

## **Democratic Pluralism: A Perspectival Study of American and Indian Nationhood Experiences- Challenges for the Malaysian Nation-State: An Instructive look at American and Indian Nationhood Experiences- Lessons and Challenges for Malaysian Nation-Statehood.**

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**Abstract.** It is of common knowledge today, that the world is undergoing much social and political upheavals and challenges in national and societal governance. ‘Duly democratically elected’ and constituted governments face varying degrees of political opposition in the governance of their societies, which often are made up of diverse ethnic communities. It is well acknowledged that the American and Indian nations are among the few longest surviving and ‘cohesive’ democracies. This perspectival study looks at the principles and practices of democratic, pluralistic governance in the above nations, and thereby the lessons that can be drawn from them, and thence the challenges for the Malaysian nation in further enhancing the cohesiveness and quality of life for its peoples. The research approach employed for the data input was the use of relevant secondary data sources. Current on-line available data and that from the national media, were also used. The analysis of all related data was mainly a documentary analysis approach. The findings of this study indicate that beyond the centrifugal pulls faced by the American and Indian democracies, a firm and undergirding commitment to the principles and values of democratic pluralism, has enabled them to generally function well and move forward in a cohesive societal framework. The Malaysian nation’s challenges can well be to draw appropriate lessons from the principles upheld and practised generally actively, of democratic pluralism at the grass-roots, in the above older nations. Further, the study shows that there is constant deliberation to concertedly initiate democratic measures to incorporate minority groups more assuredly as fully engaged constituent sections of its national citizenry, towards inclusiveness and the greater national good.

**Key words:** American, Indian, Malaysian democratic pluralism, principles and practices, constituent, centrifugal pulls, cohesive societal framework.

### **1.Introduction.**

It is often said that the Indian and American democracies are two of the open and the world’s largest ‘functioning’ democracies. An individual citizen’s innate motivations to actualize and ‘demonstrate’ his or her rights and contributions for the common good, and to participate in

the running of his/her nation's governmental establishment, is given appropriate expression and recognition by such as an open, democratic government (Kohli, Atul, ed.2001; McGowan, Meagan C. 2008).

This above democratic ideal as it were, is ensconced in no better and explicit way than in the words of a former American president, Abraham Lincoln, when he honoured the dead in the American Civil war in 1863, saying,

We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of *freedom- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth* (Farndon, J. 2010, p.237).

As man 'makes' and 'realises' his very own nation and its forms of governance, over and for him and all his brethren, through the apparently universal, 'bench-marking' and ubiquitous electoral process practised even in some dictatorships like the North Korean, Russian and Zimbabwean (Zimbabwe: The Obscenity of Dictatorship - Open source investigations, [www.opensourceinvestigations.com](http://www.opensourceinvestigations.com) › *Dictatorship*) governments, , Lincoln's forethought and wisdom about the preeminence of the entity and place of mankind in this world, is crystalised in his words above, as to the undeniable *righteousness of democracy* above all other forms of governance.

## 2. Objectives of study

The following objectives will constitute the direction of this brief study.

- 2.1. In order to appraise the significance of some of the 'realities' and practices of democracy as they unfold in the lives of the world citizens today, this study intends to look at some salient aspects of democratic governance in the United States of America and India, and,
- 2.2 What challenges and insights lend themselves to and for Malaysian democracy towards the realization of optimum national well-being for the Malaysian citizens-society.

## 3. Research Questions

- 3.1. To what extent are the principles and qualities of democratic pluralism observable in the governance practices of the nations focused in this study.
- 3.2. What efforts help in the attainment of solidarity and national well-being via democratic pluralism.

## 4. Research Methodology

Secondary data from book texts, journals, media reports and informed discussions on the subject of this study were the main sources of reference for data collection and classification as appropriate for the focused study themes. A qualitative data analysis of the above was employed

### 4.1. Defining democracy

In both homogeneous and multifarious, that is, diverse societies, the individual citizen's rights are to be unfailingly safeguarded in a democracy. The political organization, at the apex of governance, is duty bound to ensure the citizen's human and legal rights are well in place. This is in turn determined by the extent the citizen abides by the rules and laws of the said democratic system.

