

Exogamous Marriages Between Migrant Indians with Local Dayaks and the Identity of Their Offsprings

Caesar Dealwis*

Abstract

Exogamous marriages are a common phenomenon in Malaysia which has a population of 28.6 million people, speaking 140 languages. The generally held belief is that minority groups tend to adopt the dominant group's cultures. However, although it is possible that the minority group would want to adopt certain cultural traits this does not mean that they want to be completely integrated with the dominant group. The main aim of this study is to establish whether the immigrant Indians who have married local Dayaks in the state of Sarawak still maintain their cultural values or have they adopted native cultural values and the secondary aim is to establish the identity of their offsprings with regards to the extent of such assimilation and enculturation. The methodology consisted of observation and questionnaires and oral interviews conducted with 120 respondents who are Indians immigrants and their offsprings with local Dayaks. The study investigated the use of a number of markers of identity such as language used with family members; food habitually consumed at home; festivals celebrated; marriage preference of offsprings; and social identity of offsprings. Although the findings indicated that the offsprings of the Indian immigrants who have married local Dayaks have shifted to the larger Dayak community for every marker of identity investigated, there are some traces of Indian identity which they are still maintaining to show their Indianness.

Keywords: Exogamous marriages, immigrant, Indian-Dayak, assimilation

1. Introduction

Malaysians Indian constitutes the largest Indian community to be found in any

*Dr Caesar De Alwis works at UiTM Samarahan in Sarawak Malaysia. His research interest is in language choice and identity of minority groups.

country in the world outside the Indian sub-continent itself (Tate, 2008). In understanding the history of the Malaysian Indians, it will provide some insight into the culture, the problems and challenges faced by the various sub-ethnic groups, within the Malaysian Indian community.

The overwhelming majority of migrants from India were ethnic Tamil from the British Presidency of Madras. In 1947 they represented approximately 85 per cent of the total Indian population in Malaya and Singapore. Other South Indians, mainly Telegus, Kannadigas and Malayalees formed a further 14 per cent in 1947, and the remainder of the Indian community was accounted for by North Indians, principally Punjabis, Bengalis, Gujaratis, and Sindhis. The Indian migrants were brought into Malaya either as “labour” or “non-labour”. The “labour” migrants were mainly from South India, they were predominantly estate workers, the majority being employed on rubber estates, though a significant minority worked in Government public works departments. There were also many Tamil merchants and businessmen in Malaysia. The “non-labour” migrants were known as the “literate” Indians and came from Ceylon, South India and North India (Sikhs) to mainly man the administrative, technical, defence and security services (Appudurai & Dass, 2008).

In Colonial Malaya the Indians were the economic slaves of the British, be it in the plantations or the administrative urban centers. This position was somewhat maintained in post-Independence Malaya and Malaysia. Living in the rural isolated plantations the Indians (rubber tapers) were mainly isolated and segregated from the other communities. This was compounded by the colonial divide and rule policy. However, today with the fragmentation of the rubber estates and the rural urban shift it is hypothesized that there will be greater mobility across the ethnic groups. Whilst there was some upward mobility to professional and middle-class ranks, this was largely confined to sub-ethnic Indian groups that had the initial advantage of English education and who placed a high premium on education.

The spoken tongue of the great majority of Malaysian Indians is Tamil; the legacy from the earlier stages of the Indian connection with Southeast Asia is predominantly South Indian, and more specifically Tamil. The popular cults of Hinduism practiced in Malaysia are the same as those followed in Tamil Nadu, while social values and the role of the family follow traditional Tamil patterns. The cultural heritage is still very much alive in contemporary Indian Malaysian society. It gives the Malaysian Indian his identity, helps shape his beliefs and values, and conditions his attitudes (Tate 2008, p14). The awareness of Tamil culture and Tamil language brought the Tamils of different economic classes and castes together (Manickan, 2009). In Malaysia, state policies exist to allow the expression of Indianness at the national level, as such the Indians communities have various

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organizations to cater to the social needs of their members i.e. education, place of worship and mass media (Mani, 2008).

However, the second generation Indians having gone through the national schooling process have become Malaysian citizens, which meant for most of them, distancing themselves from the Indian sub-continent from which their fore-fathers arrived (Mani, 2008). The Tamil language publicly held religious festivals, mass media, food and customs have all assumed newer interpretation to suit the environment of post-independent Malaysia. The second and third generation Indian community function as communities for religious and kinship purposes, their economic and social integration into the wider national network of their respective societies i.e. the Malay society of Malaysia is gradual (Mani, 2008). The promotion of the Tamil language in education and mass media and government, led to the retention of cultural identity and cultural ballast among the Malaysian Indians thus, expressing ethnic identity of Malaysian Indians (Mani, 2008).

The focus of this study is on the Sarawak Indian community which has a unique structure due to their separate origins and subsequent isolation from the Indians in Peninsular Malaysia. The Indians in Sarawak are the seventh largest community with a population of 3,851. Today, there are 2,414 Tamils residing in Sarawak. Out of this number 1,315 are male and 1,099 are female. The Tamils form the largest Indian linguistic groups, the others being the Malayalee (227), Sikh/Punjabi (551), Telegu (33), Ceylonese Tamils (33), Singhalese (15), Bangladeshis (18), Pakistanis (171) [Source: Department of Statistics, Sarawak. 2009].

