

CHAPTER I

. INTRODUCTION

The Malayan population is made up of three important races - the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. In the past sixty years much emphasis has been placed on the Malays and the Chinese on whom several books and articles have been written. As for the Indian community any emphasis given was only to Indian labour; the business community has been completely neglected. Hence, an introduction to this community is necessary.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives are:

- (a) to give the necessary background for the attitude of the Indian business community;
- (b) to examine some of the main business pursuits of the Indians and some aspects of their organisation and business methods; and
- (c) to discuss the future prospects of the Indian business community in Malaya.

The Indians, like the Chinese, are an immigrant community domiciled in Malaya. Their present business position is closely linked with Malaya's history. Hence, judgement on the Indian business community's present position and attitude cannot be fully made from circumstances which exist today. To understand this the past has to be dug into; only this can bring out some possible reasons for the relative lack of success among Indian businessmen at present. The circumstances which exist today will give an indication of their future prospects.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The study is limited to Malaya which includes both the Federation and Singapore. As for the community, the scope

is limited to the Indian business community. However, frequent references will be made to Indian labour and especially to the Chinese business community which will sometimes be used as a basis of comparison. But it is important to note that comparison exists only when specifically mentioned; when not mentioned it does not mean that the Chinese community does or does not possess similar features. Only minor references will be made to Western enterprise which has been left out of this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The material for the study was taken from several books and newspapers. This material was however insufficient and had to be supplemented by interviews and personal tours to Indian shops. Interviews were also conducted with the Department of Statistics, the Registrar of Companies and the Registrar of Businesses for statistical information.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The first limitation is the lack of any substantial written material on the subject. Books on Indians in Malaya are few; and books on Indian businessmen in Malaya are virtually non-existent. To quote Hugh Tinker, "In contrast to the wealth of material which has appeared during the last decade on the Chinese in Southeast Asia, the Indian communities are still awaiting detailed study."¹ The few books on Indians in Malaya are mainly of a political and historical nature and only devote a couple of paragraphs to the business aspect; furthermore, nearly all these books are out of date. Finally, material on general business conditions in Malaya are lacking; most of the articles written deal with the manufacturing and industrial aspect of business.

Secondly, there is a lack of sufficient statistical information. As Senator S.O.K. Ubaidullah of the Indian Chamber of Commerce says, "In Malaya, there is an inadequacy of statistics on many subjects. The compilation of even

¹The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 20, No.3, May 1961; quoted in G. Netto, Indians in Malaya, Weng Printing Co., Singapore, 1961.

initial commercial statistics has not yet been contemplated."2 Interviews with the Statistics Department, the Registrar of Companies, and the Registrar of Businesses were not very successful. The only statistics available are the 1957 Census Report and a 1954 racial classification of businesses and limited companies. Resort has to be taken to the various directories; but these are however incomplete.

CHAPTER ORGANISATION

The foundation of the study is laid down in Chapter II which deals with the historical background and Chapter III which deals with the social and attitudinal background. Chapter IV gives an outline of the various business pursuits of the Indians including some aspects of their organisation, financing methods and labour. Chapter V deals with one of the most aspects of Indian business-moneylending. The final chapter (VI) attempts to evaluate the future prospects of the Indian business community in Malaya.

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²The Straits Times, 27th. July, 1961.