MALAYSIAN LITERATURE
IN ENGLISH

BBL 3206

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Jabatan Bahasa Inggeris
Fakulti Bahasa Moden Dan Komunikasi
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INTRODUCTION

a. Information about the course

Department: Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Name of course: Malaysian Literature in English
Course code: BBL 3206
Credit hours: 3 (3+0)

This course consists of 3 credit hours in which students have to commit themselves in the method of ‘self-learning’. Therefore students have to commit themselves to the schedule given in the module. As the responsibility is entirely in their hands, maintaining the study pace is important.

b. Information about the writer

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Specialization: Malaysian Literature and Cultural Study
Qualifications: Bac. Arts (English), M.A (English), Northern Illinois, USA
c. Objectives of the course

This course is compulsory for the Bachelor of Arts majoring and minoring in English Literature, and also for the Bachelor of Education (TESL). The main objectives of this course are as follows:

1. To develop awareness and appreciation of Malaysian works from three main genres: Poetry, Prose, and Drama.

2. To identify the different elements that relate to Malaysian literature especially through cultural experience, for example; traditions, filial piety, customs and beliefs, ceremonies and festivals, use of variety of English Language and colloquial language.

3. To state the theme of each literary work and evaluate them in terms of selected works.

4. To relate the plot of prose, and analyze its general structure technique and consider the main events.

d. Synopsis of the course

The development of Malaysian Literature in English; Malaysian writers in English for short stories; Lee Kok Liang and his social concerns; the translated works; traditions and believes; cultural dilemma; the Malaysian complexities; the multi-cultural voices; society and politics; problems of the past; the present and the future; colourful environments; insights and the Malaysian women on their joys and woes.
e. Course content

This course consists of 42 hours of self-learning (3x14). Thus the module consists of 14 Units. For the first half of the semester students are required to study Units 1-7. Units 8-14 will be covered after the second “Face to Face Meeting”. Units 1,2 and 4 focus on the development of Malaysian literature. The discussion highlights the major writers and their contributions to the literary development. Unit 4, however, deals with the translated works specifically written by Malay writers. Indeed, translated works have increased the volume as well as the variety in Malaysian literature. Units 3, 5, 6, and 7 discuss Malaysian cultural issues in selected short stories. Units 8-9 discuss a particular novel and Units 10-11 are about a Play. In addition, the discussion considers the socio-political problems in the Malaysian society. Units 12-13 are especially for the appreciation for Malaysian poetry. Finally, in Unit 14 focuses on stories about Malaysian women. This includes Malaysian women writers and their personal reflections about their gender and society. The course highlights thematic concerns, which are directed to the various cultural issues prevalent in the selected texts. Therefore, students are required to analyze the issues critically through the portrayal of plot, character, setting and point of view.

f. Evaluation

Students are to fulfill the following requirements:

1. Mid Semester Exam 30%
   The questions are based on Units 1-7. They are in the forms of multiple choice (objective) and those that demand answers in the essay form (subjective).

2. Project Paper * 30%

3. Final Exam 40%
   The questions are based on Units 8-14 and the answers are in the subjective form.

* Project Paper

Writing a profile

Select a Malaysian author and write a profile about his or her background and literary achievements. Choose one of his or her major works and discuss it in depth. The profile should be written within 1-2 pages and the discussion of the major work is within 5-6 pages. Therefore the whole paper should be 7-8 pages inclusive of all the references that students have applied in writing of the paper.
g. References

The texts required for this course are:


*Students should have selected texts as references, but students are encouraged to supplement their readings with other materials related to Malaysian Literature in English.
Other Recommended Readings:


# Course Content: Units, Topics, and Time Period for Self-Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1</td>
<td>The Development of Malaysian Literature in English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2</td>
<td>Malaysian Writers in English: Short stories</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3</td>
<td>Lee Kok Liang and His Social Concerns</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 4</td>
<td>The Translated Works</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 5</td>
<td>Traditions and Beliefs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 6</td>
<td>Cultural Dilemma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 7</td>
<td>The Malaysian Complexities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 8</td>
<td>The Multi-cultural Voices</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 9</td>
<td>Society and Politics</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 10</td>
<td>Problems of The Past</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 11</td>
<td>The Present and The Future</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 12</td>
<td>Colourful Environment</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 13</td>
<td>Insights</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 14</td>
<td>The Malaysian Women: Joys and Woes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Explanation on Icons in the Module

To facilitate students to understand the content of the course, several icons are presented in the module. These icons help students to remember the structure of the module. The following is a list of the icons together with the purpose of using them.

a) Introduction = Introduction of unit, topic, or sub topic

b) Objective = Objective of module, unit or topic.

c) Important contents = Main contents in the unit or topic.

d) Suggested references = Extra references for greater understanding of the unit or topic (books, journal or handouts).

e) Questions from the text = Questions included by the writer in the discussion of the topic. Self-assessment question (SAQ)
Questions for self-learning = Question(s) prepared by the writer to assist students to understand better the topic discussed.