2. Background to the setting

Sarawak is the largest of the 14 Malaysian states located on the island of Borneo and is separated from Peninsular Malaysia by the South China Sea. Sarawak's cultural and racial compositions are more diverse than that in Peninsular Malaysia. Exogamous marriages are a common phenomenon in Sarawak which has 33 different ethnic groups. With a population of 2,071,506, the Iban forms the majority with a population of 603,735, Chinese 537,230, Malays 462,270, Bidayuh 180,753, Melanau 112,984 and other indigenous 117,696. Sarawak Indians belongs to the minority group with a population of 3,851 people (Department of Statistics Sarawak). The earliest contact of the Indians with Sarawak was in the 12th century through trade (Chang, 2002). The Indians in Sarawak, are the fourth generation of Indian immigrants who came in the 1900s to work as labourers for the Public Works Department and in the tea and coffee plantations for the *White Rajah* administration (1841-1946) and later the colonial administration (1946-1963). An early Indian settlement was located at *Gunung Serapi* (Mount Serapi) in Matang. Apart from

the state capital Kuching, Indians are also found in smaller numbers in the urban areas of Miri and Sibü.

Due to their small numbers, the early Indian immigrants married outside their own linguistic group. Some early Indians married Dayaks and local Malays (David and Dealwis, 2006). As a result of such marriages the language used in the home domain also varied from the original heritage language of one of the partners. An interview with an elderly Malayalee, Sarojini Narayanan in June, 2008 revealed that Malayalees in Kuching speak Tamil at home due to marriage with Tamils while others also speak Dayak and Malay because they have married Dayak women.

Dayaks consists of Ibans and Bidayuh who are the largest groups in Sarawak. The Dayak are among the original inhabitants of Sarawak and have been described by foreign and local writers as '*shy and unwelcoming to strangers*' (Low [1980],1990; Beccari [1904],1986;Brooke [1866];1990; Minos 2000). The early contacts with outsiders were with the warring Ibans who captured them and destroyed many of their villages (Chang, 2002). Before Sarawak became part of Malaysia on 16 September 1963, the Iban language was used in formal domains (Ariffin and Teoh, 1992). Iban and Bidayuh were also taught in primary school in the Iban and Bidayuh villages during the colonial period. (Dealwis, 2008). The introduction of the Malay language to these village schools in 1967 was considered as a 'strange subject' and many did not bother to learn it (DBNA 2005).

Today, the Dayaks are basically rural people and most of them are found in the interior of Sarawak. According to Minos (2000) beginning from the 1980s the Ibans and Bidayuhs began migrating to the major towns and the city of Kuching in order to look for better jobs, higher education and a modern lifestyle. The Indian men in Kuching tend to marry Dayak women because of the smaller Indian population and members of the community are mostly related. The Dayaks are generally non-Muslims, so the Indian men who marry them do not have to change their religion. The Indian men marrying Dayak women either stay in the city of Kuching or in their wife's village. As exogamous marriages are a common phenomenon in Sarawak, both communities do not object to such unions. Their children are generally well accepted by both the Indian and Dayak communities.

There is no official statistics of the actual number of local Indians marrying Dayaks. Unlike the offspring of Chinese and Kadazan parentage in Sabah who are officially recognised as Sino-Kadazan to indicate their mixed parentage, the offspring of an Indian father and a Dayak mother has to follow the father and is classified as an Indian. According to Boulanger, C. (2000: 59), while it is conventional in Peninsular Malaysia, in keeping with colonial convention for a child, to take the father's ethnic identity this is not always an acceptable option to the child born in Sarawak today. This is especially sensitive

when the child in question is the product of a marriage that involves a *Bumiputera* (native) and a *non-Bumiputera* (non-native). The Indian-Dayak children are classified as Indians but reported being 'neither here nor there'. This leads to the questions as to why such feelings exist and whether classifying them as Indians is fair.

3. Aim of the study

Today 50 years or so after independence has the Indian immigrant community assimilated with the host community? Whether a community has assimilated or not in to the larger dominant culture is largely contested because of the many different forms or types of assimilation. Assimilation can be cultural, structural, marital etc.

The Peninsular Malaysian Indians groups have integrated in the way they have used Malay language for inter-ethnic communication, and adapted some of the Malay food and customs. Otherwise, except in economic participation, most Peninsular Malaysian Indians communities have developed their own network with newspapers, kinship ties, religious groups and even political loyalties thus, retaining their cultural identity and ballast (Mani, 2008). The Tamil Indians in Sarawak were isolated from the Indians in Peninsular Malaysia, as such our major objective is to determine if they have managed to retain the cultural identity or have they integrated with the host community?

To date, no comprehensive study has been conducted on the Indians and if they have assimilated in Sarawak. Consequently, this study has been conceptualized to examine the issue of exogamous marriages between immigrant Indians with local Dayaks and the identity of their offsprings. For Fishman (1989: 216) ethnicity is concerned with origins and cultural behaviour. Ethnicity pertains to "peopleness," that is actions, views, or attributions pertaining to and belonging to a people. A group's actions and views are manifested through a number of symbols. These include food; clothes, religion, customs, culture, and language (see also David and Naji, 2003: 95).

