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**MAHATHIR'S LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL  
CHANGE ON INDIAN COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA: INDIAN  
HINDU SPIRITUAL VALUES**



**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA**  
**SEPTEMBER 2019**



Awang Had Salleh  
Graduate School  
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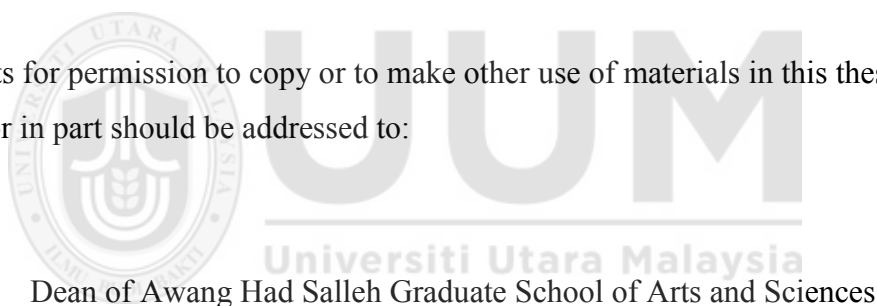
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## Abstrak

Penyelidikan ini adalah tentang komunikasi kepemimpinan Mahathir dalam mewujudkan perubahan sosial di kalangan masyarakat India. Walaupun banyak penyelidikan berkaitan komunikasi kepemimpinan telah dijalankan, namun kajian tentang hubungan pemimpin yang berasal daripada kaum majoriti dengan pengikut kaum minoriti (India) dari sudut pandangan budaya tidak banyak dikaji sebelum ini. Oleh itu, penyelidikan ini meneliti komunikasi kepemimpinan Mahathir dari sudut pandangan budaya masyarakat India di Malaysia. Penyelidikan ini telah menemu-bual masyarakat Hindu yang terdiri daripada golongan pemimpin serta rakyat biasa. Seramai 23 responden telah dipilih berdasarkan teknik persampelan purposif. Pengumpulan data telah dilakukan melalui teknik temu-bual, pengambilan nota dan rakaman audio. Respons deskriptif masyarakat India terhadap komunikasi kepemimpinan Mahathir ke arah perubahan sosial diterokai dan dibentangkan berdasarkan teori kepemimpinan transformasional. Penemuan dan konklusi yang dibentangkan adalah berdasarkan data yang dikumpul, persoalan penyelidikan dan kajian literatur. Berdasarkan analisa tematik, lima tema telah dikenalpasti iaitu konsep komunikasi kepemimpinan masyarakat India, komunikasi kepemimpinan Mahathir, pengaruh budaya India dalam pembentukan persepsi terhadap komunikasi kepemimpinan Mahathir, pengaruh komunikasi kepemimpinan terhadap perubahan sosial, respons dan kehendak masyarakat India terhadap komunikasi kepemimpinan Mahathir. Berdasarkan penemuan kajian, model komunikasi kepemimpinan yang bersesuaian dengan masyarakat India telah dibentuk. Model ini dapat dijadikan sebagai panduan dalam mengurus dan menangani isu masyarakat India yang merupakan masyarakat minoriti. Penyelidikan ini sememangnya memberi pemahaman yang mendalam terhadap komunikasi kepemimpinan, khususnya perhubungan antara pemimpin dari kaum majoriti dengan pengikut minoritinya dari sudut pandangan budaya.

