



# FOREIGN LABOR` : DRIVING AND OBSTRUCTIVE FACTORS FOR INDIAN LABOR TO MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the factors driving and hindering Indian foreign labor to Malaysia, especially in Subang, Selangor. The arrival of foreign workers to this country from the British era until now has never stopped. The influx of foreigners into this country is evident in economic sectors such as the agricultural sector in the colonial era and now for all sectors. Without foreigners, Malaysia's economy cannot be driven at the present time, especially in some sectors such as the plantation, construction, and fishing sectors. The need for foreign labor in this country's economic sector is very important.

Keywords: Foreign labor, Indian labor, Economic sector, Obstructive factors, Driving factors

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The presence of Indian in Malaya began at the end of the 18th century and began to intensify in the middle of the 19th century because the migration occurred on a large scale. At first, migration only involved merchants and traders. However, since 1786, manual laborers began to migrate to work in the rubber plantations with low wages. After 1786, Indian nationals began to enter Malaya in large numbers due to the opening of Penang.

The Indians who migrated to Malaya came from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. This group was brought into Malaya to accommodate the British wishes to work in the plantation sector. This can improve Malaya's economic sector under British leadership. The British brought Indian to Malaya using the contract system and the

kangani system. While some Indian also came voluntarily to Malaya. The influx of Indian could be felt after the opening of the Straits Settlements in 1826.

The wave of attendance is always changing according to trend and time. The presence of foreigners will also change from time to time according to needs. For example, before independence and after independence, Tanah Melayu required Indian to work in the plantation sector but now they are replaced by Indonesian in the same sector. The efficiency of Indian recruitment agencies is huge because of channeling the right labor to the right place.

The 2005 Labor Statistics Report shows that many foreign workers are brought to Malaysia to mobilize the agricultural sector. This is because the young people in Malaysia refuse to work and instead practicing the attitude of choosing a job. The young people of the cyber age now rarely work in the agricultural sector and instead choose white collar jobs. In addition, young people like to work in a comfortable place such as an air-conditioned office, expect a large salary and aspire to a comfortable life. The elderly are decreasing in agriculture due to the age factor.

On these days, demand has increased for Indian laborers to work in the manufacturing, plantation and agricultural sectors. This caused the Malaysian Government to agree to bring Indians to Malaysia to meet the demand for the relevant sectors.

The Economic Times on 10 July 2008, reported that there are about 130,000 Indian workers in Malaysia in skilled and semi-skilled jobs. It can be said that, at present, the influx of Indian labor into Malaysia is increasing. This causes researchers to be interested in studying the involvement of Indian labor from India in the manufacturing sector in Southeast Asia. This study was conducted in Subang, Selangor because this place was found to be compatible with the influx of Indian labor in the state of Selangor.

## 2.0 PAST STUDY

There are various studies conducted related to the involvement of labor in various economic sectors in Southeast Asia. Previous studies related to Indian laborers in Malaya are as follows:

According to (Nawi et al. 2013) has explained about the lack of local labor in the fishing sector and replaced by Thai foreign labor that obtained approval from the government. He studied aspects of income, expenditure and savings, labors of the Thai Tok Bali fishery. In the book produced by (Sandhu, 2010), he explained the process of the arrival of Indians from India to Malaya. It also describes the hardships experienced while coming here and the treatment received by Indians from the British.

In a scholarly exercise written by Kadir, (1985), entitled *The Political Development of the Indian Community in Malaya before independence* shows the obstacles and threats faced by the Indian community during British and Japanese colonialism.

In the book *"Plantation Capital and Indian labor in colonial Malaya"* by Sundaram, (1993) explains the condition of Indians in the plantation sector. It also touches on labor in Malaya.

Nadarajah, (2002) in his master's thesis aimed at *The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Labor Market in Malaysia*, explains the impact of the economic crisis in 1997. This study explains the history of Malaysia's economy linked to foreign labour. It also explains about changes in the hiring of foreign workers, job opportunities for foreign workers and explains about the sectors of the economy affected during the crisis. In addition, the role of the government and the job opportunities that exist for foreign labor are also discussed.

