POVERTY AMONG THE MALAYSIAN INDIAN PLANTATION COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Malaysia Plan[1] has projected the estate workers as a poverty group. It is difficult to define poverty as it is more than a financial handicap. It could be a psychological impairment aggravated further by a lack of physical amenities such as food, shelter and clothing. Schert and Joseph explain poverty in the following terms:

> "The exact definition of poverty is still subjected to debate by different social science disciplines. However, several difinitions can be envisaged in the economic, social, psychological and perceptual contexts. The fact of low income below a subsistence level is yet the single best definition of poverty. However, the gap between the middle class and the poor masses is more than an economic one. Its psychological, social and personal connotations are as important as they are economic and educational. The overriding concomitant of poverty is the absence of power. By powerlessness one refers specifically to inability to control or alter significantly one's life situation and the forces impinging on it. The personal concomitants of poverty includes a sense of hopelessness and worthlessness. The physical realities of poverty serve to reinforce the social and psychological features".[2]

As poverty can be defined in many ways, this paper will merely attempt to identify some of the features of poverty on the basis of the underlying theme that poverty be regarded as a form of relative deprivation. Relative deprivation in the context of this paper is taken to mean that the estate workers receive a low income that is sufficient to meet the bare needs of life such as food and clothing to sustain themselves. But this income is inadequate for proper social functioning such as maintaining a family, receiving proper education and enjoying good health through the intake of good nutrition. Although basic amenities such as housing and medical benefits are provided by the employer, they are inadequate in terms of quality. It is the contention of this paper that the Indian Plantation Workers do receive the above mentioned 'goods' or some of their needs are fulfilled but in a limited way; as such they are not absolutely deprived but relatively deprived.

To illustrate this theme, two distinct but related perspectives will be adopted. First, the historical origins of the plantation community will be analysed until the year 1957, being the

[1] *Fourth Malaysian Plan*, para 108, p. 37.

[2] Quoted in D.J. Schert and T.J. English, "Community, Mental Health and Comprehensive Health Service Programs for the Poor," *American Journal of Psychiatry* (1966), vol. 123, pp. 1666-1674. Cited by S. Sundram, *A Socio-Legal Study of Rubber Estate Workers in West Malaysia* Project Paper, Faculty of Law, Universty of Malaya, (Kuala Lumpur, 1982), p. 149.

close of the colonial era. This historical analysis would synthesise the past with the present, thereby providing a basis for an overall analysis of the poverty of the plantation community. Secondly, a model will be applied to interpret the nature of poverty among the Malaysia Indian Plantation Community in the Post-Independence Period. The proposed model is called 'Level of Living Index' which has been used by Drewnowski and Scott[3] for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. In this model, three main issues are discussed, viz., basic physical needs, basic cultural needs, and higher needs. Thus, the analysis of poverty of the plantation community will be on fulfilment of needs, which are basic to social development of any community and fulfilment of these needs will indicate whether the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community are relatively deprived.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

A study of the Indians in the plantation sector is significant because in 1980, 59% or 731,000 of the total Indian population of 1,239,000, lived in rural areas[4] The Indian Labour Force still predominates the plantation sector in comparison to other ethnic communities, for, in 1980, out of 253,170 workers in the plantation sector, 48% were Indians, 38% were Malays, and 14% were Chinese.[5] Indian estate workers are found in coconut, tea, rubber, oil-palm and pineapple estates. However, they predominate in the rubber and oil-palm estates. In the rubber estates, they make up 52% of the total population of 167,210 workers. In the oil-palm estates they make up 38% of the total of 77,840 workers.[6]

A number of studies have been done on the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community focussing on issues of poverty. Shirlie Gordon[7] in the early 70s aptly indicated that the workers were in a state of poverty. She pointed out that children of illiterate parents lived in over-crowded and depressed plantation quarters. About 43% of the plantation workers' quarters were without electricity. S. Gordon also indicated that most of the Tamil schools had one room and one teacher.

The other major contributor was N.J. Colletta who not only recognised the existence of poverty but was also of the opinion that poverty was perpetuated through the Tamil Vernacular Education system which did not provide a broad avenue for socio-economic mobility. She sums up the entire situation of the plantation workers' plight in the following terms:

> "Ignored by government policy, hidden from the eyes of mainstream Malaysian society, the plantation Indian labour force has indeed become Malaysia's forgotten people. Enmeshed in the entangled conflicts of social class, caste and cultural identity, the Indian labourers remain locked in time and space as victims of a vicious cycle of poverty,

[3]Peter Townsend, *The Concept of Poverty* (London, 1970), p. 7.

[4]*Fourth Malaysia Plan*, p. 219.

[5]Ministry of Labour and Manpower, *Labour and Manpower Report* (Kuala Lumpur, 1980), p. 8.

[6]Ministry of Labour and Manpower, *Labour Indicators* (Kuala Lumpur, 1980) p. 8.

[7]Shirlie Gordon, "The Conditions of Our Plantation Workers — the mothers and fathers of children," *Intisari* (Singapore, 1970), Vol. 3, No. 4, pp 49 — 55.

ensured by this fate by the dysfunctional nature of the Indian estate vernacular school. . .''[8]

Wiebe and Mariappen[9] do not state explicitly that there is poverty amongst the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community but have indirectly indicated in their discussion on income and expenditure that expenditure was usually more than income. Many of them were also in debt.

