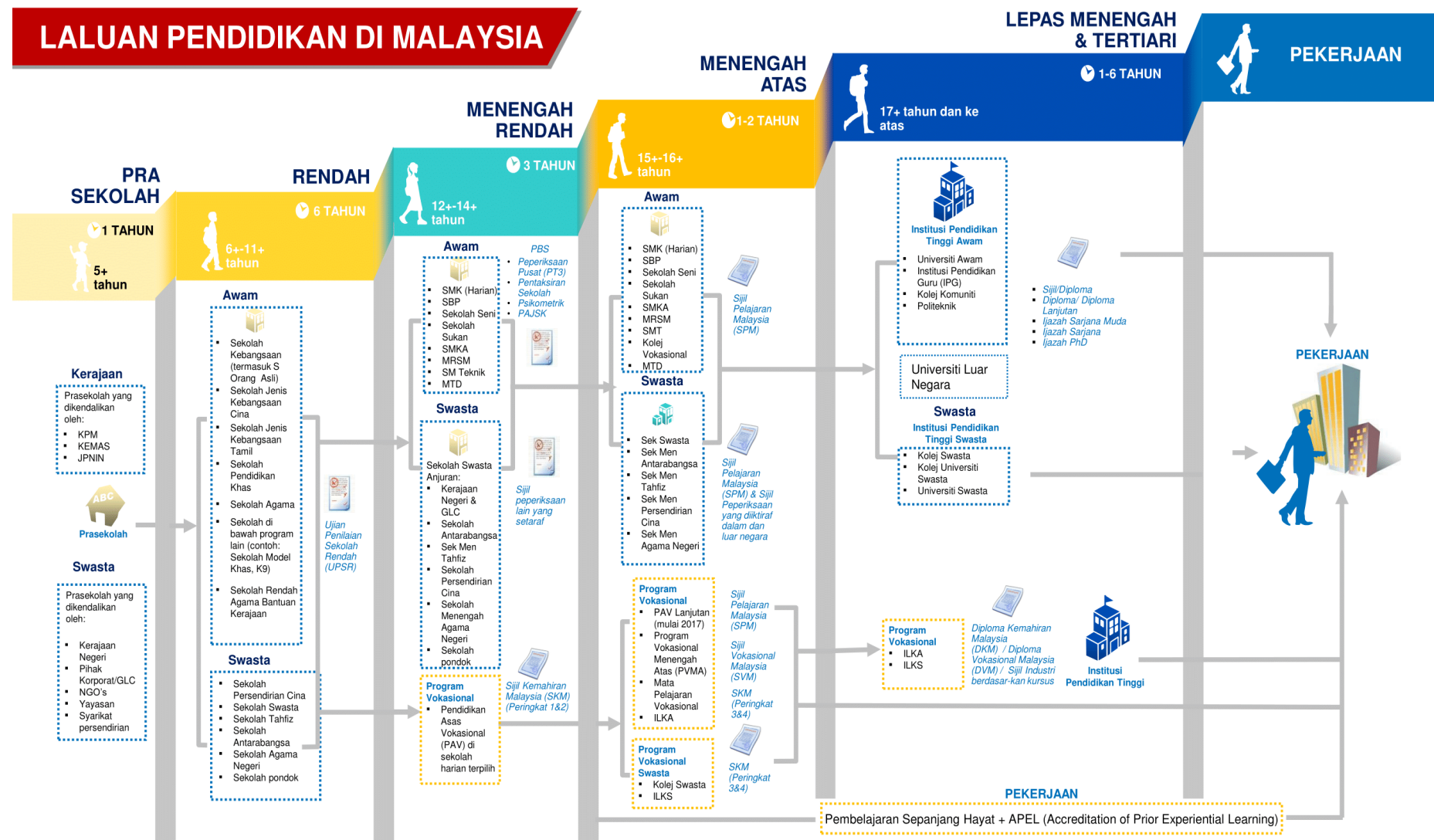
## Appendix II: Table 1: Population by District in Penang ('000), 2012 – 2016