As Daniel Tetteh Osabu-Kle ([carleton.ca/~.../revised-psci-4104a-osabu-kle-f09.pdf](http://carleton.ca/~.../revised-psci-4104a-osabu-kle-f09.pdf)) has incisively noted that,

Democracy has only one real or essential definition. Other definitions of it arise precisely because there is a difference between the real or essential meaning of democracy and the actual practice of democracy that leads to nominal and operational definitions. ... The essential or real meaning of democracy derives from two Greek words *demos* and *kratos*. *Demos* means *the common people* and *kratos* means *rule*. Thus, democracy essentially means the rule of the common people. ... any attempt to define it otherwise is a matter of convenience and may have its roots in the difference between what democracy essentially is and how it is practiced.

The 'common people' factor becomes the essential constituent of a democracy, as rightly warranted in any form of governance, as its practice impacts them wholly. The people, even if marked by their ideological demarcations, need to be seen in a democracy in a composite perspective as the people of a common entity- the nation. As Rustow (1970, pp.337-367) upholds a democracy directed as a manifestation of the rule of the common man, has to be premised on the feeling of national unity. In the ancient Greek world, those who held power and often, the common people themselves deemed it appropriate as much, that sections of society- children, women, prisoners, slaves were to be excluded from political decision-making. This was felt reasonable, and democratic values and practices as such, were seen to be upheld.

The above practice still prevails today in the modern age. Children and foreigners cannot partake in a nation's electoral processes. With exclusions of sections of a sovereign, self-governing polity as such, however reasonable or 'pragmatic' they may be, democratic practice often thus becomes a mixture of the democratic and dictatorship contents. It has often come to bear in modern society, that the organized few- the elite, solicit the authority and acquire the means to rule over the unorganized masses, the majority. Democratic practice thus, often becomes a convenient means for its dictatorship component to override and determine, and occasionally buttress, the 'democratic norms' to be effected in society.

#### **4.2. The Modern-day architecture of democracy: Cultural-democratic pluralism.**

Many nations in our modern-day world are increasingly becoming cosmopolitan. With marginalised and 'stateless' communities, like the Rohingyas from Myanmar as it were (Kazi Fahmida Farzana, 2014) , the Middle East and Western Asian migrants to the European, and other developed and developing nations, seeking a new and secure lease on life, the demographics and cultural dynamics of these host nations have become very much cosmopolitan. The political and governance policies hence do tend to become more broad-based, being cognizant of the socio-cultural and political pulls and needs of the new multicultural societal contexts.

How this above socially and culturally differentiated pluralism in nations today is constructed and characterized becomes therefore, crucially significant for the sense and definition of what the *lived national and nationalistic experience of 'nationhood'* actually is for the peoples of the nation.

The realisation to some measure as it were, of this sense of 'nationhood' for political-international recognition and standing of the polity concerned, was the concerted commitment of all sectarian groups to a pluralistic understanding and acceptance of a *common, 'holistic nationhood'*. Instead of acceding to primordial and ethno-centric urges giving particular *importance to race, religion, and colour differences, a sense of inclusivity and an 'educated' understanding of the strengths that can result in the 'psychological-cognitive merging' and conflation* of all the above differences, presents itself as a workably stark potentiality in the

culturally democratic-pluralistic ambience of national polities (Jayasuriya, L. *Citizenship and Republicanism in a Multicultural Nation* 1993, <http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au/>).

The attainment of a *holistic democratic nationhood* discussed above, is often driven by the tenets of **constitutional liberalism**<sup>1</sup>. In the context of the prevalent *multicultural milieu* in nations generally today, the goals of nationhood mentioned above, are defined by the principles of *constitutional liberalism*. In addition, the *goals of governance* of the ruling government of a polity are crucial. Giving meaning to democracy for all citizens not only requires marrying the above with individual liberty and equality, but also to place the democratically constructed, constitutional principle of the rule of law, at the very centre of an operational governmental republicanism.

