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## Reasons for Assimilation: Focus on the Indian Muslims in Kuching, Malaysia

### SUMMARY

According to Lasimbang and Miller (1990), people react negatively if they feel they are being subsumed into a larger group on an unequal basis, but they may readily shed their identity for a larger group identity if it is in their best interests. The aims of this study are to investigate if the Indian Muslim community in Kuching, Sarawak wants to be part of the Malay community and to determine the reasons for such assimilation. To understand reasons for such assimilation and for the adoption of a Malay identity open-ended interviews were conducted with thirty Indian Muslims from various socio-economic groups and eight Malay respondents in Kuching. Does Malay identity act as scaffolding for the Indian Muslims in Kuching which in turn creates the basis for social, economic and political attainment? Assimilation for the Indian Muslims in Kuching with the local Malay community has occurred to some part because of mixed marriages with local Malay women and also because of a shared religion i.e. Islam. The ethnic boundaries of the Indian Muslims are permeable and they want to be identified as Malays.

KEY WORDS: Kuching, assimilation, identity, Indian Muslims

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Sarawak is the largest of the 14 states of multilingual Malaysia, and is located on the island of Borneo. Sarawak has a population of 2,071,506 people (*Monthly Statistical Bulletin*, June 2005) consisting of 26 different ethnic groups. The largest group is the Iban with a population of 603,735, and this is followed by the Chinese 537,230, Malays 462,272, Bidayuh 166,756, Melanau 112,284, other *Bumiputeras* (sons of the soil) 117,690, Indians 3,851 and others which comprise of 62,738 non-Malaysian citizens.

Kuching is the capital of Sarawak and is located in the Kuching Division, which is also known as the First Division. Kuching has a population of 509,374. The ma-

major religions in Sarawak are Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Taoism. Hinduism and Sikhism are practiced mostly by the Indians and Punjabis. In Sarawak, just as in other states in Malaysia, Malays are Muslims (see also David, 2003).

The language situation in Sarawak may be described as multilingual and broadly diglossic. The sociolinguistic norms of the *bumiputeras* in Sarawak are influenced by the Sarawak Malay dialect, English and Bahasa Malaysia i.e. the official Malay language. The Sarawak Malay dialect is the *lingua franca* of interethnic communication in Sarawak in informal domains such as everyday conversations (McLellan, 1992: 199). While English and Bahasa Malaysia are taught in schools, the Sarawak Malay dialect is learnt by non-Malay Sarawakians through contact with local Sarawak Malays in unofficial domains. Bahasa Malaysia is the official language in Malaysia and is used in official domains, while English is accorded as the second most important language and is often used in unofficial domains among professionals at the workplace and those who are English-educated at home (Gill, 2002).

According to Madzhi Johari (1988: 1), Sarawak Malay dialect has the highest number of speakers compared to any other dialects or languages in Sarawak and is spoken widely without embarrassment in unofficial domains. In fact, Asmah (1987: 58) has reported that the Malay language has been the *lingua franca* in intergroup communication in Malaysia since the colonial days. Her study of people staying in Kuala Lumpur (1991: 98) clearly showed that there was no extrinsic correlation between language and ethnicity. This can also be said of the minority groups in Sarawak. In fact a study by David and Dealwis (2006: 343) found that the Telegu immigrants in Kuching were no longer speaking their heritage language but instead a pidgin variety of Bazaar Malay and English. Another study by Bibi Aminah and Abang Ahmad Ridzuan (1992: 131) also showed that members of the younger generation of *Orang Miriek* in Miri, Sarawak were shifting to Sarawak Malay dialect in the home domain, because they wanted to be identified as Malays and not *Orang Miriek*.

The use of the Sarawak Malay dialect among the Indian Muslims and Sarawak Malay undergraduates, who are studying in various public universities in Peninsular Malaysia, is a marker of Sarawak Malay identity. The use of Sarawak Malay tends to create closer rapport and solidarity between the Sarawak Malays and the Sarawak Indian Muslim undergraduates when they are studying in public universities in Peninsular Malaysia.