The writer's own thesis[10] based on three case studies also indicates the state of poverty that is prevalent. The major conclusion of the study was that materially speaking the majority of the estate workers have a bare minimum of practically everything. They have food which is of low nutritional value. The houses are scantily furnished and education-wise the successive generations of Tamil school children are not exposed to new ideas.

The writer's article[11] on education also highlights the fact that dropping-out is caused by poverty which in turn has affected the socio-economic mobility of the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community.

The relevant works described above point to the direction that the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community is in a state of poverty. It is the purpose of this article to further update and articulate the prevalence of poverty amongst the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community through the collation and review of recently published and unpublished findings that relate to the issues of poverty which in the context of this paper is relative deprivation. Poverty among the workers will be seen in the light of a model that was proposed to be used as an indicator of social development in other countries.

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: LABOUR MIGRATION

The Malaysian plantation sector has its origins in the Industrial Revolution in Europe. A principal economic feature of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the transfer of European and American capital to other parts of the world, especially the colonies to finance the production and transportation of primary commodities required by European and American markets. In order to make this capital really operative, cheap and abundant labour was necessary. The availability of capital was, however, not easily matched by the availability of labour. Sandhu[12] explains that the British government looked for alternatives to Indian labour for exploiting the raw materials of her colonies. In the case of Malaya, the indigenous population could not be persuaded to work in the plantations because they were quite happy with their farms and preferred to remain in their own villages. The Korean government prohibited any kind of labour movement from the country and the Chinese would not work under a foreigner.

[8]N.J. Colletta, "Malaysia's Forgotten People: Education, Cultural Identity and Socio-Economic Mobility Among South Indian Plantation Workers," *Contribution to Asian Studies* (Holland, 1975), Vol. 7, p. 110.

[9]P.D. Wiebe and Mariappen S, *Indian Malaysians: The View from Plantation* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 121-125.

[10]J. Rabindra Daniel, *A Socio-Economic Study of the Indians in the Rubber and Oil-Palm Estates of Perak and Selangor* M.A. Thesis, Department of Indian Studies, University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur, 1978), p. 220.

[11]J. Rabindra Daniel, "A General Survey on Education Amongst the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community," *Malaysia in History* Journal of the Malaysian Historical Society (Kuala Lumpur, 1981), pp. 77-94.

[12]K.S. Sandhu, Indians in Malaya: *Immigration and Settlement, 1786-1957* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 56-57.

The British could not depend on African labour anymore as slavery was abolished in 1833. The Dutch government also prohibited the exodus of labour from Java which was its colony. As an alternative, India was favoured because India was in close proximity to Malaya and the Indians were already used to British rule. Palmer notes that the British government also wanted to counter the preponderance of the Chinese over other races by encouraging the influx of Indians and other nationalities.[13]

The opening of sugar plantations in the 1840s, coffee in the 1870s and finally rubber in the 1890s[14] necessitated a steady inflow of labourers. To fulfil this need, a highly systematized and bureaucratised system of immigration, guided by a variety of ordinances, laws and by-laws, was developed. The first system of recruitment of Indian labour was the 'indenture' system. Sandhu[15] places this system under the category of Assisted Labour Migration. This system has been described as the new system of slavery. A professional recruitor was involved in the buying and the selling of the labourers. The labourer upon arrival in Malaya was forced into a contract and became virtually a bonded slave. In theory, indenture supposedly originated with a contract, usually written and voluntarily assumed. In practice, the contract led to an indenture or a return to India. This mode of recruitment was in existence between 1810 and 1910. The main features of the indenture system was that most of the recruits were males. Most of the employers appeared to have worked on the principle of maintaining their workers at as small a cost as possible.

The indenture system was gradually replaced by the 'Kangany' system which had its beginnings in the last quarter of the 19th century and was abolished in 1938. Under this system, the 'Kangany' (foreman) went to his native village and district and used his influence and social position to recruit members of his own household, his relatives or those with whom he was acquainted. The recruitment under this system was more personalised and it resulted in the emigration of several members of the same class as well as a group of people from the same village or district. The main feature in this system was that the recruits were also males. The predominance of certain castes in some estates is largely the result of the 'Kangany' system of immigration as the 'Kangany' usually recruited members of his own caste.

Under the third system of assisted labour migration, labourers came voluntarily by reporting at the Malayan Depot in India and were thereafter assisted in migration.

The inflow of Indians into Malaya came to a standstill in 1953 when the Immigration Ordinance (No. 68 of 1952) was passed by the Malayan Government on the 24th of April 1952 and came into operation on 1st August, 1953.[16] Sandhu estimates that the great bulk of the movement was transitory in nature with 4,250,000 entering and about 3,000,000 leaving the country (Malaya) between 1786 and 1957.[17]

[13] J. Norman Parmer, Colonial Labour Policy and Administration: A History of Labour in Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c. 1910-1941. (New York, 1960), p. 19.

[14] K.S. Sandhu, "Some preliminary observations of the origins and characteristics of Indian migration to Malaya 1786-1957," *Intisari* (Singapore, 1970), Vol. 3, No. 4 p. 25.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[16] K.S. Sandhu, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

As a result of the interplay of historical forces, there emerged a new labour class of foreign extraction. It is argued that this class was wrapped up in a plantation system which had implications for the perpetuation of poverty. Thus, Thompson[18] aptly observed:

> "The importation of labour elsewhere enabled the planter to reconstitute human material into a social order consistent with his puspose. The Planter wanted a labour class who would not or could not compete with members of the plantation class, and therefore he imported Negro, Chinese, Mexican and Indian labourers. . . men who could be generally assumed to feel no call to perform the duties of citizenship or demand any of its rights."