Checking questions from the given exercise = Answering scheme is prepared together with the question (not all question are followed with the answers).

Conclusion/ summary = Conclusion or summary based on the unit or topic studied.

No student knows his subject; the most he knows is where and how to find out the things he does not know.  

Woodrow Wilson
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | Introduction: the early writings in English about Malaysia.  
      | Topic 1: The early recognition on Malaya.  
      | Topic 2: Literature of the expatriates.  
      | Topic 3: The beginning of Malaysian writers  
      | Topic 4: Japanese occupation and the post-war period.  
      | Topic 5: Literary development in the 1950’s  
      | Topic 6: Development of poetry | 1 |
| 2    | Introduction: focus on Malaysian short stories  
      | Topic 1: Historical background  
      | Topic 2: Malaysian short stories of the sixties  
      | Topic 3: Malaysian short stories of the seventies | 8 |
| 3    | Introduction: Lee Kok Liang and his prolific literary achievements  
      | Topic 1: Comments on his stories, “Glittering Game” and “Just a Girl”.  
      | Topic 2: Comments on “Birthday”  
      | Topic 3: Comments on “It’s All in a Dream” | 15 |
| 4    | Introduction: Malaysian works written originally in the Malay language; the Malay people and their culture; the impact of Malay culture on other cultures and vice versa.  
      | Topic 1: The Early Period  
      | Topic 2: The 1920 Period  
      | Topic 3: The 1930 Period  
      | Topic 4: The 1940 Period  
      | Topic 5: The 1950 Period  
      | Topic 6: The 1960 Period  
      | Topic 7: The 1970 Period | 19 |
| 5    | Introduction: the conflicts between those who are uphold tradition and those who believe in the importance of modernization.  
      | Topic 1: The Importance of Heritage  
      | Topic 2: Traditional Value in the Malay Society | 27 |
| 6    | Introduction: the community’s frame of mind and how the individuals are influenced by the ‘culture’ they live in.  
      | Topic 1: Spiritual Obsession  
      | Topic 2: Material Obsession | 32 |
7 Introduction: the conflicts between two different cultures and the consequences endured by the individuals.
   Topic 1: Cultural conflicts
   Topic 2: Friendship and cultural values

8 Introduction: the multi-cultural voices and race relations within the Malaysian society in the 1950s.
   Topic 1: Racial consciousness and problem
   Topic 2: The multi-cultural voices

9 Introduction: the outcome of colonial rule in the Malaysian society; the problems of diversity.
   Topic 1: Socio-political situation in pre-independent Malaya
   Topic 2: The symbolic feature of the novel

10 Introduction: the depiction of British intervention in Perak as a literary presentation; the conflicts between the British and the Malays politically and culturally.
    Topic 1: Malaysian society and its history
    Topic 2: The political and cultural gaps between the Malay reader and British.

11 Introduction: the author’s commentary on truth and history depicted in the play, *We Could***You Mr. Birch.*
    Topic 1: History is for the present and the future
    Topic 2: Society and its relation with history

12 Introduction: reflections on the colourful environment of the rural and the city.
    Topic 1: Beautiful villages and city life
    Topic 2: Poems- the village and its society
    Topic 3: Poems- the city life

13 Introduction: poems that depict mixed emotions about the nation and the society.
    Topic 1: Aftermath of the Second World War
    Topic 2: The poets’ personal views on national aspirations.

14 Introduction: explorations on issues about Malaysian women; suffering, sacrifice, happiness and personal achievement.
    Topic 1: Women Writers and Women Characters
    Topic 2: Zurinah Hassan: *When words become a sin*
    Topic 3: Shirley Lim: *Mother* and *I look for women*
    Topic 4: K.S Maniam: *The dream of Vasantha*
References


Other recommended readings:


UNIT 1: THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Introduction

Before you study the various literary works recommended for this course it is important for you to know the background and development of writings about Malaysia in the early years that is as early as the 17th century. These writings in English began hastily, followed by books on geography, geology, anthropology, historiography, and even autobiography by British officers and other foreigners. Those written in later years inspired local writers who then began to look into themselves and made attempts to draw in their imaginations together with observations and experiences to share with the readers.

Objective

After studying this unit you will be able to arrange in chronological order the literary development in Malaysia, especially for works written in English. These works range from articles and stories narrating and dramatizing respectively the Malaysian experience.