## ORIGIN OF THE KUCHING INDIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The Indian Muslim community in Kuching has a long and varied history. However, there is no documented evidence specifically about the Indian Muslim arrival in Kuching. Moreover, R. D. S. Singh (1993) stated that the Indian Muslims in East Malaysia did not come as Indian labourers but as textile merchants, who played a significant role in retail business. Personal communication with three older respondents (above 60 years of age) of the Indian Muslim community in Kuching also revealed that the first generation men generally came on their own from South India as textile merchants and later ventured into spice and food businesses. Many of them married local Malay women in Kuching, while some returned to India to look for wives, with whom they returned and settled down in Kuching. Some had two wives, one in India and the other in Kuching. According to Respondent 1, an elderly Indian Muslim man, the early immigrants spoke only the Tamil language among themselves but learnt the local Malay dialect quickly, because they settled down as a small community in the *Jalan Masjid* (Mosque Road) area in Kuching, which is in a Malay village. Respondent 2 explained that they were respected by the local Malay community because of their Islamic religious practices and good business ethics.

The early Indian Muslims were generally socio-economically better off than the Telegus and other early Indian immigrants to Sarawak (see David and Dealwis, 2006: 343). The early Indian Muslims started textile, spice and food businesses, which were concentrated in the present day India and Gambier Street where they remain even today. Shafi Mohamad (1993: 1) mentioned that many of the Indian Muslims in Kuching were traders in traditional businesses such as textile retailing, restaurants, and bookshops, money-changing and sundry shops. According to Respondent 9, some of the younger members of the community tend to follow in their father's footsteps and gain employment in the same sectors. However, with development in education, a growing number of members of the younger generation have also become professionals in various fields, most notably in medicine, law, engineering and business.

Observation by the researchers revealed that the Indian Muslims have a close and dense social network. A *surau* (small mosque) was built for the early immigrants by the community leader, Thamby Ibrahim, about 160 years ago and this is located in a small alley between the Indian Muslim textile and spice shops. According to Respondent 4, the mosque was a focal gathering point for the early Indian Muslim immigrants and various activities for the community took place there. Even today it is a venue for social networking. In the *surau*, the researchers observed that Tamil is still used by these elderly Indian Muslims but that the younger generation

has shifted to Sarawak Malay in their social interactions with one another, before and after prayers on Friday afternoons. According to another elderly Indian Muslim respondent, the *khubah* (sermon) was in Tamil in the early days but it is in Bahasa Malaysia today, so as to cater to the increasing number of non-Tamil speaking Indian Muslims.

Social networking among community members was intense and remains high. The Indian Muslims, who operated their family textile and spice businesses along India and Gambier Streets, came into contact with one another regularly for their daily prayers at the *surau*. Respondent 8 reported that they would meet to discuss business matters in the Indian Muslim Chamber of Commerce building, which was located a few hundred metres away from their business premises. The same respondent also said that the social networking pertaining to business matters was carried out actively, and that they received grants from the federal and state governments to support their business ventures, which have greatly increased in number. Respondent 12 added that the close networking of the Indian Muslims of Kuching's was not only limited to the business domain but also to social events. They visited one another during functions such as weddings, *Ramadhan*, *Hari Raya* (Eid), *Hari Raya Haji* and other celebrations. According to Respondent 20, they are aware of the whereabouts of one another and hence were easily able to provide the residential addresses of their members to the researchers.

Today, there are two distinct groups of Indian Muslims in the city of Kuching. One group consists of the descendants of the earlier group, who came as textile merchants and spice traders almost at the same time as the other early South Indians, who came as tea planters at Mount Serapi and as labourers for the Brooke administration (1839–1942). Among the more enterprising Indian Muslims in the city of Kuching today are the descendants of the Merican, Deen, Kadir, Bolhassan, Maaruf, Salleh Ahmad, Kahar, Naina Mohammad, Nazamuddin and Daud families. Many of the children from these families have married local Malay women and identify themselves as Malays. They have adopted Malay sociocultural norms and the younger community members are fluent in the Sarawak Malay dialect. They are either professionals or businessmen and play a significant role in the political and economic development of Sarawak.

Although many of the descendants of the Indian Muslims in Kuching identified themselves as Malays, a few more recent immigrants from India consider themselves Indians. Respondent 7, a university professor, said that the reason for this different ethnic identification could largely be due to cultural norms and values practiced by the offspring of either both Indian Muslims parents or Indian Muslim fathers, who had married local Malay women. If both parents are of Indian origin there is a tendency for the offspring to be more Indian than Malay culturally. On

the other hand, if one parent is a Malay, then their children will be more Malay than Indian culturally. According to Dealwis and David (2009), the same pattern also existed among offspring of Indian men who married into the more dominant Bidayuh group in Kuching, where the children of such exogamous marriages were more Bidayuh than Indian culturally.

