

# Understanding the Psyche of the Contemporary Dominant group Malay Malaysian- The Silently Discomfiting and ‘Pulsating’ Ramifications Impacting them and the ‘Other’.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7452>

Received: 28 March 2023; Accepted: 07 April 2023; Published: 03 May 2023

## ABSTRACT

Malaysia, as a formerly colonised nation, is seen as a political entity not totally free from the centrifugal forces that tend to emerge and undo the social bonds that are attempted to be forged by the powers that be, and by the diverse communities themselves. These are in the form of socio-economic programmes, the **New Economic Model**, ‘**Masyarakat Madani**’ (**Civil Society Malaysia -equality is its primary pillar**), development plans, and so on generally said to be for the benefit of all Malaysians. Malaysians, particularly the minorities and the natives of the land, **yearn to belong to the nation**. This, the above groups want to not only be talked about, but seen to be done in the form of **equitable governmental largesse**. This is viewed presently as still very much skewed towards the majority group which is constitutionally endowed with special rights. The sense of **beleaguerment**, and being indoctrinated irrationally that they are intellectually incapable, and intermixed with a **fear of loss** of their rightful benefits in the country, which eventually has endowed on them the title-‘**sons of the soil**’, continue to seemingly prevail in their mental psyche. This has seemingly taken them on the trajectory to want to be regarded as the nation’s **favoured group**, to then egatively-impacting-on-nation-building sense of discrimination and disgruntlement ‘lived’ with by the ‘**Other**’– the minority communities. Writings of social science academics and analyses on the socio-political scenario of the country were the focus of the research methodology employed. It was concluded from the data studied that in all urgency, a further **in-depth values-based and holistic ‘Education’ system** was the key means of bringing about positive changes to the seemingly debilitating psychological traits of the dominant group mainly, and importantly, fulfilling the **needs of ALL citizens** proactively and for the nation going forward, **without any element of qualification or reservations**.

**Keywords:** “Beleaguerment”, “Negative psychological traits”, “‘Other’”, “Education”, “Needs of citizens”, “Nation-building”.

## INTRODUCTION

The birth pangs of the Malaysian nation are not over, and not too different from that of many formerly colonised countries of the mainly Western industrialised powers. Essentially, this nation did not shed blood to attain independence; sometimes it is said, ‘not a drop of blood’. Further, the nation has made concrete strides towards nationhood, and the economy was energised thus far, to maintain social harmony. The diverse communities are **overtly peace-loving and ‘accepting’** of one another to day. **Multiracialism (-multiculturalism)** is generally well portrayed and demonstrated in Malaysia (Faruqi, S.S., in Pillai, P., 2015).

The nation however, suffered the ignominy and tragedy **of inter-racial violence and conflict** in the Second World War, with the Chinese community said mainly to have collaborated with the Communist party, and henceforth seen as traitors to the Malayan nation. The Malays on their part are said to have assisted the

Japanese in their rule of Malaya and Singapore. Communism then having laid its roots in Malaya and in the South-East Asian region, and the Chinese nation on an international drive to ‘convert’ countries to communism, and thereby gain world political dominance and supremacy, the **Chinese Malaysians** were again suspect as to their loyalties. Interracial killings of people of one communal race and the other had started to occur.

The incidents and experiences that the people endured, it has been ardently and emotionally lamented by well-meaning Malaysians, should never have to be a part of the Malaysian pluralistic narrative. The Malaysian citizen who discovers much later in life that she is a Muslim by birth, but has lived life as a liberal Malaysian making her livelihood in a legitimate employment partaking in food particularly favoured by non-Muslim communities, faces unwarranted and disturbing socio-psychological experiences.

The need to live one’s life, to ***STRIVE and GO FORWARD*** becomes a most demanding challenge. The nation’s frequent, ‘spiritual’ ‘fatwas’(rulings), proclaimed in order to present and create a pious, traditional, Islamic picture and society (and this is directed to the largely rural Muslim population), can be mushrooming at a great human cost, within the Malay society, and in the larger society. The educated, ‘learning’, and ‘modernizing’ Malay women particularly, and the community at large, today feel torn between **divergent cultural-values outlooks of life, and the ‘Islamic’ requirements** imposed on them (Bahrin, Karina Robles, 2022).

The **Malaysian Rakyat** today can be said to want to be seen as an accepted and valuable partner, in the national narrative. The last GE (General Elections) 15 and the formation of the **‘Unity government’** has, even more, placed the Rakyat as crucial players in the affairs of the nation, going forward. Being a **‘unity government’**, not that the earlier governments and government-political parties had not openly declared that they stood for the **upliftment of all Malaysians and national solidarity**, this government with its new prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, does tend to throw some ‘refreshing’, promising light on the above issue. The people generally are actively involved and follow the political events that tend to surround this above individual.

Thus, **the Rakyat- the non-Malays particularly and the postmodern Malays**, can be said to be hoping for sustainable, positive changes in the country, politically and socially. They can be said to directly want to play a vital and meaningful role in the nation-building schemata of this country, which clearly had fallen far short of this noble goal, even when it was boldly publicized to the man on the street and child as the first vision -challenge (nine challenges were listed), of the 1991-launched Vision 2020.

The common Malaysian today, it can well be said, aspires to be encapsulated by this **shared sense of purpose** (whereby) “... all (Malaysians) are working together to bring the nation to new heights, improving (and **fulfilling his longing to belong** and thereof) his quality of life...” (Nathaniel Tan, 1.1.2023, p.19). This then can be characterised as the **VERY ESSENCE OF NATION-BUILDING**, whereof every Malaysian citizen feels and acts knowing he/she is an equally important entity, as valued as the next person, in the *evolutionary trajectory of the nation*.

However, studying this subject as a subjective social phenomenon, requires the researcher’s total sense of professionalism in delineating fact from fiction, even if the social commentaries involved in the analyses of the research issue can be open, in some instances to unobjectifiable debate and verbiage. In the **social sciences, humanities, and history**, as this above study is centred upon, the degree of confidence as to the findings and results (or conclusions arrived at as such), that is, the **5-sigma designation (as often employed in the natural sciences field)**, allowing a statistical fluctuation of only 1 in a very large number of applications running into millions, and is thus is not a germane expectation.

