

**GENDER BELIEFS AND CAPABILITY
DEPRIVATION: A STUDY AMONG INDIAN
WOMEN IN PENANG, MALAYSIA**

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DEPRIVATION: A STUDY AMONG INDIAN
WOMEN IN PENANG, MALAYSIA**

by

NITHIYA D/O GUNA SAIGARAN

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Dedication

*To all my gurus who taught me about the feminism and real
empowerment of women!!*

Dedicate my favourite poet Barathiyaar's golden lyrics

*“ஆணும் பெண்ணும் நிகரெனக் கொள்வதால்
அறிவிலோங்கி இவ் வையம் தழைக்குமாம்*

.....

*அச்சமும் நாணமும் நாய்கட்கு வேண்டுமாம்;
ஞான நல்லறம் வீர சுதந்திரம்
பேணு நற்குடிப் பெண்ணின் குணங்களாம்;*

.....

*“நிமிர்ந்த நடையும் நேர்கொண்ட பார்வையும்
நிலத்தில் யார்க்கும் அஞ்சாத நெறிகளும்
திமிர்ந்த ஞானச் செறுக்கும் இருப்பதால்
செம்மை மாதர் திறம்புவ தில்லையாம்”*

(புதுமைப்பெண்) - பாரதியார்

“The world growth intellectually when it strongly prioritize equality of men and women. Fear and Shyness should regarded as weakness of women. On the contrary, knowledge, strength, wisdom, good deeds should be women's strengths in living the life. A new age women should have her head high, sharp look, a upright heart and unafraid at anyone because of the innate integrity, possess assuredness born of courage and conviction. This new age woman does not falter as she has the possession of wisdom and she never feels to inferior to any”

(A new age woman)- Barathiyar

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT | ii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | v |
| LIST OF TABLES | ix |
| LIST OF FIGURES | xi |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | xii |
| ABSTRAK | xiii |
| ABSTRACT | xv |
| CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.2 Statement of the Problem..... | 6 |
| 1.3 Research Objectives..... | 9 |
| 1.4 Research Questions..... | 9 |
| 1.5 Background of the Study..... | 10 |
| 1.5.1 History of Migration of Malaysian Indians | 10 |
| 1.5.2 Structural causes of poverty of Malaysian Indians..... | 17 |
| 1.6 The Socialization of Tamil Indian women..... | 21 |
| 1.7 Definition of Key Concepts..... | 24 |
| 1.7.1 Gender beliefs..... | 24 |
| 1.7.2 Capability Deprivation | 25 |
| 1.7.3 Urban Poverty..... | 26 |
| 1.8 Organization of the Chapters..... | 27 |
| CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | 28 |
| 2.1 Introduction..... | 28 |
| 2.2 Capability Approach..... | 28 |
| 2.2.1 Amartya Sen's (2001) Capability Approach..... | 28 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----------|
| 2.2.2 | Martha Nussbaum’s (1988; 2000) Capability Approach..... | 34 |
| 2.2.3 | Ingrid Robeyns (2003) and Sabina Alkire’s (2002) capability approach..... | 39 |
| 2.2.4 | Gender Perspective of the Capability Approach | 42 |
| 2.3 | Social Construction of Gender (Beliefs)..... | 43 |
| 2.4 | Theoretical Perspectives of Gender Beliefs..... | 52 |
| 2.4.1 | Social Learning Theory | 52 |
| 2.4.2 | Pierre Bourdieu’s Gendered Habitus | 53 |
| 2.5 | Past Research on Gender Beliefs: Traditional gender beliefs and Egalitarian gender beliefs of Eight (Selected) Capabilities..... | 54 |
| 2.5.1 | Gender Beliefs and Physical Health | 54 |
| 2.5.2 | Gender Beliefs and Mental Health | 56 |
| 2.5.3 | Gender Beliefs and Education | 58 |
| 2.5.4 | Gender Beliefs of Domestic Work and Dependent’s Care..... | 60 |
| 2.5.5 | Gender Beliefs of Paid Work and Special Talents | 63 |
| 2.5.6 | Gender Beliefs and Time Autonomy..... | 67 |
| 2.5.7 | Gender Beliefs and Material Ownership (Savings and Property Ownership)..... | 69 |
| 2.5.8 | Gender Beliefs and Bodily Integrity and Safety..... | 72 |
| 2.6 | Gender, Capabilities and Multidimensional Poverty..... | 73 |
| 2.7 | Past Research on Gender and Poverty..... | 77 |
| 2.8 | The Conceptual Framework of the Study..... | 81 |
| 2.9 | Summary..... | 82 |
| | CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY | 83 |
| 3.1 | Introduction..... | 83 |
| 3.2 | Research Design..... | 83 |
| 3.3 | Study Area..... | 87 |
| 3.4 | Population of the Study..... | 88 |
| 3.5 | Sampling and Sample..... | 88 |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--|------------|
| 3.6 | Method of Data Collection..... | 91 |
| 3.6.1 | Quantitative Method of Data Collection | 91 |
| 3.6.1(a) | Conceptual and Operational Definition | 92 |
| 3.6.1(b) | Validation of the questionnaire | 93 |
| 3.6.1(c) | Pilot Study..... | 93 |
| 3.6.2 | Qualitative Method of Data Collection | 95 |
| 3.7 | Method of Data Analysis..... | 96 |
| 3.8 | Ethical Issues..... | 98 |
| 3.9 | Summary..... | 99 |
| CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS..... | | 100 |
| 4.1 | Introduction..... | 100 |
| 4.2 | Demographic Profile of the Sample..... | 100 |
| 4.3 | Most Common Gender Beliefs of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women (In Relation to Eight Selected Capabilities)..... | 108 |
| 4.4 | The Levels of Capability Deprivation of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women..... | 113 |
| 4.5 | The Relationship between Gender Beliefs and Capability Deprivation of Eight Selected Capabilities..... | 115 |
| 4.6 | How do Gender Beliefs Influence the Capabilities of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women?..... | 119 |
| 4.6.1 | Cultural Norms | 121 |
| 4.6.2 | Resource Allocation among Genders | 137 |
| 4.6.3 | Parents as Role Models..... | 143 |
| 4.6.4 | Punishments and Rewards | 157 |
| 4.7 | Summary | 164 |
| CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION..... | | 165 |
| 5.1 | Introduction..... | 165 |
| 5.2 | Most Common Gender Beliefs among Poor and Non-poor Indian Women..... | 165 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------|
| 5.3 | The Levels of Capability Deprivation of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women..... | 169 |
| 5.4 | Relationship between Gender Beliefs and Capability Deprivation of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women..... | 174 |
| 5.5 | The Major Themes Related to the Influence of Gender Beliefs on Capabilities..... | 191 |
| 5.5.1 | Cultural Norms | 192 |
| 5.5.2 | Resources Allocation among Genders..... | 196 |
| 5.5.3 | Parents as Role Models..... | 199 |
| 5.5.4 | Punishments and Rewards | 202 |
| 5.6 | Summary of the Findings..... | 204 |
| CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION | | 208 |
| 6.1 | Introduction..... | 208 |
| 6.2 | Outline of the Findings and Research Objectives..... | 208 |
| 6.3 | Theoretical Contributions of this Study..... | 210 |
| 6.4 | Significance of the Study..... | 211 |
| 6.5 | Limitations of the Study and Future Research..... | 213 |
| 6.6 | Conclusion..... | 215 |
| REFERENCES..... | | 216 |
| APPENDICES | | |