In the book *Workers With out Frontiers* by Stalker, (2000) he describes the migration of foreign workers around the world through new methods. It also explains the impact on the industrial sector in general, changes in employment skills and the demand for foreign labour.

Bohning, (1996) has also explained the problem of labor shortage and dependence on imported labor as well as policies to bring in foreign labor. It also explains about various methods of foreign labor entry.

Amjad, (1989) in his book explains the economic effects of labor migration to countries in the Middle East and the majority of them are from Asian countries. He took several countries as examples such as Bangladesh, India, Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Interview Method**

In order to obtain additional data, the researchers have used the interview method. This method is done formally and informally where the researchers interview several individuals who are deemed important to obtain information. Formal interviews help the researchers get information about the situation in the study area.

Usually important figures in the study area will be used as the main source of information because they know more about their respective areas. For this purpose as well, several important figures who were directly or indirectly involved were interviewed. The researchers have agreed to the time given by the laborer to conduct formal

interviews while informal interviews take place while the laborer is working or eating to obtain additional information for this study.

### 3.2 Questionnaire Method

A questionnaire method was used to collect information on Indian laborers in the industrial sector in the study area. This method is very appropriate to obtain the information needed for this study. Respondents were randomly selected from different factories.

### 3.3 Observation Method

The next method used for information is the observation method. This method is used to collect data and see the real life of foreign workers. This method can also be used to feel the physical pressure faced by the respondents. The researchers also able to see and write the respondents' daily activities. Therefore the researchers will be able to know more and more the way of life of the community being studied accurately.

## 4.0 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Obstructive Factors and Pull Factors

#### 4.1.1 Obstructive Factors

Lee and Sharon in the Journal "Asian and Pacific Migration", stated that the place of origin is a barrier factor that also affects a person's decision to migrate to another place. Current state in the original place of residence that influence a person to migrate include war, limited job opportunities, poverty and so on. In this section, the researchers will discuss about the factors that cause a worker to migrate from his country of origin to another country, especially to Malaysia. Foreign workers are willing to sacrifice a lot of money just to work in another country. Obstructive factors are causes which occur in the country of origin that are used as factors to go out of the country of origin such as economic, social, and political factors.

#### 4.1.1.1 Economy Factors

##### a) India Economy

In terms of economy, India is an agricultural country and almost 90 percent of economic activities are related to the agricultural sector. India's sluggish economy has caused many Indians to go out looking for job opportunities in other countries despite having universities and college degrees. Most Indians who are young people

between the ages of 18 and 30 like to migrate to developing countries such as Dubai, Singapore, Kuwait and Malaysia because they have a high exchange rate.

#### b) Poverty

Since the 1600s, India has been colonized by Western colonizers such as the British, French, Portuguese and Dutch. Since colonialism until now, poverty is indeed one of the important factors that cause Indians to leave their country of origin. Although India became independent 60 years ago on August 15, 1947, the country is still plagued by poverty. In 1997, the financial crisis hit Asia. India was badly affected. This caused many residents of the country to go out to other countries. Some Indians come to Malaysia to work in the industrial sector. The economic recession that occurred in 1997, caused mass migration abroad.

Poverty is one of the main factors that cause labor to leave India. Poverty in the country of origin causes many people to live in poverty. Many laborers who come to Malaysia have their own backgrounds. Laborers who come to Malaysia have abundant of family problems. To overcome the problem of poverty, laborers come to Malaysia in search of money. They really hope, with this migration, they can solve the problem of poverty that has plagued them all their lives.

The poverty factor which is the main cause of obstructive factors to Malaysia. The poverty faced by labor families are not new. They face this dilemma from generation to generation. Their life can be linked to the saying 'kais pagi makan pagi, kais petang makan petang.' They only eat special food on great days and Deepavali.

The poverty gap in India is very visible. This is because the rich in India are getting richer and vice versa. To overcome poverty, Indians have gone abroad to find work. Jobs sought abroad can overcome the poverty inherited from the ages.