Nor can it be a sociologically plausible proposition, as the humanities and the social sciences are filled and

fraught with intricate human nuances of unique, personalised circumstances (Tibi Puiu, 2021).

The social science researcher is thus faced with the challenge and task to delve into the social manifestations that present themselves and attempt to discover commonly applicable and new insights into the meanings of the social consequences. As long as there are new ‘discoveries’ relating to the subject of study the research can be validated. The **intellectual integrity and ethics** of good research in the use of well-grounded techniques and methodologies, need to be complied with at all times (Grayling, A.C. 2021. pp.6,7).

As such, this study right at its outset does not presume and claim that the discussions and findings are final and that they do not calibrate into other more coherent alternative pathways. Nevertheless, It surely is of the stand that objective social realities need to be seen for what they are, especially in their on-the-ground consequentialities, and thus, be tackled head-on. The resolutions discussed thereof, can be rigorously evaluated and henceforth, the outcomes need to be actualized, toward Malaysian nation-building in its truest home-grown forms.

### **Objectives of Study**

The primary aim of this brief study is to attempt to understand the Malay mindset with regard to their socio-psychological outlooks and attitudes of supposedly being threatened by the ‘Others’, the minority citizens.

Further, to attempt to study the attitudes of contemporary non-Malay Malaysians resulting from the existential majority Malay community outlook primarily, this being grounded in the Malaysian government ‘Bumiputera first’ officialdom and governance.

## **METHODOLOGY OF STUDY**

The primary approach in gathering data for this study was through reference research. The methodological procedures employed in this brief study were defined by the qualitative-evaluative approach. The related national and official documents were evaluated in relation to the purposes of this study. The well-considered standpoints of educationists and scholars, on the related issues in this study, were taken note of. These were analysed and the probable meanings and implications to the focus and themes of this study were then discussed. The interpretations and analyses of data gathered also constituted essential elements in the presentation of the entirety of the narrative of this study.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Talking History Again...?, The Strive for an Aristotelian Praxis**

–In the Malaysian nation certain core and unrelenting issues continue to make themselves be heard once too often. The resolution of these issues is an unwelcome but can be seen as a fulfilling ongoing task, however challenging and discomfiting they may appear to be. These which impact the basis of ethnic relations are: education and business opportunities and representation in the public services for the two main minority groups-the Chinese and Indians, the Orang Asli and the Bumiputera non-Muslims in East Malaysia, continue to strain the existing bonds of collaboration among the above groups; opportunities for the minority communities for senior public service positions are often a contentious issue. The often majority-community vested interests, as Chandra Muzaffar (2017, p. 170) has observed, are often clearly opposed to any change in the policy practices as such. It can be concluded thus, that the above is not ready for any accommodation of non-Malay aspirations. This is despite the universally acknowledged position that an ethnically balanced public, and also the private sector services, in the Malaysian multicultural society, would well promote a socially healthy equilibrium in the nation at large.

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## The COURSE OF MALAYSIAN NATIONHOOD

When we study the course **Malaysian nationhood** has undergone, the **Malayan Union** had come close to becoming the one Malayan nation that was generally aspired for by the common people, and national leaders who had the interests of all multiracial communities at heart. This was a British plan to ensure that the Malayan nation was a united polity when they left after the declaration of independence for the Malayan entity. But, because the above plan for **central governance included various features such as unrestricted citizenship rights for non-Malays, and further abolishing Malay special rights**. Their religious domain was however safeguarded with the limited and reduced powers to the rulers who retained control over Islam and Malay customs-‘adat’.

In the above, certainly drastically, the traditional national the ‘tanah Melayu’, ‘bangsa Melayu’, the symbolic and authoritative positions and status of the Malay Rulers, and other symbols that became ingrained in the Malay psyche and hence cherished, these arising from their historical beginnings in South Asian Malay Nusantara regional evolution, were removed. The Malays were to be subsumed into the ‘Bangsa Malayan’.

These developments were totally unacceptable to the Malays, who then protested against the British plan. UMNO saw its roots in the above developments. It is observed that the above political party, for all that it stood for as the protectors of Malay interests as it is often claimed today, its hidden agenda had been to support the pre-war British governance and presence. That is, the British favour the Malay elite particularly, was the ‘status quo ante’ that prevailed before the 1941 war. Even with the educated and economically progressive Malays, as juxtaposed to a measurable extent, with the **simply contented, ‘kampung’-based Malays and their value systems**, the British were seen as backing and advancing the better endowed Malays. The large lower stratas of economically and socially ‘non-progressive’- in the western industrialization sense, Malays were essentially left to fend for themselves by the British.

### 1. Misplaced Animosities- Their Inherited Impact Fomented on Racial Identities

As Azlan Tajuddin (2012, p.103, as quoted by Raja Nazrin (2019), p. 29) explains, the nationwide grassroots action, primarily driven by the ordinary, ‘simple’ Malays, having dawned on them the potential loss of political power over their ‘**Tanah Melayu**’, that **“a contagion of Malay ire quickly spread across the Malay peninsula, sending a stern message to those complicit with the Union proposal (plan towards central one-state governance) to beware of the consequences of their actions”**.

The declaration of the **Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948 (FMA)** saw the British High Commissioner himself being tasked to ensure and safeguard the ‘... **special position of the Malays, and of the legitimate interests of other communities**. The Agreement also included a proposal intended to make it more difficult for the **Chinese and Indians** to be awarded citizenship status (ibid, p.30).

With the advent of the Second World War in 1941 and then the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM, a movement mainly membered by the local Chinese and also some Malays), grew in force in the peninsula. Their activities severely affected life and property, particularly in the rubber and tin industries, and thus a nationwide emergency was declared.

It can be noted that these developments exacerbated the growing feelings of antipathy between the Malays and the non-Malays.

