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SARAWAK INDIANS IN RECENT TIMES — A PERIOD OF INTEGRATION**Suresh Menon****FOREWORD**

The migration of Indians to Sarawak during the last few decades may be attributed to events occurring during the years between World War I and World War II, an important period in the history of the modern world. Its particular importance lies in the fact that there was a "Revolution of Expectations" in the minds of the underdeveloped and colonised world. There were literally no dark continents or undiscovered parts of the globe. The colonial powers of Europe were the masters of much of the non-European world.

Three conditions existing at that time helped to revolutionise expectations of the ordinary people of the colonies. Firstly, the success of the American idea gave renewed hope to the rest of the world — the downtrodden and underdogs of European societies crossed the Atlantic to America and helped create an independent and economically successful country, a country that was free from the institutions of oppression and bondage. Secondly, the Russian communists under Lenin held to unrealistic though attractive ideas of equality and material utopia. Thirdly, much inspiration was drawn from the revolt, turmoil and upheaval that besieged the biggest colony in the world, namely India, or what we commonly refer to as the Indian sub-continent.

Independence movements were going on since the last century in that part of the world. The rest of the colonised world was watching whether the most powerful of the colonial powers, namely Britain, at the peak of its Imperial glory, would really grant independence to India. India was then the source of much of Britain's power, wealth and comfort.

SARAWAK INDIANS IN RECENT TIMES — A Period of Integration

by

Suresh Menon

INTRODUCTION

The migration of Indians to Sarawak during the last few decades may be attributed to events occurring during the years between World War I and World War II, an important period in the history of the modern world. Its particular importance lies in the fact that there was a "Revolution of Expectations" in the minds of the underdeveloped and colonised world. There were literally no dark continents or undiscovered parts of the globe. The colonial powers of Europe were the masters of much of the non-European world.

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The Second World War was a period when the whole of the civilised world struggled and waited. When the war ended, India became independent, starting a chain reaction of independence movements. His Majesty's prisoners became Prime Ministers of newly independent nations. Other colonial powers followed suit, some willingly, others after much bloodshed.

The newly independent countries with their revolutionised expectations wanted a lifestyle that matched that of their colonial masters. In a great hurry for modern life, they implemented developmental and educational

programmes despite limited knowhow, scant manpower and almost zero potential for development. Facing the dire need for skilled personnel, they scouted for expertise in managerial skills, academicians and technical personnel. For their manpower needs, these newly independent countries turned to India which by then had evolved into a country capable of producing trained and educated people.

The educated people in India, themselves with their own expectations revolutionised, were impatient with their home conditions — jobs were scarce and salaries very low. A rare and congenial combination of circumstances existed just then. Indians were ready to go out and serve in countries that were hungry and waiting for their services. The same service was available from the developed European countries, but the cost was prohibitive. This situation resulted in a large scale “export” from India of teachers, doctors, lawyers, scientists, technicians and administrators, agriculturists and even labourers.

This was the scenario at the end of World War II. Contracted service and expatriates started to come in large numbers to Sarawak. The foregoing discussion makes it clear that the phenomenon was not peculiar to Sarawak, but rather a universal one, encompassing all newly independent countries of the world.

THE COMING OF THE EXPATRIATES TO SARAWAK

The Second World War ended in 1945 with the surrender of the Japanese on 14 August, 1945. Sarawak was ceded to the British Crown in July, 1946, with the British administration taking over the control of Sarawak.

The United Nations Organisation together with its associated bodies were formed after the war. A UNESCO study made during that period recommended that newly emerging nations make use of the expertise of qualified and experienced personnel from India who were described as “reliable, hardworking, dedicated and cheap.” The Sarawak Government took good advantage of the UNESCO recommendation. This resulted in the mass recruitment of expatriates to provide for the administrative, educational, medical and other manpower needs of Sarawak. The following discussion outlines the major categories of expatriates who served in Sarawak, a large number of whom later became naturalised citizens of Malaysia.

Teachers

The teaching profession comprised the largest number of expatriates in Sarawak. Their contribution to the advancement and maintenance of academic standards in Sarawak is immeasurable. It can be safely said that almost everyone in this distinguished gathering who has received his education in Sarawak has had an Indian teacher one time or other.

Most of the Indian teachers came from the state of Kerala, on the west coast of India. Although the smallest state, Kerala had and still has the highest literacy rate in India. The Keralites were mostly appointed as contract officers in government, aided and private schools. The first group of teachers arrived in early 1950.

There were about fifty Indian teachers in 1960. That was the period when the Education Department embarked on an intensive program of