Most of those who immigrate to Malaysia are farmers. This is because as a result of their efforts are always ended up disasters such as floods, hot weather, animal disturbances and so on. These cause them to earn a living elsewhere. In fact, there are foreign laborers who also have a small area of land and the result is not able to support the laborer's family. All these factors cause Indian laborers to find stable jobs and must leave their country of origin.

c). Unfair distribution of income

In India, the standard of living is very different. Poor Indians continue to fall behind while the rich continue to get richer. This confirms the belief of the poor that they are oppressed by the rich. The economic gap is clearly visible. The great disparity in living standards causes Indians to constantly compete for a comfortable life, and in this competition, the poor are always oppressed. As a result of this oppression, many poor people left India to find work. Indian culture is evolving and new things are happening all the time. In the past, sons rarely left their home to work elsewhere. But that is changing now, because there are many job opportunities elsewhere. The family business will be inherited but now things have completely changed.

d.) Limited job opportunities

The agriculture sector is a critical sector to the Indian economy. In the agricultural sector, there are few job opportunities. Many farmers work on their own land and are helped by their families. Most farmers are willing to take risks to grow rice. This is because the weather is unpredictable and causes the destruction of crops and does not always produce profit. This situation causes many farmers to refuse to hire workers to work. Although many graduates want to work in the agricultural sector, the unstable income makes the agricultural sector unable to absorb the surplus labor force.

Workers who migrated to Malaysia worked in many different sectors over the years. This includes the textile, agricultural, factory, and animal husbandry industries. Most of them failed to find a solution to eradicate the poverty that haunted their lives for a long time. Some of them work all day as general laborers and at night as security guards to cover the growing family expenses.

Most Tamil Nadu laborers seek employment opportunities across India but the limited supply results in high unemployment rates. In fact, the people of Tamil Nadu do not experience any pleasure in life because they are plagued by poverty. Even though the world is aware that India is a country rich in God's gifts such as minerals, soil, water and so on. India also has a labor force that can develop the industrial and agricultural sectors in its own way. Although the country is rich in many aspects, but international investors invest less in this country due to political instability. The people of Tamil Nadu are willing to sacrifice for political parties and government policies often change and are not the same between states in India. The element of corruption is very strong in India. The recipient of bribes is willing to ignore the party that should receive it and this causes investors to have less faith in the Indian

state. This situation causes the Indian economy to not grow with the passage of time. The population is growing but the economy is growing slowly. Lack of job opportunities in India opens up space for Indians to find jobs abroad. Job offers abroad open the eyes of Indian shoppers to try their luck. This can also free them from the shackles of poverty that they feel since birth.

#### e.) Family Debt Problems

Most of the laborers were found to have borrowed money. Laborers also need to settle debts taken by their family members. In India, most people live with a lot of debt. The researchers have the opportunity to see this situation for themselves when conducting a field study in Tamil Nadu. When the researchers visited the laborer's family, some families had to borrow money from their neighbors just to buy cow's milk.

Economic problems are common for their families. Their purpose in coming to Malaysia is to help their families get out of the financial problems they have been facing for generations. They have a clear goal which is to come to Malaysia to find a lot of money to solve financial problems. They believe that every time they spend abroad can solve their financial problems. Therefore, the happiness of life will be enjoyed by his family.

All the laborers who come to Malaysia believe that they can solve the debt problems that they and their families are experiencing. The problem of family debt is one of the factors preventing laborers from going to Malaysia.

#### f.) Lack or Absence of Savings

The lack or absence of savings is an obstructive factor why Indian workers are willing to go abroad for work. Lack of savings is also a cause of labor from the country of origin migrating to this country. Even though he has worked for 10 years in his home country, he still has no savings.

Almost 90 percent of the workers who come to Malaysia do not have fixed savings or even empty savings. This is because the income they receive is only enough for daily use. They were unable to save and had to go into debt with grocery store owners and borrow money from friends in case of emergency. This is also a factor that causes foreign laborers to migrate to Malaysia. One of the interviewed laborers named Senthil stated that:

"Now I can pay off the debt I borrowed to come to Malaysia and at the same time pay off my family's debt. This makes me very proud."