As Shad Saleem Faruqi (2015, p. 212, in Patrick Pillai) has sharply observed, indicating pointedly what needs to be done for the national goal of social cohesion, that ... ‘since the nineties racial polarization has

reached alarming levels. We have become a “nation of strangers”. **Walls of separation amongst Malaysians** have been constructed relating to certain western values and practices that have inevitably found expression here through the waves of industrialization and globalization. This of course, has been a known phenomenon but was not given much prominence in the colonial and the immediate post-colonial years, but which has today come to be used to **paint ‘a less than holier’ picture of the other cultural communities than that one belongs to.**

After the second world war saw certain developments such as the increased intensity of the **clamourings of non-Malays**, the CPM (Communist Party of Malaya) capitalised on this, and started rearing its head violently. It wanted an official voice in national governance. They however, could not stop the British in their implementation of the **Federated Malay States Agreement in 1948.**(The Malays gained greater rights and the Malay states again became protectorates). The British, to ensure **harmonious governance** and to extend their **imperialistic ambitions**, allowed the maintenance of Malay special privileges, but removed the Malay symbols of a national language, a flag, a national identity, and the ceremonial and mythical sovereignty of the sultans were just kept in place (Ariffin, 2009, in Lim T G and others, p.50, Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD) ).

The different cultures primarily promote the good and the universal values of human love, truth, and well-being yearn for understanding and acceptance amongst all mankind. The resulting humanity of peoples is then richly strengthened with the diversity of humane values. It is therefore only certain individuals, who wanting personal powers and social aggrandizement, exploit ‘naïve’ people towards their socially unhealthy thoughts and ways. Thus, it is crucial that **THE EDUCATION of Malaysians**, reaching well to the imagined depths of our humanity, has to be seriously and intensely further endeavoured today.

The Malayan civil service was expanded with the emplacement of more Malay officers, mainly by the wishes of the state rulers. As Nazrin notes, the “...The Malay rulers tended to oppose non-Malays working in state jobs that involved administering Malays directly. ...” (ibid, p.32). This can be seen in the context as it bears on the relationship between the plural, diverse communities, with regards to the provisions of the nation’s 1957 Constitution on equality, the legitimate interests of all citizens and the non-Malay communities; the **1971 RUKUN NEGARA national ideology and its national vision; the 1988 National Education Philosophy and its commitment in nurturing the Malaysian model human being**, and so on.

The above scenario, as it has grown to its present-day proportions clearly presents a **silently growing fractured picture of the national social milieu.**

Nevertheless, seemingly presenting a positive outlook for the nation going forward, a new government constituent political party, the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) manifesto, referred to as the 1988 Permatang Pauh Declaration, its promises still relevant today, advocates that development towards a common, prosperous future), is to reinforce a dynamic cultural identity, where **faith in noble cultural traditions**(are maintained) intact, but there is **open-ness in all that is good in all traditions**” (Azly Rahman, 2015, p.56).

In the context of the above vision declaration, as it can be characterised, it is to **strive towards** the formulation of the **RIGHT means and strategies** that can birth the common acceptance among Malaysians of **ONE ANOTHER as Malaysians. Reason and the conscientization in human consciousness** need to be the driving forces; and as the above writer posits, the above are ingredients for a concerted programme of mental **re-“villagization”**. The basis is the **harmonious empowering of kinshi p** amongst all members of the diverse Malaysian communities.

This does not mean we abandon **modernization** as we know of it today. That would possibly be an impossible if not, a regressive move. What “villagization”, or **‘kampung-ism’ purports is essentially a philosophy of ‘Balik kampung’, to “... EMBRACE a more pastoral (and people-centred) and liberating philosophy of struggle”**

(ibid). This will necessarily involve tweaking and adapting the commonly pervasive World Bank and International Monetary Fund prognoses, diagnoses and the commonly much-heralded, and supposedly liberating socio-economic **developmentalism stratagems** (see Arundhati Roy (2019) UK: Penguin Random House, *My Seditious Heart*, pp.23-27,46,7.....). The ‘promised land’ in the world at large today appears to be manifested with some material good, but is superficially and manipulatively more burdened with **unimaginable and ill-conceive deconomic, social and ethical ‘benefits’, and ills** (<https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/topics/waste-resources/resource-use-its-consequences>).

The above national predicament as such, can be seen as a cultivated burden being carried by Malaysians today, which had arisen by the divisive electoral politics and the embedding political culture that can tend to imprison us in a life of mediocrity.

The one national identity, or, as it can be called, a **National Self**, that is yearned for, to belong to, particularly, as discussed above, by the minorities, need not just be an academic-intellectual exercise, BUT by a grassroots, revolutionizing relearning of the what is the **‘common, plural Malaysian’** (Farish A. Noor, 2008, *In Search of a Malaysian Identity*, in *Out of the Tempurung*, ed. Fong Chin Wei, Yin Ee Kiong. New South Wales, Australia: East West Publishing Pty Ltd., pp.9-23)

The **multicultural, multiethnic Malaysia** is NOT an ideal, but a clear possibility, when the **majority Malay and all others** stake their **RIGHTFUL place and space** in this ever real, plural nation.

The grassroots education plan discussed above, can be our saving GRACE, whereby the attitude and religiously humane value of ‘moderation’ can be strengthened in the personality of the Malaysian, from an early age in life. The **RIGHT learning** can be implemented and strictly monitored to remove the **sense of ‘Otherness’** seemingly harboured by the **‘Other’** totally in Malaysia (Jaaffar, J., Shad Saleem Faruqi, Jahaberdeen Mohamed Yunoos, Marina Mahathir, pp.74-143, in *Moderation*. 2016, Petaling Jaya: Star Media Group).

Robert Sapolsky (2017), in his seminal work, ‘BEHAVE’, notes that studies have shown that **children right at kindergarten** can learn **dichotomies** even in the absence of ill intent. Arbitrary markers, such as the **‘US’ (as contrasted to ‘THEM’)** core value (for example, those associated with religious beliefs or cultural forms of living) associated with a group, can, as in the conditioning of **Pavlov’s dogs or rats, can gradually take on a life of its own and become “... the signified instead of the signifier. ...** Minimal group studies show our (all human beings) propensity for generating biased US/Thems from just arbitrary (marker) differences. What we then do is link (the ordinary object-forms-)arbitrary markers to (more important culturally significant and) meaningful (particular is typically core) differences in values and beliefs” (ibid, p.190,1; Holmes, Natha M. and others, 2010. ‘Neuroscience & Bio-behavioural Reviews, Science Direct, Vol.34, Issue 8, July 2010, pp. 1277-1295).