In the domain of the republican system of government as such, with its focus on fair and decentralized government, clear checks and balances on excessive government, and overarched under the essential principles of democratic equality, it thus projects equality of citizenship. As Cecile Laborde (2008, p.11) analyses,

... its ideal is that of a society where *all citizens enjoy basic but robust civic standing, in the form of political voice, basic personal autonomy, equal opportunities, ... as equal citizens*. In a republic, citizens enjoy not only the objective goods that membership in a fair scheme of social cooperation brings, but they also enjoy the subjective (ones)... Among such goods is *the feeling that they are seen by others (and that they see others) as full members of such a scheme*. Such attitudes of **mutual civic recognition are fostered**, not through the forcible inculcation of common values, let alone through the repression of deviance and dissent, but through the **actual sharing of genuinely public spaces- mixed neighbourhoods and common secular schools, ... (with cultural education), where citizens learn to live together, ... and continuously re-invent their imagined collective identity**.

This above ideal of republicanism when translated into good, equitable governance towards the social demands of an **existential democratic pluralism**, is then possibly able to address and appropriately translate the 'felt' needs of the total citizenry of a multicultural polity, into meaningful beneficial outcomes.

It can be noted that in an intensely multiracial country, at one time thought to be a tinder box for potential racial strife, it is reported that the ethnic diversity index (EDI) of the west Malaysian states correlates positively with economic growth and development. The correlation score was at  $r=0.665$  for the EDI in 2010 and economic growth from 2000 to 2010. Malaysia, although having a generally high fractionalization index (FI) of 0.596 (this is taken as similar

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Constitutional liberalism relates to a ruling government's goals. It refers to the tradition, deep in Western history, that seeks to protect an individual's autonomy and dignity against coercion, whatever the source- state, church, or society. Democracy is becoming more common around the world. Freedom House reported that **in 2013 there were 118 electoral democracies. Many of these countries are not constitutionally liberal and can be described as illiberal democracies**. In countries not grounded in constitutional liberalism, the rise of democracy often brings with it *hyper-nationalism and war-mongering*. When the political system is opened up, diverse groups with incompatible interests gain access to power and press their demands. Political and military leaders, who are often embattled remnants of the old authoritarian order, realise that to succeed, they must rally the masses behind a national cause. The result is invariably aggressive rhetorics and policies, which often drag countries into confrontation and war. Noteworthy examples range from Napoleon III's France, Wilhelmine Germany, and Taisho Japan to those in today's newspapers, like Armenia and Azerbaijan and Milosevic's Serbia. *The democratic peace, it turns out, has little to do with democracy* (Fareed Zakaria, 2007)

to the EDI), as compared to Sri Lanka, with a lower FI of 0.428 but with its tragic record of genocidal-ethnic strife, history shows how national governance and the impregnating of consensual nationhood values in the peoples can regulate and advance pluralistic life-values (Hans-Dieter Evers, 2014).

### 4.3. Nationalism, its aftermath on democratic pluralism

As history has well shown, in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries **European and Asian nationalism** was a unifying factor, bringing together peoples of diverse backgrounds. This, it is often lamented was with little regard for ethnic identities which bonded communal groups through their socio-cultural and religious practices and precepts.

The drive and aspirations for recognition of some form of **self-determination in matters ‘close to one’s heart’**, have often been negated by the *larger nation-state determinants*, which were themselves based on the above.

Hence, nationalistic sentiments of the people of a polity, while helping to construct the principal ideology leading to democratic political statehood and national patriotism, almost inadvertently, led to group democratic claims challenging the larger nation-state.

If as in the philosophical and spiritual traditions of man, good was to result from man working in unison, and the greater good from greater togetherness (Grayling, A.C., Britannica Guide to The Ideas that made the modern world, London: Constable & Robinson Ltd., pp. xii-xiii), then it would be appropriate here to look briefly at the famous, “*Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*”, (1961, as based in the *Charter of the United Nations (Art.1, para 2 and Art.55)*). Of particular import, together with that of *self-determination to sovereign statehood*, the **principle of the preservation of unitary statehood and respect for one another’s (national states) existing frontiers**, was at all times to take precedence over any claims to ‘group’-based self-determinations, which invariably result in the dismemberment of existing ‘statehoods’.