Almost all the workers interviewed also agreed that savings are very mandatory because they need to be used during emergencies. If they borrow from ceti, then they have to pay high interest rates.

#### 4.1.1.2 Social Factors

##### a) Caste

In Indian society, caste is a society division into high and low class. Caste is a factor in which foreign workers are not willing to be insulted and reviled by the upper class. Usually the highest class in the caste is the Brahmin and the lowest is the pariah. The lower castes will be set aside by the upper castes including those who hold high positions. They had to inherit their father's or grandfather's jobs such as washing toilets, sweeping garbage and so on. They are also considered unclean and should not be touched. This caste system started from a long time ago and has become their flesh and blood. Any government forms also have a column for caste. There are more and more caste-based political parties and they also protect the lower caste population. This causes the low caste people to be oppressed until they don't get any help they deserve. If the lower caste people have a high education, then they will not get a suitable job and they will have to inherit their family's job.

The caste system originates from the Bhagavad Gita written by Valmiki. From time immemorial to the present, caste has played an important role in the lives of Indian citizens. The lives of Indian citizens are determined by their respective castes. For example low caste who work repairing shoes. These low caste people only repair shoes and this job will be inherited. Caste will determine the type of work a person does. Although highly educated, but if they come from a low caste, they will not get a good job. This causes them to leave the country looking for work to escape from the shackles of poverty and old-fashioned thinking. This situation causes many laborers to want to find work abroad in order to get out of the shackles of poverty and old-fashioned thinking. The same thing happened during the Colonial Era where the upper classes oppressed the lower classes which caused many to migrate to Malaya.

##### b) Natural Disaster

India is a country prone to natural disasters. Usually India will face floods and droughts. The temperature can reach 40° C. Disasters like this have certain times that cause laborers to work on their agricultural land. They also suffered losses because their crops were destroyed. This causes them to want to migrate in search of work. Almost 90 percent of the Indian community works in agriculture because Tamil Nadu is a fertile state.



### c) Numerous Dependents

One of the obstructive factors is the family aspect. Most of the laborers who come to Malaysia come from the rural area of India. They have no entertainment. There is only one entertainment which is intimate relationship. This means that a family has too many family members even if their economic situation does not allow them to have many children. The lack of education factor is also a cause due to lack of awareness about family planning.

Indian society still adheres to one concept which is "orethike oruvan". This means that a husband and wife will live and die together. As a result, an Indian family has a large number of children. One of the laborers named Shangkar who was found in Batu Tiga, Shah Alam answered when asked;

"The large number of children is not our plan, it is a gift from God. This is also a blessing for us."

Indian society has a large number of children or siblings, a family size consisting of six to 10 family members is a norm. This situation forces family members to earn a lot of money to support their family members. Because of that, some family members had to go abroad to work.

### d) Marriage

The marriage factor is also one of the obstructive factors to labor. This marriage is not only for them, but for their family members such as younger brothers, sisters and brothers. In the country of India, the celebration of the wedding ceremony will be carried out with great enthusiasm. A combination of family members of the groom and the bride make this celebration celebrated for 2 to 3 days. Although this ceremony is carried out with joy, but there are also constraints involved such as expenses, dowry and so on. Dowry is a gift that is agreed upon by the woman and the man and will be given to the groom. The giving of dowry is westernized as an element of luxury and the giving of dowry will classify the rank of the bride. Dowry is also given in the form of copper tools for kitchen use to start a new life. Dowry is also given in the form of money, gold, motorcycles, cars or houses.

To hold a wedding ceremony, they need Rp 30,000.00. For foreign workers, they need 10-15 years to collect this much money. This caused them to leave India to find money to get married. A sad thing is that there are times when they can't participate in the wedding of their sister or relatives even though the wedding is done with money from their hard-earned money.

#### e) Relatives

Some laborers who came from Tamil Nadu stated that they were invited by relatives. This means that some laborers already have their own family members working in Malaysia or Singapore. This is a factor that attracts foreigners from India to come to Malaysia. They were also found to trust their relatives more than the agents.