**Kata Kunci:** Komunikasi Antara Budaya, Minoriti, Komunikasi politik, Komunikasi transformasi

## **Abstract**

This research focuses on Mahathir's leadership communication in creating social changes among Indians in Malaysia. Various studies were conducted on leadership communication but researches which touches on the leadership communication between a leader of a majority community (Malay) and his/her followers from the minority group (Indian) from the cultural perspective are limited. Therefore, this study investigates the leadership communication of Mahathir from the Indian perspective. The researcher interviewed Indians in Malaysia including leaders and commoners based on purposive sampling method. A total of 23 informants have been recruited as the study informants. Data were collected through interviewing, note-taking and audio recording. Descriptive accounts of the Indians' responses towards Mahathir's leadership communication for social changes from the Indian perspective were explored and presented using the transformational leadership theory. Based on the thematic analysis, five themes were emerged to answer the aims of the study; Indians leadership communication conception, Mahathir's leadership communication, the influence of Indian culture towards Mahathir's leadership communication, leadership communication for social change, responses to Mahathir's leadership communication and the expectation of Indians towards leadership communication. Based on the findings of this study, a leadership communication model from the Indian perspective is developed which could be used as a reference in managing the Indians who are the minority community. This study provides an insight of leadership communication towards bringing social change, particularly focusing on the relationship of a leader and his followers from the minority community.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communication, Minority, Political communication, Transformational communication

## **Acknowledgement**

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Dr Mohd. Khairie Ahmad for the continuous support of my PhD study and related research, for his patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis.

Besides my advisor, I would like to thank my co-supervisor Dr. Norhafezah Yusof for her insightful comments which helped to improve my thesis. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to the respondents who participated in my research with full cooperation.

I am very grateful to the examiners Associate Prof. Dr. Chang Peng Kee and Dr. Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani Ahmad Sabri. They were very kind during viva and in the period of the correction. Their constructive comments helped to improve this thesis.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family and relatives for supporting me spiritually throughout writing this thesis and my life in general. I dedicate this work to my parents, Suppiah, Letchumi and my wife Megala Rajendran who supported me throughout this venture.

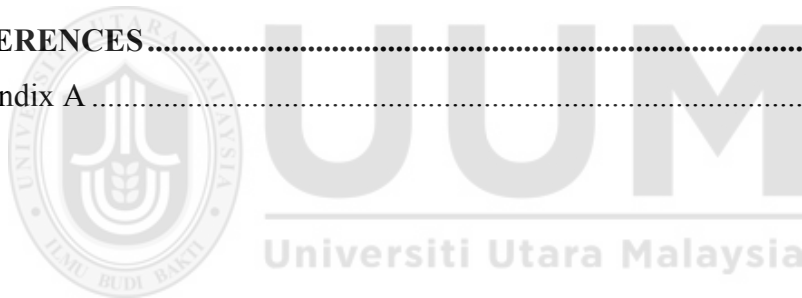
I also place on record, my sense of gratitude to one and all, who directly or indirectly, have lent their hand in this venture.

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## Glossary of Terms

*Vedas*- ancient Hindu text

*Bhagavad-Gita*- The Holy Book of Hindu; the highest and most authentic authority in Hindu. Quotation from the Bhagavad-Gita is normally followed by a reference to the number of the chapter and the number of the quoted verse

*Valmki Ramayana*- ancient Hindu literature

*Gunas*- attributes; “sattva”, “rajas” and “tamas”

“*Sattva guna*” refers to the qualities of an individual who work for the harmonization and betterment of the people and they are self-less

“*Rajas*” refers to the quality of an individual who only think for himself or herself, aiming at only ego, fame, name and power.

“*Tamas*” refers to the quality of an individual who is corrupted and driven by his/her personal interest, and willing to sacrifice anyone for selfish goals.

*Krishna*- Hindu God

*Arjuna*- Lord Krishna's follower

*Sri Rama*-Incarnation of Lord Krishna

*Sita*-Wife of Sri Rama

*Muni*-Sages

*Ayodhya*-Sri Lanka

*Guru*-master/teacher

*Karma*- Action

*Dakshyam* - Problem-Solver

*Sattva-samuddhi*- Ethical

*Yagna*- Inclusiveness

*Buddhi Yoga*- Critical

*Satyam* - Fulfilling promise

*Yoga*- Control and manage

*Brahma-bhuta*- sacrificing

*Buddhi*- Intellectual

*Karma*-refers to the action that one engages which involves body, mind and speech

*Karma-yoga*-duty-oriented

*Yoga*- refers to device or intelligent method

*Upanishads*-ancient Hindu literature

*Mahabharata*- a part of Bhagavad-Gita

*Sraddha*- utter faith

*Susrusa* –obedience

*Sama*- refers to the way of explaining to people by using common sense and logical explanations.