Indian Muslims who have come more recently to Kuching came from Peninsular Malaysia in the 1970s, either as government servants or individuals. These recent arrivals ventured into the food business. Among these popular *mamak* restaurants are *Daun Kari*, *Restoran Nasi Kandar*, *Restoran Alkautzar*, *Bombay Masala* and, the Islamic Café. Although the term *mamak* is used to refer to Indian Muslims in Peninsular Malaysia, Kuching Indian Muslims are referred to as *tolcans*. However, they are also addressed as *mamak* today, due to the influence of Malaysian television shows.

## AIMS OF THE STUDY

The objective of this research is to determine the reasons for the Indian Muslim community in Kuching having assimilated into the more dominant Malay community by using not only the Sarawak Malay dialect but also by practicing Malay cultural norms. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of reasons for assimilation, some other community studies, particularly pertaining to Indian Muslim communities in Malaysia and minority non-Malay but Muslim communities in Sarawak, as well as minority Indian communities in Malay-dominated areas in Sarawak will be discussed with a view to determining reasons for assimilations in these communities.

## REASONS FOR ASSIMILATION

Assimilation is generally placed in the same category as acculturation while they are clearly not the same. Barry (1979, in Dealwis and David, 2009) defines assimilation to include the complete disappearance of the group's identity. Cultural assimilation happens when people from a minority group accept the norms, values and patterns of behaviour (culture) of a majority group (Hj. Mohd Jalil et al., 2003, in Dealwis and David, 2009). The generally held belief is that minority groups tend to adopt the dominant groups' cultures. However, although it is possible that the minority group would want to adopt certain cultural traits, this does not mean that they want completely to integrate with the dominant group, as seen in limited local Indian studies in Kuching (see David and Dealwis /2006/ on Telegus in Kuching, Dealwis and David on Indian-Bidayuhs in Kuching /2009/).

Therefore, assimilation is the process by which minorities gradually adopt patterns of the dominant culture (Macionis, in Dealwis and David, 2009). This involves changing modes of dress, attitudes and values, religion, language and social networks and even identity. Barry (1979, in Dealwis and David, 2009) elaborates: “assimilation is a process whereby the descendants of the immigrants adopt the behavioural pattern, identity cultural tradition and the way of life of the host community”. In assimilation, an outsider, immigrant, or subordinate group becomes indistinguishably integrated into the dominant host society. This implies that the values and culture of the dominant group are ultimately accepted and internalized by the subordinate group (Swan et al., 2004).

Assimilation is facilitated when the two communities share a common religion. David (2003: 47), discussing the offspring of Pakistani men with Kelantanese women in Peninsular Malaya, showed that assimilation was complete as they spoke the local Kelantanese dialect and were completely integrated with the larger Kelantanese community. 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 has assimilated in terms of language, clothes, names and even dietary habits. Despite such a high degree of assimilation they “will always identify themselves as Chinese” (Teo, 2003). Discussing the Babas, Tan (1993) states that their identity was one of both being indigenous and being Chinese at the same time. He explained that their women wore Malay-style dress and that their food was a unique combination of Chinese and indigenous cuisine. Nambiar (2007) stated that Muslims Malayalees in Malaysia wanted to be identified as Malays and that the trends towards assimilation started a long time ago. The reasons for assimilation included marriages of early Malayalee traders with local Malay women, Islam as a common religion with the Malays, and the benefits of enjoying the privileges given to *Bumiputeras*.

Another reason for wanting to be assimilated into the Malay community was also due to pressures from the larger Malay community. Mohammad Subakir’s (1998) study of the Javanese in Sungai Lang reveals that the Javanese wanted to be identified as Malays and were shifting from their Javanese mother tongue to Malay in the home domain. Bibi Aminah and Abang Ahmad Ridzuan (1992) discovered that the younger generation of *Orang Miriek* classified themselves as *Orang Melayu* rather than *Orang Miriek* and used *Bahasa Miriek* (Miriek language) only when speaking with elders in the home domain. Tunku Zainah (1978: 13) stated that the young *Orang Miriek* did not want to speak *Bahasa Miriek* because they were ashamed to speak in *bahasa kuno* (a primitive language), whereas Sarawak Malay was regarded as more modern. Although the Telegu minority of Kuching are Christians and do not share a common religion with the local Malays, the second generation have as-

simulated to the majority Malay lifestyle and also use Malay as their home language (David and Dealwis, 2006).

