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EXPLORING ON TREES FOR LANDSCAPE IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF SERI ISKANDAR INDIAN ETHNIC

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of a distinct landscape identity is crucial in effectively representing a place, community, and culture, encapsulating their unique essence, and fostering a sense of belonging. The tree serves as the defining feature of the landscape, establishing its unique identity. However, there is a lack of understanding regarding the trees that represent the Indian ethnic group for landscape identity. This study explored the trees for landscape identity of Indian ethnic in Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia. The study used a quantitative approach by analysing the tree preference data from the selected Indian community. The findings revealed that specific aspects such as native plants, water features, and architectural motifs rich in cultural symbolism were favoured for a Malaysian Indian garden. These insights hold significant value for policymakers and landscape professionals seeking to create gardens that embody the Malaysian Indian identity.

Keywords: *landscape experience, perception, preferences, symbolism*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has immense potential to create gardens and landscapes that showcase a distinct identity, reflecting its natural and cultural heritage (Bunnell, 2004; Osman and Suhardi, 2007). The country's population is primarily composed of three ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, Indian) with diverse religious backgrounds, including Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity (Jamil, 2002; Bunnell, 2004; Richmond, Cambon and Harper, 2004; DiPiazza, 2006). Developing a unifying identity that represents Malaysia may appear challenging due to such cultural diversity. However, it is crucial to consider public opinion and preferences when it comes to the visual aesthetics and appearance of Malaysia's evolving gardens. Ultimately, this study suggests that garden iconography should be perceived as a collection of stimuli open to interpretation, perception, and judgment.

Understanding the preferences and perceptions of the Malaysian Indian community towards garden iconography is crucial for creating landscapes that resonate with their cultural values and aspirations. By investigating the opinions of the Indian community regarding various aspects of tree characteristics, the role of trees in day-to-day life, tree shapes and colors, planting compositions, and suitable planting locations, this study aims to provide insights that can inform landscape design decisions and foster a sense of belonging for the Indian community within the Malaysian landscape.

The research findings shed light on the preferences of respondents from the Malaysian Indian community on different tree characteristics, emphasizing their positive feelings towards shading trees, palm trees, shrubs, and groundcover. The study also revealed the significant role trees play in their day-to-day lives, particularly in terms of medicine, decoration/aesthetics, religion, and comfort. Moreover, respondents displayed varying perceptions of tree shapes, colors, planting compositions, and preferred planting locations, which highlight the diverse visual preferences within the Malaysian Indian community.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the preferences and perceptions of the Malaysian Indian community regarding garden iconography, with a focus on tree characteristics, the role of trees in daily life, tree shapes and colors, planting compositions, and suitable planting locations. By understanding these preferences, the study aims to contribute to the development of landscape designs that reflect the cultural heritage and aspirations of the Malaysian Indian community.

This research holds significance in contributing to Malaysia's landscape identity by acknowledging and incorporating the preferences and aspirations of the Malaysian Indian community. By recognizing the cultural diversity and incorporating it into landscape design, Malaysia can celebrate its multicultural society and create spaces that foster a sense of pride and belonging for all ethnic groups. The findings of this study can guide landscape architects, urban planners, and policymakers in designing inclusive and culturally sensitive landscapes that truly represent Malaysia's rich tapestry of cultures.

This research paper is structured into three main parts: a literature review, findings and discussion, and a conclusion. The literature review will provide an overview of existing studies and theories related to garden iconography, cultural diversity in landscape design, and the Malaysian Indian community's perspectives. The findings and discussion section will present the research findings and provide an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the key findings, highlight the contributions of this study, and suggest future research directions to further explore and enhance Malaysian landscape identity.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review section explores the artistic nature of gardens and their visual representation through iconography. It delves into the historical influences on garden design, highlighting the combination of nature and human creativity in creating gardens with symbolic meanings. The review also discusses the concept of iconography, which helps analyze the historical context and underlying meanings of garden artworks. It emphasizes the importance of understanding user preferences in shaping garden iconography, especially in newly developed gardens. By examining relevant studies, this literature review provides a foundation for understanding the artistic and symbolic aspects of gardens and their representation through visual imagery.