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) To establish whether the immigrant Indians who have married local Dayaks still maintain their cultural values or have they adopted native cultural values
- 2) To establish the identity of their offsprings with regards to the extent of such assimilation and enculturation.

4. Theoretical Framework

4-1. The Differences between Segregation, Accommodation, Enculturation and Assimilation

For Fishman (1989: 216), ethnicity is concerned with origins and cultural behaviour. Ethnicity pertains to “peopleness”, that is actions, views or attributions pertaining to and belonging to a people. A group’s actions and views are manifested through a number of symbols. These include food, clothes, religion, customs, culture and language (Naji & David 2003: 95).

The generally held belief is that minority groups tend to adopt the dominant group’s cultures. However, although it is possible that the minority group would want to adopt certain cultural traits this does not mean that they want to be completely integrated with the dominant group. Consequently, there are levels of adaption and integration as seen in Figure 1. Figure 1 illustrates the continuum model of the levels of integration (Nazaruddin et. al., 2003: p164). All five level of integration below portray how minority groups become a part of the main stream of society.

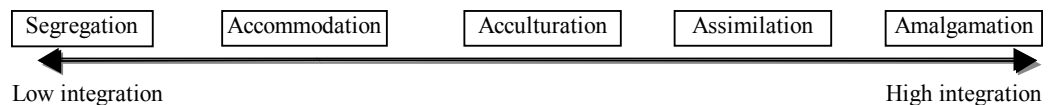


Figure 1. A continuum model of the adaptation of foreign cultural identity markers

There are levels of social integration vis a vis. cultural accommodation, acculturation, assimilation and amalgamation which took place during British colonial ruling in Malaya as seen in the rise of the Tamil Muslim community in Penang (Halimah and Zainab, 2004).

4-2. Levels of Integration Segregation

On the far-most left, segregation entails the social isolation of a group from another, and at the other extreme end, is the cultural amalgamation of a group’s (vis. minority group) to the dominant group.

Macionis (2001: 364) explains segregation as “the physical and social separation of categories of people.” Social identities for this sort of level of integration is high, for groups would categorise identities based from their ethnocentric perspectives. In Malaya during the British rule segregation was practised by the British so as to foster their ‘divide-and-rule’ policy and in order to maintain social order.

4-3. Accommodation

Accommodation on the other hand is “a process where ethnic groups are aware of each other’s norms and values but they continue to safeguard their own living culture,” (Nazaruddin, et al., 2003: p164) while living together in harmony. Cultural elements of the majority group are borrowed and accepted, but there is little change to the original cultural value.

The term *integration* or *retention* employed in Canadian policy towards minorities is intended to indicate that the state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide a framework within which minorities can, if they wish to do so, retain their own language, religion and culture and relate to their culture of origin. Integration necessarily implies, however, that the majority population is willing to accept and understand the desire for retention, so that people can live together as a community rather than in parallel. Knoll describing Canada in the mid-1980s notes the harmonious cohabitation between different minorities and the dialogues between divergent cultures. In Canada, the state largely refrained from providing a framework for the resolution of individual problems, leaving the initiative to private institutions of each ethnic group (churches, associations and businesses), which allowed for solutions appropriate in a social democracy

4-4. Enculturation

In contrast, acculturation (or enculturation) is the change in the direction of the culture of another ethnic group. This process involves members of one ethnic group borrowing cultural elements from those of another ethnic group. Such cultural borrowings may be mutual. When cultural elements of the other ethnic group are incorporated into one’s own culture and are passed on to the next generation, acculturation becomes a significant phenomenon (Tan, 1988: p239). Acculturation does not necessarily involve a loss of ethnic identity (Teo, 2003: p6) but as it shows the process towards integration it is at times referred to as integration.

Acculturation is gradual rather than abrupt and is the process of systematic cultural change of a particular society carried out by a dominant society (Winthrop 1991: p82-83). Such changes come about due to conditions of direct contact between individuals of each society. Individuals of the minority culture learn the language, habits, and values of dominant culture by the cultural process of acculturation. The changes may be reciprocal or non-reciprocal. If the latter, then the process is asymmetrical and the result is the partial absorption of one culture into the other.

The process by which people from minority cultures enter social positions and acquire political, economic and educational standards of the dominant culture, is called assimilation. In this way through the social process of assimilation, they become

integrated within the dominant culture. According to Skinner (1957) the large minority Chinese community of Thailand has been assimilated and have acquired a dominant position in their country of residence. Skinner defines Chinese assimilation in Thailand occurring

“...when the immigrant’s descendent identifies himself in almost all social situations as a Thai, speaks the Thai language habitually and with native fluency, and interacts by choice with Thai more often than with Chinese. “

(Skinner 1973a: p383)

4-5. Assimilation

Assimilation is generally placed in the same category as acculturation when they are clearly not the same. Acculturation refers to the process “that is sometimes known as cultural assimilation” and it happens when, “people from a minority group accept the norms, values and patterns of behaviour (culture) of the majority group (Hj. Mohd Jali, et al. 2003: 165).” The generally held belief is that minority groups tend to adopt the dominant group’s cultures. However, although it is possible that the minority group would want to adopt certain cultural traits this does not mean that they want to be completely integrated with the dominant group. In contrast, assimilation is “the process by which minorities gradually adopts patterns of the dominant culture” (Macionis, 2001: 363-364). It involves the changing modes of dress, attitudes and values, religion, language and social networks and even identity. Ban (1979: 252) elaborates “assimilation is a process whereby the descendants of the immigrants adopt the behavioral pattern, identity, cultural tradition and a way of life of the host society”. In assimilation an outsider, immigrant, or subordinate group becomes indistinguishably integrated into the dominant host society. It implies that “the subordinate group actually comes to accept and internalise the values and culture of the dominant group” (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology).