*Dana*- refers to the explanation by providing an incentive

*Bheda*- refers to selective discrimination and differentiation.

*Danda* - the use of force

*Nishkama karma* -selfless action

*Yagna*- Participatory Leadership

*Brahma-bhuta*- Pure service

*Jnana*- Knowledge

*Tapah van mayam*- Clear message and Delivery

*Buddhi*- Intelligent in various field

*Dakshyam*- Problem-solver

*Vijnana*- Wisdom

*Sattva-samuddhi*- being ethical

*Satyam*- Sincerity

*Abhijatasya*-Value-driven

*Nirguna*- Not-corrupted

*Buddhi Yoga*- Visionary



## **List of Abbreviations**

MIC-Malaysian Indian Congress

UMNO-United Malays National Organisation

HINDRAF-Hindu Rights Action Force

TLT-Transformational Leadership Theory

NEP-New Economic Policy

NDP-National Development Policy

IKIM- Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia)

GLOBE- Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness

NGO- Non-Governmental Organisation



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 An Overview

This chapter begins by describing the background of the study. It also discusses the need of the study, followed by problem statement, research questions, research objectives, study significance and scope. Next, the conceptual definitions are explained and finally the summary of the thesis is given.

### 1.2 Research Background

Researches on transformational leadership theory for more than twenty-five years indicated that transformational leadership affects followers' attitude and behaviour (Mhatre & Riggio, 2014) and it was evident that there is a sufficient conceptual gap in understanding the functionality of transformational leadership theory (Yukl 2006; van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). However, it was found that research investigating transformational leadership theory from a contextual perspective is still underdeveloped and not fully explored, specifically leadership communication involving leaders who belong to majority community and their followers from the minority group in cultural context (Ayman, & Korabik, 2010). Consistent with the idea, Burns (1978) stated that transformational leadership theory explains that a leader who possesses cultural knowledge of his followers will be able to contribute towards betterment of the followers. It was further supported by Kanungo and Misra (2004) who stated that transformational leadership is influenced by culture. Further, Singh and Bhandarker (1990) also strongly asserted that a leader can bring change in society if his leadership communication is consistent with the culture of his or her followers.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol:

#### Exploring Mahathir's leadership communication towards social change among Indians community in Malaysia

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

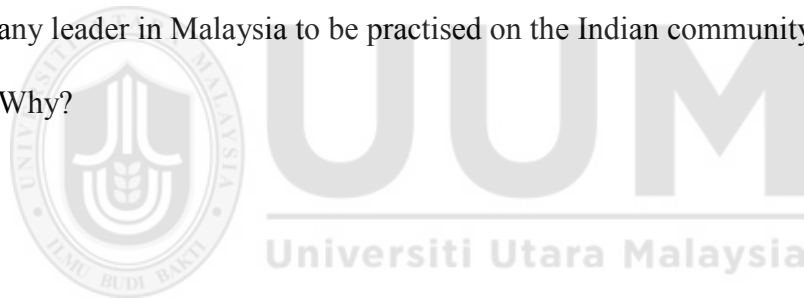
Position of interviewee:

Question:



1. How do you define leadership communication?
2. What do you think should be the characteristics of a good leadership communication?
3. From your understanding, what is the importance of leadership communication? Do you think a leader with a good leadership communication can bring some social change in a society? Probing: Why and how?
4. Based on what you heard on Tun Dr. Mahathir's speech, what do you think about Tun Dr. Mahathir's communication? Is it effective?

5. What is the characteristic of Mahathir leadership that you preferred the most?  
Probing: Why do you think so?
6. Do you think Mahathir's leadership communication has helped Indian community to achieve a better standard of living? If yes, why and in terms of what aspects?
7. What is your response towards the policies implemented by Mahathir?
8. Do you think the Indian cultural values affect the way you perceive Mahathir's leadership communication?
9. How those values are related to Mahathir's leadership communication?
10. Do you think Mahathir's leadership communication can be the best model for any leader in Malaysia to be practised on the Indian community? Probing: Why?



(Thank you for participating in this interview session. All the information provided is private and confidential, to be used only for the research purpose).