2.1 The Garden as A Work of Art:

Aesthetic factors have been crucial in the evolution of different garden styles throughout history in the field of garden design (Miller, 1993). Gardens reflect a synthesis of nature and human creativity, conveying many atmospheres, pictures, and symbolic meanings (Hunt, 2000; Helmreich, 2002; McIntosh, 2005). By displaying both organic forms and artistic components, they act as a bridge between the natural world and cultural manifestations (Nakagawara, 2004). According to Gilbert (2005), gardens are intentionally crafted to showcase aesthetic and material aspects within a landscape. Recognized as a phenomenon that combines artistry and nature, gardens possess aesthetic qualities that position them as human art forms (Thacker, 1979; Miller, 1993; Ross, 1998; Brace, 1999; Nakagawara, 2004; Connell, 2005; Turner, 2005; McIntosh, 2005; Clayton, 2007; Gross and Lane, 2007). Tschumi (2005) views gardens as artistic manifestations that reflect specific times and places. Furthermore, Albers (1991), Ross (1998), and Waymark (2003) propose the study of gardens as works of art due to their symbolic significance and close associations with disciplines such as painting, poetry, architecture, and calligraphy. Hence, it can be inferred that gardens embody the artistic, physical, and visual representation of a culture. Undoubtedly, gardens are artistic creations imbued with symbolic and cultural value.

2.2 Iconography of Gardens:

Iconography refers to the visual representation of ideas, expressing specific concepts through visual images (Wages, 1999). The American Heritage Dictionary (2003) defines iconography as the use of images and symbolic representations traditionally associated with a person or subject. Through the study of iconography, we aim to uncover the underlying meanings of artworks by examining their historical context (Daniels and Cosgrove, 2007). Straten (1994) argues that iconography, or "image reading," is a creative method for analyzing artistic works within their historical context. In the case of gardens, Daniels**,** and Cosgrove (2007) acknowledge their status as artistic works with cultural value, representing, structuring, and symbolizing the environment. Wages (1999) suggests that iconographies encompass the diverse ideas associated with gardens as depicted in historical paintings or images. Therefore, garden iconography should include visual representations of gardens, incorporating specific icons, figures, and symbolic objects. It serves as a tool intertwined with art, history, and philosophy, encompassing a collection of garden images that communicate garden identity. As such, it contributes to the development of a visual language that aids in garden identification. Well-established historical gardens have already gained recognition, making their identities easily recognizable through imagery and visual

2.3 Iconography Preferences and Development of a New Garden Identity:

The creation of gardens has been shaped by traditions and cultural influences (Lehrman, 1980). Hunt (2000) views historical gardens as sites imbued with iconography and philosophy, considering them as texts that hold deep meaning and significance. Carroll (2003) explains that gardens have evolved over time in response to people's needs and preferences. In essence, it has been argued that gardens have been designed based on varying preferences, requirements, purposes, and activities (King, 1979; Hunt, 2000; Hobhouse, 2002; McIntosh, 2005; Clayton, 2007). Therefore, newly developed gardens need to be embraced, valued, and appreciated by the individuals who will actively engage with them.

According to previous studies by S. Kaplan and R. Kaplan (1989), cultural backgrounds significantly influence people's preferences for natural environments and designed landscapes. Moreover, based on Kaplan's (1989) Informational Processing Model, both the components and spatial qualities of a garden impact people's environmental preferences. Consequently, when creating a new setting, it is crucial to consider people's preferences for garden components and spatial qualities. This is because individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds will have distinct preferences for garden elements and layouts. Thus, user preferences for content and spatial arrangement play a vital role in shaping garden iconography.documentation.