Table 1: Population by District in Penang ('000), 2012 - 2016									
Malaysian									
District	Year	Total	Total Malaysian	Bumiputera		Chinese	Indian	Others	Non-Malaysian
				Malay	Others				
Penang	2012	1,631.1	1,511.6	661.0	6.5	679.2	160.2	4.7	119.5
	2013	1,656.8	1,529.9	673.5	6.6	683.1	161.9	4.9	126.9
	2014	1,681.3	1,548.3	686.0	6.8	686.9	163.6	5.1	133.0
	2015	1,704.5	1,566.6	698.5	6.9	690.7	165.2	5.2	137.9
	2016	1,725.8	1,584.8	711.1	7.0	694.4	166.9	5.4	141.0
North East	2012	540.9	498.6	112.8	2.5	326.3	55.2	1.8	42.3
	2013	548.1	503.3	114.9	2.6	328.1	55.7	1.9	44.8
	2014	554.9	507.9	117.1	2.6	330.0	56.3	2.0	47.0
	2015	561.3	512.6	119.2	2.6	331.8	56.9	2.0	48.7
	2016	566.9	517.2	121.3	2.7	333.6	57.5	2.1	49.8
South West	2012	211.2	197.8	121.4	1.1	62.2	12.5	0.6	13.4
	2013	214.8	200.6	123.7	1.1	62.6	12.6	0.6	14.2
	2014	218.4	203.5	126.0	1.1	62.9	12.7	0.6	14.9
	2015	221.8	206.3	128.3	1.1	63.3	12.9	0.7	15.5
	2016	224.9	209.1	130.6	1.1	63.6	13.0	0.7	15.8
Northern Seberang Perai	2012	308.3	295.3	179.8	0.9	90.0	24.0	0.6	12.9
	2013	313.3	299.5	183.2	0.9	90.5	24.3	0.7	13.7
	2014	318.2	303.8	186.6	0.9	91.0	24.5	0.7	14.4
	2015	322.9	308.0	190.0	0.9	91.5	24.8	0.7	14.9
	2016	327.4	312.2	193.4	1.0	92.0	25.0	0.7	15.3
Central Seberang Perai	2012	391.8	351.7	176.9	1.5	135.4	36.6	1.2	40.2
	2013	398.9	356.2	180.3	1.5	136.2	37.0	1.3	42.7
	2014	405.6	360.8	183.6	1.5	137.0	37.4	1.3	44.8
	2015	411.8	365.4	187.0	1.6	137.7	37.8	1.4	46.4
	2016	417.4	369.9	190.3	1.6	138.5	38.1	1.4	47.5
Southern Seberang Perai	2012	179.0	168.2	70.0	0.6	65.3	31.9	0.4	10.7
	2013	181.7	170.3	71.4	0.6	65.6	32.3	0.4	11.4
	2014	184.3	172.3	72.7	0.6	66.0	32.6	0.4	12.0
	2015	186.8	174.4	74.0	0.6	66.4	32.9	0.5	12.4
	2016	189.1	176.4	75.3	0.6	66.7	33.3	0.5	12.7
Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia, as cited in Penang in Numbers 2016 - 2017									

### Appendix III: Table 2: Population by Ethnicity and Age ('000), Penang 2016

Table 2: Population by Ethnicity and Age ('000), Penang 2016						
Age	Total	Bumiputera	Chinese	Indian	Others	Non-Malaysian
0 - 4	113.0	61.5	36.4	10.1	0.3	4.8
5 - 9	111.5	61.3	36.2	12.1	0.6	1.4
10 - 14	119.7	61.6	43.6	13.5	0.4	0.7
15 - 19	134.8	64.4	49.5	14.1	0.6	6.3
20 - 24	171.2	68.0	54.5	14.9	0.6	33.3
25 - 29	169.9	68.9	47.8	13.3	0.3	39.5
30 - 34	157.7	67.4	52.9	13.5	0.2	23.7
35 - 39	128.4	50.7	50.6	12.1	0.4	14.6
40 - 44	117.5	45.5	51.7	11.5	0.4	8.4
45 - 49	108.1	40.1	52.4	11.1	0.3	4.1
50 - 54	96.4	33.9	48.2	10.9	0.3	3.2
55 - 59	84.8	28.4	44.3	9.7	0.2	2.2
60 - 64	70.2	22.5	38.3	7.6	0.2	1.6
65 - 69	55.5	16.2	33.0	5.4	0.1	0.9
70 - 74	35.2	10.0	21.7	2.8	0.1	0.6
75 - 79	24.0	6.3	15.5	1.6	0.1	0.4
80 - 84	11.6	2.8	7.5	0.9	0.0	0.3
85+	8.2	2.3	4.8	0.7	0.0	0.4
Total	1,717.7	711.8	688.9	165.7	5.0	146.3
Department of Statistics, Malaysia, as cited in Penang in Numbers 2016 - 2017						

