The Indian Diaspora in Malaya: Links and Divides Between the Chettiar Business Class and Working Class Indians During the British Colonial Era

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Abstract
The historiography of Malaya that deals with Indian diaspora rarely differentiates Indians on the basis of their ethnic origins and their relationships during the British era. The ethnic Indian populations during the British era comprised the majority Tamils, and the other groups such as the Telugus, Malayalees, Gujaratis, Chettiars, Sikhs and Indian Muslims. The ethnic groupings among those of Indian origin could be divided into three main economic classes: labour, business and civil service. This article focuses on the Chettiars as the group that comprised the business class and looks at their interactions with the other ethnic groups of Indian origin belonging to the labour class and civil service. This article demonstrates that although the Chettiar provided credit to other Indian ethnic groups, the moneylending system was one-sided, favouring only the Chettiar, who did not play a positive role in ensuring the overall socio-economic interests and welfare of working class Indians.

Keywords
Chettiar, business class, working-class Indians, British Malaya, indebtedness, civil service

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³ The word ‘ethnic’ and the phrase ‘ethnic group’ are used to refer to a population subgroup (within a larger or dominant national or cultural group with a common national and cultural tradition).

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