If the so-called ‘Developed’ nation, **America** is seen today as an example of ongoing nation-building attended disruptively by the national folly of its everyday politics, Klein, E. (2020) laments sadly that the nation over the past fifty years has been continuously declining into a state of **zero-sum identity politics**. This latter phenomenon is rapidly becoming a **‘weaponised’** political instrument in America, and this he posits, is breaking **the social bonds** that were turbulently and painstakingly constructed to **cement the diverse strands** that make up the American nation.

The above is a socio-political scenario, and as a developing country, Malaysia needs to draw ***INSTRUCTIVE LESSONS*** from it. **And avoid it at all costs.**

If the Malaysian **university context** can be seen as a microcosm of the larger Malaysian society, but probably not really at the grassroots, then there is much that needs to be revisited as regards its role as the **promulgator of Malaysian nation-building**

. **Edward Said's reminder** that, "...the (*scholarly*) *academy's reason for being* is the **realization of the intellect (together with its humane evolutionary quality)**, then the intellect **MUST NOT** be coercively held in thrall to the authority of the **national identity (decision-makers)**. Otherwise, I **FEAR**, the old inequities, cruelties, and **unthinking attachments** that have so disfigured human history will be recycled by the academy, which then **loses much of its real intellectual freedom as a result**".

Malaysian society was clearly a passive collectivity to the overarching and open implementation of the **NEP (New Economic Policy)**, implemented after the tragic racial riots of 1969). It reached into the realm of academia with practices of **ethnic discrimination**, "...that made the universities predominantly Malay institutions..." (Teik, K.B. 2008, p.176). This is generally viewed and analysed as an exercise in **myopia and intolerance**. **Competence and quality** have been allowed to be eroded with the much-reduced role of the non-Malays in employment, and senior positions of academic decision-making and authority (ibid, p.178,181).

As Anthony Reid, a historian who was working at the History Department, University Malaya in the 1960s, has observed, that, after the May 13, 1969 riots, the cosmopolitan phase in the above institution clearly ended. "...Malay lecturers were thrust prematurely into leadership (positions, with only a few non-Malays allowed to be in such positions) in the hope of better controlling if not satisfying aggressive and politically-connected students. ... The university was also caught up in the radical shift in a Malay-nationalist direction" (Reid, A. 2022, in *Life After-Oral Histories of the May 13 Incident*, pp.85,7. Petaling Jaya: Gerakbudaya Enterprise).

The dangers of falling into a rut of being contented, and insidiously, complacent, of the **pragmatic mediocrity syndrome**, are already present in Malaysian society, and **NEED, at all costs, to be REMOVED**. This clearly would involve a **socio-political pragmatic change** with an altogether new and focused **national imagination**, in which **PLURALITY and MODERATION** will truly be the foundation blocks.

### **'Deconstructing' the Malay Psyche- Towards Common Universalities**

From even the pre-modernist social and cultural anthropological standpoint and time, the Malay has undergone, a **fundamental cultural sense of 'beleaguerment'**. The Malays, it is said, have always had a pressing need to be close among their own kith and kin. They, as also other communities generally, have a strong sense of trust and hope in numbers.

This has had implications and ramifications on the socio-political structure of Malaysian society. The solidarity they construct in their 'majority' numbers, and which today, rather intimately, is fortified by their strong **roots in their Islamic faith**. As a group of people and also by official sanction, they want to be assured that they are always insulated from all and non-Malay-Muslim intrusion and subversion of any kind.

The Malay society can be said to have wanted and probably felt that they needed, to be morally separated and physically elevated as much as they could, from all external, contaminating forces and influences. An example is the historical creation of the **Malay Reservation Land scheme**, which saw the Malay Rulers and government giving it their official blessing. This is today embedded in the nation's Federal Constitution (Article 89(1), Federal Constitution, 1957).

Today, this need for **exclusivity** has entered the world of language. Legalistically, Islamic terminologies, such as '**Allah**', '**Ibadah**', '**Iman**', and others, have been deemed assiduously for the use of Muslim only. Also, the vocal religious demands for states to impose presumptive Islamic doctrines such as the '**hudud**' law which requires the removal of 'the hand that steals'. The question as to whether it will also apply when nationally legalised, to non-Muslims, has not received a definitive response.

These actions and other similar ones, have allowed and continued to give the Malays an institutionally (mainly government) backed sense of protection and security. The sense of sharing the world thus, with others, is a seemingly distant and unrewarding possibility (Clive Kessler, 9.8.2016. 'Deep .....? Malay cultural psychology).

The **NEP(New Economic Policy)** launched in 1971, to primarily uplift the Malays from their pre-independence, colonial economic doldrums context has been said to have not achieved its objectives fully, after over six decades essentially, and it is still an ongoing programme.

The above, as well as the **Vision 2020 national programme** was launched by the 'maverick' prime minister of the nation then, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, in 1991 with the creation of a '**Bangsa Malaysia**', a one-identity Malaysian society essentially, which was received with much acclaim and hope then, but its impetus having essentially fizzled out today, leaving large sections of ordinary Malaysians, many ordinary Malays and non-Malays, the latter particularly, who yearn to belong (this need as discussed in this paper)

As discussed in this paper, with the failure of the **1946 Malayan Union**, the British attempted to replace it with the Federation of Malaya Agreement in 1948. This again was to bring all the disparate Malay states as well as the settlements of Penang and Malacca, all of which had their different and distinct historical beginnings, to come together as one nation. The three main parties which have been noted to stand to benefit much from the above political arrangement were the British, the Malay rulers, and the Malay elite of that era. The British wanted to be at the centre of things, to assume and assert centralised control.

