

## Roots and Routes from India:

Questions and comments from the Chat with Subbiah Lakshmanan & Jayapal Ramasamy  
6 Nov 2021 Saturday

### Questions and comments from the Chat: Mr Subbiah Lakshmanan's talk

1. From SLL to Everyone:

Wonder how Subbiah's own family ancestors played out in the history of Indians' roles and contribution in Singapore?

I come from a Chettiar financier family. My great grandfather started his financing business in 1892 in Market Street. 3 generations up to my father were financiers. I spent my primary school days at the Kittangi in Market Street. The Market street area is the original Little India of Singapore till 1977 when it was redeveloped. You can learn from my blog on Market Street/Raffles Place: <https://www.microindiasingapore.com/>

2. From UJ to Everyone:

Could you say something about cultural identities that Indians brought to Singapore?

Indians till independence primarily identified with their caste. The current linguistic identity of Tamil, Malayalee etc is more of a post independence development in India and overseas. People generally lived together with other caste members in Singapore whenever possible and also used those networks to get jobs here. Post war – the links with India became weaker and together with universal schooling – people of different castes inter-mingled more and inter-marriages occurred breaking down caste identities. Other than a few castes like Brahmins, Chettiars – there is almost no caste awareness in Singapore.

3. From K to Everyone:

Very interesting and educational history that have been forgotten.

4. From B to Everyone:

Very interesting, thank you Mr Subbiah

5. From UJ to Everyone:

Thank you!

6. From HLS to Everyone:

What happened to Indian opium production when china started to cultivate for its own consumption?

As the demand for opium increased, local Chinese production came on board from Yunnan, Xinjiang and Dongbei. However, this never fully supplied the market and in parallel there was a demand for Indian opium till WW2.

Opium trade peaked about 1880 and then declined substantially after 1900. But it could never be eradicated – because all the key players relied on opium taxes as the number source of government revenue – Qing, Kuomintang, Communist Party, Japanese.

Even in Singapore opium tax was the number one source of government revenue till about 1905 when rubber superseded it.

7. From KCH to Everyone:

**Did the Indians have clan associations like the Chinese?**

They do not have a clan in the sense of the Chinese – which is basically a lineage based association starting from a common ancestor. They had caste associations – either formal or informal – Kounder Association, Brahmna Sabha, Chettiar Chamber of Commerce. And later language based associations – Malayalee Association.

But all of these were not as important to social life as the Clans were to the Chinese. This is because – many Chinese came to Singapore as pseudo-refugees with no job and limited networks. So they needed the welfare support and protection of the Clan associations and secret Societies.

Indians generally came with a job through labour recruitment campaigns by British employers. So they had basic necessities like housing, job, contracts – when they arrived and did not need to rely on caste associations. The caste associations were more for social reasons and keeping in touch with India.

8. From RK to Everyone:

Thank you

9. From BTT to Everyone:

TYVM. Very informative & educational talk

10. From SM to Everyone:

Thank you Mr. Subbiah, this is very fascinating. Always very informative listening to you.

**Questions and comments from the Chat: Mr Jayapal Ramasamy's talk**

11. From TKS to Everyone:

**Were there many inter-marriages between Indians and Chinese ? My DNA is 66% Chinese, 27% Malay and 6 % Indian. Our Straits-born community did have a few hybrid marriages.**

In Malacca where the Baba community was formed. It was not uncommon for Chinese and Indian business families to have intermarriages especially in the early days. The Chetti Melaka community in Malacca also had frequent inter-marriage with Chinese.

12. From MSR to Everyone:

**Can you explain the role of the early Dubash community of colonial workers? What was their role? Did they have an admin role in the set up of British colonial Singapore? How many of them were there? Where did they come from? What language did they speak?**

Dubash is a job title – like civil servant. They are not an ethnic community. They were the servants of the East India Company in India and came with the British. I do not know how many – but the EIC administration was small – so I don't think it would have exceeded 100. They would have come from Calcutta and Chennai.

13. From JC to Everyone:

Is there a uniquely Singaporean Indian culture we practice that does not exist in India? With a 100+ years of cultural evolution, is our Singaporean Indian culture very different from mainland India?

This is not my expertise. But one thing that is different is our temples. We have a lot of social service programmes attached to temples. In India this would not be the case. A temple is a temple and strictly for worship only.

14. From CMW to Everyone:

Who were the important Indian community leaders prior to WWII around the 1930s? How did that relate to larger social and political dynamics in India and Malaya?

The community leaders would be those appointed as Justice of Peace by the British. Otherwise the Indian community was not really organized in that way. But from the 1920s proto-Indian organizations did develop and the key leaders were:

Tamils like - AC Suppiah, O Ramasamy Nadar, K Sarangapany

North Indians like - A Jumabhoy, Namazie, Mallal

15. From K to Everyone:

Did the East India Company ruled and influenced many parts of South East Asia?

Yes

16. From JC to Everyone:

Thank u!

17. From SK to Everyone:

Thank you so much Mr. Lakshmanan

18. From TK to Everyone:

Thanks for the presentation

19. From MSH to Everyone:

Very Interesting presentation! Thank you Mr Subbiah!

20. From KC to Everyone:

Thank you Mr Subbiah for the very informative and interesting talk.

21. From M to Everyone:

Thank you Mr Subbiah

22. From TK to Everyone:

Thanks Subbiah for sharing

23. From M to Everyone:

He was the MP for Anson

Yes, P.Govindasamy was MP for Anson.

24. From MSR to Everyone:

How did the general Hindu community view non-Hindu South Indians especially Christian converts? I know the Teochew Clans felt very threatened by religious conversion. Were there similarities in the Hindu community?

My reply is based on my experience only. The Hindus felt very threatened in the 1950s, 1960s when Indian Christians were aggressively converting Hindus to Christians. There were many who converted.

25. From MSR to Everyone:

Do you see the Hindu or Indian communities ability and ease to intermarry and integrate culturally heavily reliant on the generally open mindset of Hinduism?

Yes, agree. It was much easier being in Singapore.

26. From SLL to Everyone:

How do you construct your family trees, wonder if any difference compared to other races, Chinese etc. What tool do you use?

I just did a simple flow chat; there are no differences to other races. I did not use any tool. Maybe I should explore further.

27. From TK to Everyone:

thanks Jayapal

28. From SM to Everyone:

Bhoot Chaturdhashi

29. From K to Everyone:

With the aggressive spreading of Christianity in Asia, many traditional cultures and identities are lost in the recent decades.

I agree with you.

30. From TK to Everyone:

thanks KK