LIST OF TABLES

| | | Page |
|------------|---|-------------|
| Table 3.1 | Cronbach Alpha Value for Pilot Study (Section A: Gender Beliefs)..... | 95 |
| Table 3.2 | Cronbach's Alpha Value for Pilot Study (Section B: Capability Deprivation)..... | 95 |
| Table 4.1 | Age Profile | 101 |
| Table 4.2 | Highest Education Level | 101 |
| Table 4.3 | Marital Status | 102 |
| Table 4.4 | Number of children | 102 |
| Table 4.5 | Number of total household members | 103 |
| Table 4.6 | Employment Status | 103 |
| Table 4.7 | Job Type | 104 |
| Table 4.8 | Main kind of paid work..... | 104 |
| Table 4.9 | Individual income range..... | 105 |
| Table 4.10 | Income provider (if the respondent is a housewife)..... | 106 |
| Table 4.11 | Main Kind of Regularly Done Unpaid Work..... | 106 |
| Table 4.12 | Information About Savings Account in the Bank | 107 |
| Table 4.13 | Information About the Property | 107 |
| Table 4.14 | Special Skill and Talents..... | 108 |
| Table 4.15 | Overall Gender Beliefs of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women | 109 |
| Table 4.16 | t-test of Gender Beliefs of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women | 109 |
| Table 4.17 | Most Common Gender Beliefs of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women in Eight Selected Capabilities | 111 |
| Table 4.18 | The Levels of Capability Deprivation of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women | 113 |
| Table 4.19 | t-test of Capability Deprivation of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women..... | 114 |

| | | |
|------------|--|-----|
| Table 4.20 | Correlation Matrix for Gender Beliefs and Capability Deprivation of Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women for Eight Capabilities..... | 116 |
| Table 4.21 | Multiple Linear Regression for Poor and Non-Poor Indian Women's Capability Deprivation | 117 |
| Table 4.22 | Key Themes of How Gender Beliefs Influence Capability Deprivation..... | 120 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | Page |
|------------|---|
| Figure 2.1 | Conceptual framework of the study. 82 |
| Figure 3.1 | Mixed method sequential explanatory model. 85 |
| Figure 3.2 | Mixed method sequential explanatory study to measure and explore gender beliefs and capability deprivation of poor and non-poor Indian women. 85 |
| Figure 5.1 | Summary of findings: Gender Beliefs and Capabilities Deprivation of Poor and Non-poor Indian women. 207 |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|--|
| CA | Capability Approach |
| HINDRAF | Hindu Rights Action Force |
| IDM | Individual Deprivation Measure |
| KPIs | Key Performance Index |
| MPI | Multidimensional Poverty Indices |
| NDP | National Development Policy |
| NEP | National Economic Policy |
| NEP | New Economic Policy |
| NVP | National Vision Policy |
| PLI | Poverty Line Income |
| SPM | Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for Social sciences |
| UM | University Malaya |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UPSR | Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah |
| USA | United States of America |
| USM | Universiti Sains Malaysia |
| WIDER | World Institute for Development Research |

**KEPERCAYAAN GENDER DAN KETERSISIHAN KEUPAYAAN: SATU
KAJIAN DALAM KALANGAN WANITA INDIA DI PULAU PINANG,
MALAYSIA**

ABSTRAK

Tesis ini mengkaji kepercayaan berasaskan gender dan ketersisihan keupayaan dalam kalangan wanita India yang miskin dan bukan miskin di Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. Objektif-objektif kajian ini adalah: mengenalpasti kepercayaan gender yang paling kerap yang diamalkan oleh wanita India yang miskin dan wanita India yang bukan miskin; untuk menentukan tahap ketersisihan keupayaan di kalangan wanita India yang miskin dan wanita India yang bukan miskin; untuk menguji hubungan di antara kepercayaan gender dan ketersisihan keupayaan dan juga untuk menghuraikan faktor-faktor yang mengaitkan kepercayaan gender and ketersisihan keupayaan di kalangan wanita India yang miskin dan wanita India yang bukan miskin. Kaedah gabungan kuantitatif dan kualitatif telah digunakan untuk kajian ini dan data telah dikumpul menerusi borang soal-selidik daripada 300 responden dan temubual mendalam daripada 24 peserta wanita India yang tinggal di daerah Kawasan Seberang Perai Tengah dan Timur Laut. Penemuan-penemuan kajian telah mendedahkan bahawa kepercayaan gender yang paling kerap diamalkan oleh wanita India yang miskin ialah kepercayaan tradisional dan kepercayaan yang paling kerap diamalkan oleh wanita India yang bukan miskin ialah kepercayaan egalitarian. Wanita India yang miskin mempunyai tahap ketersisihan keupayaan yang lebih tinggi berbanding dengan wanita India yang bukan miskin. Terdapat kolerasi positif di antara kepercayaan berasaskan gender bagi setiap keupayaan dalam kajian ini. Empat tema dikenalpasti dalam menerangkan hubungan di antara kepercayaan

berasaskan gender dengan ketersisihan keupayaan; norma-norma budaya, ibu-bapa sebagai model utama, perbezaan dalam memperuntukkan sumber di kalangan gender dan hukuman dan ganjaran. Kajian ini berjaya berjaya mendedahkan proses ketersisihan keupayaan wanita India dari perspektif gender.