The most exploitative aspect of the plantation was the stunting of the estate workers' economic and social freedom. This is even so with the present workers who belong to the second and third generation and are locally born. They are not able to come out of the plantation system and have little contact with the larger society. This is because the plantation industrial system, which is related to a closed social system, isolates them from the outside world. The vernacular education that was provided for the workers' children did not generate mobility. This closed world of the plantation could be matched to a total institution. R.K. Jain,[19] applying Goffman's concept of the total institution to represent plantation society says, "whether a person was born into it or was introduced into it as an immigrant, he found it difficult to escape from the closed world of the estate."

Thus, the extracts from works by Thompson and R.K. Jain reveal that poverty has its roots in the historical past and the plantation system likened to a closed world provides a basis for the perpetuation of poverty in the future.

Against this historical basis therefore the poverty of the present-day Malaysia Indian estate workers will be examined in the light of a model proposed by Drewnowski and Scott (see Figure 1).

THE MODEL

Drewnowski and Scott introduced this model to highlight salient features of the level of living index for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in 1966. Unlike most studies where income is used to explain poverty, this model includes non-economic parameters and as such makes it broad and gives a total and realistic picture of poverty when it is applied to the study of any community.

The level of living is defined as the level of satisfaction in respect of the needs of population (in this case, the plantation community) assured by the flow of goods and services enjoyed in a unit of time. The model has three major components of the level of living and the authors give equal weight to the component indices. These are: (1) Basic Physical Needs: (2) Basic Cultural Needs: and (3) Higher Needs. Basic Physical Needs comprise 3 sub-components, viz., (a) Nutrition, (b) Shelter, and (c) Health. Basic Cultural Needs comprise 3 sub-components as well, viz., (a) Education, (b) Leisure and Recreation; and (c) Security. The Higher Needs component has one sub-component and that is Surplus Income.

[18]Edgar T. Thompson, *"Plantation as a social system,"* *Seminar on Plantation Systems of the New World* (1957), p. 32.

[19]Ravindra K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, 1970), p. 295.

FIGURE 1
MODEL OF LIVING INDEX

COMPONENT			TYPES OF INDICATORS
I.	Basic Physical Needs	A. Nutrition	Intake of calories and protein per head.
		B. Shelter	Degree of overcrowding; structural facilities.
		C. Health	Proportion of deaths at young ages; proportion of population with adequate medical care.
II.	Basic cultural Needs	A. Education	Proportion of Children enrolled in school; pupil teacher ratio.
		B. Leisure and Recreation	Number of hours free from work per head per year; daily newspapers per 1,000 population; radio and TV sets per 1,000 population.
		C. Security*	Violent deaths per million population per year; proportion of population covered by unemployment and sickness insurance and old age.
III.	Higher Needs	Surplus Income	Income in excess of cost of meeting basic needs.

Source: Adapted from Drewnowski, J. and Scott, W., *The Level of Living Index,* United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Report No. 4, Geneva, September 1966, pp. 44-45. Cited in Peter Townsend, *ed., The Concept of Poverty* (London, 1970), p. 7.

* This sub-component will be excluded because of lack of data.

Each of these sub-components might be identified on the basis of several indicators; thus, for example, the indicator for shelter was the degree of overcrowding and structural facilities. Not all the indicators given in the model will be applied. For example, the indicator according to the model for the sub-component 'Nutrition' is 'Intake of calories and Protein per head'. But in this paper the indicator is changed to (a) the type of diseases prevalent, (b) the toddler mortality rate as well as incidence of low birth-weight. Likewise, further specification of the indicator for each of the sub-components will be mentioned in the course of the paper.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POVERTY: BASIC PHYSICAL NEEDS

The following sub-components from the model of Drewnowski and Scott may be examined: (A) Nutrition, (B) Shelter, and (C) Health.

A. *NUTRITION*

The main indicators to show the effects of poverty amongst the plantation community in relation to nutrition are: (a) the type of diseases prevalent amongst plantation workers as a result of malnutrition, (b) the toddler mortality rate as well as the incidence of low birth-weight and (c) protein energy malnutrition.

Three main studies may be cited to illustrate that the plantation workers do suffer from malnutrition. The first study is by C.P. Ramachandran,[20] who defines malnutrition as food which is sufficiently taken to prevent hunger but not in adequate or balanced amounts for normal growth and maintenance of health.

The lack of protein is a common form of inadequacy in the diet and this has negative effect on the growth of the body. Besides protein malnutrition, various other nutritional deficiencies may occour due to an inadequate diet. Anaemia results from deficiency of iron and it is common among Indian women. The other deficiency is lack of vitamin A which causes night blindness. C.P. Ramachandran sums up his study with the conclusion that the two main causes of malnutriton are poverty and lack of education.

The second major contribution[21] was made by N. Kandiah and Lim Ju Boo on the nutritional status of a rural estate community. They carried out a survey to determine the status of nutrition of 518 respondents of all ages, i.e. 46% of the total Indian population, of an estate in Selangor (the name of the estate was not revealed by the authors). The survey indicated that a major proportion of the children suffered from anaemia. This is illustrated in Table I which indicates the incidence of anaemia among the various age groups.