## LALUAN PENDIDIKAN DI MALAYSIA



## Appendix V: Table of Highest Level of Education Achieved by Ethnicity in Penang, 2010

Table 3: Highest Level of Education Achieved by Ethnicity in Penang, 2010					
Level of Achievement	2010				
	Malay	Bumiputera Lain	Chinese	Indian	Others
Pre-Primary	12,472	80	12,841	2,516	75
Primary School	108,140	729	109,971	27,621	797
Lower Secondary	80,776	676	91,296	27,305	635
Upper Secondary	196,715	1,641	157,741	41,919	1,230
Pre-University	18,055	197	23,693	4,262	176
Certificate/Programmes in a specific trades & technical skills	3,452	16	1,006	348	10
Tertiary (Certificate & Diploma)	40,490	593	29,526	7,085	360
Tertiary (Degree/Advanced Diploma & above)	27,289	579	36,506	6,106	304
Unknown	45,806	586	107,880	12,736	571
Total	533,195	5,097	570,460	129,898	4,158
Source: Department of Statistics, Education & Social Characteristics of the Population, 2010. pp 310 - 314, as cited in Socio-economic Studies of the Marginalised Indian Community in Penang, 2013-2014					

## Appendix VI: Table of Labour Force by Sex and Ethnic Group, Malaysia, 2013 – 2017

Table 4: Labour Force by Sex and Ethnic Group, Malaysia, 2013 - 2017								
Sex		Total	Malaysian Citizen					Non-Malaysian Citizens
			Total	<i>Bumiputera</i>	Chinese	Indians	Others	
Total	('000)							
	2013	13,980.5	11,821.6	7,781.8	3,075.8	873.3	90.7	2,158.9
	2014	14,263.6	12,117.6	8,042.2	3,097.9	902.4	75.0	2,146.1
	2015	14,518.0	12,348.5	8,192.4	3,154.0	907.1	94.5	2,169.4
	2016	14,667.8	12,406.6	8,206.1	3,192.6	906.1	101.9	2,261.2
	2017	14,952.6	12,678.3	8,438.3	3,206.1	929.7	104.2	2,274.3
Male	2013	8,739.4	7,198.0	4,724.9	1,876.6	544.6	52.0	1,541.4
	2014	8,823.2	7,299.1	4,818.3	1,883.3	553.5	44.0	1,524.1
	2015	8,952.8	7,406.7	4,897.5	1,897.9	553.9	57.4	1,546.2
	2016	9,012.1	7,449.8	4,928.3	1,909.4	555.7	56.4	1,562.3
	2017	9,195.9	7,582.5	5,052.9	1,905.7	560.8	63.2	1,613.4
Female	2013	5,241.1	4,623.6	3,056.9	1,199.3	328.8	38.7	617.5
	2014	5,440.4	4,818.5	3,224.0	1,214.6	348.9	31.0	621.9
	2015	5,565.1	4,941.9	3,294.8	1,256.1	353.9	37.1	623.3
	2016	5,655.7	4,956.9	3,277.8	1,283.2	350.4	45.4	698.9
	2017	5,765.7	5,095.8	3,385.5	1,300.4	368.9	41.0	660.9
Total	(%)							
	2013	100	84.6	55.7	22.0	6.2	0.6	15.4
	2014	100	85.0	56.4	21.7	6.3	0.5	15.0
	2015	100	85.1	56.4	21.7	6.3	0.7	14.9
	2016	100	84.6	55.9	21.8	6.2	0.7	15.4
	2017	100	84.8	56.4	21.4	6.2	0.7	15.2
Male	2013	100	82.4	54.1	21.5	6.2	0.6	17.6
	2014	100	82.7	54.6	21.3	6.3	0.5	17.3
	2015	100	82.7	54.7	21.2	6.2	0.6	17.3
	2016	100	82.7	54.7	21.2	6.2	0.6	17.3
	2017	100	82.5	54.9	20.7	6.1	0.7	17.5
Female	2013	100	88.2	58.3	22.9	6.3	0.7	11.8
	2014	100	88.6	59.3	22.3	6.4	0.6	11.4
	2015	100	88.8	59.2	22.6	6.4	0.7	11.2
	2016	100	87.6	58.0	22.7	6.2	0.8	12.4
	2017	100	88.5	58.8	22.6	6.4	0.7	11.5
Source: Labour Force Survey 2017								