Assimilation is facilitated when the two communities share a common religion. David (2003) discussing the offspring of Pakistani men with Kelantanese women shows that assimilation is complete as they speak the local Kelantanese dialect and are completely integrated with the larger Kelantanese community. In addition to a common religion, being a minute minority the Pakistani men adapted and assimilated with the local culture. In the same way the small Chinese community in Kelantan known as “Kampung Cina” or Peranakan Chinese have assimilated in terms of language, clothes, names and even dietary habits (Teo, 2003). Despite such a high degree of assimilation they “will always identify themselves as Chinese” (Teo, 2003; p67). Tan discussing the Babas states that their identity is one of both being indigenous and being Chinese at the same time

Exogamous Marriages Between Migrant Indians with Local Dayaks and the Identity of Their Offsprings (Tan 1993: p72). He explains that their women wear Malay-style dress and their food being a unique combination of Chinese and indigenous cuisine.

4-6. Amalgamation

Amalgamation is a “process that happens when culture or race mixes to form types of new culture and race”, and it usually takes place through inter-marriage between ethnic groups or races (Nazarudding et al., 2003: p165).

In places with small Chinese communities with little economic power and limited Chinese marriage partners, accommodation or even assimilation may be a necessity whereas in countries with large and economically powerful Chinese communities and easy access to Chinese marriage partners, diasporic Chinese tend to maintain more strongly their Chinese identity. Ranging between the two extremes one also finds what Gosling (1983: p2) calls “intermediate” Chinese such as the Sino-Thai or the Baba (Malay born Chinese). What characterizes the intermediate Chinese is their practice of what has been described as “situational ethnicities.” By mixing elements of Chinese and indigenous cultures, the intermediate Chinese create different intermediate identities according to the demands of the moment and the types of audience available, which dictate whether they should act on their “backstage” or “front stage” identity.

In Tan Chee-Beng (1988: 67) study of the Baba in Melaka, he shows that the Baba expression of the various levels of their identity “depends on whether they interact with fellow Baba, with non-Baba Chinese, with Malays or with individuals of other ethnic groups”. In accordance with the needs of the situation, a Baba can emphasize or de-emphasize the Chinese, Baba, and Malay cultural traits he/she carries within him/her in order to show solidarity or not with a certain group. In the same way describing the Chinese in Thailand Tong and Chan (2003) differentiated between structural and cultural assimilation and identities which alternate with situations and with public or private settings.

In discussing the exogamous marriages between immigrant Indians with local Dayaks and the identity of their offsprings, there is a need first to clarify what we mean by the term *identity*. Identity refers to an individual's or group's sense of who they are as defined by them and /or others (Swann, et al, 2006: 140). *Acts of identity* is a term originally used by Robert Le page and Andree Tabouret -Keller (1985) to explain an individual speaker's language use. They explain that speakers draw on features of a language or languages to express aspects of their identity.

5. Methodology

As no study has been made of the exogamous marriages between immigrant Indians with local Dayaks and the identity of their offsprings, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether they follow Bidayuh or Indian cultural norms and if so the extent of such acculturation.. A total of 45 Indians who have married local Dayaks became respondents in this study. They were identified through social networking and lived in Kuching, Sibü and Miri which are the main towns in Sarawak. All of them came to Sarawak either from India or Peninsular Malaysia to work in various sectors and have married local Dayaks. As for their offsprings a total of 75 respondents between 15–30 years old were involved in this study.

The methodology consists of observation and questionnaires and oral interviews conducted with 120 respondents in their homes in Kuching, Sibü and Miri Divisions. It was easy for the researcher to gain entry into these homes and obtain authentic information as an insider because he is an Indian married to a Bidayuh. Most of the respondents are either his relatives or friends and such close networking has made the respondents more open when giving their responses during interviews.

The 7 months study began with the researcher investigating his relatives and friends first. Ten hours of language spoken by the respondents with family members were also recorded to gauge the dominant language use at home. Later, the researcher also enlisted the help of Indians who have married Dayaks, who knew other Indians who have married Dayaks in Kuching, Sibü and Miri Divisions. This technique of enlisting the help of a member of the group under investigation was also used by Gardner–Chloros (1991) in her study of language use in Strasbourg and David (1996) in her study of Sindhis in Malaysia. This strategy provides openings into many more Indian–Bidayuh homes, especially in the Padawan and Serian districts.

The research investigated the use of a number of markers of identity. These included the following

- a. Language used with family members
- b. Food habitually consumed at home
- c. Festivals celebrated
- d. Marriage preference of offsprings
- e. Social identity of offsprings

6. Findings

a) *Language first learnt*

All the 45 Tamil immigrants learnt Tamil language as their first language. As for their offsprings, 25 offsprings learnt English as their first language and 30 learnt Dayak language (either Iban, Bidayuh or Orang Ulu languages) as their first language, and 20 learnt Malay as their first language. None of the offsprings learnt Tamil language as their first language (see Table 1).