These representational images can be referred to as iconographies. Consequently, understanding the components of garden iconography becomes useful in identifying and interpreting the meanings behind these established gardens. However, the iconography of newly developed gardens remains unclear, and there is a lack of information on what the iconography of these gardens should entail. To establish and develop the iconography of these new gardens, a study focusing on specific images is required.

2.4 The Influence of Indian Society on Trees:

The influence of Indian society on trees is significant. In India, trees hold immense cultural, religious, and ecological importance. They are deeply integrated into various aspects of Indian society, shaping the way people interact with and perceive trees (Tukur, R., Garba, K., Adamu, N., Abdulrashid, I., & Rabi'u, M. (2013).

Firstly, trees are considered sacred and are worshipped as manifestations of deities in Hinduism, which is the dominant religion in India. The Banyan tree, for instance, is believed to be the abode of Lord Krishna (Fibiger, M. (2021). Many temples and religious sites are surrounded by groves of trees that are protected and revered. This spiritual connection to trees promotes their conservation and discourages their destruction.

Secondly, trees have played a crucial role in Indian traditions and rituals for centuries. The practice of planting trees to commemorate special occasions, such as births, marriages, and religious festivals, is deeply rooted in Indian culture (Jaganmohan, M., Vailshery, L., Mundoli, S., & Nagendra, H. (2018) These rituals foster a sense of environmental stewardship and encourage the preservation and growth of trees.

Furthermore, Indian society has a long history of using trees for their practical benefits (Jaganmohan, M., Vailshery, L., Mundoli, S., & Nagendra, H. (2018). Traditional knowledge systems, like Ayurveda and Siddha medicine, utilize various parts of trees for medicinal purposes (Chowdhury, M., Koike, M., Muhammed, N., Halim, M., Saha, N., & Kobayashi, H. (2009) Many indigenous communities in India rely on the forests for their livelihood, gathering forest products like fruits, nuts, and resins (Banerjee, A., & Madhurima, C. (2013). Additionally, trees provide shade and shelter in the hot climate of the country, making them integral to the daily lives of millions of people.

Despite these positive influences, rapid urbanization and industrialization have posed significant challenges to tree conservation in India. Deforestation, pollution, and encroachment on forest land have resulted in the loss of tree cover and disrupted the delicate ecological balance (Ansari, A. (2018). Efforts are being made to address these issues through reforestation programs, public awareness campaigns, and environmental policies.

In conclusion, the influence of Indian society on trees is profound. Trees hold great spiritual, cultural, and practical significance in Indian society. While modernization poses threats to their conservation, there is a growing awareness of the need to protect and restore the trees that have been an integral part of Indian culture for centuries.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Study was Conducted in Seri Iskandar Community, Perak, Malaysia

The study area, located at Seri Iskandar's 32610, with geographical coordinates 4'21'31.84" N and 100'58'59.81' E, focused on understanding the role of trees in shaping the landscape identity of the Indian ethnic community in this neighbourhood's selection of Seri Iskandar as the study area was due to its unique neighbourhood characteristics and significance in representing the Indian ethnic identity.

Figure 1: Map of Seri Iskandar Perak showing Indian community locations.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The research methodology utilized a quantitative approach, gathering tree preference data through survey questionnaires distributed among the Indian community in Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia. The questionnaire covered various aspects of tree characteristics, the significance of trees in daily life, visual preferences, and preferred planting locations. Participants ranked their preferences concerning shading trees,

palm trees, shrubs, and groundcover, as well as the role of trees in medicine, aesthetics, religion, and comfort. The collected data was analysed using statistical techniques to identify preferred tree characteristics and compositions.

4.0 RESULT & DISCUSSION

in this section, we present the findings and analysis of our study on the preferences and perceptions of the malaysian indian community towards garden iconography. We explore specific aspects such as tree characteristics, the role of trees in daily life, tree shapes and colours, planting compositions, and preferred planting locations.