Content:

Topic 1: The early recognition on Malaya
Topic 2: Literature of the expatriates
Topic 3: The beginning of Malaysian writers
Topic 4: Japanese occupation and the post-war period
Topic 5: Literary development in the 1950s
Topic 6: Development of poetry
Topic 1 The Early Recognition on Malaya

- Malaysia or Malaya as known in the past was mentioned by Ptolemy, the first writer ever to give a descriptive account about Malaysia as the Golden Chersonese in which was a description of the Malayan peninsula. In 1601, Richard Hakluyt mentioned Malacca in his translations of Antonio Galvano's Discoveries of the World.

- In 1620, Samuel Purchess in Purchess: His Pilgrims (1628) again mentioned Malaya. Thus, these works in books of 17th and 18th century contain references about Malaya and other countries in the region.

- In the 19th century, there were books written on Malaya, which dealt with the geography, geology and anthropology of the area. There were records of legends, folklore and social costumes. Other forms were books of reminiscence by British Residents and also books of adventure by those who were enthusiastic to fulfill the demands in Europe for the tales of the exotic surroundings of the region. Not to forget authors such as Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham who used Malaysian setting for the background of their stories.

Topic 2 Literature of the Expatriates

The Literature of expatriation emerged in the late 19th century and these writers were seen to have genuine love for the country and regarded it as a home away from home. During 1920-1930 the British Civil Servants eventually considered writing historiography and reconstructing the histories of the major Malayan princes and families. However, the long term British Civil Servants gave clearer evidence of identifying themselves with the people. These authors were Sir Richard Windstedt, Sir Hugh Clifford, and Sir Frank Swettenham.
Topic 3  The Beginning of Malaysian Writers

During the same period, a few books by Malayan writers who wrote in English crept into the literary scene. However, these books were more autobiographical, social and historical in their content. A good example is, Gregory de Silva, a Malayan Portuguese who wrote Only a Taxi Driver (1922), The Princess of Malacca 1925 and Sulaiman goes to London (1929).

In the 1940's, two lady writers Katherine Sim and Agnes Newton Keith identified themselves with Malaya. Katherine Sim wrote, Malayan Landscape (1946), Malacca Boy (1956) and Flower of Sun: An Introduction to the Malay Pantun (1954). Meanwhile Agnes wrote Land Below the Wind (1939), Three Came Home (1947) and White Man Returns (1957).

Topic 4  Japanese Occupation and the Post War-Period

During the Japanese occupation writing came to a standstill. Nevertheless, propaganda writing such as pamphlets and articles were circulated among the inmates. There were songs and doggerel verses and was anthologized as the "Changi Songs". Australian and British writers continued in prison the literary pursuit, for example Gilbert Martin who wrote Grim Glory (1942). The post-war period, especially in the late 1940's gave rise to several books describing the horrors and suffering inflicted by the Japanese occupation, and the below indicates the writers who were inspired by what they saw and experienced during the 2nd World War.

- Burchan Singh : Singa The Lion of Malaya (1949)
- Tan Thoon Lip : The Kompetou Kindness (1946)
- M.W. Navaratnam : The Japanese Adventure (1948)
- Chin Kee Onn : Malaya Upside Down (1957)
  - The Silent Army Ma-rai-ee (1951)
  - The Grand Illusion (1961)

~ The literary viewpoint is deeply felt in Chin Kee Onn's realistic lay-out of the detailed accounts of the Japanese and Malayan Liberation Army tactics, the warfare,
and the tension. The characters were caught under fire against the tropical setting of rubber plantations and wild jungle encampments. In the *Grand Illusion*, Chin Kee Onn had brought another great event of modern Malayan history, the Emergency. The novel describes the activities of the terrorists of the Malaya Communist Party in their efforts to overthrow the British administration.

Likewise *Han Suyin*, a world-renowned novelist in her story *And the Rain May Drink* (1956) had also used the Emergency to explore the political and social problems of contemporary Malaya. The description and narration portrayed how a terrorist agent successfully maneuvered his activist's ideology among the rubber tappers.

**Topic 5  Literary Development in the 1950's**

The 1950's acted as turning point for the development of Malaysian Literature in English. With the growth of the two campuses of University of Malaya in K.L. and Singapore, paved the way for the founding of student literary magazines: *Cauldron, New Cauldron, Focus and Write*. As a result, many undergraduates were able to express themselves in poetry and prose and consequently their literary enthusiasm was seen in their first anthology, *The Compact: University of Malaya Short Stories (1953-1959)*, (1959). This collection the works of eight writers was the first of its kind, revealed their interests and abilities of new generation of storytellers in Malaysia. Three contributors who became prolific in the years ahead were *Awang Kedua, Ee Tiang Hong* and *Lloyd Fernando*.

