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Malay literature a catalyst for unity

KUALA LUMPUR: "Tomorrow, they will exchange the pau and ketupat with one another, they give and receive what is innately theirs".

This is the translation of the verse in the Malay poem "Suasana" (Atmosphere) penned by the late National Laureate Datuk Dr Usman Awang describing succinctly the inter-ethnic relationship between the Malay and Chinese neighbours.

One can say it is merely a brilliant play of words, but the poem has succeeded in penetrating through racial barriers and provides another perspective in bringing closer people from different ethnic backgrounds, literary figure Associate Professor Dr Lim Swee Tin said to Bernama.

"There is a gentle and subtle message of unity in the poetry that tells us there is much space and opportunity in our hearts and soul for amity.

"Our works of literature could truly be the catalyst for racial unity", he said.

LITERARY WORKS THAT PROMOTE UNITY

Besides "Suasana", Lim said there were many more literary works laced with messages promoting inter-racial unity.

For example, the novel "Sangeetha" by Azizi Abdullah, 'Pemuda dan Gadis Tionghoa' (A Young Man and A Tionghoa Girl) another poem by Dr Usman and the short story 'Estet dan Kwarters Batu 13' (The Estate and 13th Mile Quarters) by Zainal Rashid Ahmad could potentially bridge the racial divide and end the polemics that play up on racial sensitivities.

The non-Malays have also contributed their fair share of creative writings on the subject of unity.

Saroja Theavy Balakrishnan, E Pian Pro Poul (a Thai author), Soo Cham and Kathirina Susanna Tati have all penned poems on nurturing racial harmony.

However, the nation needs more Malay

literature authors, especially among the non-Malays, who can write about the aspirations of their respective communities.

Reading such works of literature is a lot more helpful in cultivating inter-racial acceptance and understanding than subscribing to poorly thought-out arguments that is often the basis of racial politics.

MORE ON MALAYS

"Every race in the country has different aspirations, experience, knowledge and culture.

"When a Chinese author writes on the aspirations of his people and that is read by other races, it will help others was well to understand the Chinese community better.

"A literary work usually has the ability to move readers deeply and help them understand and appreciate another race", said Lim.

He said the Malays wrote majority of the literary works on the subject of unity, but it would be best if an author of a particular ethnicity or race could have written or increased publications on his/her people.

He said this was because their own knowledge of their community could help them in coming up poetry works that truly evoke the aspirations and the frustrations of the particular community.

Understanding where someone of a different ethnicity is coming from is helpful in determining the correct response towards their frustrations, particularly after the 13th general elections, where racial tension was at its peak.

MORAL VALUES

Malay literary works by non-Malay authors may also help in increasing readership of Malay literary works by non-Malays.

This will inadvertently help in increasing their mastery of the national

language.

These literary works also incorporate in their themes good moral values such as politeness and steering clear of envy and jealousy of the achievements of other races.

"Of late we hear a lot of people talking about poor practice of the fifth Rukunegara principle, "Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan" (courtesy and morality). Literary

works have long addressed this issue and put forth a solution to it", he said.

DBP'S EFFORT

Therefore there is a need to mobilize efforts to encourage more non-Malay authors to write on the subject of national unity.

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), the government body coordinating the use of Malay language in the country, has taken some steps to increase the number of publications from tribal languages to Malay.

It's Director Datuk Dr Awang Sariyan when speaking at the launch of the Multiracial Literature Seminar 2013 at the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage recently said the efforts included language learning programmes, writing workshops and writing competitions.

However, Lim felt that others should also get involved in the effort.

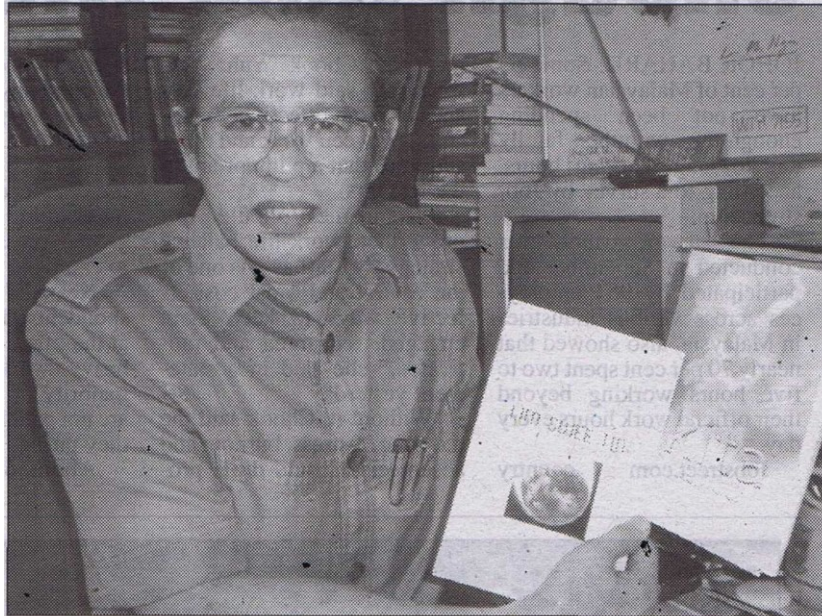
He suggested Aswara to take the initiative of setting up a Writers Academy.

"We can gather all the writers who are ready to write in the name of national unity and integration, here.

"We produce as many impactful publications as possible, in the spirit of togetherness and harmony. These works of literature can do away and deflect these feelings of suspicion upon one another", he said.

These literary works are more effective than slogans that are only superficial in nature. Its messages manifest the soul and minds of the people. - Benama

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Associate Professor Dr Lim Swee Tin, Lecturer for Malay Literature, Department of Malay Language, Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication, University Putra Malaysia (UPM), shows off his writings during an interview with BERNAMA at UPM in Kuala Lumpur recently - Photo Bernama