GENDER BELIEFS AND CAPABILITY DEPRIVATION: A STUDY AMONG INDIAN WOMEN IN PENANG, MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates poor and non-poor Indian women's gender beliefs and capability deprivation in Penang, Malaysia. The objectives of this study are to identify the most common gender beliefs among poor and non-poor Indian women; determine the levels of capability deprivation of poor and non-poor Indian women; examine the relationship between gender beliefs and capability deprivation and explicate determining factors between gender beliefs and capabilities of poor and non-poor Indian women. Mixed- method design was utilized for this study and data were gathered using survey questionnaires from 300 respondents and in-depth interviews with 24 participants from two districts in Penang: *Seberang Perai Tengah* and *Timur Laut*. The findings revealed that the most common gender beliefs of poor and non-poor are traditional beliefs and egalitarian beliefs, respectively. Poor Indian women experienced higher levels of deprivation compared to non-poor Indian women. In addition, there was a positive correlation between gender beliefs and the overall capability deprivation and also with gender beliefs and deprivation of each capability. Four themes were identified in explaining the interconnection between gender beliefs and capability deprivation, which are cultural norms, parents as role models, resource allocation among gender and punishments and rewards. This study has expanded the body of knowledge which is much needed by explicating Malaysian Indian women's deprivation from the gender perspective.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There are numerous works on capability deprivation (Chattier, 2012; Eberharter, 2018; Mehrotra & Kapoor, 2009; Redmond, Praino, & Siddiquee, 2017). However, empirical studies on the interconnection/ relationship between gender and capability deprivation using the capability approach are still limited in sociology (Kremakova, 2013). Capability deprivation is defined as some form of capability suffering or the weak state of the capability (Arponen, 2018; Eberharter, 2018; Redmond et al., 2017; Waglé, 2014) and is strongly related to the gender system in the household (Bastos, Casaca, Nunes, & Pereirinha, 2009; Cin, Karlıdağ-Dennis, & Temiz, 2018; Robeyns, 2003). Capability deprivation is a concept that was derived from the capability approach introduced by Sen (1979)¹ and was later developed by other well-known scholars such as Nussbaum (2000), Robeyns (2003) and Alkire (2005). Capability approach is regarded as an important milestone in poverty research because it underscores the fact that impoverishment cannot be measured based on income alone but on the state of capabilities of an individual (Alkire, 2013, 2005a; Keleher, 2014; Nalagon, 2003; Sen, 2001). The capability approach further highlights that income is one of the reasons but is not the sole reason for impoverishment experienced by an individual (Deneulin & Shahani, 2013; Rauhut & Haiti, 2005; Sen, 2001). Sen (2001) posited that real poverty lies in the deprivation experienced by household members in their various capabilities (Hick, 2012; Nalagon, 2003; Sen, 2001).

¹ Sen (1980)

In Malaysia, most of the poverty studies were based on the income and household analyses and hence capability deprivation has been given scant attention. Although gender perspectives in poverty research can be found in Malaysia, research applying the gender inequality lens through the capability approach framework is relatively limited. In addition, there is little focus on Malaysian Indians in the extant poverty works. Thus, it can be surmised that the available literature on poverty in Malaysia reflects three setbacks/limitations: extensive focus on the household analysis or income, exploration of gender on surface level and single ethnic-targeted research. These three setbacks in poverty studies suggest that researchers have generally ignored the marginalization of Malaysian Indians in comparison to other ethnic groups in the country. Marginalization of the community strongly related to gender inequality issues that they experienced in their household. In similar, the marginalization of the Indian community was related to their gender inequality of their household system apart from the structural causes. Having lived in Malaysia for generations, Indians are one of the major ethnic groups that have greatly contributed to the nations' development economically, culturally and politically. Despite the contributions, they remain a marginalized community in Malaysia and are regarded as economically deprived (Cangià, 2014; Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Muzaffar, 1993; Nair, 2007b). Coming to Malaya as marginalized labourers, the migration was supposedly to have assisted the Indian community to break free from the vicious cycle of poverty. Lamentably, they generally remain poor (Muzaffar, 1993). Living and working in plantations had deprived them more; they had to contend with low wages, poor living infrastructures, language barriers and heavy workload (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Gopal & Malek, 2015; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). The Malaysian government's efforts in relocating labourers from plantations to the urban areas in

order to restructure the economy of Malaysia have largely excluded the Indian community (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013). This further pushed the Indian community into deprivation in terms of education, employment, and material ownership when compared to their Chinese and Malay counterparts (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Muzaffar, 1993). After independence, other efforts taken by the Malaysian government to improve the economic situation of Malaysians through the implementation of policies and programmes such as New Economic Policy (NEP), National Development Policy (NDP) NDP, National Vision Policy (NVP) have lamentably escalated the exploitation and the discrimination among Indians (Anbalakan, 2003; Cangià, 2014; Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Holst, 2012). This is because the policies were not attentive to Indians' marginalization; rather it extensively focused on Malays and their development. Continuous marginalization and deprivation have created greater gender inequality among the Indians compared to other ethnic groups (Mathiaram, 2019). The long-term marginalization impacted the Malaysian Indians so badly that they are currently going through deprivation in various aspects. Indians are identified as a largely marginalized group in the urban areas making poverty an urban issue (Mathiaram, 2019). This marginalization is supported by the poverty statistics, whereby in Malaysia approximately 80% of Indian households in urban areas live below the poverty line income of RM 960, amounting to 3,500 Indian households being categorized as poor, with another 22,700 Indian households earning about RM 1,000 a month, or less (Mathiaram, 2019). Furthermore, among the 227,600 B40 Indian households, the majority of them are being employed as plant and machine operators, production assemblers, and services and sales workers (Mathiaram, 2019). The economic growth development showed that Indians are experiencing more impoverishment, whereby only the top

20% (T20) in the Indian community has marked notable economic growth (Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016), whereas, the bottom 40% (B40) of the Indian community is identified as more regressed in terms of their economic growth (Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016). These poverty statistics showed that Malaysian Indians are indeed lagging behind economically when compared to other ethnic groups in Malaysia. It should also be noted that these statistics have a major drawback such that the existence of Malaysian Indian women is ignored. Historically, Indian women's presence was invisible since the statistics and their contributions were not been recognized and recorded as much as those of Indian men. Even after the nation's independence, the invisibility of the Indian women remains the same.