Table 1. Language first learnt

Group	Language	No. of respondents
Immigrant	Standalone Tamil	45
Offsprings	More English less Malay and Dayak	25
	More Malay less English and Dayak	20
	More Dayak less English and Malay	30

When communicating with their family members, 20 of the 45 immigrant respondents said that they spoke more English with less Malay and Dayak at home, 10 spoke more Dayak with less Malay and English with family members, and 15 immigrant respondents said they spoke more Malay with less Dayak and English with family members at home.

On the other hand, 30 of their offsprings said that they spoke more Malay with less English and Dayak with their parents and siblings; 25 respondents said they spoke more English with less Malay and Dayak with their parents and siblings; and 20 respondents said they spoke more Dayak with less Malay and English with their parents and siblings at home (see Table 2).

Table 2. Language used at home

Group	Language used	No. of respondents
Immigrants	More English less English and Dayak	20
	More Dayak with less English and Malay	10
	More Malay with less English and Dayak	15
Offsprings	More Malay with less English and Dayak	30
	More English with less Malay and Dayak	25
	More Dayak with less Malay and English	20

A mixed pattern of English, Malay and Dayak seemed to be the dominant pattern of language used in the home and not Tamil which was the heritage language of the immigrant. According to David (2003: 50) there is generally a tendency for children to acquire the language of their mothers. It is also often the place of residence that determines which of the two groups that children of mixed parentages identify with more strongly. In alliances with Thai men and Malay women in Kelantan the children speak little Thai (Golomb 1978: 115) and instead use Malay – the language of their mothers. In marriages between Pakistani men and Malay women in Machang, Kelantan, their offspring use the majority host language and the language of their mothers, i.e. the Kelantanese dialect of Malay (David, 2003: 51). However, offspring of urban Kelabit men and Chinese women in Miri, Sarawak, used more English at home (Martin and Yen, 1992: 157). In this study the offspring of Indian Dayak parentage staying in the rural areas use more Bidayuh compared to those from the urban areas who use more English with family members (see Example 1).

Example 1. Language used at home

<p>a) <u>More Dayak less Malay and English Respondent (R22) with Father (F)</u> F: Obuo newspaper <i>jual</i> eh tia. <i>(He sold all the newspapers.)</i></p> <p>R22: <i>Daripada</i> nyak nyikon tuui tuui, bitugung tugung nog eh bikulat. Doik ada faedahnya. Paguh yoh jual newspaper eh. Brisi geh topat noh tia. <i>(It's better from seeing it pile up until it collects fungus. There's no purpose for that. It's better to sell the newspaper. It also makes the place clean).</i></p>
<p>b) <u>More English less Dayak and Malay: Respondent (R12) with Mother (M)</u> R12: Better to do shopping at Boulevard. Parking pun <i>senang</i>. Samak drive lagi best. <i>(It's better to go at Boulevard. It's also easier to get parking there. It's best for father to drive.)</i></p> <p>M: Muuh tih masih no confidence in driving. <i>Sampai bila mahu</i> ask samak drive muuh around? <i>(You still do not have confidence to drive. How long do you expect your father to drive you around?)</i></p>
<p>c) <u>More Malay less Dayak and English : Respondent (R16) with sibling (S)</u> R16: Dayung gila makan nasi campur dengan mee. That's really too much. <i>(Crazy woman eating rice mixed with noodles...)</i></p> <p>S: <i>Apa kata kau ia?</i> That's creative bakok. <i>Kamek masaknya dua dua nya sekali</i>. Muuh jealous. <i>(What are you saying? stupid. I cook both together. You're...)</i></p>

Key: Times New Roman Bold: Dayak ; Times New Roman Italic underline : Malay

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Malay, Dayak and English are often used intermittently as code-switches in daily communication because these languages are taught in school and have influenced the sociolinguistic norms of the offsprings at home. In Malaysia, Malay is the medium of instruction in schools and is used in formal domains whereas English is taught as a second language and is used among the educated in informal domains (McLellan, 1992: 195). The immigrants could have leaned Malay at their workplace as it is the official language used.

b) Food habitually consumed at home

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of food they ate at home. Table 3 below shows that all the immigrant respondents frequently ate more Indian less Western, Dayak and Malay as compared to their offsprings at home who have preferences for Malay, Dayak, Western as well as Indian food see Table 3).

Table 3. Food habitually consumed at home

Group	Type of food	No. of respondents
Immigrants	More Indian less Western, Dayak and Malay	45
Offsprings	More Malay with less Western, Dayak and Indian	12
	More Western with less Malay, Dayak and Indian	8
	More Dayak with less Malay, Western and Indian	35
	More Indian with less Western, Malay and Dayak	20

The food preference of the offsprings was due to the fact that their local parents were more familiar with the varieties of Dayak and Malay dishes rather than Indian and Western food. However, 20 of the offspring respondents said that they preferred more Indian food to other types of food. The majority or 35 of the offspring respondents however said that they preferred more Dayak food to other types of food. A total of 12 offspring respondents said that they preferred more Malay food to other types of food and only 8 offspring respondents said that they preferred more Western food to other types of food. Based on the researcher's observation, among the common Dayak dishes cooked at home were *midin*, *paku*, (ferns) *kasam ikan*, *kasam babi*, (fermented pork and fish) *pansuh* (chicken cooked in bamboo), and *rebung* (bamboo). The dishes were mostly sweet, sour and salty and cooked with lemon grass. The common spicy Indian food were curries which included chicken, mutton and fish.