In general, all these minority communities mentioned above have undergone assimilation with the host community (Winzeler, 1985: 42). Assimilation also leads to the change in the direction of the culture of another ethnic group. This process involves members of one ethnic group assimilating cultural elements from those of another ethnic group into their own group. Such 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, assimilation becomes a significant phenomenon (Tan, 1993).

## METHODOLOGY

The reasons for assimilation were obtained from oral interviews and observations by the researchers in the homes and business premises of the respondents. Unstructured interviews were held with 33 or 10% of the 300 Indian Muslims in Kuching. Five of the respondents interviewed were above 50 years old (i.e. Respondents 1–5); 15 were between 30–49 (i.e. Respondents 6–20); and 13 were below 30 years old (i.e. 21–33). The 33 respondents, selected randomly, were born in Kuching and were staying in Malay dominated areas in *Jalan Masjid*, *Petra Jaya*, *Gita*, *Matang* and *Semariang*. They were professionals and businessmen and fluent in the Sarawak Malay dialect, Bahasa Malaysia and English.

A total of 8 local Malays were also interviewed in order to gauge their perceptions on Kuching Indian Muslims. The local Malays respondents were friends of the researchers. They were chosen because they knew many of the respondents.

## LOCATION OF STUDY

The State of Sarawak is divided into ten administrative divisions, namely Kuching, Sri Aman, Sibu, Miri, Limbang, Sarikei, Kapit, Samarahan, Mukah, and Betong. The community under study was that of the Indian Muslims of Kuching. At the time this study was conducted, there were 70 homes of Indian Muslims in *Jalan Masjid*, *Petra Jaya*, *Gita*, *Semariang* and *Matang* areas.

The researchers observed that the Indian Muslim children attended national and Arabic schools located in these Malay dominated areas and socialised with the Malays daily, using the Sarawak Malay dialect.

Although no statistics are provided by the *Statistical Bulletin* (latest 2005) on the population size of the Indian Muslims in Kuching, based on calculations by

Encik Abdul Rahim, a second generation Indian Muslim who has a textile shop in India Street, there were about 300 Indian Muslims in Kuching at the time this study was conducted.

The number of surviving early immigrants was less than ten people. These were above 60 years of age and three were interviewed in order to obtain a historical account of the early Indian Muslims in Kuching.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Indian Muslims men came first in the 1900's as merchants from South India via Singapore and many of them married local Malay women. Indian Muslim women arrived later as wives, but they were fewer in number. An elderly respondent said that this latter group of Indian Muslims maintained their Indian identity by speaking Tamil at home and had other markers of Indian identity such as the *saree*, *dhoti* (the white cloth worn by Indian men to cover the lower part of the body) and Indian food.

The bachelors among the early immigrants married local Malay women and lived in Malay dominated areas in *Jalan Masjid*, and this led to the use of Sarawak Malay in the home domain. Generally, all the early immigrants learnt the local Malay dialect when conducting spice and textile business with local Malays along Gambier Road and India Street in Kuching. Since they shared the same religion of Islam with the Malays, the early immigrants were well accepted into the Malay community. These Indian Muslims were already practicing the Islamic faith even in India, before coming to Kuching. Thus, from the early days, the Indian Muslims and the Malays in Kuching shared the same religious bond. Non-structured interviews conducted with elderly Tamil Muslims indicated that there has always been greater affinity with the Malays right from the early days of their arrival, rather than with other Indians who were non-Muslims, even though they came from South India. Respondent 4 (62 years old) said:

*Nang rapat dengan orang Melayu sitok. Ni endak kamek diam di kampong Melayu, makan minum kedak sidak juak. Lagipun sama agama, Islam. Sik selalu nanga orang India nok lain. Sidak diam dekat Green ngan Rubber Road sia. Sik serrapat ngan sidak Melayu tapi sidak berghambeh juak mun musin Raya.*

*(We're close with the local Malays. We're staying in the Malay village and share our meals with them. Moreover, we have the same religion which is Islam. We seldom see other Indians. They stay in Green and Rubber Roads. We're not as close with the Indians as we are with the Malays, but they visit us during Hari Raya.)*