TABLE I

INCIDENCE OF ANAEMIA[22]

	Number of Respondents	Number of Anaemic cases	%
Pre-School: 0-7 years	57	27	47
Children of school — going age	247	92	37
Adult Males: 18 years	78	20	26
Adult Females: 18 years	105	72	69
Total	487	211	43

[20]C.P. Ramachandran, "Malnutrition, Malaria and Worms — Three threats to plantation workers' children," *Intisari* (Singapore, 1970), Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 85-93.

[21]N. Kandiah and J.B. Lim, "Nutritional Status in A Rural Estate Community," *Medical Journal of Malaysia* Vol. 31, No. 4, 1977, pp. 270-275.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 27.

Iron deficiency is also common among children who are in school. The study demonstrated that there was a variety of other nutritional diseases. Protein energy malnutrition was common among the children of school-going age group and pre-school children. Vitamin A deficiency was also a common disorder in the community, where the intake of dairy products, fish, liver, etc was practically nil. Meat, fish , eggs and other expensive items were beyond the means of a large family with a small income. The lack of Vitamin C was another common deficiency.

Both the researchers concluded that poverty, lack of education, large families and the lack of knowledge regarding preventive medicine and nutrition were the causes for the prevalence of nutritional disorders.

The third study by Mirnalini Kandiah[23] verifies the earlier findings of the previous two studies to a certain extent. Indirect indicators have been used to show the nutritional status of the community. The indirect indicators are (i) Toddler Mortality Rate (TMR) (ii) Incidence of Low Birth-Weight (LBW) and (iii) Protein Energy Malnutrition (PEM).

(i) *Toddler Mortality Rate (TMR): Ages between 1-4 years*

The TMR has declined in Peninsular Malaysia from 10.65 per thousand in 1957 to 2.30 per thousand in 1979. In 1978 the TMR was highest for Malays at 2.91, intermediate for Indians at 2.38 and lowest for the Chinese at 1.18. However, the annual percentage rates of decline of TMR, if examined over two separate Post-Merdeka (Independence) decades, namely 1957-1967 and 1967-1976, indicate that the average annual percentage decrease in TMR was the least satisfactory for the Indian population for both periods. This is illustrated in Table II.

TABLE II

ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE OF ANNUAL DECREASE IN TODDLER MORTALITY RATE

Period	All Races	Malays	Chinese	Indians
1957-1967	5.3	6.2	8.9	4.9
1967-1976	7.7	8.2	7.6	5.3

Table II indicates that the improvements made in health and socio-economic conditions of the Malaysian Community have only marginal impact on the rural Indian Community, the majority of whom live in the estates.

(ii) *Incidence of Low Birth-Weight (LBW)*

A birth-weight of less than 2.5 kg is generally regarded as low. A survey[24] made in 1977 by the Department of Statistics of 200,269 in the country showed that the incidence of low birth-

[23]Mirnalini Kandiah, "A Review of the Nutritional Status of the Indian Community in Peninsular Malaysia," *"The Family Practitioner* Journal of the College of General Practitioners of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, 1982), Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 39-43.

[24]Quoted in Y.H. Chong and H. Hussein, "Recent Birthweight Distribution and Trends in Kuala Lumpur," *Medical Journal of Malaysia*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (1980) pp. 40-45. Cited by Mirnalini Kandiah, "A Review of the Nutritional Status of the Indian Community in Peninsular Malaysia," *The Family Practitioner* Journal of the College of General Practitioners of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, 1982), Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 39-43.

weight was highest among Indians — 19.5%, followed by the Malays 11.7% and lastly the Chinese 8.6%. The birth-weight is now accepted not only as an indicator of socio-economic and health status of a community, but is also considered to reflect the gap between the privileged and less privileged segments of the same population.

(iii) *Protein Energy Malnutrition (PEM)*

PEM has been defined as a range of pathological conditions arising from the smultaneous deficiency of protein and calories (energy) commonly associated with infection in infants and young children. Indian school children from both urban and rural areas have the highest prevalence of malnutrition.

Thus, poverty, a low level of education and ignorance of the knowledge of a good diet can be seen as causes of malnutrition. The most outstanding effect of malnutrition is on education, as it hinders intellectual development and a child's motivation.

B. *SHELTER*

The indicator adopted in this sub-component to show relative deprivation is the degree of over-crowding and structural facilities.

The percentage of the total labour force living in accomodation provided by the employer in 1980 was 69% in rubber estates and 70% in all oil-palm estates. The workers who did not stay within the estate might stay in neighbouring villages or squatter areas.[25]

The houses that were built before Independence were of low standard. There was also the presence of concrete houses in some estates. According to the writer's[26] study this is the prevailing situation. In the study of 3 estates, most of the houses had only two rooms. The material used for the floor was usually cement and the wall was of wooden planks. The roof were usually made of aluminium. The dwelling units were very close to one and another. The houses were usually over crowded as six persons shared a house. The floor plan of a typical dwelling unit is illustrated in Figure II.