**Ethnic divisions** commonly constitute one major cause for the above. When ethnicity burgeons into nationalism, often in situations depicting endemic frustrations harboured by minority groups over the inequitable distribution of economic resources and opportunities, **religious fundamentalism** and primarily, the sluggish development of democratic forms of government, can lead to the resurgence of strong sentiments of **ethno-nationalism**. The Turkish-Kurdish confrontation in Eastern Europe today is a clear example of the above. This often engenders a heightened sense of an **exclusive ethnic identity**, and thereby, **demands for state autonomy**.

In order then for nations to evolve into effectively functioning and progressive political entities, where *different minority and majority communities (multi-nations)* possessing the same rights can live together, it is necessary then to give credence in ‘everyday’ practice and pragmatic terms, to the United Nations Charter discussed above. Also, as Idris Jala (2016, p. 60) emphasises, in the context of the Malaysian nation, it is the **socio-economic and political management of the societal polarities**, bringing people together by actively celebrating, respecting and embracing the different cultures as a one-whole Malaysian society, which then can well *advance democratic pluralism*.

### 4.4. Consolidation of democratic practices and their sustenance in the American and Indian Democracies.

It is acknowledged by writers and the general global society, that apart from the above two nations, national governments in the world generally profess to serve the common masses. Some with discriminative, intense political intrigue and ‘genocidal’ past and recent historical records, especially in the Middle Eastern, African (MENA- Middle East and North Africa) and Asian regions today [note: existence of autocratic governments in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Rwanda, Sudan, Yemen; ‘failed’ states of Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan are some examples, (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited 2015)], boast of regular ‘free’ elections, and thus aspire to be seen as ‘democratic’ polities. But are they really?, is often a disturbing question in the minds of particularly social and political scientists who may well hold the well-being and welfare of the governed at heart.

In this above scenario and socio-political context, the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2014 Report entitled aptly, ‘Democracy and its Discontents’, ranks the United States as a ‘Full democracy’, with a world ranking of nineteenth and a score point of 8.11 (note: on a ‘strengths of democracy’ scale of 1 to 10, with 1 indicating the weakest standing; Canada, ranked in the ‘Full democracy’ category, is positioned seventh, with a score of 9.08; United Kingdom-‘Full Democracy’, 16<sup>th</sup> ranking position, score of 8.31).

The following table below shows the democratic rank positions of seven nations, illustrating the strengths and divergences that can be gauged in relation to their comparative positions with regards the extent of the practices of democratic pluralism attained.

**Table 1: Democracy Index 2014 of Selected Nations**

Nations/Positions	Rank scores	Rank position	Full democracy	Flawed democracy
Norway	9.93	1	/	-
<b>United States of America</b>	<b>8.11</b>	<b>19</b>	/	-
Canada	9.08	7	/	-
United Kingdom	8.31	16	/	-
Singapore	6.03	75	-	/
<b>India</b>	<b>7.92</b>	<b>27</b>	-	/
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>6.49</b>	<b>65</b>	-	/

The sustaining strength of the Indian democracy largely, (as with the American one), is the **widespread practice of local, village and representative ‘government’**. The Indian nation’s diversity in its cultures, religions, and its vast physical spread has innately provided the social impetus for the representation and protection of the individual Indian citizen-entity. The system that became grounded in the Indian psyche has been referred to as the **‘Panchayat’**.

As the nation’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized in an Indian television interview in 1957, that India has had a democratic tradition for centuries, although, and foundationally pertinent for the national governance today, that it started and was based in the nation’s villages. This, thus reflected a **grass-roots democracy** which is still in force today, and hence, has helped to easily blend into the British, Westminster representative democratic

system put in place in the nation's political-administrative system at independence (Md. Manzurul Karim, 2013, pp.41-45).

The political culture that enlivens the Indian socio-political 'life' today as such, has been the above grounding factor, leading to the sustenance and social endorsement of democratic pluralism, and further, it is noted, that it is the impetus for the rapid economic development being experienced in the nation [note: India will be the fastest growing economy in 2016, according to the recently released United Nations (UN) World Economic Situation and Prospects 2016 Report. The report notes that India's economic growth will shoot up to 7.8 percent in 2016. This is an improvement from the 2015 value of 7.2 percent growth in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The report further points out that India will account for 70 percent of the foreign investment in South Asia in the coming years ([India Today.in New Delhi, January 23, 2016](#) )].