Poverty statistics most often assume that all the members in the household are the same. However, the patriarchal system in households suggests otherwise. According to Chowdhury and Patnaik (2013), Indian households are based on the patriarchy system, which has been shown through three major features: male and female differentiation, role allocation and gender-based hierarchal placement. The Malaysian Indian family system is predominantly patriarchal (Hirschman, 2016) given that most of the Malaysian Indians are the descendants of the migrants who came from traditional households² where class, race and gender discrimination and women exploitation was a tradition. The migration was supposed to benefit the women and free them from the shackles of exploitations of the patriarchal system. Unfortunately, it had further cemented their deprivation through a new vicious cycle of exploitations. Hence, it can be assumed that the invisibility from being a labourer in Malaya and being one who holds household roles has a strong connection with their gender system in their household. Sen (2017) asserted that in the traditional

² Traditional households refer to the households that have traits, norms, roles, practices and relationships based on traditional beliefs, which emphasize hierarchical status among men and women.

households where the patriarchal system and traditional gender ideology are glorified, capability deprivation is unavoidable. As a member of a traditional household, which emphasizes the patriarchy system, Malaysian Indian women definitely experience deprivations in life. Indian women's participation in the roles apart from their household roles is more complicated as they are expected to do prescribed household roles of the patriarchy system. Having said that, there are a number of Indian women who have successfully transcended from their household roles and have subsequently embraced breadwinner and leader roles. By and large, however, the Malaysian Indian women in open employment do not enjoy the complete freedom to discard or limit their focus on their household roles because they are still struggling with the dilemma in managing both household and employment roles (Hirschman, 2016). These household constraints and barriers can potentially cause women to become a "deprived group of the society" (Kharel, 2003). In the same vein, household constraints and traditional roles have been found to significantly deprive Malaysian Indian women and compel them to become a marginalized group (Mathiaram, 2019). These constraints refer to the gender complexities in Indian households that could be depriving women in terms of education, employment, domestic work, time autonomy, and personal liberty. The embedded deprivation occurs due to gender inequality issues arising from the patriarchy household system; hence, this urgently requires a holistic gender analysis by applying a capability deprivation approach. Seeing through the capability approach lens would enable us to identify the complexities of the Indian household system and women's position in it. Besides, the capability deprivation concept would further allow us to study the intensity of the deprivation in their capabilities. The

more disadvantaged a woman's socioeconomic status the more deprivation she will experience in her household.

Apart from Kedah and Malacca, Penang is another state in which Indians settled down as labourers (Sandhu & Mani, 2006). This state was chosen as the research location of the current study for two reasons. First, most of the available literatures were very general and focused on the urban poor in Kuala Lumpur, Sarawak and Sabah but not specifically on Indians in Penang (Parthiban, 2013). There are also limited literatures on poverty among Indians and those studies have particularly overlooked Indian women. Second, Indians in Penang are still struggling with poverty (Mathiaparam, 2019; Nair, 2007b). Mathiaparam (2019) highlighted that impoverishment among Indians is an issue that requires serious attention as the majority of the poor Indians that settled in Penang lived in the urban areas in Penang. The majority of Indians in Penang are generally employed in lower paid employments which require only minimum skills and education requirements (Mathiaparam, 2019; Nair, 2007b). Hence, this study highlights the relationship between gender beliefs and capability deprivation among poor and non-poor Indian women in Penang. Comparison of the two socio-economic groups of women who have been grouped into 'poor and 'non-poor' categories (based on mean household income) is warranted to prove that the complexity of the capability deprivation is beyond the socioeconomic group classification.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Historically, the impoverishment of Malaysian Indians started even before they migrated to Malaya during the British colonial period. Majority of them had gone through extreme exploitation and discrimination based on their race, caste,

class, and gender in their home country. The exploitations experienced by them as labourers, were severe under the British administrators and plantations system. Later, after Malaysia's independence, they were displaced from the plantations to urban areas. This further cements the impoverishment due to isolation, lack of education and language proficiency. The situation was compounded by the "Pro-Malay" concept which was emphasized in the various efforts i.e. policies and programs to improve the Malaysian economy. In sum, discrimination due to the post-independence changes in terms of land ownership and infrastructure development projects and the failure of economic policies contributed to the perpetuation of the impoverishment of Malaysian Indians. This also contributed to the various types of deprivation experienced by this marginalized community as suggested by Sen (2017).

The poverty statistics of Malaysia in the year 2014 suggest that about 80 per cent of Indian households lived below the poverty line of RM 960 and the majority of them were being employed in low paid jobs (Mathiaram, 2019). The statistics are clear indications of the marginalization and impoverishment among Malaysian Indians (Mathiaram, 2019). Despite enjoying decades of independence and been counted as the fifth generation of Indians, the existence of the impoverishment of Malaysian Indians raises two critical concerns that need to be given attention, particularly when looking at the experiences of Malaysian Indian women.

The first concern is the existence of gender system of their household, before and after they migrated to Malaysia. The second concern relates to how gender belief system contributes to the deprivation of their capabilities. The gender system is associated with gender inequality in the household and it covers various aspects such as gender beliefs, gender roles, distribution of resources and the vulnerability of

women in the household (Bastos et al., 2009; Callan, Nolan, & Whelan, 1993; Chant, 2006). As long as gender inequality is not addressed, it would continue to negatively affect women's capabilities and thus prolong the impoverishment of women. The abovementioned concerns illuminate the importance of this study which explored the impoverishment of Malaysian Indian women as ethnic minority by interconnecting gender beliefs and capability deprivation. This research area is also relatively limited in the Malaysian context.

It should be noted that the main focus of this study is on deprivation and not merely on poverty. Since, capability deprivation is the core component of this study, both poor and non-poor Indian women were targeted. In this study, Indian women were categorized as poor and non-poor based on the mean household income. This was done in order to get an in-depth understanding of the differences and similarities in terms of the experiences and factors that could influence the process of capability deprivation. The inclusion of the non-poor Indian women in this study is based on several reasons: First, it will help to ascertain the level of deprivation experienced by poor and non-poor women. Second, it will help explain the factors that influence the capability deprivation experienced by women in both groups. Finally, it will explore how women exercise their agency to move from capability deprivation to capability enhancement.