It should be observed that the Workers Minimum standard of Housing Act of 1966 requires the Management to provide a covered floor space of not less than 260 sq feet in an area of household of not more than 5 adults. The rooms are small, measuring 7½' by 10' as shown in Figure II. There is no enough floor space for children to study. Frequently, the kitchen and the living hall become bedrooms. According to a socio-economic study of rubber estate workers in 1981, 228 out of 936, or 24.4% of the total number of respondents were provided with inadequate housing, if a criterion of 3 persons to a room is taken. This inadequacy of living space can also be seen from the fact that almost all the respondents used rooms other than bedrooms for sleeping. About 56.5% used the kitchen and 42.3% used the living room.[27]

The effect of poor housing on its residents can be seen in the words of Alvin L. Schorr:[28]

[25]Ministry of Labour and Manpower, *Labour Indicators* (Kuala Lumpur, 1980), p. 68.

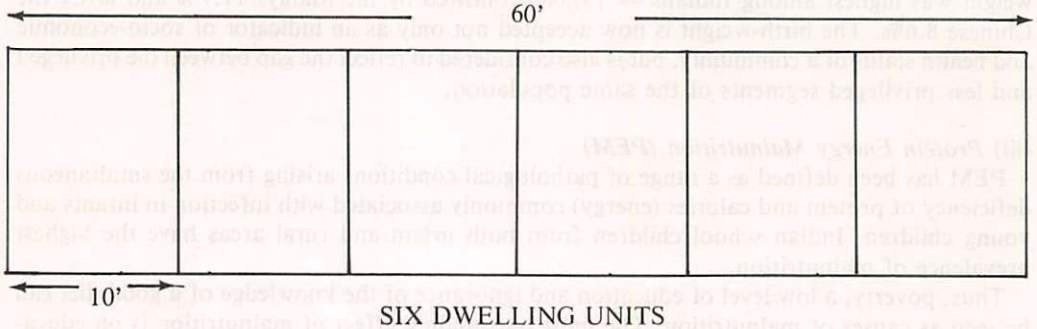
[26]J. Rabindra Daniel, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-138.

[27]Socio-Economic Research Unit, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

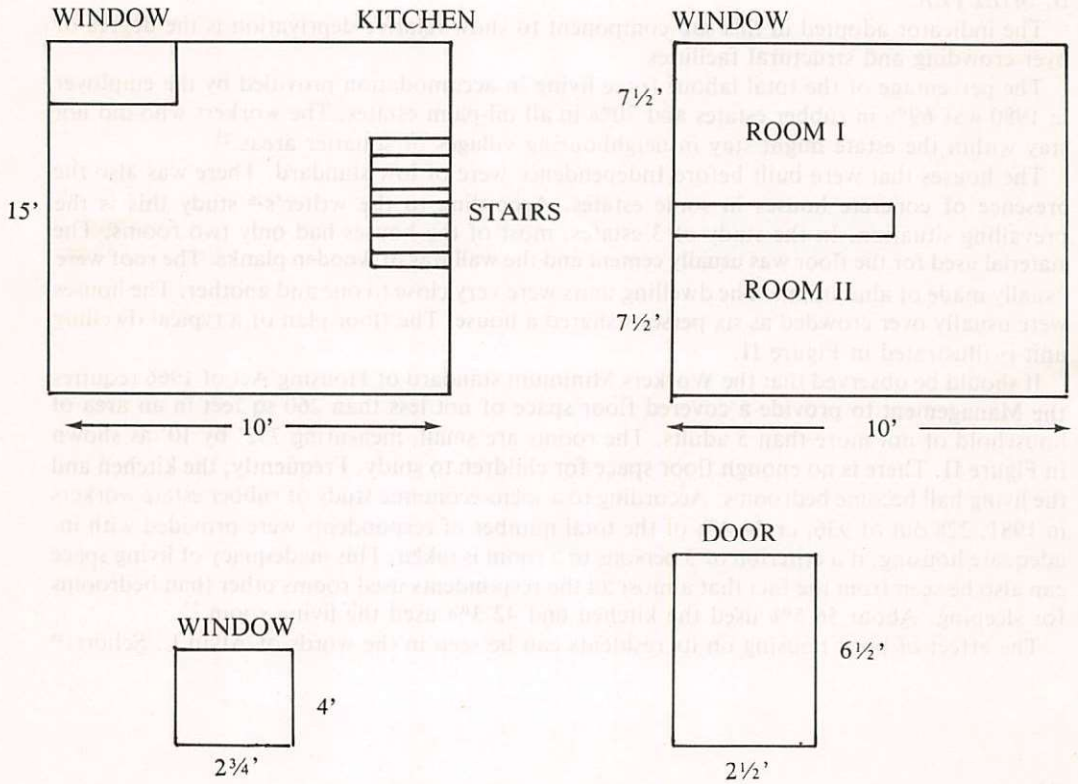
[28]Alvin L. Schorr, "Housing Policy and Poverty," ed., Peter Townsend, *The Concept of Poverty* (London, 1970), p. 113.

FIGURE II

FLOOR PLAN OF A DWELLING UNIT



FLOOR PLAN OF DWELLING UNIT No: 1



SOURCE: J. Rabindra Daniel, *A Socio-Economic Study of the Indians in the Rubber and Oil-Palm Estates of Perak and Selangor,* M.A. Thesis, Dept. of Indian Studies, University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur), p. 134.

> "The following effects may spring from poor housing: a perception of one's self that leads to pessimism and passivity, stress to which the individual cannot adapt, poor health, and a state of dissatisfaction; pleasures in company but not in solitude, cynicism about people and organizations, a high degree of sexual stimulation without legitimate outlet, and difficulty in household management and child rearing; and relationships that tend to spread out in the neighbourhood rather than deeply into the family."