The Malays were not happy as they realised that it was not to be a '**Melayu**' nation and not even a **Malayan nation** because of the imposing position of the colonial British in the proposed administration. Although the British renamed their Federation of Malaya designation as '**Persekutuan Tanah Melayu**'. This was merely to appease the Malays, that they, the British too, wanted Malaya to be seen as a 'Melayu' nation.

**Divisions and schisms** between the communities to the above plan arose and were apparently knowingly sown by the British. The **Malays wanted a Malay country exclusive to their needs and controls**, while the **non-Malays desired a federation that embraced them as well, together with the Malays**, all under the **umbrella of a common Malayan identity**.

The British nor the Malay leaders then were not too willing to concede the **de facto position of the non-Malays**, who had then made Malaya their home having planted their roots in the land, leaving their 'origins' in distant lands. They had come with their families and took up employment that contributed to the opening up of the country.

However, the above were accorded citizenship rights, BUT not the essential **nationality ingredient** that the Malays enjoyed. The latter **INGREDIENT** endows a complete **sense of ownership and being** in the land.

### **The Splintered, Muddled Psyche, and Affirmative Action.**

It can be noted that the **psychology of upmanship and exclusivity** among the Malays who basically had a much stronger claim on the land being a part of the **Malay Nusantara stock of the Malay Archipelago** for centuries, was firmly being sown in the psyche of the Malays.

As the singular drive of this paper being the exploration of ways towards **Malaysian solidarity and MUTUAL acceptance of diverse groups towards a one-people nation**, it is pertinent to point out that even before independence was attained, there were Malaysians who saw far ahead and desired to remove the social walls and build strong bridges among the people.



The failure of the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement (FMA) saw the **evolution of Malays and non-Malay leaders**, such as Burhanuddin Al-Helmi and Ishak Haji Muhammad of the then Parti Kebangsaan Melayu (Malay Nationalist Party), Ahmad Boestaman of the Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Movement of Conscious Youth). The above took the politically pragmatic step of banding together under a new name, combining the needs and interests of Malay men and women, calling itself the ‘Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Centre of People’s Power), PUTERA. Their vision was the protection of Malay interests with a clear and strong voice.

An even **more daring and visionary event** was the coming together of Putera, with the Chinese led by Tan Cheng Lok of the AllMalaya Council for Joint Action (AMCJA). Together they proposed the **People’s Constitutional Proposal (PCP)**.

It was most unfortunate that this far-reaching programme was not implemented. This was because of the opposition to it by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce (APPPC). Further, the increased presence of the Malayan Chinese Communist party (MCP) and its violent activities put an end to the above ‘out-of-its-time’ valiant effort.

In the PCP, a significant proposal was the implementation of a ‘**Melayu**’ nationality, **WITHOUT RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS**, for all Malaysians. **Fundamental liberties and EQUALITY FOR ALL CITIZENS**, who committed their total loyalty to the nation. Singapore was to be included in the new nation. All languages got the green light for their use, with Malay as the primary language of the nation. A **Council of Races** composed of all communities resident in the nation was to be formed. It was to function primarily to restrain all **discriminatory** legal and policy proposals.

At this juncture, it is most pertinent to look at what Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad (2010, p.127) without any reservations whatsoever, explains that, as regards the state of affairs in the Malay community after six decades of independence and the affirmative action programmes, “the vast majority of the poorest Malaysians are the Malays, the GAP between the rich Malays and poor Malays has grown bigger...”(<https://www.tpb2030.gov.my/ebook/en/16/>).

For our common reflection, the New Straits Times editorial, the Leader (March 5, 2023, p.2), highlighted that there were still 260,000 **HARDCORE POOR** in 2021 in the nation. Why should the nation at the current, modern stage of its development have even one very poor citizen? It elaborates on how politics and the growing culture of corruption have failed the common people.

On the above subject of **evolving a sense of Malaysianness today**, it is again emphasized that ‘**Education**’ in its most ‘**universal**’ forms can be implemented to look at the essential features of the constitutional proposals with utmost seriousness. Certain aspects (as prime ministers for the former Straits Settlements) of the above could be retuned and adapted, to fit into the current socio-political context of the nation, **without sacrificing the cardinal principles that are clearly directed at building a cohesive Malay/an (sian)nation for the present times**.

It will do the country a lot of good if the above (taken together with **the 1957 Federal Constitution, the national ideology document, the Rukun Negara (1971), the National Philosophy of Education (1988), the Vision 2020 programme (1991)**, are studied further in greater depth for a truly united Malaysian nation), and are dissected with a social science sense of clarity, for the **embedded messages** that the writers may well have held in their hearts. **The Role of Minorities- the Chinese Factor, for Nationhood**.

Malaysia’s ethnic pluralism inevitably shines forth the path ahead toward cohesive cultural pluralism. There can be no two ways about it, as seen by the many exacerbated cultural divides and politicised ethnocentric proclamations all over the world today.

Over six decades of independence have shown that we **can go forward confidently as a thriving multi-ethnic society.**

For the nation to map out and tread the development pathway, the core merged social-economic programme, the servant-leaders together with the ordinary citizens, have to be constantly cognizant of the many and unwieldy challenges posed by the following- emerging Islam as a political force within the Malay community; the sanctioned **bumiputeraism doctrine per Article 153 of the Federal Constitution**, continuing the policy of enabling a determinate share of the economic cake; and the incipient undercurrents of **religious intolerance and hence social distancing of the ‘Other’** of different cultural backgrounds.

The ‘Other’ and possibly the economically active and strong Chinese, cannot continue to be seen as a national threat with regard to the nation’s well-being. It is noted that the latter has quietly been recognised as a major mover of the national economy.....