**Appendix VII: Table of Broad Statistics of Labour Force by Industry ('000 Persons), Penang 2012 – 2016**

Table 5: Broad Statistics of Labour Force by Industry ('000 Persons), Penang 2012 - 2016					
Industry	Year				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	22.80	22.90	17.00	12.10	10.50
Mining and Quarrying	0.50	1.40	0.40	0.90	0.10
Manufacturing	240.40	242.10	253.70	283.70	272.50
Water Supply; Sewage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities	1.40	2.20	2.00	2.70	5.30
Construction	4.10	5.80	6.00	4.50	3.30
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles	57.50	58.80	53.00	47.30	61.30
Transport and Storage	123.20	132.00	128.40	129.70	127.60
Accommodation and Food Service Activities	41.20	36.50	36.30	42.20	127.60
Information and Communication	65.40	69.00	88.70	73.20	79.20
Financial and Insurance/Takaful Activities	5.20	3.80	6.80	5.90	7.80
Real Estate Activities	17.40	17.60	17.50	21.50	19.60
Administrative and Support Service Activities	33.30	31.60	35.40	37.00	32.80
Public Administration and Defence, Compulsory Social Security	28.30	26.20	39.30	29.80	29.10
Education	40.10	41.70	46.90	48.60	47.20
Human Health and Social Work Activities	35.40	38.30	34.70	43.90	33.60
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	5.10	6.10	5.00	4.10	5.50
Other Service Activities	12.50	15.90	14.90	12.10	14.20
Activities of Households as Employers	14.90	8.50	6.90	9.50	8.40
Total	770.50	784.10	808.60	834.20	827.40
Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia, as cited in Penang in Numbers 2016 -2017					



## Appendix VIII: Table of Labour Force by State and Age Group in Malaysia, 2017

Table 6: Labour Force by State and Age Group, Malaysia, 2017											
State ('000)	Total	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64
Penang	839.5	17.7	113.7	149.8	137.2	111.6	93.6	80.1	65.4	47.6	22.7
Malaysia	14952.6	520.4	2111.6	2740.6	2406.4	1883.7	1579.1	1379.8	1159	790.9	381.6
Source: Labour Force Survey Report, 2017											

## Appendix IX: Table of Residential Prices by Type of Housing in Penang, 2018

Table 7: Residential Prices by Type of Housing in Penang 2018								
Property Type	District	Minimum (RM/Unit)	25 Percentile	Mean (Rm/Unit)	Median (RM/Unit)	75 Percentile	Maximum (RM/Unit)	Sample Size
Cluster House	Penang	63,000	75,000	169,364	140,000	255,000	400,000	11
	South West	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
	South	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
	Central	100,000	100,000	128,333	135,000	150,000	150,000	3
	North	255,000	25,000	321,667	310,000	400,000	400,000	3
	North East	63,000	70,000	102,600	75,000	140,000	165,000	5
Condominium/Apartment	Penang	97,200	300,000	587,049	438,000	600,000	3,600,000	117
	South West	320,000	350,000	452,455	390,000	530,000	760,000	22
	South	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
	Central	97,200	160,000	220,785	185,000	230,000	445,000	13
	North	280,000	445,000	853,647	585,000	880,000	3,600,000	58
	North East	145,000	216,500	264,542	260,000	305,000	440,000	24
Detached House	Penang	60,000	150,000	1,363,452	500,000	1,200,000	13,500,000	33
	South West	150,000	150,000	225,000	225,000	300,000	300,000	2
	South	70,000	196,500	776,625	725,000	1,350,000	1,600,000	8
	Central	74,000	128,000	405,809	200,000	568,000	1,300,000	11
	North	430,000	750,000	4,070,625	2,742,500	5,825,000	13,500,000	8
	North East	60,000	115,000	325,500	352,500	536,000	537,000	4
Flat	Penang	42,000	180,000	263,668	280,000	350,000	500,000	159
	South West	128,000	170,000	260,333	320,000	335,000	360,000	24
	South	72,500	72,500	172,938	220,000	242,000	242,000	8
	Central	42,000	44,000	80,344	67,875	113,500	150,000	8
	North	62,415	218,000	290,368	300,000	360,000	500,000	114
	North East	60,000	70,000	109,400	97,000	100,000	220,000	5