The relationship between gender beliefs and capability deprivation could be explained through the capability approach theory. Sen (2001) posits that the gender system needs to be further investigated to better understand capability deprivation and impoverishment of an individual. Each individual is unique because of his or her socioeconomic background, age, geographical location, and other demographic aspects. Hence, adopting the capability approach ensures that each woman is a unit

of analysis with her diverse components, which would reveal more about her impoverishment. This focus is, however, absent in many poverty types of research (Bastos et al., 2009; Nalagon, 2003; Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2005b). Hence, this study was undertaken to address the gap. Thus, gender belief and capability deprivation of women will be the focal point of the study. Specifically, within the framework of the capability approach, this study intended to investigate gender beliefs and capabilities of poor and non-poor Indian women in Penang, Malaysia.

1.3 Research Objectives

- To identify the most common gender beliefs among urban poor and non-poor Indian women.
- To determine the levels of capability deprivation of poor and non-poor Indian women.
- To examine the relationship between gender beliefs and capability deprivation.
- To explicate determining factors between gender beliefs and capabilities of poor and non-poor Indian women.

1.4 Research Questions

- What are the most common gender beliefs among urban poor and non-poor Indian women?
- What are the levels of capability deprivation of poor and non-poor Indian women?
- What is the relationship between gender beliefs and capability deprivation of the eight selected capabilities?

- How do gender beliefs influence the capability deprivation of poor and non-poor Indian women?

1.5 Background of the Study

The background of the study is presented in two sections. The first section discusses the history of migration of Malaysian Indians. The second section looks at the structural causes of poverty of Malaysian Indians. These two sections collectively reflect the impoverishment of Malaysian Indians.

1.5.1 History of Migration of Malaysian Indians

The Indian community is a minority ethnic group in Malaysia (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016). Indians came to Malaya via the Bay of Bengal as traders and they were involved in export and import of gold and spices much earlier than the eighteenth century (Anbalakan, 2003; Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). The interaction between the two countries resulted in the exchange of social and economic aspects that were reflected in their cultures. During the colonial period, Britain required large cheap labour force for its rubber plantations because rubber was high in demand in the international market (Arasatnam, 1970; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). Hence, India, especially Tamil Nadu became the main primary supplier for labour force when the British colonisation took place in Malaya (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2012; Sandhu & Mani, 2006).

From 1911 to 1930, approximately 90,000 Indian immigrants were recorded to have arrived as labourers under the British administrations and they were

characterised as from the lower caste *Madrasis*³, who lived in impoverishment, discrimination and exploitation in their home country (Madras) (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Hagan & Wells, 2005; Pillai, 2012; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). Majority of them offered themselves to become labourers mainly to escape from the impoverishment experienced in Tamil Nadu (then known as Madras) and they were promised reasonable wages and life in an environment with good infrastructure and facilities provided by the British administrators (Arasatnam, 1970; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). However, this did not materialize. Poverty and impoverishment were a part of the life of Indians, especially Tamils when they were brought to Malaya as plantation workers in the first part of their migration (Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). There were also a small group of more educated migrants who came to work in the public service or as administrators in the rubber plantations (Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Pillai, 2004; Sandhu & Mani, 2006).

Initially, the migration constituted a larger percentage of Indian male labourers compared to Indian female labourers. Indian female labourers were scant during the initial phases of migration of labour in Malaya (Hagan & Wells, 2005; Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). Female Indian labourers' presence was only felt through the limited statistics recorded by the administrations for historical documentation purpose (Paramanathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). The economic advisor of the Indian Government, Nanjundan (1950), cited three reasons for the

³ Refer to South Indian people who came from Madras (now called as Tamil Nadu) who belong to the lower caste and class (Sandhu & Mani, 2006; Spencer, 2013). British administrators considered them as labourers who could be easily managed, who could accept low wages and work with minimal supervision in the plantations (Spencer, 2013). Sandhu (2006) posited that the British preferred the lower caste Madrasis as workers in their plantations because they were the "most satisfactory type of labourers, especially for light, simple, repetitive tasks in plantations" compared to Chinese labourers. These labourers were also called as the untouchables who went through numerous class, gender, and race-based exploitations and discriminations in their home country (Spencer, 2013).

limited migration of Indian female labourers to Malaya (Lee, 1989; Paramanathan, 2016). The first reason is that most of the male labourers left their spouses in their home country because of the distance and they had also planned to have only a short-term contract work in Malaya (Hagan & Wells, 2005; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Kurian, 2018; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). Second, the high death rates of female labourers during their involvement in jungle clearing work (Nanjundan, 1950). The final reason is the emigration ban in 1938 which dictated that male labourers who decided to be Malaya residents after some years of working would have the opportunity to bring their spouses later (Nanjundan, 1950). Nonetheless, Indian labourers' household system would not easily permit women to be involved in paid labour outside the household. Hence, this has been said to be one of the main reasons for the limited migration of female Indian labourers to Malaya (Lee, 1989). Furthermore, Indian families were rooted in their patriarchal system. In these households; women were hugely responsible for household responsibilities, reproduction of children and taking care of their spouse's family.

However, international demand and the price increase of rubber had widened the rubber economy among capitalists who invested largely in it (Anbalakan, 2003; Arasatnam, 1970; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Lee, 1989; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). Thus, British administrators in Malaya felt the necessity to bring more labourers to Malaya as plantations workers to meet the growing demand of the rubber industry (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989). Hence, female labourers were recruited and brought to Malaya mainly for lower skilled work in the plantations such as jungle clearing, grass cutting and cleaning (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). The female Indians suffered various kinds of exploitation and impoverishment in the plantations (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). First, female Indian labourers

experienced discrimination in terms of wages. Compared to the Indian male labourers, female labourers were given 20 per cent less for their work in the plantations as skilled and unskilled labourers (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). Secondly, exploitation was experienced by them via prostitution and related sexual abuses in the new labour settlements in the plantations (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). In the rubber plantations where 80 per cent Indian population resided, the minority of Indian women was forced to become sex workers (Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). Pillai (2004) mentioned that South Indian women were not only brought in to be employed as workers in the plantations like their male counterparts, but they were also expected to play multiple hidden roles in Malaya. Initially, the female labourers in Tamil Nadu intended to participate in the weeding and light labour work and to assist their male counterparts (Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). However, the intention of the British administrators seemed to be quite opposite than planned or imagined by the Indian women.