Demographic Information

The details recorded for the respondents' demographic are age, sex and

Table1 show the Gender and Age of the respondent in research:

Age Group	Male	Female	Total%
5-19	0	0	0%
20-29	8	7	50%
30-39	7	8	50%
40-49	0	0	0%
Total	15	15	100%

The respondents were categorized into four age groups: 5-19, 20-29, 30-39, and 40-49. In the age group of 20-29, the survey recorded a total of 16 respondents, with an equal split of 8 males and 8 females, accounting for 33.33% of the total respondents each. Similarly, the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups also had 16 respondents each, evenly distributed between males and females. Surprisingly, no respondents were categorized within the 5-19 age group. The "Total" row indicates that the survey encompassed 24 male respondents and 24 female respondents, constituting 50% of the total respondents each.

Finding for research factor 1: Tree Characteristic

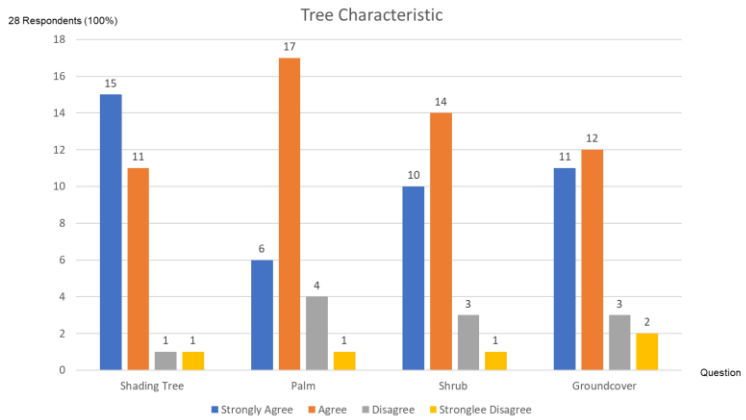

Figure 2.1 shows the total numbers of the respondents regarding their feeling on Tree Characteristic

In this study, we investigated the influence of trees on the landscape identity of Seri Iskandar, with a focus on the Indian ethnic community. Through an analysis of respondents' perceptions and attitudes towards various tree categories, we sought to understand the cultural significance and contribution of trees to the local landscape. The findings revealed compelling patterns, with a majority of respondents expressing strong agreement concerning the importance of "Shading Trees" (76.47%) in providing comfort and shade. Additionally, "Palms" were deemed significant (60.53%) for their aesthetic and cultural value in the landscape. "Shrubs" (68.57%) and "Groundcover" (65.72%) were also positively perceived, further emphasizing their role in enhancing the landscape's aesthetics and identity. These findings highlight the integral relationship between trees and landscape identity within Seri Iskandar's Indian ethnic community, offering valuable insights for landscape planning and preservation efforts. Findings indicate that a complex relationship with the landscape has inculcated much traditional knowledge about forest resources, opportunities, and challenges to participation in programs and landowner associations, and concerns over their property, among other factors (Gordon, J., Barton, A., & Adams, K. (2013))