This study posits that the debilitating cultural perceptions as such, and thus the group-seeking psychological ones, be discarded through universal values-based education. The Malays, together with the ‘Other’, can stand tall and prosper if this is consciously and consistently striven at. It cannot be denied that the Malaysian nation is, without any iota of a doubt, **a CULTURALLY PLURALISTIC NATION.**

How does the ethnically provocative Chinese factor, mainly, come into play in understanding the Malay psyche for the larger objective national integration? The above have been active in the Malay Archipelago as traders and settlers for centuries even before the founding of the Malacca Sultanate in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century British hegemonic plans for the development of Malaya, brought in a surge of Chinese and Indians to work in the tin and rubber economic industries mainly, that the British started. The long history of these ‘pendatang’ workers and their contributions, today has enabled them largely, to be ‘accepted’ as co-Malaysians. The contextual understanding of the so-called ‘Others’, as based on their historical ROOTS, is what is sadly and distressingly lacking in the general society.

The past and the tendency to point fingers so as to ascribe blame, in the context of this study, to cast aspersions on the Chinese, Indian or ‘Other’ migrant minorities, will not help our young generation to strive for Malaysian nationhood. Cultural and political polarization in the nation clearly had its roots in pre and post-colonial times, and appears to be an imbedded feature in our present day social milieu too. The diverse communities are not interacting with one another, with an openness that commonly can be a sine quo non for the full energising of the nation’s developmental strategies. Inbreeding of in-group ethnic perceptions of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ have come to create fertile grounds for the above to flourish (Anderson, B.,2016).

However, this nation in this modern age today stands as a **beacon of hope** and exemplification for communal integration. The **social fabric admixture of ethnic cultures** has given Malaysia the recognition that culturally diverse peoples can well **strive onwards to evolve as a nation towards a common one ‘Malaysianness’.**

For example, the protection given to vernacular language schools-the Chinese and Tamil primary and secondary schools mainly, is a testament to the **‘openness’ and wisdom of the founding fathers** of the nation, as to the practice of the democratic principle of equality in allowing the **natural evolution and nurturing of the aesthetic traditional cultures** close to the hearts of its citizens. This necessarily is done (and needs to be an ongoing effort, particularly by the national and community leaders) with a view of the resilience and sustainability of the larger picture of Malaysian nationhood, as based and guided by the nation’s **Federal Constitution and the nation’s Rukun Negara ideology statement.**

The commonly held belief is that a nation's stability is better secured when the one-administrative state is sustained by the learned and ingrained understanding of its citizens of the concept and pragmatic usefulness of **secular cultural pluralism**. The Malaysian nation as it stands today, is cautiously run and governed by the **politics of accommodation**, bringing together the Peninsular and East Malaysian ethnic groups, "...in which special protection for the indigenous (majority Malay-Bumiputera) community..." is ensured by law (Beh Loo See, 'Malaysian Chinese Capitalism: Mapping the Bargain of a Developmental State', in Voon Phin Keong, Ed. 2007. 'Malaysian Chinese and Nation-Building- Before Merdeka and Fifty Years After', Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies).

The Malays and 'Others' in multicultural Malaysia, the latter seemingly being a *fait accompli*, can **'unlearn and reconstruct'** one's long-established notions in order for one to realise that **ethnic biases and ethnic consciousness are clearly influenced by "...prevailing social and political dynamics and constructs"** (Lim Teck Ghee, 2018, p.17). The removal of **psychological negativities** of the 'Other', and even of one's own ethnics by the adoption of a sense of low self-esteem for oneself and one's community, as the much-acclaimed but flawed work by Dr. Mahathir, the 'Malay Dilemma' would tend to seed into the minds of the Malaysian Malay, is a matter of paramount importance for ALL Malaysians. Only with **total respect for one another's cultural backgrounds and characteristics as they are lived, without encumbrance on the other, is a mutual expectation** in a multicultural society.

It is pertinent at this juncture to reflect on the analysis by Syed Hussein Alatas (1977) that Mahathir had based his idea stand on the racial inferiority of the Malays on the 'survival of the fittest' hypothesis. The Chinese particularly were looked upon as "hardy individuals" without a clear account of the historical background and socio-political context in Malaya then. "The explanation of cultural phenomena in terms of race and Darwin's evolutionary theory have long been discredited in the social sciences. It does not apply to China either. For thousands of years, the Chinese peasants had to cope with difficulties" in their homeland (ibid, p.179). It was then the opportunities that presented themselves and the sense of the need to venture and strive that enabled them to become hardy workers.

Mahathir inadvertently had not dealt with the serious struggles for existence amongst the Malays. **"Malay fishing and rice-farming were not as easy as Mahathir (had) suggested"**. This included the struggle against diseases, and yet they had strived on well (ibid,p.178). All these involved clearly hard work. Even if these were short periods of time, there is no clear scientific evidence to definitively state that the Malays' work habits as such were cultural in nature.

As the British colonial authorities Frank Swettenham and Hugh Clifford in colonised Malaya had pointed out then, that "...knowing the Malay language, living intimately with the Malays, and studying them with a sympathetic attitude", had lacked. If it had been attempted the regard for the above could well have been more positive (ibid, p. 47).

In all seriousness, Malaysians today thus need to ask themselves whether we are getting into a **rut of "cultural fundamentalism"**. As Thomas Meyer(2001) emphatically argues, that all great **civilisations are constituted by ethnic diversity**. The latter has essentially functioned as commonly constructed and thus transient **political constructs** of the entities concerned, helping them **EVOLVE** towards people-centred, **cohesive multicultural nationhood**. As the above scholar notes logically and prismatically, "The separatism born of mutual cultural exclusion has given way (when allowed the space to do so) to **manifold overlappings,...** (resulting) from the **cross-border influence of the electronic communication media, increases in affluence in...., the impact of (pervasive) modernization logic, of economic globalization** and world migratory movements" (p.104).

Nazmi (op cit) stresses that the modern-day Malay-Bumiputera on the ground, that the powers-that-be are always on their side, that the majority Malays have always dominated national politics and control the government sufficiently. The Federal Constitution provides them the grist by means of Articles 3- Islam as the religion of the nation; 152- Malay language; 153-Malay, natives special rights, 160-definition of Malay; 32- King of the nation (by tradition, a Malay ruler elected from Malay rulers of the nine states; 32-deputy(Malay) king; 38- Conference of Malay rulers, to BE always secure in this their 'Tanah tumpah darah'- the land of their birth and indigeneity. This certainly applies also to the 'Others', especially as their young generation and their earlier generations, would **demand** so.