The American republic too, it has often been emphasized by political science scholars, upholds the ideals and practices of representative democracy and human rights, within its political framework of decentralized authority to the smaller, outlying regions and states. The nation's political origin and its successful progression to this day, it has been emphasized, was primarily due to the two following principles,

- a. the primacy accorded to representative democracy and its unwavering implementation, and,
- b. the division and distribution of power between national and subnational governments.

As history records, the United States of America has been established by the early thirteen provincial assemblies representing small English settlements on the east coast of North America going back over three centuries. The global power and superiority in education, science, economics, space exploration, military superiority and so on, that America possesses today, can be attributed to the deep strengths of the political system engendered in the American socio-political 'life' from the early days of its birth. This, in brief can be said has been due to the "**...decentralized nature of American democracy**" (Myerson, R.B. 2015).

In India, the federal pluralistic democracy has contributed to an extent, with the localized and also subordinate, caste-defined groups, moving socially and politically forward, to organize themselves more robustly. Generally in the nation as a whole and particularly in the state of Kerala it is observed, the lower-class and subordinate groups have been able to organize themselves effectively for their rightful benefits as national and state citizens. Such redistributive reforms, much in favour of the ordinary citizen, were possible as such, within the framework of democratic norms upheld. In contrast as it were, to the difficulties that developing countries generally face in managing escalating levels of political mobilization in today's world, the principles of democratic pluralism upheld which are translated into constructive institutional designs, have been clearly instrumental in enabling organized societal demands and democratic governance to become mutually reinforcing (Heller, P. 2000, p.486).

As in the American context, the Indian political system struggles with the issue of ensuring a life of quality for its peoples. Democratic substantiations on the ground, as it were, can tend to result in various forms of macro and micro cleavages and 'groupisms'. These are then exacerbated by practices of excessive clientelism, coercion and patrimonialism, widening the already social-caste, religious and educational differences that exist quietly and in pacificity. Even if these developments reflect that there is a deepening of democracy in the national society, as it can be seen in the active democratic 'expressions' even in the existing fissiparous and diverse character of both the above nations- as witnessed today in the 'stage dramatics and

rhetorics' of the 2016 American presidential elections, the *canons of democracy- constitutional guarantees of the rights of association, separation of powers, regular and open elections at the state and national levels, and the democratic institutions put in place, have clearly helped forge the sense of nationhood in the people from diverse communities.*

Both the above nations then can be said to portray that their democracies are largely working democracies, and thus effective democracies. This is so as the civil societies in the two nations project a quality of democratic performance, in that opportunities are constantly invoked for constant feedback and negotiation, demands and claims made beyond the formal institutions, and the social mechanisms employed constantly to enable active social patterns of association, both formally and at grass-roots levels.

Roger Myerson (2015, p.12, op cit.) has aptly analysed the American democracy, with its relevance for all democratic pluralistic-republicanism oriented governance systems, that,

“... The **key lesson** from American history is that those who would promote *vigorous democratic development* should appreciate the vital benefits of a (constitutional) balanced federal system- one in which the people can elect responsible local governments, as well as their sovereign national government”.

Alexis de Tocqueville (2010.p.656), a French aristocrat consumed by his devout love of his mother land France, in the 1770s, who wanted to study the basic principles of free government embodied in the American Constitution, provides the **grist of substantiation** for the above, emphasizing that the American citizen (and all self-respecting individuals) attains his goals by *allowing for the strengths and reason of all individuals to operate*, and further, upholds *liberty as his principal means of action, as compared to one who values personal power and servitude.*

The ultimate strength and longevity as such, of this ‘panchayat’-democratic pluralistic-republicanism, national governmental system is determined by countervailing forces being ***crucially embedded then in the resulting ‘balancing act’, as it were, of ‘the individual citizen rights’ movement and a constitutional liberalism promoting the national cause.***

#### **4.5. The Malaysian context and perspective**

In Malaysia, the nation’s constitutional parliamentary democracy is defined not only by the ‘rakyat’ paradigm, but more so in terms of the manifest politico-administrative practices, resulting in the domination of the race paradigm today. However, it is a constant ‘pull and push’, vacillatingly contentious scenario, with the ‘rakyat’ and the race paradigms attempting in all manner of rational sanity and with continuous negotiations, contestations and tensions, to exist side by side. This above scenario is embedded in the nation’s multi-ethnic pluralism which gives rise to the sociological motivations and the materialistic momentum of demands for control of the nation’s political economy, political power and the constantly declared ideological assertions for hegemonic (ethnic group oriented) recognition and power.