Two of the laborers interviewed which stated that they had relatives who came before them to work in Southeast Asia. One of the laborers who came to Malaysia has a brother who works in Klang, who is the laborer's younger brother. Another laborer stated that he has a younger brother who works in Singapore. Workers who have siblings in Klang will always visit their siblings. While another laborer only visited his sister in Singapore once in two years. However, laborers coming to Malaysia always consider all their friends who came from India as their brothers. The concept of "sagotharan" or "brotherhood" is always emphasized among the Indian community from Tamil Nadu.

#### 4.1.1.3 Political Factors

##### a) Political instability in the State.

Most of the Indian laborers working in Malaysia are loyal supporters of Dr. Karunanithi. According to one of the workers, they supported the opinion of the Former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu who stated that:

"Indians who go out of the country, they know how to go home. We no need to worry about Indians who are abroad."

Despite having a strong political party, often when the election takes place, the daily life of the community is disrupted. As a result of the election, there was also a "banthu" which is a temporary state of emergency. Emergencies depend on specific areas. For example, in the event of the death of the leader of the ruling or opposition political party, supporters loyal of the leader will declare "banthu" ie shops must be closed and family members prohibited from leaving the house. If the store is open, the store will be destroyed. This causes a lack of income and becomes an obstacle to Indian laborers migrating to Malaysia. Disputes between political parties also often occur causing political instability.

The political situation in India is less stable when compared to Malaysia. This is because Tamil Nadu is such a big state compared to Malaysia. The unstable political situation caused economic activities to be affected.

Because of that, most traders, entrepreneurs and the general public suffered losses. This makes them more willing to leave their country of origin to earn a living.

#### 4.1.2 Attraction Factors in Malaysia

In this section, it will be explained about the willingness of Indian labor to migrate from India to Malaysia. In addition, the factors that encourage foreign workers to migrate to Malaysia will be explained.

There are various driving factors that cause many foreigners to migrate to Malaysia. Everyone who migrates has his own goals. If you consider every attendance, then their main goal is to find a lot of money to solve the poverty that they have been facing since birth. They also do not want their grandchildren to face starvation as they once experienced before. Through the research method conducted, it was found that many factors invited them to Malaysia. The main factors that can be considered are a good salary, friends who are abroad, various vacancies available in Malaysia, the weather is almost the same and so on.

##### 4.1.2.1 Economy Factor

###### a) High wages

The first driving factor that drives Indian foreign workers to come to Malaysia is the high salary rate in Malaysia. The wages they receive are very high compared to their country of origin and the exchange rate is also high compared to other countries. The Malaysian Ringgit to Rupee exchange rate is high. The currency exchange rate in 2020 is equivalent to  $\text{Rm}1.00 = \text{Rp} 17.00$ . This exchange rate makes them willing to come to Malaysia to work in blue collar sectors. The salary they receive after cutting levies and other things that depend on the understanding between employers and employees, it's very low but for them Malaysia is a popular destination. They think that the wages they will receive in Malaysia will give them a luxurious life. This caused many Indian laborers to come to Malaysia.

##### 4.1.2.2 Social Factor

###### a) Food Equality

In particular, the population of India is a citizen where they consume in a huge amount of foods. This factor is very attractive to them because the same food in the country of origin makes them like to move to Malaysia. Foods found in Malaysia are the same as in the country of origin but only the name is different. For example here we will say roti canai, in India they say Parotha. They also think that, if they move to Malaysia, they don't have to

struggle to find the same food supply as in India, especially spices. Some foreign workers have also stated that some of their friends who go abroad like Saudi Arabia facing food problems because it is difficult to get the food they want. In addition, foreign workers are familiar with spicy food such as curries, just like Malaysian Indians cook, which makes them willing to come to Malaysia.

When asked about food to one of the laborers named Pacaippan, he replied,

" We don't have to worry about food because what we eat in Malaysia is the same as in India. But the trouble is that the food we eat has to be cooked by ourselves. This is because in India we never enter the kitchen and only eat the food served."