**Topic 6  Development of Poetry**

- The early development of Malaysian poetry in English was familiar with the works of *Ee Tiang Hong, Ooi Cheng Teik* and also *Edwin Thamboo*, a Singaporean, provided the inspiration and model for the new generation of poets.

- Among the three poets, *Ooi Cheng Teik* presented an extraordinary work, *Red Sun Over Malaysia: John Man's Ordeal* (1948) the first volume of poetry in English written by a Malaysian. The poem was dedicated to *The Unknown War Victim and the Common Man*. The book described the author's indignation over
- the Nippon's New Order in Malaya. The poem consisted 350 four-line stanzas, which followed the mode of the early Victorian poets.

- On the other hand, Edwin Thamboo's Rib of Earth (1956), an anthology of his poems marks the transition from Victorian to modern poetry in Malaysia. His approach to poetics allowed fresh clarity and directness in form and style. He introduced regional images and diction that gave local colour as well as meaning to Malaysian readers. For example, there are the 'kris' 'kampung' and 'tamarind' instead of sword, village and the oak.

- Ke Tiang Hong, the author of, "I the Many Faces" (1960) introduced fresh style and simplicity in subject matter. He deliberately moved from conceptual complexity and proceeded into his personal experience about politics, the Malaysian countryside and events.

- Margaret Leong, an expatriate, was as prolific as the local writers who wrote poems that showed her knowledge and affection for the country especially the different languages and races, and the beauty and vitality of the various places. Her works included:

  - Rivers to Senang (1958)
  - The Air Above the Tamarind (1959)
  - Carol Sands (Two volumes of verse for children-1959)

Briefly, trace the chronological development in the writing of prose (Malaysian Literature in English) between 1920 - 1960.
Response to SAQ

- 1920's
  - After the World War 1, books written by Malaysians began to appear in the autobiographical, social and historical forms, e.g. Gregory de Silva - *Only a Taxi-Driver* (1922)
    
    - *The Princess of Malacca* (1925)
    
    - *Sulaiman Goes To London* (1929)

- 1930's
  - Literature of Expatriation: Several books were written by long term British civil servants who identified themselves with the people and country. e.g. Sir Richard Winstedt
    
    - Sir Frank Swettenham and others.
    
    Other writers:
    
    - Katherine Sim - *Malayan Landscape* (1949)
    
    - Agnes Newton Keith - *Below the Wind* (1939)
      
      - *Three Came Home* (1947)

- 1940's
  - World War II (the Japanese Occupation) - works of Australian and British writers e.g. Gilbert Mant's *Grim Glory* (1942) - a descriptive journalism
    
    - After the war, the writers wrote about the cruelty of the Japanese rule.

- 1944
  - Tan Thoon Lip - *Kempetei Kindness* (1944)

  - Chin Kee Onn - *Malaya Upside Down* (1947)
    
    - *Maraize (The Silent Army)* (1952)
    

  - Han Suyin - Her novel *And The Rain My Drink* (1956) is about the Emergency Period in Malaya.
* J. Maxwell Hall - His sixty years in Sabah inspired him to write twenty four short stories in *Makan Siap: Table Tales of North Borneo* (1946)

- 1950's-1960's - Growth of University of Malaya encouraged the students to promote literary magazines - Cauldron, New Cauldron, Focus and Write.

  Introduced the **first** collection of Short Stories by eight writers (a new generation of Malaysian writers) entitled: *The Compact: University of Malayan Short Stories* 1953-1959. Three of the writers were Lloyd Fernando, Ee Tiang Hong, Awang Kedua.

* Lee Kok Liang - wrote short stories published in journals in Australia and England. His first collection of short stories is *The Mutes in the Sun*.

* Katherine Sim - After leaving the country, she wrote *Malacca Boy* (1956), which is the first novel about the Malayan way of life.

**Conclusion**

In about fifteen years Malaysians writing in English had achieved tremendous development in the literary genres of prose and poetry. Although initially the volume of works was small, it was sufficient to provide an impetus for several Malaysian writers to gain greater achievement in the literary field in the coming years.
UNIT 2: MALAYSIAN WRITERS IN ENGLISH: SHORT STORIES

Introduction

The focus on Malaysian short stories is inevitable if one studies the development of Malaysian literature. Most Malaysian writers initially embarked on short stories or poetry before they looked beyond into novels and drama. Thus this unit provides a detailed study on the Malaysian short stories until the contemporary period. Another important note is that some of the writers mentioned are Singaporeans, but then these writers, too, have contributed much in regional literature for literary novels of South East Asia.