In this context, Professor Cheah Boon Kheng, in his seminal work on the making of the Malaysian nation, notes that Malaysia practises a “discreet form of multiculturalism”. The nation, being made up of three major ethnicities- the Malays, Chinese and Indians, there is no complete and full equity for the resident groups.

Officially, there is partial multilingualism in the educational system. ...In terms of social equity, there is only partial equity and opportunities to enable different ethnic communities to develop and contribute to the social, political and economic life of Malaysia, free from discrimination on grounds of race, gender, culture, religion, language, location, or place of birth. ...There is (thus) a need for sustaining and enhancing **ethnic pluralism. We have to accept ethnic stratification as a reality.**

Ethnic groups must be allowed to preserve their distinctiveness within what is seen as a gentle and insidious form of cultural domination. ... Malaysia is (well seen as) a striking example of a fairly successful dominant-ethnic model of nation-making. The political culture of the new state's core ethnic community becomes the main pillar of the state's new national identity. Though other cultures continue to flourish, the identity of the emerging political community is shaped by the historic political culture of its dominant ethnic. This modern-state incorporates other ethnic communities in the manner of West European state-making and nation-forming.

(Kajian Malaysia, Vol. XXI, Nos. 1&2, 2003, pp.405, 6).

The Malaysian nation's historicity therefore, has defined its multiculturalism to constitute a dominant Malay-ethnic pillar with supportive, accommodated smaller ethnic pillars. In the evolving trajectory of nation-building, the Malaysia nation can be better seen as, not a 'melting pot' of cultures as this connotes a state of constant "fire and heat, force and violence", thus incessant social instability, but a "mosaic model". This is quite apparent today as it relates to the nation's social contract at independence in 1957, enabling its peoples to constantly venture to democratically celebrate its diversities, and to live in consensus (ibid, p. 406).

The 'rakyat' socio-political construction sees its beginnings in the era of the Melaka kingdom, which the Malaysian sociologist Syed Husin Ali (2008) calls "the zenith of the old Malay kingdoms". Milner (1982) elaborates in his study on political institutions in the Malay world then, that,

...Malays believed service to the ruler (the 'Raja') offered the opportunity for social and spiritual advancement. They understood that their position in this life and the next depended on the Raja; he was the bond holding men together,...Political life [of the Malays] could be subsumed under one term: men constituted themselves to be living not in states or under governments, but in a 'kerajaan' [form of societal governance], in the "condition of having a 'Raja' ". (with reference to the Hikayat Deli, the Sejarah Melayu)

And further, in a later study, Milner notes that,

...all the subjects of the ruler were treated appropriately, according to rank. (This) was an aspect of the ruler's "work". The ruler himself had reason to satisfy his subjects' needs, because he needed subjects. The more 'rakyat' he had... the higher his own status (Milner. 2011, p.66).

The early Malay manuscripts, such as the 'Sejarah Melayu', going back to the fifteenth century, in the period of the 'Melaka' sultanate era, relate a symbiotic relationship between the ruler and the common people- the 'rakyat'. This emphasized the position of the 'rakyat' as an integral and indispensable part of the state- the 'kerajaan', and the ruler- the 'raja'. The ruler was fully cognizant of the socio-political reality then, that without the 'rakyat', there would be no place for the 'raja'.

As a functioning form of governance of the people who with the Melaka kingdom opening up to external trade and state links, and the growth of largely a coastal cosmopolitan pluralism, the 'rakyat', or the people, began to be seen as the people living in the ambit of the ruler's authority, whose needs had to be satisfied. Although, the 'rakyat' were the subjects of the ruler and their lives 'bound' to him, that is, totally dependent on him, the ruler had to safeguard his position and 'nama' by 'serving' the needs of his people.