#### c) Weather and Climate

The next common factor is weather and climate. This factor causes many people to migrate to Malaysia. The hot and rainy weather throughout the year in Malaysia is the same as in the home country. They are used to this kind of weather. This makes them happy to migrate to Malaysia. The position of India and Malaysia on the Equator causes both countries to receive almost the same weather.

This situation causes Indian laborers to choose Malaysia as a popular destination because they don't have to worry about the weather. In fact, they are used to this situation. In India it is hotter and if it rains, this will cause flooding. When asking one of the laborers named Vinnirex about the weather and climate, he replied:

" Before I came to Malaysia, I once asked a friend who had been here whether it was necessary to bring a sweater. My friend mockingly replied "Woi! Remember you went to Dubai! You go to Malaysia. The weather there is the same but not as hot as in India".

#### d) Equality of Religion and Culture.

Most of the foreign workers from India like to migrate to Malaysia because it has a variety of cultures and races just like in the country of origin. If seen in the country of origin, they are subjected to race and caste. Without race and caste, they cannot live perfectly. But here they live in peace and harmony regardless of race and culture. Even in one room there are workers of different religions such as Hinduism and Islam. Low-caste foreign workers are also not insulted or reviled in Malaysia because here everyone is respected and treated fairly by employers and local residents. If compared to the country of origin, they are treated badly because the lower castes

are usually looked down upon. In fact, they are not allowed to enter the place of worship, but here they are not treated like that. The culture they practiced in India was also brought to Malaysia. Polite culture is still practiced. Despite working in the same place, young people still show respect to the elderly.

Every noble value learned is practiced even when abroad. Helping someone else is their nature even though they are new to this country. Usually they will celebrate festivals together - like Hari Raya, Deepavali and Christmas. They often exchange food with each other as a duty. This further strengthens the brotherhood between them. This relationship makes them not feel they are abroad.

#### 4.1.2.3 Political Factor

##### a) Malaysia's Political Stability

Malaysia's political stability is an attractive factor for foreigners. When compared to other countries in the Southeast Asian region, Malaysia is a stable and peaceful country. This causes many foreign workers to like to come here. The stable and improved economic situation due to political stability is a factor that attracts labor to Malaysia. The entry of foreign investors into Malaysia can also improve the economy. This causes the need for foreign labor to increase and this becomes an attraction for foreign labor. They prefer to come to Malaysia because the political system in their home country is unstable and often changes policies.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Malaysia is a rich country with various economic activities. This causes many foreigners want to come to Malaysia. Examples, foreigners who make Malaysia their focus are Indonesian, Bangladeshi, Vietnamese, Nepalese and Indian. There are several factors that cause the occurrence of obstructive and driving factors, but foreign labor continues to flood Malaysia because the country has its own attractiveness.

In addition to that, they cannot participate in any social gathering because they have been away and their employer has not allowed them to return. They just sent money to get married but they didn't show up. Sometimes they do not return even to death among family members. They only talk on the phone.

There are various dilemmas faced by current laborers in Malaysia. Workers are cheated by agents. Agents have promised good jobs and wages but when the laborers come to Malaysia, they are only given jobs in the manufacturing sector. If they had been told earlier about the job in the manufacturing plant, maybe they would not have come to Malaysia. Even the salary given is not as promised. There is also fraud among agents because they

set different fares. Some laborers are charged Rp80,000 and some are charged Rp95,000. This proves that the agent is trying to get a lot of money from the labor. When they arrived in Malaysia, the laborers were tricked with job positions.

However, Indian labor did benefit from their emigrants. They can raise money and help even a small amount of money. With remittances, labor families can pay off family debts. In addition to that, sending money to India can reduce the burden of other family members and be able to hold the wedding of siblings even if they cannot attend.

In general, the researcher can formulate some points related to the aspects discussed. Among them the most important is that the laborers have difficulties in terms of raising money to come to Malaysia. Labor takes risks by borrowing money at high interest rates. Although there are laborers working in the government sector, they are willing to leave their jobs and come to Malaysia with the expectation of getting a good salary.

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