All the eight Malay respondents who were randomly interviewed also felt that the Indian Muslims in Kuching are Malays, because they practice Islam and speak the local Malay dialect without an Indian accent. Respondent 35 said:

*When I was in school, I never saw my friend Mohd Rahim bin Kadir as an Indian. I know he has Indian blood but I consider him just like me, Malay. He speaks Sarawak Malay just like other Malays too, and on Fridays we go to mosque together with other Muslims from school.*

About four second-generation men, whose parents were both Indian Muslims from India, returned to South India with Indian Muslim wives, whereas the rest have married local Malay women. Tamil is still used in these four homes and family members have strong contacts with South India. Their children are proficient in Sarawak Malay and Tamil and do not mind classifying themselves as Malays when it comes to applying for places in higher institutions of learning and obtaining the other educational benefits that are given to *Bumiputeras* in Malaysia. All the interviewed Indian Muslims who were below 30 stated that they classified themselves as Malays when applying for government scholarships and places in public universities. Respondent 24 said:

*Only Bumiputeras can enter UiTM (University Technology MARA) and more easily other public universities compared to a non-Bumiputera. I applied and got accepted to do a course in Science. I applied as a Bumiputera – a Malay . So I'm a Bumiputera – a Malay because of my religion, even though both my parents are Indian Muslims and not Malays. There is no column for Indian Muslims in the application form.*

Although there seems to be a real desire for wanting to be part of the Malay community, the Indian Muslims realize that there are economic benefits as well (see also David, 2003 and Nambiar, 2007). To be part of the Malay community would be more economically advantageous than being part of the smaller Indian community. Under the National Economic Policy, which was launched in 1970, the Malays, being the indigenous community in Malaysia, are given benefits that include economic, social and educational benefits to improve their social-economic status. Respondent 19, an educated Indian Muslim textile merchant said:

*By becoming a Bumiputera the Indian Muslims are aware that they can get more financial assistance from the government to better their business. The Indian Muslim Chamber of Commerce can assist us to get loans from the state and federal governments. We are classified as Bumiputeras when applying for such loans. Not many Malays are keen and we join ventures with them to get better tenders and projects as well. We can get the loans if we categorise ourselves as*

*Malays. Many of us are doing well with this kind of help. So, we are not really complaining.*

The Indian Muslims' real desire for wanting to assimilate with the more dominant Malays is clearly seen in the fact that they stay among the Malays in *Matang* and *Petra Jaya* areas and practice Malay culture in their daily lives. However, it should be noted that the desire to become Malays is more apparent among Tamil Muslims of mixed parentage. In homes in which both parents are Indian Muslims, Tamil is the most dominant language spoken by family members.

Observations made show that seven of the Kuching Indian Muslim respondents claimed themselves as Malays when they were among the Malays, but seemed to claim knowledge of some Indian heritage when the Indian researchers interviewed them. Respondent 22 said:

*I cannot speak Tamil. I speak Sarawak Malay with the other Indian Muslims here just as I speak to the Malays. We don't really feel we are different from the Malays. But if you ask me, I know I have Indian blood because I look Indian. When I see other Indians on the streets, I must think I am an Indian. But it's alright, I can accept that, too.*

The numerous exogamous intermarriages with local Malay women contracted by male members of the first generation, and even more of such exogamous marriages by second generation descendents, have facilitated the assimilation of the community to the larger Sarawak Malay community. The Tamil Muslim community has shifted from being a Tamil speaking community to a Sarawak Malay speaking community and this has caused the weakening of ethnic boundaries. All the respondents interviewed stated that their national registration cards have classified them as *Melayu* (Malay).

*When my parents make my IC (identity card) they put my Bangsa (race) as Melayu (Malay) and my religion as Islam. So, I'm Malay and that is a fact and no one has questioned me so far.*

What makes it easy for the Indian Muslims to take on Malay identity is the fact that the definition of Malay in the Malaysian Constitution shows great flexibility. According to the Constitution, a Malay is defined as one who practices the Islamic religion, practices Malay customs and speaks the Malay language. In the Native Court of Sarawak (*Mahkamah Adat Istiadat*), a non-native is eligible to apply to be identified as a Malay if he or she professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language and observes or conforms to the Malay customs and cultures; and his or her mother or father is a native of Sarawak of the Malay community (Laws of Sarawak, 1977). Therefore, it is possible to *masuk Melayu* [become a

Malay] (Haja, 2002, in Dealwis and David, 2009) as long as they convert to Islam, practice Malay customs and use the Malay language.