Objective

By the end of this session you would be able to:

- understand the history of the Malaysian short story writing in English
- know the active period of short story writing
- recognize the various writers involved in the short story writing era
- identify the various themes, forms and style and cultural values whenever required and
- answer SAQ questions on your own with the text as your reference and guide.

Content:

Topic 1: Historical background
Topic 2: Malaysian short stories of the sixties
Topic 3: Malaysian short stories of the seventies
Topic 1 Historical Background

During the period of British colonization English became, as elsewhere in the days of Empire, the language of administration, higher education patronage, and international affairs. Today, Malay is the official language but the generation that acquired their university education in the 1950's in particular regarded English as their first language. It is this generation that has produced most of the literature in English that has come out of Malaysia. The writers of the 1950's created the nucleus of a national literature in English where there had existed previously only as isolated achievements.

During the 1920's and 1930's books were written by long-term British civil servants. The authors were Sir Richard Windstedt, Sir Hugh Clifford and Sir Frank Swettenham. In the 1940's others who likewise identified themselves with Malaya took their place. Katherine Sim was one such example.

Writing came to a standstill during the Japanese Occupation from 1942 to 1945. The Occupation gave rise after the peace, to a number of books describing its horrors and tribulations. Gurchan Singh's Singa: The Lion of Malaya (1949) provides an account of the experiences of an Indian member of the Malayan Police Force.

Of the short story writers in Malaysia, J. Maxwell Hall (born 1884) is perhaps the earliest. His sixty years in Sabah have given him the material for the twenty-four stories in Makan Siap: Table Tales of North Borneo (1949). Most of the stories are of piracy, mutiny, amok, crime, cunning, and courage in the territory of the Chartered Company before it became a British colony. Each is simple narrative devoid of psychological penetration, symbolism, or allegory.

The work of eight writers was collected as The Compact: University of Malaya Short Stories, 1953-1959 (1959). This collection reveals a tremendous range of interests and abilities, and matters of sex and love are especially common. Three of the contributors, Ee Tiang Hong, Lloyd Fernando and Lee Kok Liang give signs of latent talent.

Ee Tiang Hong is also a competent poet. Lloyd Fernando's sardonic sense of humour permeates each of his stories, which deal with interpersonal relationships in the minor affairs of everyday life. His sparse style, crisp dialogues and mastery of many moods all indicates a professionalism that is uncommon and not yet possessed by the other writers. Lee Kok Liang (born 1929), a fourth generation Chinese lawyer started writing short stories while an undergraduate at the University of Melbourne.
He had some stories published in journals. *The Mutes in the Sun* (1963) is his first collection of stories - stories written in an animated and at times conversational style that is enlivened with local idioms and regional, vivid imagery. His stories almost all show piteous, unloved persons in search of understanding and sympathy, and matters to their ultimate essence of love or hate. His innocents accept their fate with equanimity and are, at least externally, unmoved by disappointment and sorrow.

**Topic 2 Malaysian Short Stories of the Sixties**

It is not an exaggeration to say that the stories represented the best writing in English in this form by Malaysian writers over the last dozen years or so up to 1966. It must also be pointed out that their place in the local literary scene cannot be fully understood without knowledge of contemporary writing in Malay.

*Kassim Ahmad’s, Common Story* one of the earliest to be written, has a slight Hemingway touch. It presents the disillusion of a young man. Yusuf, who realizes that the ideal of cultural integration (which fired so many intellectuals in the early 50s) is not (as he had believed) something to be achieved overnight. Bewildered by conflicting trends, Yusuf returns to his kampung, stirred by a political faith and convinced at the same time that the erosion of the original and enduring values of his community must he halted.

But as most of the stories show, the diversity of our own experience offers an overwhelming challenge to which writers in English have, on the whole, responded. The attentive way in which the narrator in *Lee Kok Liang’s, Return to Malaya* dwells upon the concrete variety of the Malaysian scene is a case in point. This story, deliberately accepts as basic the confusing welter of everyday of its worth. *Lee’s* story, *Ibrahim Something* written in 1966, deals, both humorously and sympathetically with the sensitive consequences of a Chinese-Malay couple’s attempt to make a small corner of sense in that welter. He is the only writer to make concerted effort to master the art of the short story, and *Ibrahim Something*, dealing with a different theme, shows how much assurance and penetration he has gained in the process.

He had stories published in journals in both countries. His work was read with greater interest. *The Mutes in the Sun* (1963) is his first collection of stories -- stories written
in an animated and at times conversational style that is enlivened with local idioms and regional vivid imagery.