There are still not many food operators selling Indian food in Sarawak as compared to Peninsular Malaysia. It was only in the 1980s that Indian restaurants started to operate business in the city of Kuching. According to Mohd Shafiee, an Indian-Muslim food operator, the main reason he set up a food business was to cater to the increasing number

of Peninsular Malaysian Malays and Indians who began coming to work and study in Sarawak since the 1980s. Most of the food stalls in Sarawak are operated by Chinese. Therefore it is not surprising that Indian–Bidayuh tend to gravitate towards Chinese food when not having a meal at home.

- a) *I'm already used to Indian curry because I studied in West Malaysia for my degree. Before going there, I seldom ate spicy food. At home we have Indian and Bidayuh dishes. Indian food means curry. For Bidayuh food there are more varieties.***R7**
- b) *It's always hot and spicy and we did not eat much curries when we were small. Nowadays, it's fine for me but I still prefer Bidayuh dishes* **R9**
- c) *We eat more Dayak food at home. My mother cooks curry with lemon grass, Dayak style. My Dad must have curry. So, we have curry almost everyday.* **R11**
- d) *I like to eat meat stews I also eat curry but less. When I eat outside, I eat Chinese food.***R16**
- e) *I like sour and salty food and there are many Bidayuh dishes which are salty and sour. I love kasam (fermented food). Indian food is alright too but not as delicious as kasam* **R21.**

c. Celebrating festivals

The 120 respondents were also asked to determine the importance of celebrating Indian and Dayak festivals regularly (see Table 4). Since 20 of the immigrant respondents were Christians, they attached special importance to celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. The remaining 25 respondents were Hindus and they celebrated Deepavali and Thaipusam annually.

On the other hand, there was a general agreement among the offspring respondents with regard to the importance of celebrating Gawai Dayak on 1st of June annually. All the 75 respondents said that they celebrated Gawai Dayak to show their Dayak identity. Gawai Dayak which is celebrated on the 1st June every year is a harvest festival for the Dayak community in Sarawak. There are two days of public holidays every year and when collecting the data for this study, the researcher observed that there were more merriment compared to celebrations such as Christmas or Deepavali. All the 45 immigrant respondents joined in the celebration with their family members irrespective of whether they were Hindus or Christians by having *open house* and visiting their relatives. They served their guests with 'tuak' (rice wine), *lemang* (glutinous rice cooked in bamboo) and *kuih jala* (fried cracker) *pansuh*, pork and chicken curry. A total of 65 offspring respondents who were Christians also celebrated Christmas and Easter while the remaining 10 who were Hindus would celebrate Deepavali and Thaipusam (see Table 4).

Table 4. Festivals celebrated by Indian-Bidayuh

Group	Type of festival	No. of respondents
Immigrants	Deepavali and Thaipusam (Hindu)	25
	Christmas and Easter (Christian)	20
Offsprings	Gawai Dayak (Harvest Festival : non-religious)	75
	Christmas and Easter (religious)	65
	Deepavali and Thaipusam (religious)	10

d. Marriage partners

Table 5 displays the data concerning the ‘marriage partner’ selected by the 75 offspring respondents. A total of 40 of the offspring respondents said they preferred Dayak marriage partners to other races; 25 of the respondents said they did not mind marrying either Dayak Indian or other Christians. The rest or 10 of the offspring respondents believed that they should only marry Indians who are Hindus (see Table 5).

Table 5. Offspring choice of marriage partners

Marriage partner	No. of respondents
Dayak	40
Indian Hindus	10
Dayak/Indian/ Christian	25

During the interview, more specific information emerged. Some of the comments are as follows:

“I prefer to marry some one who is also mixed Dayak -Indian like me. We can understand each other better. We know what the sensitivities each other’s culture are.”

R6

*“I’m mix, I don’t mind marrying either Dayak or Indian. Samelah.”***R13**

“I married a Dayak because I’m staying with the Dayak. I don’t see Indians around. It’s natural that I should marry someone whom I mixed with” **R15**

“Our parents are not choosy so we are not choosy too. All my brothers and sisters married other non Dayak Christians such as Chinese. I might just follow them.” **R22**

“Many people said that Indian mixed with Dayak children are beautiful so I think I’ll choose a beautiful girl. Indian or Dayak as long as beautiful. Never mind the race.” **R24**

*“It’s easier to marry a Dayak and to communicate with our in-laws. I can’t speak Tamil and marrying into a Tamil speaking family will create a communication barrier.”***R25**

e. Social identity

In the social identity theory and identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can perceive itself as an object and categorise itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. This process is called self-categorization in social identity (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell, 1987) and is called identification (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Through the process of self-categorization or identification, an identity is formed. Self-categorization is equally relevant to the formation of one's identity (Stryker, 1980).