The core reason that motivated Indian women to take up the job as cheap labourers in Malaya was their eagerness and desperation to escape “*the shackles of feminine subjectivity*” in their country of origin (Pillai, 2004). Nonetheless, the Indian women’s aspiration and hope was soon dashed when they realized that they had to put up with various forms of discrimination and exploitation with regards to wages, heavy labour, poor accommodation, physical and mental health constraints in the plantations (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). Consequently, they were trapped deeper than before in the same feminine exploitation of their family and society as in their home country. In describing the dilemma and the suffering of the Indian women roles in Malaya, Pillai noted that:

“Because she was not only Other but female Other, the weight of subalternity she shouldered was double. She was at most times a waged labourer, but her wages were lower than her male counterpart's. Her labour was double as she worked both in the field and within her home. Her body was not the only tool for the plantation industry but also a sexual tool used by both colonial mastermale members of her community”

(Pillai, 2004, p.142)

Single Indian women suffered even more than married women (Pillai, 2004). As far as most of the British administrators, plantation managers, and owners were concerned, single Indian women could be exploited easily, particularly for sexual services compared to the Indian women who had partners (Pillai, 2004). With no one to fend for them, the unmarried Indian women were very vulnerable to sexual exploitations by plantation managers and owners (Pillai, 2004). Pillai (2004) reported that single female labourers had been forced to share accommodation with six other people and sometimes their roommates were male labourers and they did not have any other choice besides sharing the space with them. Through this type of accommodation, plantation managers and owners exercised the concept of “*the sleeping dictionary*”⁴ towards Indian women to learn the labourers' language and culture (Pillai, 2004). The exploitation and the discrimination experienced by the Indian women in the plantations were invisible in the history of Malaysian Indians' migration as labourers to Malaya (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). Limited resources discussed the real-life experiences of female Indian labourers in Malaya (Pillai, 2004). However, autobiographies and novels that have been written by the labourers and Malaysian writers have lent a voice to the muted female labourers in terms of expressing their painful experiences in Malaya as labourers (Pillai, 2004). The symbolic construction of the identity of the characters was well reflected in the

⁴ Defined as a situation where a foreign woman has a sexual relationship with a man and from whom he learns the rudiments of her culture and language (Jary & Jary, 1991)

"gendered chambers" where the Indian women lived as labourers and victims (Pillai, 2004). Minimum wages and participation in prostitution are strong evidences on the exploitation and discrimination experienced by the Indian women labourers in Malaya (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). This evidenced that the Indian women as labourers in the plantations in Malaya experienced 'plantation patriarchy'⁵, whereby the authority figures sustained norms and practices that justified lower entitlements for women labourers (Jayawardena & Kurian, 2015; Kurian, 2018).

The exploitation also existed in the household where the roles of Indian women were surrounded by traditional roles such as being a mother and a housewife. In the colonial labour system in Malaya, an Indian woman played two roles; as a labourer in the public domain, and as a wife in the private domain which is rigorous and intense (Pillai, 2004; Sangari & Vaid, 1990). This was unlike their male counterparts who had the freedom and privilege to leave the domain whenever they wanted to because they could forgo their roles at home but the Indian female labourers were tied down with their role as a housewife upon returning from work (Insan, 1989; Pillai, 2004). She had to juggle the two domains by moving back and forth but could not leave one domain altogether. The exploitations in the plantations had consequently inflicted aggravated impoverishment among Malaysian Indian women (Kurian, 2018; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004, 2012).

After independence, the Malaysian government focused on the economic development of the people. The plantations were targeted and this gave way to development projects (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Nair, 2007b). Hence, the

⁵ Refer to the concept introduced by Kurian and Jayawardana to investigate the inclusion of gender prejudices and patriarchal norms stemming from colonialism, race, caste, ethnicity, religion and culture in the labour regime and living arrangements on the plantations in Sri Lanka justifying and normalizing the subordinate status of women workers (Jayawardena & Kurian, 2015; Kurian, 2018).

displacement of labourers from the plantations took place and the Indians were affected the most since they were the majority residing in the plantations. The Indians were also affected because the plantation work had been a steady source of income for the Indian labourers by providing employment and wages (Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016). As such losing it all of the sudden aggravated the impoverishment issues among Indians. The impoverishment issues that started in the first generation of Indian migrants became worse when the plantations were used for development projects. The Indian community who had assimilated into plantations and rural environment had to move to urban areas due to urbanization and modernization (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). They had also lost a sense of belonging because many of them had lived in the same estates for a few generations. The plantations had been their source of comfort other than providing them with jobs and income. The relocation process disrupted this and when they were relocated to urban areas, they faced difficulty in adjusting to urban living. Most had very limited education hence were only able to do menial jobs in the urban areas (Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). They also faced other barriers such as low language proficiency in languages other than their mother tongue (i.e. Tamil). This somehow made it very difficult for them to adjust to the new environment and living conditions (Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006).

Several authors have concurred that relocation from plantations to urban areas has contributed to the severity of poverty among Indians (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). While the relocation of Malays from squatter housing settlement was properly arranged through low-cost terrace houses planning, the Indians were not that fortunate; thus, leaving them with no

option other than staying in the Indian squatter settlements for a long period of time (Insan, 1989; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016). The isolation from the waves of development has caused the Indians and their generation to struggle with social issues such as gangsterism, vandalism, high dropout rates, petty thefts and juvenile crimes (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016; Sandhu & Mani, 2006).

Upon the displacement to urban area setting, the complexities of the impoverishment of the Indians got worse (Mathiaparam, 2019). Indian male labourers were forced to find new employment to feed their families, while the female labourers had to take care of the household while their husbands were away at work (Insan, 1989; Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). Currently, majority of the Indian male breadwinners in urban areas are still struggling with two major issues, which are unemployment and competition with foreign workers for lower-skilled jobs (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Nair, 2007a). The first wave of the labourers started from the year 1970 to year 1985; second wave (1986-1998) and the third wave (1998 onwards) (Kanapathy, 2006). The influx of foreign workers for low skilled jobs also made it very difficult for Indian women with low educational qualification to find full time employment.