The above conclusion is based on relevant studies on poor housing. The effects of such a bad housing situation may also be felt among the estate workers who are subjected to similar housing situations.

C. HEALTH

The indicator applied in this sub-component is to perceive whether medical facilities that are provided are adequate. The upkeep of the health of the plantation worker is the responsibility of the employer. The employer needs to provide, hospital accommodation, a good sanitary environment and is also responsible for the prevention of malaria.[26] Although the law stipulates some form of medical benefits, the medical benefits accorded to the plantation community are highly rudimentary in nature. At the turn of the century, divisional dispensaries and group hospitals were already in existence. Residential estate medical officers were employed in the larger estates. Part-time visiting medical officer (VMO) were appointed with the fragmentation of estates in the early sixties. Many of these officers visited the estates infrequently.

The distribution of health facilities is indicated by Eddy Lo[60] in Table III. The health facilities and resources provided in the estates included hospitals (76), which may serve individual estates or groups of smaller estates; First Aid Bases (32); Visiting Medical Officers (138) and Estate Hospital Assistants (54), Hospital Assistants only (226), and a few staff nurses and midwives. The ratio of health facilities/resources to plantation population was 1: 6416 for hospitals, and 1: 509 for health personnel. But a survey[31] conducted in 1982 indicated that over 70% of estate hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia was not registered under the Hospital Act of 1971 and Private Hospital Regulations of 1973. The hospitals were not registered because the requirements as stipulated by the law could not be met fully.[32] Most of the clinics are merely equipped with a cupboard of medicine. The Hospital Assistant's job carries him beyond the nursing of his patients. He is usually in charge of the general cleanliness of the estate and the sanitary environment.

[29]Ministry of Labour and Manpower, *Annual Report* (Kuala Lumpur, 1973), p. 11.

[30]Quoted in Eddy Lo, "Survey of Endemic Diseases in Estates in Peninsular Malaysia," Ministry of Health, *File No. 62* (1979), Cited by Eddy Lo, "Epidemiology of Endemic Diseases in the Plantations in Peninsular Malaysia," *The Family Practitioner* Journal of the College of General Practitioners (Kuala Lumpur, 1982), Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 9.

[31]Quoted in Eddy Lo, "Survey on the Role of Health Personnel in the Enforcement of Private Hospital 1971 and 1973 Regulations in Peninsular Malaysia," Ministry of Health *File no 171* (1982), Cited by Eddy Lo, "Epidemiology of Endemic Diseases in the Plantations in Peninsular Malaysia," *The Family Practitioner* Journal of the College of General Practitioners (Kuala Lumpur, 1982), Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 10.

[32]Eddy Lo, "Epidemiology of Endemic Disease in the Plantation in Peninsular Malaysia," *The Family Practitioner* (Kuala Lumpur, 1982), Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 7-11.

TABLE III

Distribution of Health Facilities/Resources for Estates in Peninsular Malaysia 1979

Estate	Total No Estate	Total population	Health Facilities/Resources Provided				
			Hospital	VMO HA	VMO only	HA only	Others
Rubber	15,066	295,964	44	333	91	159	FAB 26 MW — 3 other — 10
Oil Palm	2,219	117,570	19	147	39	71	FAB — 6 GHS — 1 Other — 1
Others	484	74,068	13	74	8	36	RMO — 1 MW — 2 Others — 4
Total	17,769	487,602	76	554	138	266	

Source: Eddy Lo, "Epidemiology of Endemic Diseases in the Plantations in Peninsular Malaysia," *The family Practitioner* Journal of the College of General Practitioners Malaysia, (Kuala Lumpur, 1982) Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 9.

Key: VHO — Visiting Medical Officer
HA — Hospital Assistant
FAB — First Aid Base
MW — Mid-Wife
RMO — Resident Medical Officer
GHS — Group Hospital Service

II. CULTURAL NEEDS

A. *EDUCATION*

The type of education and the level of drop-out will be used as indicators to explain the state of relative deprivation.

Education amongst the poor can be considered an important avenue for achieving socio-economic mobility. The level of drop-out can be considered an important indicator of the effect of poverty. The Murad Report[33] on Drop-outs revealed the following fact:

[33]Ministry of Education, *Murad Report* (Kuala Lumpur, 1973), p. 19.

> "The drop-out rate within the primary school years is substantially higher for Indians than the other two groups; more Indian youths drop-out during the primary school years than do Malay or Chinese youths."

This point is further reinforced by the writer's own study[34] of 150 respondents in 3 different estates in Perak and Selangor. According to that study, out of the 150 males and females interviewed, 88.6% had acquired primary school education. Out of these, 77.9% had dropped out of school by the time they had reached standard six. The few who continued their secondary school education also dropped out by the time they reached Form V.

To have an education only up to standard six can be considered a very low level of educational achievement as they only attended 6 years of school. This fact is brought out in figure III which illustrates the Education System in Malaysia. The workers' children seldom enter the Industrial Training Centres which require a pass in the Lower Secondary School Certificate (ie. Form III).