This study was also concerned with the social identity of the Indian- Dayak offsprings.. All the 75 respondents described themselves as Indian-Dayak. However, they have been categorised as Indians on their national identification cards. The Indian – Dayak have to juggle with these dual identities when mixing with either Indian or Dayak as both recognise them as members of their respective communities. Some of the comments given are:

'When I mix with Indian, they make me feel like an Indian. Sometimes they talk Tamil and they think that I can understand. The Dayaks make me feel that I am a Dayak. They always talk Dayak to me and I also talk Dayak with them because I can understand them' **R16**

'Sometimes when I follow my mother marketing, the Indian ladies selling curry paste in the market always talk Tamil to me but I answer in Malay. They know my father is an Indian. They said that I should learn to speak Tamil because I'm an Indian. When I follow my mother buying jungle produce from the Dayak ladies in Bau bazaar, they speak Dayak to me because my mother speaks Dayak. So when I go marketing with my mother I smile at the Indian and Dayak ladies selling there in order not to be labelled as a proud Indian or Dayak.' **R25**

'My Dayak friends whom I play football with in my neighbourhood make me join the Bidayuh team. They say I should speak Dayak, my mother is Dayak so I'm a Dayak. My Indian colleagues always ask me to join him to eat Indian food for lunch. I just go along with them because I don't want to be left out.' **R7**

'I studied in SMK Lake. When I was in school my Indian classmate from Peninsular Malaysia who joined us in Form 4 was quite close with me. She was lonely being the only Indian in the school so I did not mind keeping her company. People see us as Indians. However, my best friend was a Bidayuh.' **R9**

All the 75 offspring respondents considered themselves as Indian when filling in official forms because the Malaysian law states that the child must follow the father.

However, since either Dayak, Malay or English was their dominant home language and they socialized more with Dayaks rather than with Indians due to the small number of Indians in Sarawak, they felt more Dayak and less Indian. All the 75 offspring respondents said that since all of them could speak Dayak but not Tamil and practiced Dayak cultural norms in their daily lives, their Dayak heritage should be given due recognition. They should be recognised as Indian–Dayak and not just Indian or Dayak. A respondent sums it:

I'm comfortable with Indians and Dayaks. I have more Dayak friends than Indian friends. That's natural because there are not many Indians in Sarawak as compared to Dayaks. Fine that I have to follow my father's race since it is the law. Inside me I feel that I am more Dayak than Indian. I have dual identities, if you like to call it. 'R22

7. Discussion

The generally held belief among the Indian immigrants and their offsprings with local Dayaks was that they have to adopt the dominant group's cultures and in this case it is the Dayak culture. However, although it is possible that the immigrant Indian who married local Dayaks would want to adopt certain Dayak cultural traits it did not mean that they wanted to be completely integrated with the Dayak community. Consequently, there are different levels of adaptation among the Indian immigrants and their offsprings and this integration were prevalent in language used at home, food consumed and celebration of festivals.. There also existed cultural amalgamation of the Indian immigrants (vis. minority group) to the dominant group Dayak group..

The accommodation that was observed here was a process where some of the Indian immigrants were aware of Dayak norms and values but they continued to safeguard their own living culture such as practicing their Hindu religion and celebrating Deepavali and Thaipusam. The Dayak cultural elements however were adopted and accepted by their offsprings and there was change to the original Indian cultural value.

Acculturation (or enculturation) as observed was the change in the direction of the culture of immigrant Indians and especially their offsprings in the new home country... This process involved the offsprings borrowing Dayak cultural elements despite the fact that they identify themselves as Indians by race. Such cultural borrowings were mutual because in their homes both Dayak and Indian food were consumed and the festivals of both groups were also celebrated.. When cultural elements of the Dayak spouses were incorporated into the Indian immigrants' culture, and were passed on to the next generation, acculturation became more significant. Acculturation did not see the loss of ethnic identity as they considered themselves as Indian–Dayak children. but as it showed

the process towards integration of the two ethnic groups..

Acculturation as observed in the homes of the Indian immigrant who have married local Dayaks was gradual and the process of cultural change was more obvious among their offsprings.

Such changes come about due to conditions of direct contact between their parents who were of different races living in a multilingual society. The offsprings learn the language, habits, and values of dominant Dayak culture by the cultural process of acculturation. In this case the changes were non-reciprocal so the process was asymmetrical and the result was the partial absorption of one culture into the other. For the Dayak spouses but reciprocal for the immigrant Indians and their offsprings.

The process by which immigrant Indians and their offsprings with local Dayaks entered into the process of integration with the dominant Dayak culture, is called assimilation. In this way through the social process of assimilation, they become integrated within the dominant culture.

This study showed that the large minority of the Indian immigrants in Sarawak who have married local Dayaks and their offsprings have been assimilated and have acquired a dominant position in their country of residence.

The gradual national unity process (creation of a Malaysian nation) implemented by the Malaysian government leads to the gradual acculturation of various cultures. This can be seen in the homes of people who have engaged in exogamous marriages.

Malays in Malaysia and indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak are given *Bumiputera* (son of the soil) status and they enjoy various socio economic advantages made available by the affirmative action policy of the government to eradicate poverty under the New Economic Policy started since 1970. The *Bumiputera* and *non-Bumiputera* categorization further divides the Malays and Dayaks from the immigrant races such as the Indians (Borneo Post, 20th August, 2008).