1.5.2 Structural causes of poverty of Malaysian Indians

Structural causes have been reported to have further contributed to the impoverishment of Malaysian Indians (Dass, Gill, Redzuan, & Ahmad, 2014). For instance, the affirmative policies that were introduced in Malaysia after independence have been identified as one key factor that has escalated Indian's impoverishment in Malaysia (Anbalakan, 2003; Holst, 2012; Kaur, 2018). The National Economic Policy (1971-1990) implemented after the May 13 riot in 1969

was aimed at restructuring the economy of the Malaysian society that constitutes three main ethnic groups; Indian, Chinese, and Malay, as well as eradicating poverty among them (Anbalakan, 2003; Holst, 2012). Nonetheless, only the Malays reportedly benefitted from NEP as it was presumed to be pro-Malay, leaving the minority ethnic groups behind (Anbalakan, 2003; Holst, 2012; Nair, 2007a; Sundara Raja & Raymond, 2018). The implementation of NEP had stimulated the development of Malays mainly because of its high concentration on infrastructural development and agricultural sectors (Anbalakan, 2003; Holst, 2012; Sundara Raja & Raymond, 2018). In a nutshell, the impact of the NEP as an affirmative policy has a scant impact on Malaysian Indians socioeconomic development (Anbalakan, 2003; Holst, 2012; Leng, Samsurijan, Gopal, Malek, & Hamat, 2018; Sundara Raja & Raymond, 2018).

Indians who migrated from the plantations to urban areas had low employment opportunities because they neither possessed the appropriate skills nor the educational qualifications required to get a job in the urban areas (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Jayasooria & Nathan, 2016). In addition, they did not get many benefits from the implementation of the NEP which focused mainly on increasing the involvement of the Malays in the urban sector by providing them employment opportunities in the public sector (Kaur, 2018; Rajantheran, Muniapan, & Govindaraju, 2012; Thillainathan & Cheong, 2016). The detrimental impact of the NEP towards Indians was clearly reflected by the lack of ownership of the national wealth prior and after the implementation of NEP in 1971 (Anbalakan, 2003; Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Holst, 2012) in comparison to other ethnic groups. For example, the national wealth of the Malay stakeholders' percentage increased from 1.9 to 19.3 per cent. The Chinese stakeholders' percentage also increased from 22.5 per cent to 44.5 per cent

(Anbalakan, 2003). However, the Indians stakeholder position remained at 1.0 per cent at the end of the NEP in 1990 (Anbalakan, 2003).

The isolation and deprivation among urban Indians escalated further by other development policies initiated by the government especially after NEP, such as the National Development Plan [NDP (1991-2000)] and Third Outline Perspective Plan, OPP3 (2001-2010) (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). NDP, that replaced NEP, has narrowed down its efforts on the eradication of hard-core poverty and the reduction of relative poverty but did not pay much attention to the condition of Indians in the urban areas. Again, the Indians as Malaysian citizens did not progress as other ethnic groups as they were denied equal access to economic opportunities under NDP (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Nair, 2007b). The Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) through the National Vision Policy (NVP) has identified low corporate equity ownership among Indians and has subsequently notified that efforts needed to be undertaken to increase the Indian equity ownership to three per cent by 2010 (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Sandhu & Mani, 2006). Yet, no practical efforts were taken to increase the Indian community's participation in the corporate sector while other ethnic groups' property ownership and participation in the public sector improved further (Anbalakan, 2003). The development of Malaysia through policies and programs has clearly ignored the existence of the Indians and their rights in Malaysia. As a result of the long-term marginalization and discrimination of the Malaysian Indians, The Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) emerged and organised rally in November 2007 mainly by the Malaysian Indian lawyers (Kaur, 2018). In the rally, various issues were framed in the form of legal demands about the issues faced Indian community (Kaur, 2018). However, the HINDRAF rally was a failure in spurring the Malaysian Indians' development as it failed to achieve its

goals even before it began because of two setbacks: heavy-handed by Malaysian authorities and the internal problem within the action force (Kaur, 2018). Even the “*1 Malaysia*” program initiated by the former Prime Minister Dato’ Sri Haji Mohammad Najib Tun Razak on Malaysia day (16 September 2010) focused on uniting all the ethnicities in Malaysia failed to produce any commendable changes among the Indian community (Paramanathan, 2016). Poverty issues have always been more pertinent for the Indians compared to other ethnic groups. It can be surmised that the perpetuation of poverty and deprivation among Indians in Malaysia is caused not only by the historical impoverishment suffered by their ancestors during their migration to Malaya but also by the failure of economic policy in elevating their economic conditions (Gopal & Karupiah, 2013; Insan, 1989; Mathiaram, 2019; Sandhu & Mani, 2006).

Most Malaysian Indians are the descendants of migrants who have suffered class, gender, economy and political suppression in India during the British colonial period. Hence, the prevalence of their poverty has a significant relation to the culture, patriarchal culture whereby the roles of Indian women are only designated to be an instrumental tool to benefit male supremacy. Thus, the primary focus of the Indian women is about their children and household; and this could be the ultimate reason for their minimal participation in the labour force (Hirschman, 2016; Mathiaram, 2019). Furthermore, the traditional norms and values of patriarchal are quite strong, limiting the functioning of the women and utilizing them for the benefit of their male counterparts (Hirschman, 2016; Kurian, 2018).

The class and gender-based exploitation and the discrimination in their home country experienced by the Indian women migrants were further escalated due to their status as lowly paid labourers who were used for petty work in plantations and

as mothers, wives, daughters who were engaged in household tasks (Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). The women had hoped that the migration would help them to transcend their household roles to employment roles. Hence, they grabbed the opportunity to be employed in the plantations. However, the exploitation had become worse for them such that they had to face more exploitations compared to Indian men; they were subjected to sexual exploitations by the plantation officials apart from the exploitations in terms of low wages and appalling working conditions (Lee, 1989; Pillai, 2004). When the relocations of plantations happened, the Indian women became “passive” again in the employment field as they were again put in charge to take of their household. Currently, even though Malaysia Indian women began to embrace breadwinner roles, however, their participation often limited due to the constraints of household’s gender system (Hirschman, 2016; Jones, 2019; Mathiaram, 2019). The deprivation that existed in their household from the beginning had affected and prolonged their impoverishment and their development. This has further made them invisible in the Malaysian history compared to the Indian men.

