

Indians in Malaysia

Malaysian Indians (also known as Indian Malaysians) are Malaysians of Indian origin. Malaysia is home to one of the largest populations of Overseas Indians, constituting about 8% of the Malaysian population. Many are descendants from those who migrated from India during the British colonization of Malaya. There is possibility that the first wave of Indians migration towards Southeast Asia happened when the Asoka's invasion towards Kalinga and Samudragupta's expedition towards the South, then they have been present in the Malayan archipelago since the period of the influential Tamil Chola dynasty of the 11th century. Today, they form the third largest ethnic group in Malaysia after the Chinese and the Malays. The overwhelming majority of migrants from India were ethnic Tamils and from the British Madras Presidency. In 1947 they represented approximately 85 per cent of the total Indian population in Malaya and Singapore. British acquisition of Penang, Melaka, and Singapore - the Straits Settlements from 1786 to 1824 started a steady inflow of Indian labor. This consisted of traders, policemen, plantation laborers and colonial soldiers. Apart from this there was also substantial migration of Indians to work in the British colonial government, due to their general good command of the English language. The South Indian Tamils were the majority throughout the country, on the rubber estates and railways, though a significant proportion found employment on the docks in Penang and Singapore. The Malayalee community were settled predominantly in Penang, Lower Perak, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, parts of Negeri Sembilan, and Johor where they were usually in the estates or in the civil service in the earlier days. The Telugu community meanwhile were concentrated in lower Perak, northern Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Kulim and Sg Petani in Kedah and Pahang. While the business communities, the Gujarati's, Sindhis, Chettiers, and Tamil Muslims, were concentrated in the urban areas, principally Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, and Singapore. The Ceylon Tamils were also mainly an urban community dominating the public service and railways, though some were found in rural areas working as staff on the estates. In Sabah and Sarawak, the Indian population is concentrated around the major cities and towns in both states, with representations from the South Indian Tamils, Ceylon Tamils, Tamil Muslims, Punjabis, Malayalees, Sindhis and other Indian ethnic groups; taking up careers in the private and government sectors or running businesses. Indians constitute 15.5 percent of Malaysian professionals. This includes doctors (28.4%), lawyers (26.8%), dentists (21%), veterinary surgeons (28.5%), engineers (6.4%), accountants (5.8%), surveyors (3.0%) and architects (1.5%). Furthermore, Malaysian Indians make up 38% of the Malaysian medical workforce. Tamil primary schools are funded by the Federal Government and use Tamil as the medium of instruction while Malay and English are taught as compulsory subjects. The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) is the oldest and largest Indian political party in Malaysia. It is a senior member of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition. The Indian Progressive Front (IPF), another Indian-based party, is affiliated with Barisan Nasional but is not a formal

member. The People's Progressive Party (PPP) is technically a multiracial party but its membership is overwhelmingly Indian. It is a member of the Barisan Nasional. The opposition People's Justice Party (PKR) and Democratic Action Party (DAP) have a large Indian membership and have many Indian lawmakers. The Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) was formed in 2007 to address alleged racial discrimination against Indian Malaysians. It was banned after it staged a large anti-government rally in Kuala Lumpur in 2007. Hindraf's political wing is the Human Rights Party (HRP). The Malaysian Indian Muslim Congress (KIMMA) is a party that represents the interests of the Indian Muslim community. In the Indian community, which mostly consist of Tamils, Malayalees, and Telugus; Hinduism {86 percent } is the main faith, followed by Christianity {5 percent } and Islam {4 percent }. One of the biggest Hindu festivals in Malaysia is Thaipusam. Thaipusam is dedicated to the Tamil deity Murugan which occurs on the day in the Tamil month of *Thai* (January–February) when the asterism *Poosam* is on the ascendant. Kuala Lumpur, Thaipusam has become an almost national seat for *Poosam* celebrations. The venue of the Kuala Lumpur celebrations is a picturesque shrine right inside a cave that lies many feet above the ground, and can only be approached by a steep climb. This place, known as Batu Caves, is about eight miles from the city, and a chariot procession carrying the image of the deity to and from the place adds to the color and gaiety of the festival. Deepavali, popularly known as the 'Festival of Lights', is another major Hindu festival which is celebrated by all Hindu communities. Due to the systematic marginalization of the community by the primarily Malay administration, a majority is poor and share less than 1.5% of Malaysia's wealth. Despite their obvious need, they are not eligible for any of Malaysia's lavish affirmative-action programs, which are reserved for Malays and select indigenous people. Discrimination against them in employments and education by the majority Malays who want only their race to fill up all benefit programs, public university positions and jobs have deprived any potential socio-economic progress of Indians. On 25 November 2007 Hindraf initiated a move to present a memorandum to the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur highlighting on the issues faced by the community, however, the peaceful demonstration turned ugly due high-handed act by the Malaysian Police. The demonstration also let to the arrest of the Hindraf members under Internal Security Act which drew much criticism of various sections of civil societies. Recently, the Malaysian government has pledged to change this by increasing assistance to needy Malaysians regardless of race, the implementations of which have yet to be seen.