The **psychological orientations** of the Malay, (and the 'Other', in their particular domains), have necessarily today thus, be based on the simple understanding that firstly,

ensuing from the bases of the **New Economic Policy in 1971 and the Affirmative Action** programme **architected then**, were clearly that the indigenous community needed strong support for economic upliftment;

and importantly, as agreed as a compromise with all parties to the agreements, that it was for a limited period of time.

Nevertheless, the above group must be helped to be assured and thereby, adopt an egalitarian, Malaysian outlook toward work performance, equal in measure with that of ALL citizens, as assuredly governed by the constitutionally entrenched Article 153, as discussed above.

Further, as Nazmi (ibid) emphasizes, "To all Malays and Muslims, I say, bearing witness to the truth of Islam, **we should not descend (in)to extremism, but seek to uphold justice and be an example and a blessing to all human beings as advocated by our faith.** .... Muslims should know that we are always required to occupy the **moral high ground**" (ibid, p.127).

The writer of this paper knows this all too well as such, having grown up with simple Malays. With modern development coming into play in the lives of all human beings, it needs to be remembered and thus nurtured that our basic life values are what mark us as temporal, progressive human beings. This has been well exemplified by the Japanese, the Chinese, the Indians generally, and other modern progressive peoples around the world, such as in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries (<https://www.hse.ru/en/news/research/146039755.html>). The **TASK of implanting** this in the Malaysian-Malay psyche, and that of the 'Other', MUST be dedicated to total attention today.

Thus, in **Multicultural Malaysia**, there is a **SOME promise** of not one day transforming into a one-homogenized society, but that there will be an **ENABLING** of the growth of a **national ethos** of common, healthy human interaction as a diversely constituted and **integrated humanity of Malaysians**.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- The nation's birth pains can be brought to an amicable end with a well-constituted, even **with 'strong-handed' (not that of an iron-fist kind)**, Deng Xiaoping (China)-Lee Kuan Yew(Singapore)goal-oriented-core-coterie of leaders rule. We have probably come to a **cul de sac, and the future trajectory of the nation does not appear to shine a clear light on what it holds for the people**. The various communities are happily moving on, generally peaceably, in their own This certainly does not portend well for the nation, with regard to **the evolution of forward-looking citizens**.
- The **nation's new prime minister** has recently taken a much-longed-for political stand.

“...Yes, Malay and Islam are the official language and religion,.. and we (will) protect the sanctity of the Malay rulers. ... But we will **NEVER COMPROMISE THE PRINCIPLE** that this is a country for Malaysians, irrespective of race and creed. If you challenge that, you challenge us. .... Malaysia was built by the Malays, Bumiputera, Chinese, Indians, Dayaks, Iban Melanau, Kadazans, and ‘Others’,... There will be no **tolerance (firmly zero tolerance)** for any (attempt) to disrupt national security...” (Anwar Ibrahim, 2023. p.2).

This bodes well for the nation to ‘educationally’ and politically embark proactively and positively, as the similarly demographically constituted, multicultural neighbouring nation Singapore, has well attempted to do, that is, to remove social-psychological encumbrances, and cultivate and instill a **simple and vibrant sense of being Malaysian**, in the people.

- Social scientists and students of Malaysia often ask, is the Malaysian nation to become the political expression of the prescriptive ‘Melayu’-Bumiputera majority populace? Should the debilitating façade of **ethnocentric nationalism** which commonly thrives on **fear and defensiveness**, be allowed to fester unrestrainedly? It is a phenomenal consequence where this occurs, that there is the migration of citizens, the flight of investment, and the drying up of foreign investment. **Can the nation RISK the degeneration of such nationalism into fascism?**

Can the national government, with an affirmative schema, in accordance with the ‘Merdeka’, **Constitutional** and the national ideology **Rukun Negara aspirations** construct an **inclusive nationalism**, enabling a true multi-ethnic nation of Malaysians to **EVOLVE**? A **benign ‘strong-hand governance’** can possibly bring the desired results.

- Raja Nazrin, the deputy king of the nation, has strongly reminded the ruling government that the future of the nation is very much in their hands today. He said sharply that the nation must be free from **corruption and the international shame** that it has had to bear for the last few decades. The nation’s current prime minister **NEEDS** to transform his leadership style from his much-talked-about **promises of ‘tell’, to really ‘show’ action plans taking root on the ground** (NST, 6.3.2023, NST Leader, p.2). The nation’s leaders have the means and the cardinally primal **ROLE** of invoking and constructing the **essential political will needed** that will serve **the national NEEDS of the nation’s larger picture**. Firmly admonishing politicians not to repeat the **mistakes of past leaders**, Nazrin said Malaysia’s socio-economic-political stability and the people’s future are totally dependent on **transparent governance**, in every sense of the term.
- The **people (ALL Malaysians without distinction)**, Nazrin further underscored, are **DEMANDING** today, “... after 65 years of independence and 15 general elections,... a country that is free of strife and conflict, to live **harmoniously with mutual respect**, always cooperative and unhindered by **religious prejudice and racial distrust**” (NST, 3.2023, p.6; NST, 6.3.2023, p.2).
- Common sense and the historical roots and bases of the nation, in empowering these in the **psyches of groups** of society which may have been dangerously prejudiced about **‘the Other’, ‘EDUCATION’** again can be ***THE effective means*** to stamp out any further **socio-psychological damage**. The Father of the nation, Tunku Abdul Rahman’s wise and instructive words below can again be the **foundational nationhood teaching focus**.

**“This country has a multi-racial population with various beliefs. Malaysia must continue as a secular state with Islam as the official religion”.**

The Tunku clearly emphasised that the **above social reality being the overarching characteristic of Malaysia, and that it should never be turned into an Islamic state**

. It is undeniable, as manifested in all multicultural societies, that all citizens are *NEEDED* to put their shoulders for the **common good**, and therefore,

**“... no single race could have obtained independence for this country and no single race by itself can rule (and economically develop) this country”**. (Wong Chun Wai, ‘Defend the Malaysia we love’, in Ed. Soo Ewe Jin, 2016. ‘Moderation’, p.181).