The principles then of good and fair governance of the peoples which are congruent to the essential tenets of a **pluralistic democracy**, can be said to have had their beginnings in the early Malay world.

However, the Malaysian social-political scenario today has certainly changed from that of a multiracial, multicultural society with generally mutually respected, 'equidistant' relations, that is, a healthy regard for one another's social-cultural practices, to one today in which democracy is possibly striven hard to continue to retain it as *the 'beacon of everyday life' for the common citizen. But this is often punctuated by new moral and religious, centrifugal considerations.* The political-democratic powers are often challenged by the need to maintain civil society norms and to nurture religious and mutually respectable pluralistic relations between minority and the majority religious communities. Religion thus, with its attendant concomitant elements, is increasingly becoming the major and possibly, 'irksome' governance issue in Malaysia and also in other emerging nations, such as the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and others (refer Cheah Boon Kheng, 2003)

As discussed above, the essence of the democratic political system is the **order** it purports to establish in the polity and thus, in the lives of its peoples. **Laws** enacted by the nation's highest legal institution- the Malaysian *Parliament*, become the substance of the 'order' hoped for.

The *Malaysian Federal Constitution* makes it clear that it is the supreme law of the land. Its fundamental construction is acknowledged by legal authorities and the United Nations organization, as *signifying democratic principles*; and directed with a clear focus on the common masses, the *provision and enjoyment of fundamental liberties or rights*. The term "law" in the Constitution, refers therefore, to "...a system of law which incorporates *the fundamental notions of democracy and the values* it enshrines as obtained in England on Merdeka Day, (for the Malayan independent new nation)" [Gurdial Singh Nijar, Professor of law, University Malaya, the Sun, 7.6.2016, p. 13; with reference to Malaysian Federal Constitution, Articles 4, 5, 9(1), 12(1)].<sup>2</sup>

## **5. Implications, challenges and conclusions for democratic pluralism for the Malaysian nation**

It is indeed a global phenomenon that people, not only in the 'mature' post-industrial democracies and also those in the developing nations, are becoming increasingly connected to everyday politics and its applications and outcomes, essentially because of the implicitly functioning forces of social modernisation and global communication.

In Malaysia, as with other new democracies today exhibiting various expressions of democratic pluralism (in the MENA region, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Myanmar, Yemen and so on), with the rise of various non-governmental organisations, the two-thirds majority in the Malaysian nation's parliamentary seats being lost today, the emergence of break-away political parties from the earlier major political party giants- the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) breaking up with the National Trust Party [Parti Amanah Negara (GHB-Gerakan Harapan Bangsa)] going on its own; the dwindling influence of the ruling coalition party (Barisan Nasional) losing support nationally, with its Chinese party partner-Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) very much rejected by its earlier supporters, resulting in the opposition Chinese party-the Democratic Action Party (DAP), gaining greater ethnic Chinese support mainly, there are indications that the present youth-general populace may not see its

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<sup>2</sup> The reference to the common law of England is based on historical antecedence, as Malaya when it attained its independence from Great Britain in 1957, was a British colony. British common law was already in force in Malaya then, in the British government's administration of Malaya.

relationship with the government and its institutions as defined by allegiance and deference (James Campbell, 2016).

What is of utmost importance for the Malaysian government today then, is to come to grips with the task that it must arrest the possibility of a *widening potential cultural mismatch* between the culture of the government and that of its institutions, and primarily that of the **larger national society and national citizens**. With the inevitable and growing global-social connectivity, the felt need for and the reality of the evolving greater democratization of society, can result in the gradual and possibly embryonic fraying of the **much needed culture-institution congruence for national well-being** (Christian Welzel, Russell J. Dalton, eds. 2014).

As in the domain and practice of democratic pluralism, a balance can be put in place between limiting governmental authority, and the assertive tendencies of its plural and cosmopolitan-multi-ethnic citizens. It is often advocated by educationists and social science scholars that it is a grass-roots educational approach for the long term interests of society that is urgently required today, to **cultivate a sense of balance and understanding- in asserting one's rights and demands with that of the national cause and responsibilities** (Chandra Muzaffar 2014., Dzulkifli Razak, 2012., Teo Kok Seong 2015., Halimah Mohd Said 2016., Faridah Rohani Rais 2016).