## CONCLUSION

The joining of Sarawak to form Malaysia on 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1963 saw a distinction between indigenous peoples and immigrants. The indigenous people comprising both Malays and Dayak natives of Sarawak were called Bumiputera. Immigrants were those whose ancestry lay in China or India. Before 1963, the Indian Muslims in Kuching preserved their identities as Indians. However, since 1963, this small community has wanted to be identified with a larger prestigious community. Language is one aspect of assimilation and Sarawak Malay is the dominant language used at home, although English and Bahasa Melayu are also used. Assimilation for the Indian Muslims in Kuching with the local Malay community has occurred largely because of mixed marriages with local Malay women and the shared religion of Islam.

The ethnic boundaries of the Indian Muslims and Malays are permeable. According to Lasimbang and Miller (1992), people react negatively if they feel they are being subsumed into a larger group on an unequal basis, but they may readily shed their identity for a larger group identity if it is in their best interest. The Indian Muslims in Kuching react positively about being subsumed into the larger Malay community because they enjoy the benefits accorded to Malays. In fact, this study shows that just as the Pakistanis in Kelantan and the Malayalee Muslims in Malaysia do, the Tamil Muslims in Kuching readily shed their identity for a larger Malay identity as it is in their best interest.

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## **Razlozi asimilacije: naglasak na indijskim muslimanima u Kuchingu u Maleziji**

### SAŽETAK

Prema Lasimbangu i Milleru (1990), ljudi reagiraju negativno ako osjećaju da su u veću grupu uključeni na nejednakoj osnovi, ali su spremni brzo odbaciti svoj identitet za veći grupni identitet ako je to u njihovu najboljem interesu. Ciljevi istraživanja bili su ispitati želi li indijska muslimanska zajednica u Kuchingu u Sarawaku biti dio malajske zajednice i utvrditi razloge za takvu asimilaciju. Kako bismo razumjeli razloge takve asimilacije i usvajanja malajskog identiteta, proveli smo intervju otvorenog tipa s trideset indijskih muslimana iz različitih društvenoekonomskih skupina i osam ispitanika u Kuchingu. Služi li malajski identitet indijskim muslimanima u Kuchingu kao osnova za napredovanje na društvenom, ekonomskom i političkom polju? Do asimilacije indijskih muslimana u Kuchingu u lokalnu malajsku zajednicu dolazi djelomice zbog mješovitih brakova s lokalnim malajskim ženama, kao i zajedničke religije, tj. islama. Etničke su granice indijskih muslimana propusne i oni žele biti identificirani kao Malajci.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Kuching, asimilacija, identitet, indijski muslimani

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## **Les raisons de l'assimilation : gros plan sur les Musulmans indiens à Kuching en Malaisie**

### RÉSUMÉ

Selon Lasimbang et Miller (1990), les gens réagissent négativement s'ils ont le sentiment d'être intégrés dans un groupe plus grand à la base inégale mais ils peuvent facilement rejeter leur identité pour en adopter un de groupe plus grand, si c'est dans leur plus grand intérêt. Les buts des recherches étaient de découvrir si la communauté musulmane indienne à Kuching, Sarawak, voulait faire partie de la communauté malaise et connaître les raisons d'une telle assimilation. Dans le but de comprendre les raisons d'une telle assimilation et de l'adoption de l'identité malaise, nous avons organisé des entretiens de type ouvert avec trente musulmans indiens, issus de différents groupes socio-économiques et huit entretiens à Kuching. Est-ce que l'identité malaise a un effet d'échafaudage social pour les musulmans indiens à Kuching ce qui crée une base pour une réussite sociale, économique et politique? L'assimilation des

musulmans indiens à Kuching avec la communauté malaise locale se fait en partie grâce aux mariages mixtes avec les femmes malaises locales, et aussi à cause de la religion commune, c'est-à-dire l'islam. Les frontières ethniques des musulmans indiens sont perméable, ceux-ci veulent être identifiés en tant que Malais.

MOTS CLÉS : Kuching, assimilation, identité, Musulmans indiens