Awang Kedua equals Lee’s treatment of his subject. The creativity of the former in “A New Sensation” ranks as the outstanding stories of the fifties. Awang Kedua illustrates a young Chinese Malaysian’s turmoil as he progresses into adulthood. The writer has presented an excellent example of the value of tact and unrestrained utterance inherent in local culture.

In addition, the women writers, such as Shirley Lim, Siew Yue Killingley and Mary Frances Chong involved an interesting variety of local experiences. Shirley Lim also deals with the theme the journey into adulthood in her story “Journey.” In contrast she portrays a young girl’s uncertain predicament about her adult responsibility which she is going to bear.

However, Siew Yue Killingley in A Question of Dowry and Everything’s Arranged, draws in authenticity about Indian life in Malaysia. She writes convincingly the intact Indian cultural practice which does not seem to bend to changes. The writer’s outlook on the Indian culture is both realistic and humorous. On the other hand, Mary Frances Chong in her The Jade Bracelet, points out an important issue about the dying generation, a Chinese grandmother who becomes the last surviving relative to originate from China – her descendants, however, are Malaysian born.

**Topic 3  Malaysian Short Stories of the Seventies**

Lee Kok Liang, Malaysia’s best-known short story writer in English still continued to write. Stella Kon, Shirley Lim and John Machado came to the scene. Of the new comers K. S. Maniam is the most substantial of which his stories created an impression of the Indian Malaysians.

It looks as if these writers, like short story writers elsewhere, seek to break the bounds of the short story. Their stories portrayed life in pre-independent times, the perceptions of children in Malaysia’s unique multi-cultural environment, and perspectives on striking changes that have taken place in modern Malaysia.

These three loosely thematic groups of which about life in pre-independent time indicate that there is a pleasing variety of treatments. Cynthia Anthony’s, Nannan is a moving evocation of the Burmese-Portuguese grandmother of the narrator. This is
highly skilled portrait records the past to capture the beauty of the surrounding mood. Cynthia Anthony's succinct style combines somber realism in a glow for long afterwards. In her story, A Certain Cry her powerful realism captures the brutal matter-of-factness of catching and killing frogs for the cooking pot.

There are also stories dealing with the perceptions of children in Malaysia's unique multi-cultural environment. In, Playmate there is a skillful contrast between a child's innocence on sex matters and adult middle-class morality. The writer, Leong Kwan Pheng, has found her touch with her first effort at short story writing. Pretam Kaur's Through The Wall and Pictures in My Mind have a touching simplicity. She selects her details expertly, pinpointing moments of dramatic emotion which people do not always reveal. The latter story is an album of childhood scenes in which she looks backwards nostalgically, but keeps sentimentality under admirable control. It is a fine evocation of Punjabi Malaysian life.

In Pretam Kaur's, John Machado's and Shirley Lim's stories particularly, the part played by memory is all important. There is a wish to retrace one's steps to look back at the child one was, and to assess without sentimentality where the meaning lay. K. S. Maniam's, The Dream Of Vasanthia does not do this directly. It tells of a little schoolboy who is doted on by his mother and whose friendship with a classmate, who is Chinese gives him a sense of purpose. He has run wild and has been a sore trial to his mother. But, the classmate's death from typhoid somehow brings out the best in him, almost as if this would be the best kind of tribute he can pay to his dead friend.

Finally, the last group of stories present perspectives on striking changes, which have taken place in modern Malaysian societies. For example, K. S. Maniam returns to the problem of capturing the rhythms of small town life in Removal in Pasir Panjang and his hand is more expert here. By introducing a subtly paced contrast of life with the more rapid changes brought about by urban development, the writer has widened the scope of the short story in English.

He is also the author of The Return (a novel), The Cord (a play), four short stories in the collection Malaysian Short Stories, and several others published in various literary journals.

Of The Love Flawed he says, "Plain human interest motivated me to write it. I wanted to explore how a woman of 17 got trapped in situation like that and, after 10 years, how her perspective changed. My emphasis was on this change. The story says that finally, sex is nothing. It meant give way to something greater-- a kind of motherhood that people yearn for but don't get. It is also about people who tend to assume that they know so much about their boundaries-- that they know and therefore dominate and control -- until the thing they think they control begins to control them. His other noted works are The Love Flawed, Mala and The Aborting.
Self Assessment Question

Classify the themes that capture the attention of the writers during the periods 1960 and 1970.