Finding for research factor 2: Tree's role in your day-to-day life

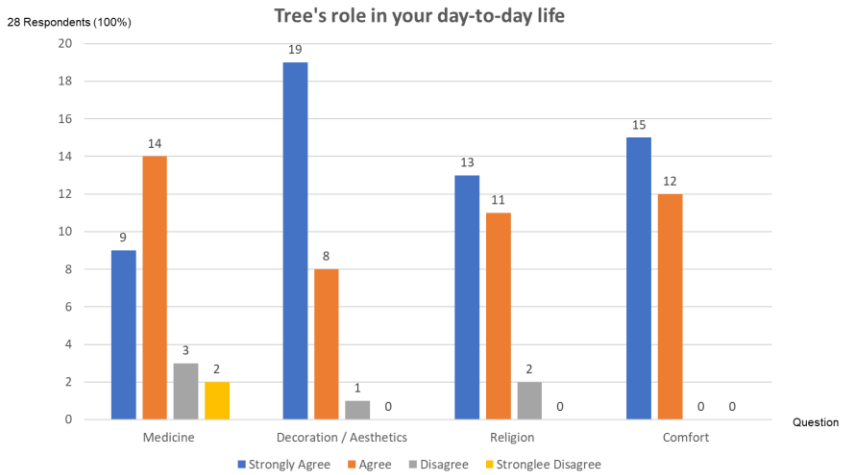

Figure 2.2 shows the total numbers of the respondents regarding Tree's role in your day-to-day life

In this study, we investigated the impact of trees on the landscape identity of Seri Iskandar, focusing on the Indian ethnic community. By analyzing respondents' perceptions and attitudes towards different tree categories, we aimed to understand the cultural significance and contribution of trees to the local landscape. The findings revealed compelling patterns, with a substantial number of respondents expressing agreement regarding the role of trees in their day-to-day life. Specifically, in the category of "Medicine," 31.03% strongly agreed, and 48.28% agreed, highlighting the perceived importance of trees in providing medicinal benefits. For "Decoration / Aesthetics," 67.86% strongly agreed, and 28.57% agreed, emphasizing the role of trees in enhancing the visual appeal of the landscape. In the context of "Religion," 41.94% strongly agreed, and 35.48% agreed, signifying the cultural and religious significance attributed to trees. Moreover, in the category of "Comfort," 48.39% strongly agreed, and 41.94% agreed, emphasizing the role of trees in creating a comfortable environment. These findings underscore the essential relationship between trees and the landscape identity within the Indian ethnic community in Seri Iskandar, providing valuable insights. We can claim that considering the tree's inherent teleology, as well as its ability to propose the species status of human populations and to reify 'race' hierarchies (Sommer, (M. (2021)