1.6 The Socialization of Tamil Indian women

The Indian culture’s gender system is rooted in the patriarchy system (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2013; Jones, 2019). Hence, Indian households are constructed based on the hierarchical position of men and women where their power relationships, roles, and tasks allocation serve the interest of the patriarchal system (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2013; Jones, 2019). In such households, men are the leader or the governor and the firstborn son is his “*designated successor*”; together both of them have the power to rule and share the responsibility of the household (Supernor, 1983; Raj & Raval, 2015). The concept of respect is the ultimate component of the

household and it is treated on par with the superiority of men (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2013). The men of the family bear the highest respectful positions where the women and female counterparts must not violate respect at any cost (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2013). The communication is always uni-dimensional (from top to bottom), where the father has the first and final word for all matters (Supernor, 1983). The other members, particularly female have no power to go against what has been decided (Raj & Raval, 2015; Sonawat, 2001). The women, as a subordinated group, must be aware of the leaders' needs in terms of their wishes, moods, sentiments, and food. These are the characteristics of the traditional Indian family in Tamil Nadu, India.

In Tamil families, the patriarchal roots are equally strong and the women are groomed to be domestic servants. They are given restricted access to resources and are constantly identified as inferior when compared to men in the household (Pillai, 2004; Rajantheran et al., 2012). Women's main role other than taking care of the household is for reproduction. Reproduction, especially giving birth to a son, is an important part of a woman's life. It gives the woman a respected status in society and she may be regarded as "incomplete" if she does not have at least a child, particularly a son (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2013; Insan, 1989). Being a housewife and serving her husband's family is seen as an honour for a Tamil woman (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2013; Desai & Thakkar, 2001). Employment or work outside the home is secondary to Tamil women. It is often perceived that the women's ultimate pride and honour lies in their household roles (Sawant, 2016). The traditional household setting expects Tamil women to play multiple roles such as a housewife, mother, and maid (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2013; Desai & Thakkar, 2001; Supernor, 1983). If they are working, their burden becomes unlimited such that they need to switch their roles

back and forth. Indian women's role is systematically located in a secondary position so that it will be beneficial to the patriarchal system (Mathiaram, 2019; Supernor, 1983). The insignificance of Indian women is also reflected in traditional practices such as they need to walk behind their husbands, eat only after their husbands have eaten, sleep only after their husbands have gone into to deep sleep, and take care of herself only after the needs of the husband and family are taken care of (Paramanathan, 2016; Supernor, 1983). Hence, the individual lives of Indian women are always being associated with their husbands and children (Sawant, 2016; Sonawat, 2001; Supernor, 1983).

In Tamil families, women have limited socioeconomic resources since employment is not a priority. Therefore, it is more likely that throughout her life, she is dependent on her husband and sons for financial support (Desai & Thakkar, 2001). Living in a family structure which is based on patriarchal values, it is not surprising that the socialization of Tamil women is also based on similar values. The socialization of Tamil Indian women has been extremely conservative and it follows a traditional authoritarian system (Desai & Thakkar, 2001; Supernor, 1983). Similar values can also be seen in the socialization process of Malaysian Tamils. However, it cannot be said that the socialization process experienced by Malaysian Tamils is the same as the experiences in India and hence they have a separate Indian identity from their counterparts (Sukumar, 2015). When people move from their homeland to a new place, they try to maintain some cultural practices but at the same time may need to change some practices to adapt to the new environment (Punitha & Kumaran, 2014). However, most often, as explained by Bourdieu (1977) the *habitus* of an individual will adopt the external characteristics and go through the transformation but the inner characteristics will be hardly changed (Edgerton, Peter, & Roberts,

2014; McNay, 1999; Swartz, 2012). Hence, even though Malaysian Tamils would have made many adaptations to survive in Malaya at the time of migration, they would have also tried hard to maintain some values that were meaningful or important to them. Similarly, changes may also occur in the following generations of the migrants. The descendants of the migration may again negotiate to maintain or change some values and norms to assimilate into the contemporary society while trying to preserve their cultural identity (Punitha & Kumaran, 2014). When it comes to gender socialization in Malaysia, patriarchal values are also dominant in all major ethnic groups in Malaysia (Hirschman, 2016; Jones, 2019). Malaysian communities, in general, held a very traditional view of women's roles (Hirschman, 2016). This further strengthens the patriarchal values in a Malaysian Indian family including Tamil families. Clearly, these values have a significant impact on the various aspects of these women's lives such as education, employment, decision-making, finance and so forth.

1.7 Definition of Key Concepts

This section explores the definitions of three key concepts in this study: gender beliefs, capability deprivation, and urban poverty.

1.7.1 Gender beliefs

Gender beliefs refer to the beliefs of men and women on how gender relations should be depicted in the living society; mainly referring to the traditional and egalitarian gender beliefs (Husnu & Mertan, 2017; Stark, 1991; Voicu & Tufis, 2012). Both traditional and egalitarian gender beliefs are shaped based on the masculine and feminine roles in the socialization process that occurs in one's household. Traditional gender beliefs refer to the stereotypical beliefs about women

which legitimize women's devaluation and accept male dominance over women (Husnu & Mertan, 2017). Traditional gender beliefs require men to be superior and women to be subordinate at any stages of their life. Whereas egalitarian gender beliefs consider both men and women to be equally important and there is no differentiation in terms of gender roles between both genders (Husnu & Mertan, 2017; Vijver, 2007). Vijver (2007) further explained that egalitarian gender beliefs refer to the beliefs that mainly focus on self-perceptions about equality among men and women. Some scholars view traditional gender beliefs as depicting women to being weak, vulnerable and are always in the need of men's authority whereas egalitarian gender beliefs delineate women as strong, independent, having leadership qualities and are equal to men (Kachel, Steffens, & Niedlich, 2016; Larsen & Long, 1988). In this study, traditional gender beliefs are defined as stereotypical beliefs of women in eight selected capabilities; physical health; mental health; education; paid work and special talents; domestic work and dependents care; material ownership; time autonomy; bodily integrity and safety. In terms of egalitarian gender beliefs, this study refers to equal gender beliefs of women and men in terms of eight selected capabilities; physical health, mental health, education, paid work and special talents; domestic work and dependents care; material ownership; time autonomy; bodily integrity and safety.

1.7.2 Capability Deprivation

The notion of capability deprivation is derived from the capability approach and it is defined as the deficiency of basic capabilities and substantive freedom that enables a person to live the kind of life that he or she values (Kachel et al., 2016; Larsen & Long, 1988; Waglé, 2014). Eight capabilities were selected and adapted from Robeyn's (2003) capabilities list, namely physical health; mental health;