- The powers-that-be **NEED** to resurrect and enliven the national philosophy, the **RUKUN NEGARA**, instituted by a royal proclamation after the **tragic May 13, 1969 riots**, on the 1970 National Day. It is **fast fading away into oblivion** as observed generally. School children, and adults too mainly, appear to give it scarce attention. This *NEEDS* to be the **leaders’ utmost national priority**. Malaysia, as a multicultural nation, and granted that its viability is in its **liberal life-juice values**, the declaration’s preamble has well enunciated that the driving ambitions of the nation are,
  - **(The achievement) of a more perfect unity** amongst the whole of our society,
  - Preserving a **democratic way of life**,
  - Creating a **just society** where the prosperity of the country can be enjoyed together in a **fair and equitable** manner,
  - **Guaranteeing a liberal approach towards her rich and varied cultural traditions**, and
  - **Building (together) a progressive society** that will make use of Science and Modern Technology (Wong Chun Wai, *ibid.* p.184).
- The current government, so as to fulfill its **servant-leadership responsibilities**, exemplifying **positive transparency in governance for ALL, HAS** to end the practice of ‘hiding behind’ the vast Malay-Muslim vote bank (particularly the simple kampung Malays), as generally voiced by the ‘educated’, and the trepidatiously-concerned-for- the-future, Malaysian citizen. This is noted here as a large proportion of the nation’s poor today are still the deemed affirmative-actioned Malay society.
- Heeding the well-worded calls by Raja Nazrin and others, this government can attempt, as suggested by this writer in earlier writings, to work with the **King** and the **Rulers**, giving their full commitment to **democratic governance** as such. They *NEED* to obtain their (the royalty’s) backing in instituting the urgently *NEEDED* changes to Malaysian life. **The Federal Constitution** may need to be justly tuned towards the above in the nation’s parliament.
- The ruling government *NEEDS* to release all official documents and data on the ‘**May 13’ incident**, in order to bring **closure** once and for all and thereby enabling all Malaysians to relate to the government with **complete trust and openness**.
- In regard to the above, establish a **Truth Reconciliation Commission** on the above subject, as done by South Africa with the end of the Apartheid regime. Malaysia has had other Royal Commissions established before and this will not be the first.
- Rightly and boldly, again with the rulers behind them, all ‘**racist’ parties need to be required to re-structure and re-invent their political positions**. They *NEED* to remove all calls for **race and religion championing**.
- Being a plural society the nation can stand tall on the global stage if the nation enacts a **Harmony, Equality, and Human Rights Act**. It has been evidenced that when national institutions and the people behind them are not monitored well, the likes of the once-active Biro Tata Negara (BTN) (Established in 1974, its purpose was to inculcate patriotism for the country in all public servants. It degenerated into a centre for the advocacy of the divisive concept of ‘**Ketuanan Melayu**’), which had essentially promoted division among the multiracial participants. This could do the nation’s **plural social fabric** much harm. The nation’s Rakyat today needs **benign and uplifting governance**, devoid of inhibitive discrimination, as has been the scenario generally, for the last few decades. However, it is not just the leftovers and crumbs that the **Rakyat** wants, as reflected in the timely and concerned words of the deputy king recently.
- As promised numerous times, and being fully cognizant of the political significance of the 40 percent

of the nation's population being non-Bumiputera (this includes the native non-Muslim bumiputras in West and East Malaysia), the Malaysian Independent Chinese Secondary Schools **Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) qualification** be given their appropriate recognition, as long as it is within the ambit of the **1996 National Education Act**. It must be borne in mind that some foreign nations have given it recognition, and these Chinese school graduates, **in order to make a life for themselves**, migrate. These foreign nations benefit from these graduates' expertise, and this is because of **apparently politically motivated, ill-considered social outlooks, and thus our avoidable and unfortunate loss**.

- It has often been strongly stressed that **MODERATION** in all aspects of Malaysian life, **NEEDS to be the basis of the seen Malaysian everyday economics, politics, and religion**. This is simply because it is **evolutionary in its dynamics, rather than revolutionary and extremist**. There can be no **zero-sum game**

**NATION-BUILDING** can well be **imagined** and carried out by ALL CITIZENS by **BUILDING HUMANE BRIDGES** between one another.

- The **middle path** is the **PRACTICAL panacea** for our social 'ills' today. But, the **TASK** remains, how well and surely can the school-educated but rigidly fixated persons, who wield much influence over sections of OUR society, ***BE 'Educated' to the Malaysian Path?***
- Lewis Carroll's instructive words in his book, 'Through a Looking Glass', when Humpty Dumpty responding to Alice with regards to the persuasive power of **words in a language**, says assertively, ***"The question is, which is to be master- that's all"***.
- ***'EDUCATION' AND 'KNOWLEDGE'***, commencing with utmost haste today, from the 'lowest and to the highest' levels of our present society **NEEDS TO BECOME THE ENGINE** for **real 'education', onwards to a true Malaysian togetherness** (Zainah Anwar, Shad Saleem Faruqi 2016. pp. 131, 201).
- The **divergent school education system** is seemingly a fait accompli in this country. The national, vernacular language and Islamic schools are too embedded in socio-political considerations that restructuring them now, may bring about **unmanageable socio-economic-political consequences**.

Thus, we **NEED** to **continuously 'educate' ourselves to learn to celebrate** ALL our cultures and promote the **strengths of our diversity** (Richter, F.J., Thang D. Nguyen, 2004. p.174).

Within the ambit of the **national common curriculum**, and this **NEEDS** to be strictly monitored to ensure it is well-implemented, **Nationhood values** as based on **our history, Constitution, Rukun Negara, human rights documents and principles, our Vision statements- 'Malaysia Boleh' (Malaysia Can do it), 'Masyarakat Madhani' (Malaysian civil society)** and so on, can be commingled, that is weaved into the Malay and English language courses especially, and presented and **nurtured** with utmost urgency and consistency (Naidu, S. 2017. Ph.D. Thesis, Universiti Utara Malaysia)

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### FOOT NOTES

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