Finding for research factor 3: Shape of tree

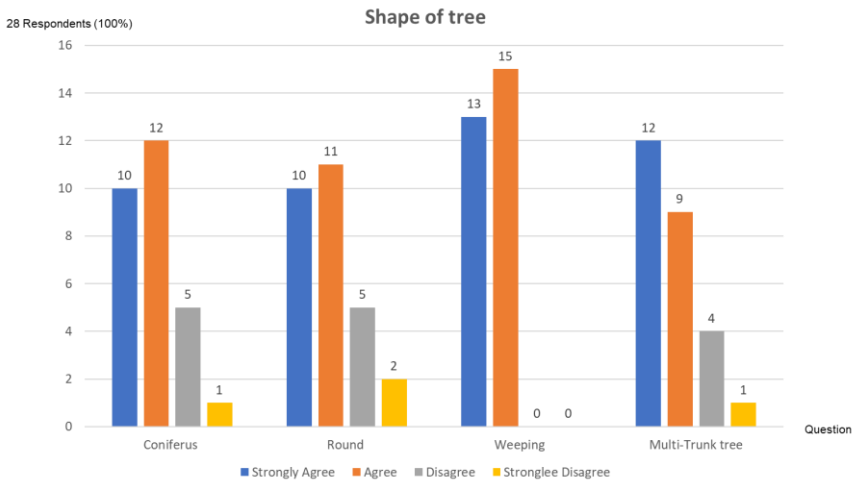

Figure 2.3 shows the total numbers of the respondents regarding shape of tree

In this study, we examined the perceptions and attitudes of respondents towards different tree categories in Seri Iskandar, with a particular focus on their role in shaping the landscape identity within the Indian ethnic community. The survey data provided compelling insights into the significance of various tree types in the local environment. For the category of "Coniferus," 32.26% of respondents strongly agreed, and 38.71% agreed with their importance in the landscape, while 16.13% disagreed, and 3.23% strongly disagreed. Regarding "Round" trees, 31.25% of respondents strongly agreed, and 34.38% agreed, signifying their positive impact on the landscape, while 15.63% disagreed, and 6.25% strongly disagreed. The category of "Weeping" trees garnered considerable support, with 46.43% of respondents strongly agreeing, and 53.57% agreeing, highlighting the value of these trees in the local landscape. Furthermore, for "Multi-Trunk tree," 41.38% of respondents strongly agreed, and 34.48% agreed, underlining their significance in the landscape, while 13.79% disagreed, and 3.45% strongly disagreed. These findings reveal the diverse perspectives of respondents concerning different tree categories and their contributions to the landscape identity in Seri Iskandar. The data provides valuable insights for understanding the preferences and perceptions of the Indian ethnic community towards various tree types, which can be vital for landscape planning and conservation efforts in the region. Based on our results, we argue that awareness and promotion of the biocultural link in shape of tree will play an important role in future efforts to preserve the unique local identity and biodiversity of this cultural landscape.)Fukamachi, K., Miki, Y., Oku, H., & Miyoshi, I. (2011)

Finding for research factor 4: Colour of tree

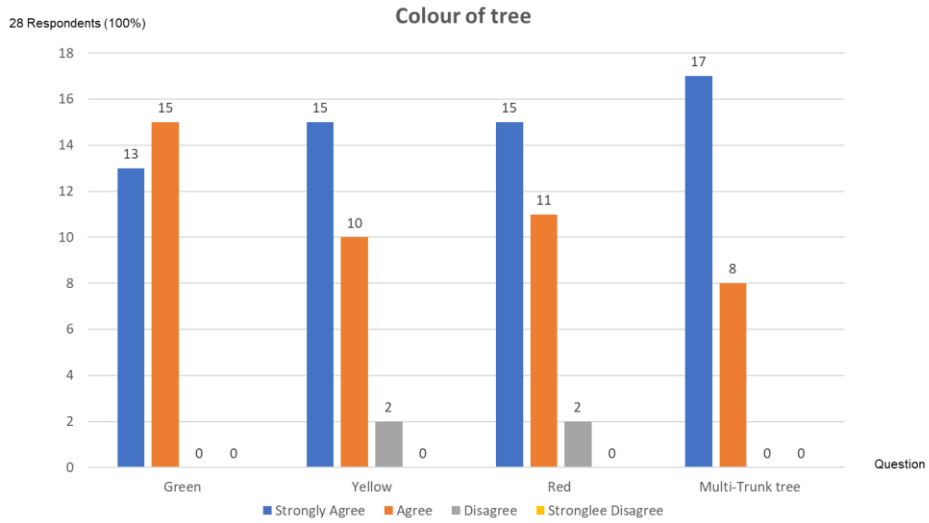

Figure 2.4 shows the total numbers of the respondents regarding colour of tree

In this study, we investigated the influence of tree color on the landscape identity of Seri Iskandar, specifically focusing on the perceptions of the Indian ethnic community. By analyzing respondents' attitudes towards different tree color categories, we aimed to understand the cultural significance and contribution of tree colors to the local landscape. The findings revealed compelling patterns, with a majority of respondents expressing strong agreement concerning the importance of "Green" trees (43.33% strongly agree and 50% agree) in the landscape, highlighting their association with nature and vitality. Similarly, "Yellow" trees were deemed significant (50% strongly agree and 33.33% agree) for their bright and cheerful aesthetic, while "Red" trees (50% strongly agree and 36.67% agree) were valued for their vibrant and eye-catching appeal. Moreover, "Multi-Trunk trees" received overwhelming support (71.43% strongly agree and 28.57% agree), underlining their uniqueness and contribution to the landscape's aesthetics. We concluded that species diversity and fragmentation of colors should be considered in the construction of autumn landscape forests, and that aesthetic quality of autumn landscape could be improved by planting and cultivating tree species with various and bright autumn leaf colors. and preservation efforts**.** (Zhang, X., Chen, J., Li, Q., Liu, J., & Tao, J. (2020).