In conclusion, the majority of the estate workers children drop-out at standard six and the remaining few who trickle into the Lower Secondary school also drop out by the time they reach Form III. The phenomenal drop-out of Indian children is caused by the following factors.[35]

Poverty is seen as an important reason for the high drop-out rate. Indian estate workers expected their children to work to supplement the low family income. Secondly, Indian parents do not provide enough motivation nor the necessary stimulation to enhance the educational achievement of the child. The parents had already developed a fatalistic attitude towards life. This kind of persisting feeling of helplessness could psychologically trigger off a negative growth in children. Thirdly, the physical environment of the school also plays an important part. Most of the estate schools in the country are of wooden buildings. The school is usually a huge hall with several partitions in it. Wooden screens usually about 6 feet high are used to partition the hall into six classes. The student's concentration is affected as a result of noise pollution in the school hall. The home environment is also not conducive to study. There was not enough space to put in study tables and also there was a lack of privacy.

Health and low nutritional standards can be seen as another factor that causes school children to drop out and adverse health reduces academic performance. Lastly, even the children who managed to reach secondary school had problems of linguistic adaptation in the Remove Class (see Figure III) as the medium of instruction changed from Tamil to Bahasa Malaysia. Children also dropped out from Remove Class because they had problems of adjusting to the new multiracial class. This kind of problem prevailed because Indian Children in the estates seldom mixed with the members of other ethnic groups.

There are also other factors that retard the future of the plantaton workers' children such as the job opportunity structure. The economic value attached to Tamil Education is low in comparison to English education in the past and Bahasa Malaysia in the present. This is shown by Arasaratnam[36]. The English-educated Indians attained their maximum influence and pro-

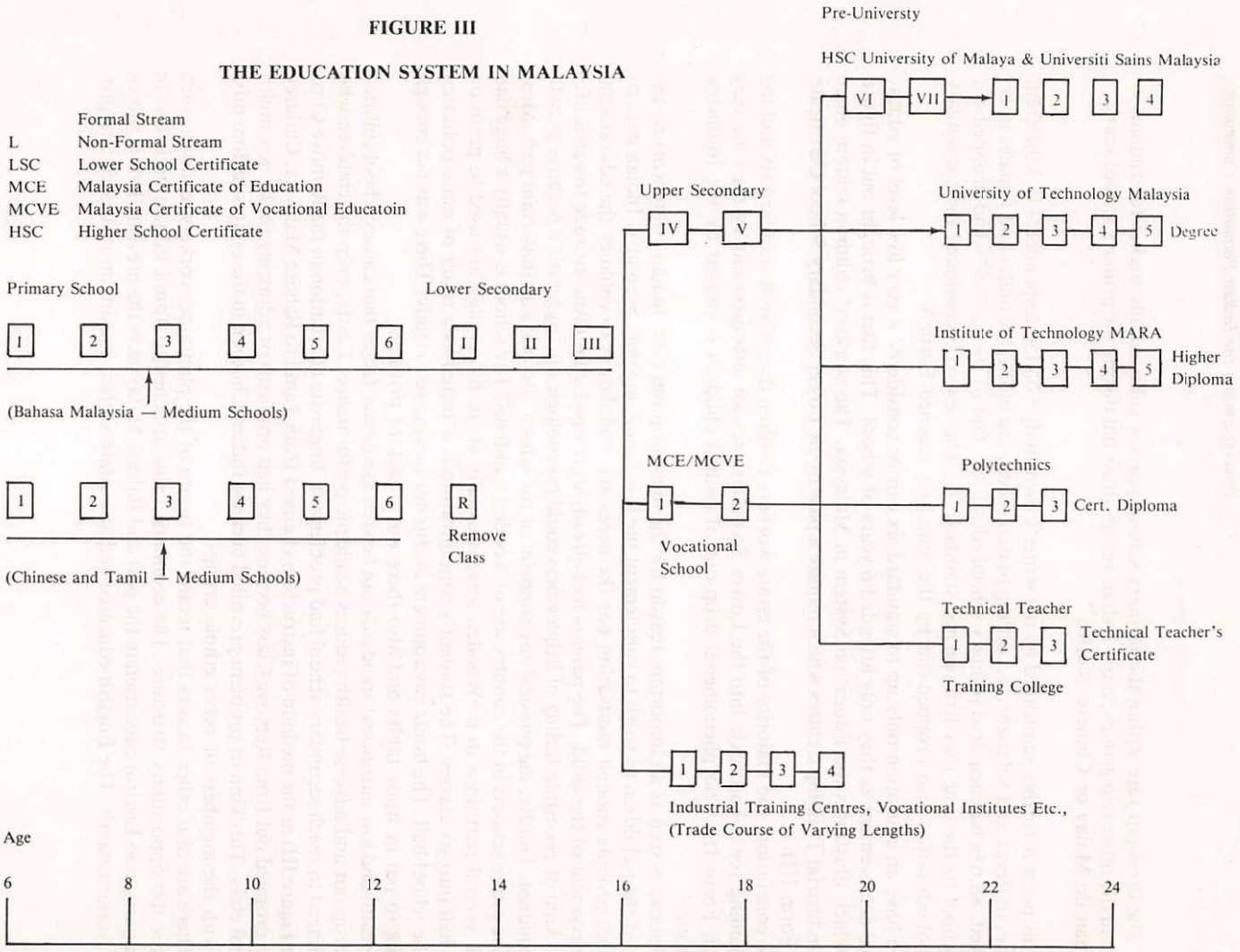
[34] J. Rabindra Daniel, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

[35] J. Rabindra Daniel, "A General Survey on Education Amongst the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community," *Malaysia in History,* Journal of the Malaysian Historical Society (Kuala Lumpur, 1981), pp. 84-90.

[36] S. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur, 1979), p. 26.