Low-Cost Flat	Penang	27,000	55,000	99,557	90,000	130,000	420,000	158
	South West	40,000	90,000	130,444	132,500	160,000	230,000	18
	South	40,000	45,000	48,556	50,000	50,000	62,000	9
	Central	30,000	55,000	72,973	70,000	90,000	132,000	55
	North	38,000	97,000	134,679	130,000	160,000	420,000	56
	North East	27,000	45,500	69,475	62,500	77,500	155,000	20
Low-Cost House	Penang	42,000	110,000	148,067	150,000	200,000	255,000	30
	South West	155,000	155,000	170,000	170,000	185,000	185,000	2
	South	110,000	120,000	140,200	150,000	150,000	160,000	10
	Central	65,000	160,000	192,083	205,000	222,500	255,000	12
	North	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
	North East	42,000	42,000	65,833	62,000	77,000	110,000	6
Semi-Detached House	Penang	120,000	450,000	805,021	625,300	804,000	3,980,000	106
	South West	1,150,000	1,223,000	1,472,600	1,390,000	1,700,000	1,900,000	5
	South	120,000	400,000	531,497	551,000	615,600	880,000	25
	Central	240,000	450,000	599,058	608,000	735,000	990,000	49
	North	250,000	1,200,000	1,869,375	1,615,000	2,450,000	3,980,000	16
	North East	255,000	300,000	492,545	450,000	720,000	850,000	11
Terraced House	Penang	67,500	249,000	457,303	350,000	262,500	1,700,000	288
	South West	330,000	637,500	865,031	840,000	1,050,000	1,500,000	32
	South	100,000	174,000	290,028	260,000	385,000	670,000	68
	Central	67,500	250,000	361,059	330,000	450,000	703,688	101
	North	545,000	900,000	1,095,091	1,135,000	1,270,000	1,700,000	22
	North East	180,000	249,000	365,252	291,700	488,000	850,000	65
Town House	Penang	65,000	68,000	654,714	575,000	1,430,000	1,430,000	6
	South West	635,000	635,000	635,000	635,000	635,000	635,000	1
	South	65,000	65,000	66,500	66,500	68,000	68,000	2
	Central	575,000	575,000	575,000	575,000	575,000	575,000	1
	North	1,430,000	1,430,000	1,430,000	1,430,000	1,430,000	1,430,000	1
	North East	380,000	380,000	380,000	380,000	38,000	380,000	1
Source: The Residential Prices Quarterly Update Q2 2018								

**Appendix X: Table of Number of Non-Islam Worship House by District, Penang until 2016**

Table: Number of Non-Islam Worship House by District, Penang until 2016						
Worship House	2016					
	North East	South West	Northern Seberang Perai	Central Seberang Perai	Southern Seberang Perai	Total
Church	44	2	8	14	4	72
Buddhist Temple	265	58	83	104	66	576
Hindu Temple	101	12	41	42	70	266
Buddhist Temple (Siam)	13	3	1	8	2	27
<i>Source: Town and Country Planning Department, Penang, as cited Penang in Numbers 2016 - 2017</i>						

## Appendix XI: Matrix on Interviewees

(Note: Much of the information has been removed to protect the identity of the interviewee)