Finding for research factor 5: Planting Composition

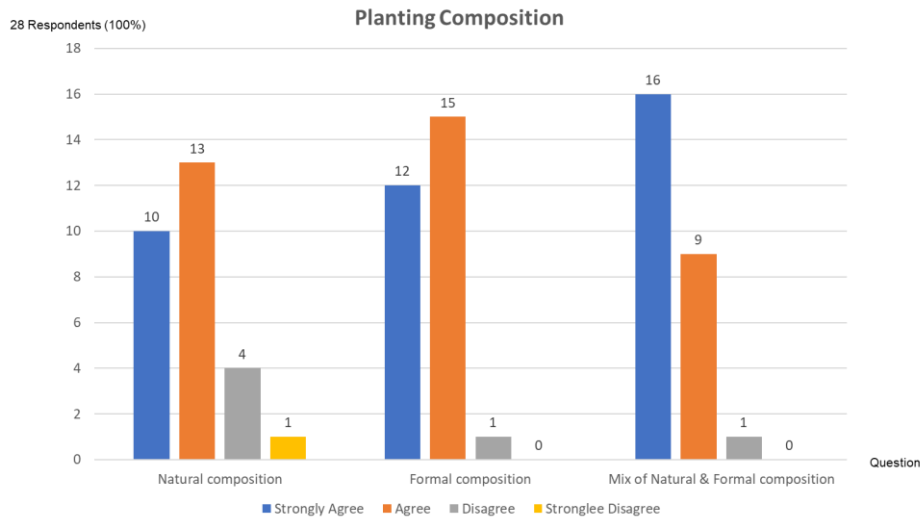

Figure 2.5: shows the total numbers of the respondents regarding Planting Composition

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the perceptions and attitudes of respondents regarding different landscape compositions in Seri Iskandar, with a particular focus on the Indian ethnic community. For the category of "Natural composition," a considerable number of respondents (32.26% strongly agree and 41.94% agree) expressed their positive agreement with the importance of natural elements in the landscape. However, there were also some respondents (12.90%) who disagreed, and a minority (3.23%) who strongly disagreed with this notion. Regarding "Formal composition," a significant percentage of respondents (37.50% strongly agree and 46.88% agree) acknowledged the significance of formal elements in the landscape composition. Only a small fraction (3.13%) of respondents disagreed with this statement. In the context of a "Mix of Natural & Formal composition," most respondents (48.48% strongly agree and 33.33% agree) highlighted the value of a combination of natural and formal elements in the landscape. Only a minority of respondents (3.03%) disagreed with this idea. Overall, these findings reveal diverse perspectives on landscape compositions among the Indian ethnic community in Seri Iskandar. The results shed light on the varying preferences and attitudes towards natural, formal, and mixed landscape compositions, offering valuable insights for landscape planning and design efforts that align with the cultural values and preferences of the community. This study demonstrates the effects of landscape composition, configuration, and land-use intensity on the similarity of communities. (Dormann, C., W., & Zobel, M. (2007)