Response to SAQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WRITERS</th>
<th>THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kassim Ahmad</td>
<td>The disillusion of a young man about the ideal cultural integration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Kok Liang</td>
<td>The confusing everyday life in Malaya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awang Kedua &amp; Shirley Lim</td>
<td>The end of adolescence and the moment of adulthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siew Yue Killingley</td>
<td>The static outlook of Indian culture against the changing modern multi-cultural society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Frances Chong</td>
<td>Dying generation and heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Machado</td>
<td>Account of childhood – the perception &amp; emotion in the midst of innocence and unique multi-cultural environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretam Kaur</td>
<td>Life in pre-independent Malaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leong Kwan Pheng</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia Anthony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.S. Maniam</td>
<td>The Indian culture against the changing trends of modern Malaysian society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reminder: Try to identify the story/stories with the themes of the writers mentioned in the list above.
Conclusion

To summarize it all, writers in English are better recognized today than they were before. They fill a small but honourable place in society. Their illumination of anonymous lives in certain sectors of society is too valuable to be ignored. Their work is very much a part of the local scene.
UNIT 3: LEE KOK LIANG AND HIS SOCIAL CONCERNS

Introduction

Lee Kok Liang (LKL) is prolific in writing novels and short stories. His works are considered true regional stories, specifically on Malaysia because there are elements of local colour in the setting, speech, social structure and customs of a particular locality. His literary works reflect a Malaysian worldview as well as scenes of ordinary and everyday life. Kee Tuan Chye, a Malaysian dramatist, commented that LKL's stories depict "capsules of his vision of his people" and important incidents of a lifestyle, society's value system, beliefs and practices that change with time.

LKL's most famous work Return to Malaya dwells upon the concrete variety of the Malaysian life. Ibrahim Something deals with Chinese-Malay intermarriage, and It's all in a Dream tells about the anxiety hinted at especially in the dream sequences. However, LKL's When the Saints go Marching shows a flare for sensory detail and pungent characterization. His theme is the reality of private agony in the midst of historic political change.

Objective

By the end of the unit, you will be able to specify the different themes, which depict the social problems that have been inflicted upon the individuals in LKL's stories. You will also be able to compare and contrast the various social problems based on why they occur and their effects upon the individual characters.

Content:

Topic 1: Glittering Game and Just A Girl
Topic 2: Birthday
Topic 3: It's All in a Dream
Topic 1  "Glittering Game and Just A Girl"

i) Glittering Game and Just A Girl focus on the naivety of two young girls. However, Glittering Game further relates to the "flesh's vulnerability" which directly pinpoints the exploitation of a young girl's innocence by the irresponsible elders including her grandfather.

- In the second story, the theme does not only extend to the problem of blind girl's naivety, but also on her inability to communicate with her parents about her feelings. Consequently, her sense of insecurity grips on her spiritually, although it is an escapism, eventually it leads her to her death by drowning herself in search for the "moon" in the river.

- One of the social issues in the two stories is about the debased attitude of the elders both within the family and the general public. Their lack of responsibility in providing emotional as well as physical security to the young ones compels the latter to be the victims of a bleak future or a tragic end of their lives.

- It is important to note that in the above and in most of LKL’s stories, the author asserts very clearly that poverty triggers his characters to be deprived and oppressed, and they are forced to bear their sufferings in loneliness.

Topic 2  "Birthday"

Birthday describes the loneliness of a girl who virtually lives in a mute world. This is the world of the young girl through whose eyes the story is seen. The girl is 'mute' to her own opinions but accepts what others have decided for her.

- The course of events takes place on the girl's twenty-fifth birthday. On that day, her grandmother had a visitor, and they were trying to arrange a marriage for the girl. The plan was shelved because the girl had accidentally spilled hot curry on the guest. This made her grandmother very angry with the girl for spoiling her plan to marry the girl off, as age is catching up on her.
- It is obvious that the girl's life is somewhat controlled by her grandmother, so much so that she had no say in anything that concerned her personally. Although it was the girl's birthday, which could be regarded as a special day, the day passed like any other ordinary day. Perhaps this also suggests that a birthday to a girl is not something to look forward to because it means a year nearer to a marriage which is decided by her elders, irrespective of the girl's own choice.

Topic 3  "It's All in a Dream"

*It's All in a Dream* relates to us the fears of a man involved in activities of the opposition party which was against the government. Thus, it is written in a descriptive mock. The protagonist was initially willing to sacrifice his family and himself for the sake of his party. Although his loyalty towards his party was genuine, he realized that the other members in the party, especially the chairman, did not give him support in times of trouble. When the protagonist realized this, he focused his attention on his family instead.

- Now, continue reading other stories of *LKL* and identify the themes and social issues of each.

**Self Assessment Questions**

i) Write a list of social issues and conflicts portrayed in *Lee Kok Liang's* stories.

ii) Do the social issues centre on one particular racial community only?