Interview No	Age	Gender	Education		Money Matters		Healthcare	Housing	
			Highest Edu	Type of Institution	Expenditure (RM)	Savings (RM)		Own	rented
1	21	F	Degree	Private	380.00	1,600.00	Insurance	√	
2	22	M	Diploma	Private	700.00	-	Aware	√	
3	25	M	MBA	Public	700.00	0.00	Aware	√	
4	28	M	Degree	Private	1,600.00	500.00	Not asked	√	
5	26	F	Diploma	Private	600.00	10,000.00	Aware		√
6	21	M	Degree	Private	300.00	-	Aware	√	
7	17	F	SPM	Public	50.00	0.00	Not aware	√	
8	18	M	STPM	Public	50.00	1,000.00	Not aware	√	
9	17	F	SPM	Public	150.00	0.00	Aware		√
10	21	M	Degree	Private	500.00	< 5000.00	Not aware		√
11	22	F	Degree	Private	300.00	-	Aware	√	
12	23	F	Degree	Private	1,000.00	10,000.00	Aware	√	
13	21	M	Degree	Private	2,000.00	0.00	Insurance		√
14	23	M	Degree	Private	300.00	< 5000.00	Insurance	√	
15	23	F	Degree	Public	150.00	-	Aware	√	
16	20	F	Degree	Public	550.00	-	Aware	√	
17	17	M	SPM	Public	210.00	500.00	-	√	
18	20	M	Degree	Public	600.00	0.00	Aware	√	
19	20	M	Degree	Public	1,105.00	-	-	√	
20	21	M	Degree	Public	500.00	-	Aware		√
21	21	F	Degree	Public	170.00	5,000.00	Aware	√	
22	26	F	Degree	Public	1,500.00	7,000.00	Aware	√	

23	18	M	Matriculation	Public	300.00	600.00	Insurance	√	
24	22	F	Degree	Public	350.00	0.00	Insurance	√	
25	25	F	Foundation	Private	1,000.00	0.00	Insurance	√	
26	18	M	Degree	Public	500.00	700.00	Insurance	√	
27	24	F	Degree	Public	-	2,000.00	Aware	√	
28	16	M	PMR	Public	150.00	30.00	Insurance		√
29	16	M	PMR	Public	80.00	4,000.00	Aware	√	
30	27	M	Degree	Private	930.00	0.00	Insurance	√	
31	17	M	SPM	Public	46.00	-	Not Aware	√	
32	19	M	SPM	Public	300.00	20.00	Not Aware	√	
33	25	M	Degree	Private	1,700.00	25,000.00	Insurance	√	
34	20	M	Degree	Private	700.00	300.00	Insurance	√	
35	16	F	PMR	Public	-	-	-	√	-
36	19	F	Diploma	Public	5.00	-	Not Aware	-	-
37	24	F	Diploma	Private	2,000.00	7,000.00	Insurance		√
38	25	M	Degree	Private	1,500.00	1,500.00	Insurance	√	
39	16	M	PMR	Public	100.00	30.00	Not Aware	√	
40	20	F	Diploma	Private	160.00	50.00	Not Aware	√	
41	20	F	Diploma	Private	300.00	550.00	Insurance	√	
42	18	M	Degree	Private	250.00	50.00	Not Aware		√
43	27	F	Degree	Public	280.00	5,000.00	Not Aware	√	
44	28	F	Degree	Public	500.00	500.00	Insurance	√	
45	19	F	Diploma	Private	> 200.00	500.00	Not Aware	-	-

## Summaries

### A. Education

Sex	Age			Location		Education (Highest Qualification)					
	16-19	20-24	25-28	Island	Mainland	Secondary	Diploma	Foundation	Matriculation	Degree	Postgraduate
Male	9	10	5	14	10	7	1	0	1	14	1
Female	5	11	5	11	10	3	6	1	0	11	0
Total	14	21	10	25	20	10	7	1	1	25	1

### B. Type of Institutions and Funding

Sex	Age			Institutions (Matriculations, IPG, College, University)		Education Funding	
	16-19	20-24	25-28	Public	Private	Loan	Scholarship
Male	9	10	5	13	12	7	2
Female	5	11	5	12	8	11	2
Total	14	21	10	25	20	18	4

### C. Employment

	Age			Employment				
	16-19	20-24	25-28	Full Time	Part Time	Both	Seeking Employment	Waiting for Posting
Male	9	10	5	4	7	0	2	0
Female	5	11	5	5	7	3	2	1
Total	14	21	10	9	14	3	4	1

#### D. Financials and Housing

Financials		Total
Savings (Zero)	5	
FinSavings (below 3,000)	10	
Savings (above 3000)	4	
Nil response	5	45
Expenditures (Below 500)	14	
Expenditures (500 - 1000)	4	
Expenditures (more than 1,000)	4	
Housing Plans (owned)	21	
Housing Plans (rented)	5	
Nil response		45
Type of housing:		
House	16	
Flat	3	
Condo	5	45
Nil Response		

#### E. Medical Insurance

Medical Insurance				
Responses	Yes	No (Not aware/ NA)	Aware	Not Aware
	9	3	6	6
	6	1	9	5
	15	4	15	11