FIGURE III

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA



NOTE: There are six years of primary education followed by three years of lower secondary education, common to all children. This education is free and universally applicable. The upper secondary school comprises two years.

SOURCE: Ministry of Labour and Manpower, *Labour and Manpower* Report (Kuala Lumpur, 1980), p.65.

sperity in the 1950s and early 1960s. The expansion of administrative and commercial services after Independence in 1957 opened a number of avenues of employment.

Thus, the consequences of vernacular education on the socio-economic mobility of the plantation workers can be summed up in the words of Colletta:[37]

> "Fixed in status by their vernacular education system, occupation (mode of subsistence) and meagre income, Indian parental expectation towards their children's education soon pave their way for their transition from the few years of vernacular schooling on the estate to wielding their father's knife among the rubber trees."

B. *LEISURE AND RECREATION*

The indicator applied in this sub-component is to see whether there are recreational facilities available in the estates and to what extent it is satifactory.

There are very few recreational facilities[38] in the estates considering the fact that most of the plantation workers are quite free after two o'clock in the afternoon. Most estates provide their workers with a community hall and a football field. Some of the basic social amenities provided by the management are free film shows and games facilities. Table IV shows the comparative social amenities provided by the estates.

TABLE IV

Comparative Amenities Provided for Labourers in 1977 and 1980

	Rubber Estates		Oil-Palm Estates	
Amenities	1977	1980	1977	1980
Free Film Shows	46%	38%	51%	75%
Games Facilities	33%	36%	57%	54%

Source: Ministry of Labour and Manpower, *Labour Indicators* (Kuala Lumpur, 1980), pp. 68-69.

From the above statistics, it can be seen that there is very little scope for non-domestic leisure-time activities. Only 36% of the Rubber estates provide games facilities. Although there are community halls, few enjoyed their facilities. According to the socio-economic report, out of 936 estate workers interviewed, 44.6% did not enjoy the facilities of a hall.[39] Radio listening and television viewing are common domestic leisure-time activities.

Thus, in terms of the provision of leisure-time recreational facilities, the facilities are quite limited. A library or a reading room is quite rarely provided by the Management.

[37]N.J. Colletta, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

[38]J. Rabindra Daniel, *op. cit.*, (1978), pp 208-211.

[39]Socio-Economic Research Unit, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

III. *HIGHER NEED: SURPLUS INCOME*

The indicator in this sub-component is to see whether the plantation workers are able to make ends meet.

Two studies will be examined to see whether income matches expenditure. The first study is by Wiebe and Mariappen and the second study is based on the socio-economic report. The income and expenditure pattern is illustrated by five Indian Households in Table V.

TABLE V

Expenditure Pattern of 5 Indian Households

Household	Occupation of Household Head	Income of Household ($)	Earners in Household	Persons in Household	Total Expenditure
A	Factory Worker	119.55	1	8	225.65
B	Weeder	241.00	2	7	142.50
C	Tapper	405.20	4	11	653.10
D	Unemployed	385.80	3	6	362.05
E	Tapper	688.20	4	7	899.60
	Total	1,839.75			2,282.90
	Average	367.95			456.58

Source: Wiebe, P.D. and Mariappen S, ***Indian Malaysians: The View from Plantation*** (New Delhi, 1978), p. 119.

According to a study conducted by Mariappen and Wiebe in an estate in Kedah the average expenditure is more than income by $88.63. The items that they reckoned for the expenditure pattern were the following: food, kerosene, matches, fuel, medicine, school-bus fees, school pocket-money, other school fees, religious expenditure, clothing, cinema toddy and travel.

The socio-economic report, a study of 936 respondents, shows a similar trend.[40] The average monthly household income was $302.00 and the average monthly expenditure was $299.00. This implies that the majority of the workers spent as much as they earned and it is particularly significant to note that those who earned $300.00 ie., 50% of the 936 respondents, stated that they spent more than they earned. Saving was minimal; only 20% of the respondents were able to save. According to the writer's study,[41] one of the main forms of saving is through the acquisition of gold. Gold is of special importance to workers who have daughters, as dowry maybe given in the form of gold on the day of the daughter's wedding.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. xii para 16 and 17.

[41] J. Rabindra Daniel, *op. cit.*, (1978), pp. 115-116.

The detailed breakdown of the expenditure figures reveal that an average of 72% of their average monthly income was spent on food alone. If other basic household expenditure like clothing, transport, medicine and education are included, the percentage goes up to 97% of their average monthly household income. It was also found that 68% of the 936 interviewed were in debt.[42]

CONCLUSION

Poverty among the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community is not a modern phenomenon but has its roots in the past and will continue to persist in the future. The analysis as illustrated through the model demonstrates that the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community suffered from low nutritional standards. The housing that was provided is of sub-standard quality which had a negative effect on the academic achivement of school-children. The vernacular system of education and the high drop-out rate further retarded socio-economic mobility and perpetuated their stay in the estates. In addition, a high cost of living and a large family which was mismatched by a low income deepened their dependence on the plantation sector for survival.

Poverty amongst the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community is one of relative deprivation. If a community's basic needs such as education, housing, nutrition are fulfilled marginally, then their social functioning will be considered unsatisfactory such as maintaining a family, engaging in recreational activities and enjoying good health. This failure of fulfilment of 'needs' will ultimately result in poverty which in the case of the Malaysian Indian Plantation Community is one that is of relative deprivation.

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