Finding for research factor 6: Planting Location

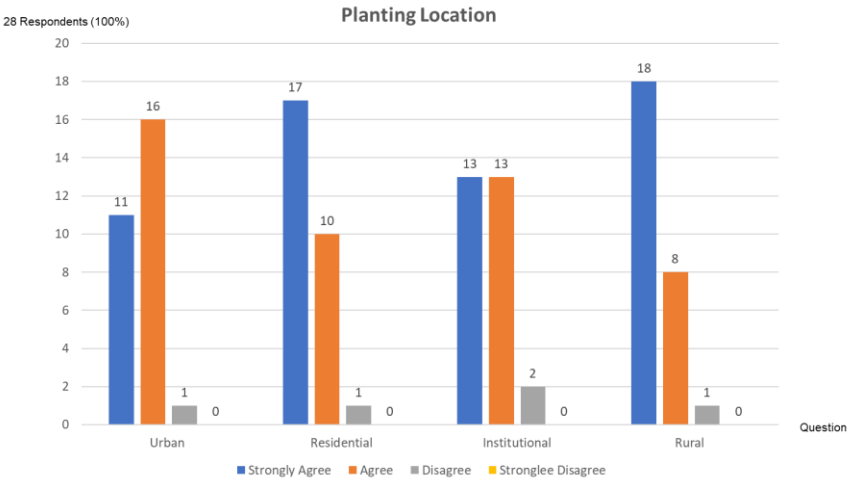

Figure 2.6 shows the total numbers of the respondents regarding Planting Location

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the perceptions and preferences of respondents concerning different planting locations in Seri Iskandar, with a particular emphasis on the Indian ethnic community. Regarding the category of "Urban," a significant number of respondents (33.33% strongly agree and 48.48% agree) expressed their positive agreement with the importance of planting trees in urban settings. Similarly, for the "Residential" category, a majority of respondents (54.84% strongly agree and 32.26% agree) highlighted the significance of planting trees in residential areas. In the context of "Institutional" planting locations, an equal number of respondents (41.94%) strongly agreed and agreed with the importance of trees in institutional settings, while a small percentage (6.45%) disagreed. Additionally, in the "Rural" category, the majority of respondents (64.29% strongly agree and 32.14% agree) emphasized the value of planting trees in rural environments. Overall, the data reveals diverse perspectives among the Indian ethnic community in Seri Iskandar regarding the significance of planting trees in different locations, providing valuable insights for landscape planning and design efforts that align with the preferences and values of the community in each specific context. Our results show that landscape pattern has an important influence on plant diversity, however, there existed scale effects. (Fan, M., Wang, Q., Mi, K., & Peng, Y. (2017)

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to identify the desired garden settings and ingredients for the creation of a distinct Indian Malaysian garden identity. The research revealed that their plant mix and preferred landscape design contribute to their identity. Furthermore, the blend of native flora and ancient architectural components was well acclaimed. Architectural elements that showed cultural identity while also integrating with nature were also preferred. Scenes with a sense of mystery and intelligibility were chosen for spatial organisation, and the mix of plant composition boosted emotions of tranquilly and relaxation. Conclusion of Findings:

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the preferences and perceptions of the Malaysian Indian community towards garden iconography. The results shed light on various aspects of tree characteristics, the role of trees in daily life, tree shapes and colors, planting compositions, and preferred planting locations.

In terms of tree characteristics, respondents expressed positive feelings towards shading trees, palm trees, shrubs, and groundcover. These elements were highly valued and appreciated within the Malaysian Indian community. Furthermore, the study revealed the importance of trees in day-to-day life, particularly in terms of medicine, decoration/aesthetics, religion, and comfort.

The perceptions of tree shapes differed among respondents, with coniferous and round-shaped trees receiving relatively high agreement, while weeping and multi-trunk trees had lower disagreement levels. Preferences for tree colors were also identified, with green and yellow trees being strongly favored, along with positive responses towards red trees. Multi-trunk trees with various colors were highly appreciated by the respondents.

Regarding planting compositions, natural compositions and a mix of natural and formal compositions were well-received, with formal compositions also garnering a significant level of agreement. The planting location played a role in respondents' preferences, with urban and residential areas being highly favoured, while institutional and rural areas also received positive responses.

Overall, these findings contribute to the understanding of the preferences and perceptions of the Malaysian Indian community towards garden iconography. They provide valuable insights for landscape designers, urban planners, and policymakers in creating culturally sensitive and inclusive landscapes that reflect the aspirations of the Malaysian Indian community. By considering these preferences, it is possible to develop gardens that resonate with the cultural heritage and values of the community, ultimately fostering a sense of pride, belonging, and cultural identity within the Malaysian landscape.

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