

**The slaying of our sacred cows**  
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**S Thayaparan**

I have been reading with cynical amusement the comments section on the Malaysiakini reports regarding Prime Minister Najib Razak's sincere appeal to the "Hindu" community to trust the BN government.

Najib is being mocked for asking for the trust of the "Hindus" but I suspect readers may have misunderstood our honourable PM. He is merely applying the same standards as he would on his own community, seeing as how there are so many Indonesian, Filipinos and Burmese, he assumes that all Indians are Hindus as are all these constitutionally created Malay-Muslims. So I take no offense.

Before The Obedient Wives Club become the fashionable object of public scorn, the MIC - the oldest political party in Malaysia - had already staked a claim to that title. And for the past 30 or so years, who can claim that it has not served its lord and master (Umno) with the utmost diligence.

One only has to conjure up the well-documented image of MP P Kamalanathan kissing the hand of DPM Muhyiddin Yassin (in a Malay wife like fashion) to understand the depth of the MIC's commitment to the institution of Umno matrimony.

The MIC or CashMoneyBrothers as I like to refer to them (to understand this reference, readers are encouraged to watch the overwrought movie, New Jack City) has no doubt played a major role in the dismal situation of the Indian community, but the reality is, Indians themselves are also to blame for their misfortune.

Voting members of the Indian community (generally poor and disenfranchised) voted for the MIC and the BN believing the propaganda that MIC spewed because the reality for them was much worse. Better to vote in hope than not at all. The bourgeois class either abstained from voting out of disinterest in the thug politics of the MIC or a general apathy towards the political process.

This of course did not preclude them from embracing indulgent Indian "cultural" societies or attending glittery Indian society events, both of which had the grubby handprints of the MIC.

What Hindraf managed to do, and do really well, was to wake up an apathetic Indian middle class to the plight of their less fortunate brethren.

It is ironic, since this Western educated section of the Indian electorate who for so long felt alienated from the political process now feels estrangement from the general Indian population because of the rhetoric of P Uthayakumar which vacillates from sublime race-baiting to the downright bizarre.

The fact that the movement is a hodge-podge of Indian intellectuals and working-class foot soldiers is a reminder of the class divisions which is endemic in the Indian community. What is it with Indians and blame shifting?

Didn't S Samy Vellu right here in Malaysiakini blame the failures of MIC and the problems of the community he was supposed to represent on former PM Dr Mahathir Mohamad? So much for Indian brotherhood.

Politics of temples and Tamil schools

The Indian community like their Malay sibling suffers from the same religious enthrallment. However, unlike the Malays, who have a state-subsidised religion, the Indian community has to pay for their religious fervour in the forms of temples and themselves.

The moneyed class provides some of the funds (as does the state) but more often than not, it is the poor who fork out exorbitant sums for these impressive structures which serves no purpose but to bilk the most vulnerable members of the community of their hard-earned money.

The priest caste which is in substance a mercantile class is sourced from India and Sri Lanka who lord it over a subservient Indian population all the while living in conditions far beyond the means of the average devotee.

Of course, the MIC is part of this process but who do we blame but ourselves for the millions of ringgit spent on "poojas" and accoutrements of piety when such money could have been used for purposes far more practical and beneficial to the community than the worship of a thousand Gods?

Hindus may mock the overt consumerism of their born-again Christian brothers and sisters but have they taken a good hard look at how temples recycle the flowers, fruits and various other religious paraphernalia?

It's big business and these so-called men of god know how to make a profit. They are the modern Pharisees. Do they not see the sacrilege of wasting milk when washing idols, when there is poverty all around them?

The temple issue and it's always revolves around temples has become the focus point of the "Indian" issue and has been used by the MIC to demonstrate its influence in the government or the lack of opposition influence, when it comes to matters pertaining to the Indian community.

How much money spent over the years, raised from the ignorant Indian masses for the construction of temples which then become contentious issues in the ongoing race debate? The MIC did not force us to give them money, we willingly handed it over to them. Umno had nothing to do with this.

And if there is a level of ignorance amongst the general Indian population, then the finger must surely be pointed at the Indian school system.

No doubt the MIC is to blame for this sad state of affairs but just as the MCA together with the DAP can rightly claim a part of the tremendous success of the Chinese school system, the bulk of the credit should go to the Chinese community as a whole as the blame for the state of Tamil schools to the Indian community.

Can Indian schools boast the same level of academic achievement as Chinese schools? Can Indian schools boast the same level of discipline in its student population as Chinese schools?

And if these schools are transmitting some sort of "Indian culture", something that I believe is in the purview of parents not a school system, what kind of culture is being transmitted looking at the level of crime, gender inequality and subservience to religious figures plaguing the Indian community?

I am very well aware of the systemic racism that is inflicted upon the non-Malays but let us acknowledged at the very least, that the discrimination faced by a certain disenfranchised segment of our (Indian) community is perpetuated by the still simmering caste divisions.

Take a page from MP Jeyakumar

In Sungai Siput, Dr Michael D Jeyakumar (below) was fast becoming the patron saint of his own lost cause.

The best thing that has happened to the Indian community besides the spurt of Hindraf-inspired activism is the fall of the long-time MIC despot at the hands of this humble country doctor in the 2008 general elections.

The PSM stalwart symbolises everything that is admirable about politics in this country (and there is precious little which is admirable) and these few brief words does the man and his cause a great injustice.

I hope to elaborate on why I think politicians like him are the way forward for a new generation of Malaysians in a future piece.

I know many Pakatan Indian representatives in PKR and DAP. They are honourable people but what I fear is that old habits die hard, especially when they get so much political mileage and the Indian reps in Pakatan will be forced to voice the same old concerns for the community as the MIC did.

Furthermore, some of my Indian friends, those from the middle class have expressed concern that Indian problems would shift from a race-based perspective to a class-based one. I don't have a problem with this except that experience has shown that any class-based discourse concerns itself with the problems faced by the middle class and not the poorer members of society.

Perhaps we can take a page from MP Jeyakumar who when asked how he intends to serve the Indian community after his win over Samy Vellu, replied, "I am here to serve all members of the community, not only the Indians."

jerit tamil school parliament protest 290307 illSo yes, I am arguing that Indian activists should abandon the struggle for Indian schools and the creation of more temples and disregard this absurd notion that "Indian interests" is best exemplified by the two.

I'll go further, until we get to a place where the Indian community has recovered from their own ignorance and the machinations of the MIC, we should halt construction of temples and only support high performing Indian schools or those with potential. The student populations of most Indians schools should be integrated into mainstream national schools.

This in no way means that we should not protest against efforts to demolish existing temples or any other non-Muslim religious structures.

Najib is correct in asking for the trust of the "Hindu" (Indian) voting public because for the past 30 years Umno-BN has known exactly what they want. However, he has no interests or desire in discovering or fulfilling what the Malaysian public - be they Orang Asli, Malays, Chinese, Indians, Sabahans and Sarawakians - really need.

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