In managing the polarities in a democratically pluralistic society, in any part of this global 'village' today, humanistic and equalitarian principles need to be cardinal constituents of national governance. All sections of society, in the long term can then meld into one large national society, shedding totally all psychological notions of marginalization and value systems formed from the experiences of being a 'second-class group or community'. This can have far-reaching social consequences and therefore, committed efforts are needed from all sectors of the Malaysian society, particularly the education sector. The *national categorisations of difference- the dichotomies of ranked recognitions, expectations as a class of a indigenous community demanding special rights, as opposed to other communal groups regarded and given the disproportionate recognition as secondary entities, and so on, do not definitely engender the requisite deep, grounding sense of a Malaysian consciousness and values for a shared democratic pluralism*, in the Malaysian society (Azly Rahman, in Lim Teik Ghee and others eds. 2009, p.272 ; Bakri Musa, 2016, p.420).

In the spirit of the Malaysian Federal Constitution then- that it was to provide the **foundation** for the emergence and **consolidation** of the nation as a secular, modern and democratic polity (Clive Kessler in Lemiere, S. 2014, pp. x-xi), giving careful regard for the **traditional parameters of Malaysian democratic politics**, and the Mahathirist (Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the fourth prime minister with the longest reign in office of 22 years) possibly well-conceived efforts at '**less democracy and more stability**' in plural Malaysia, then all moves at instituting an ethocracy- an ill-conceived ethnic hegemony promoting the idea of a 'ketuanan Melayu', can well be changed to an all-embracing '**Kedaulatan rakyat**' programme. The stark manifestations today of a Malay peasant resistance to proletarianisation, cultural revivalism, political ferment among the new Malaysian middle classes prodded by generally positive economic growth over the years since independence, and importantly, a growing fragmented vision of Malaysian modernity- that is, the divergence in the rampant religious and secular perspectives (Francis Loh K.W., Khoo B.T. eds.2002, p.5), call for a possible reformulation of democracy in this plural, multi-cultural nation. This needs to be done by a *committed national leadership*, from the top as it were, and concertedly and integratedly, through *equalitarian educational and psychological socialization programmes, in schools and with the public media*.

The Malaysian civil government, being democratically empowered and thus forming a 'canopic' protective arch for the multi-ethnic society, should concertededly monitor and guide religious activities, with simple rationality, and not be directly involved in any and all religions. This is primarily for the reason that religious sensitivities can be rife and conflict-prone. The Islamic religion as the religion of the nation, in due regard to the religious conflicts in the world today, needs to be *recast as the 'magna carta', placing all existential Malaysian religions and cultures under its protective 'canopic' arch.* This then can well exemplify the principle that **religious plurality and its toleration, are truly the key antidotes to communal disaffection and unrest** (Locke, as in Irm Haleem, NST 21.6.2016, p. 15). This can well re-energise the **pluralistic values**<sup>3</sup> which

At a **direct political level**, pluralism works for democracy because:

today, we are just about holding the multifarious Malaysian nation together in a somewhat dithering balancing act in a state of "stable tension" (Shamsul A.B. 2006).

Delving deeper in our understanding and full acceptance of one another as Malaysians of over a half century of common existence and citizenry, being involved in the social education infrastructure and as pillars of the national ideology- *the Rukun Negara, we can manifest a living sense of inclusivity in diversity and, the 'true' Malaysian.*

And why should we not, as a committed, actively 'maturing' national citizenry.

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<sup>3</sup> At the '**grassroots**' level, pluralism works for democracy because:

- it allows people to develop a wide variety of attachments and associations
- it enhances a sense of belonging and provides opportunities for people to participate actively in building the kinds of communities they want to live in
- where effective interest groups or pressure groups are formed, people also have an increased ability to influence political decision-making.
- it allows for a variety of political parties. A sign of healthy pluralism is the operation of a range of political parties.

the political parties are formed around different values and beliefs, but seek to be broad-based in their membership. In other words, the membership base of parties in a pluralist society cuts across racial, class or other lines and helps construct social bridges and thus, brings people with similar convictions together (adapted from <http://www.colelearning.net/cyp/unit3/page4a.html>).

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