To qualify for *Bumiputera* status in Sarawak, a person must be Malay or a Dayak (i.e. Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau and Orang Ulu).

The eligibility to apply is as follows:-

- (1) A non-native is eligible to apply to be identified with any particular native community and be subject to the personal law of any community if he/she
 - (a) is a Malaysian citizen and is permanently residing in Sarawak and
 - (b) satisfies the requirement stipulated either in paragraph (2) or (3)
- (2) A non-native who wishes to be identified with the Malay community and to the personal law of such community must satisfy the following requirements:
 - (a) he or she profess the religion of Islam; and

- (b) he or she habitually speaks the Malay language and observes or conforms to Malay customs and cultures; and
 - (i) his or her mother is a native of Sarawak of the Malay community; or
 - (ii) he or she is lawfully married, for not less than 5 years to a native of Sarawak of the Malay community or
 - (iii) he or she has been validly adopted by a native of Sarawak of the Malay community either under such native customary law or under the Adoption Ordinance { Cap.91 (1958) Ed.} of Sarawak.
- (3) A non-native who wishes to apply with any other native community must fulfill the following requirement:
 - (a) he or she is proficient in the language or dialect of the particular native community
 - (b) he or she practices or conforms to the customs and cultures of the native community
 - (c) his or her mother is a native of Sarawak
 - (d) he or she is lawfully married for a period of not less than 5 years to a native of Sarawak.

Under this law Indian –Dayak children should automatically be classified as Bumiputras, but the fact that they have to list their father’s ethnicity means they are automatically classified as Indians. This disqualifies them from bumiputera status. Currently there is no hybrid classification such as Indian- Bidayuh which would reflect mixed parentage. However, in neighbouring Sabah Sino-Kadazans is an ethnic classification permitted and Sino-Kadazans are recognized as bumiputera.

The Dayaks are *Bumiputera* and a ‘Christian race’ (Minos, 2000: 145). However, an Indian man who marries a Dayak woman does not have to become a Dayak or a Christian. Even the children of the Indian man with the Dayak woman are denied *Bumiputera status* because they have to ‘follow the father.’ All the 75 Indian-Dayak respondents were not happy with such a law and were of the view that it should not be applied to Sarawak where Dayaks are the majority.

However, it would be an overgeneralization to state that the offspring of Indian father and Dayak mother wish to ‘follow their mother’, because they are motivated by economic reasons to be regarded as *Bumiputera*. The findings in this study clearly show that the offspring of Indian-Dayak parentage were more Dayak than Indian in their daily norms. Dayak language was more dominant language than Tamil and was spoken at home. Gawai Dayak and Christmas were celebrated on a big scale with ‘open house’ compared to other celebrations such as Deepavali. Dayak and less Indian food were habitually consumed at

home. All these occur because Dayak is a bigger group compared to Indian and because of the influence of Dayak as a more dominant group.

The generally held belief is that in exogamous marriages the minority groups tend to adopt the more dominant group's cultures therefore applies to offspring of Indian immigrants and Dayak.. In fact, the findings of this study reveal that the children of Indian and Dayak have adopted to a large extent the cultural norms and values of their Dayak parent. An understanding of the wish of the Indian-Dayak children to be recognised as Indian-Dayak and not just Indian is essential.

In social identity theory, social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). In the case of the Indian-Bidayuh, it refers to those who viewed themselves as members of Indian-Dayak parentage. Their self-categorization of themselves as Indian-Dayak was also due to the fact that they perceived themselves as being different from other Indian and Dayak. All the respondents described themselves as '*anak Sarawak*' (son of Sarawak) wanted to be viewed positively by the Sarawak government and be given *Bumiputera* status as well.

8. Conclusion

When cultural elements of the Dayak ethnic group are incorporated into Indian culture and are passed on to the next generation, acculturation becomes a significant phenomenon for their offsprings. This study clearly shows that acculturation does not necessarily involve a loss of ethnic identity as the offsprings still wish to be identified as Indian-Dayak and not Dayak per se. Assimilation is facilitated when the two communities share a common religion. Even though the Indians were mostly Hindus but upon marrying Dayaks most of them and their offsprings became Christians following their spouse.

Assimilation is complete as their children are able to speak Dayak but not Tamil and are completely integrated with the larger Dayak community. In addition to a common religion, being a minute minority the offsprings of Dayak-Indian marriages adapted and assimilated with the local Dayak culture. In the same way they have assimilated in terms dietary habits. Despite such a high degree of assimilation they "will always identify themselves as Indian-Dayak. Thus, when discussing the Indian-Dayak offsprings, their identity is one of both being indigenous and being Indian at the same time. For some, they speak Dayak, eat Indian and Dayak food, showing a unique combination of Indian and indigenous cuisine.

This research investigated the use of a number of markers of identity such as language used with family members; food habitually consumed at home; festivals celebrated ;marriage preference of offsprings ; and social identity of offsprings. The

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findings of this research shows that the offsprings of the Indian immigrants who have married local Dayaks have shifted to the larger Dayak community for every marker of identity investigated. Giles and Johnson (1981) in Edwards (1985: 153) suggest that individuals will maintain their identity when they identify strongly with an ethnic group which has language as an important dimension. It is therefore not surprising that the Indian-Dayak offsprings identify strongly with the Dayak compared to the Indian who came as immigrants.

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