**Responses to SAQ**

The social issues and conflicts that are portrayed in *Lee Kok Liang's* stories include:
- suffering and sickness
- inability to communicate
- oppression
- alienation
- loneliness
- religion
- generation gap
- (un)fulfillment
- suppression
- poverty vs. materialism
- spiritual vs. physical

The social issues that become the theme of LKL’s works do not only centre on the Chinese community, the racial community of the author, but also beyond it. The writer had attempted to present a multiracial scenario as a social fact of Malaysian life in order to exploit the problems that plague us until today.

As seen in many of his stories, Lee Kok Liang depicts mankind as vulnerable to the weaknesses of the flesh and the tortures of the mind. Society at large is reprehensible and as a result man succumbs to a sense of helplessness and allows himself to surrender to fate in solving life problems.

CONCLUSION

Lee Kok Liang, through his stories observed life as a struggle, which brings sorrow and unfulfillment. What is important, the writer has successfully captured the human predicament in multiracial stories laying bear the traditions, values and beliefs that certainly need adjustment to the changes of time. These are important social issues of contemporary Malaysia.
UNIT 4 : THE TRANSLATED WORKS

Introduction

This unit prepares you with the background of Malaysian works written originally in the Malay language. Many of these works have been translated into English to provide Malaysian readers a deeper appreciation about the Malay people and their culture. Many of these works inevitably have drawn in the cultures of other Malaysian communities namely the Chinese and the Indians. Therefore, the writers have subtly shown their sensitivity on the impact of Malay culture against other cultures and vice versa. The outcome of this inter-cultural experience is not only enriching but also unique in the context of the Malaysian society and consequently its literature.

Objective

By the end of this unit, you will be able to identify the important Malay writers and their works, which include the various themes, forms, style and cultural values. You will also be able to recognize the active period of Malaysian literary development.

Content:

Topic 1: The early period; a historical background
Topic 2: Literary Development in chronological order
Sub topics 2.1: the 1920 period
2.2: the 1930 period
2.3: the 1940 period
2.4: the 1950 period
2.5: the 1960 period
2.6: the 1970 period
Topic 1 The Early Period: A Historical Background

~ Malay authors did not as yet understand the development of Malay literature in the early stage, for example, the "short story" form as we know of today. The short story concept at that time did not exist and its meaning never discussed.

~ That these short and amusing stories had long won a place in Malay society is a fact that cannot be denied. Hence Hashim Awang stressed that because of this too, writers after Nor bin Hashim like Ismail Sulaiman for example, when first writing short stories for the newspaper Pengasuh, wrote amusing stories. On account of this tendency writers like Ismail Sulaiman did not quite realize that he himself was writing to create a new form of literature for his period which later came to be known as "Criteria pendek" (Short Story).

~ In the history of Malay literature the watershed that divides the classical and the modern passes through the works of Abdullah Munsyi (1797-1854). His writings continued the classical style yet in content and attitude they were more independent and critical, thus introducing obviously modern elements and a new perspective.

~ His personal viewpoint and the detailed descriptions are without doubt new additions to classical Malay literature. Abdullah's main books, Hikayat Abdullah and Hikayat Pelayaran Abdullah were in part autobiographical but in part travel journals of his trips to Melaka, Singapore and to the East Coast states of Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan with spectacular details. They provide a series of images of these very important times.

~ The next important movement in the growth of Malaysian literature is the rise of a new group of writers who were backed by publishers and intellectuals. These new writers received their inspiration and examples from the literary and political situations in Egypt and Turkey, two countries that provided models of the progressive Islamic state in the first few decades of this century.

~ Through its writers Malay society was now taking stock of its situation. Because the concept of a short story was still vague and the influence of the story-telling tradition had existed for that length of time in Malay society, it caused the length of a story of the time to be unlimited. The Malay newspaper and magazine were increasing in number but not all the stories contained in the media mentioned could be published in a single publication because of limited space and pages. On that account, if there were a long story it had to be published in serials. The Malay "short story" in serials later became a style in publication for some time.
Such was the position of short stories in Malay literature before World War Two. Another matter of interest was not only that the writing of short stories continued to flourish and the attention given towards this field by the reading community became more evident.

We do not also neglect the role of publishers in pushing forward short stories. William R. Roff for instance, has succeeded in recording as many as 82 newspapers and magazines periodicals during the 1930's in Malaya. This development became even more interesting with the rising interest in creativity of writers from among the journalist circle and other educated group such as the teachers.

Thus, it can be considered that the development of Malay literary history, in particular the writing of short stories is important because of the appearance of distinct qualities and norms.

Topic 2  Literary Development in Chronological Order

The following contents focus on the development of Malay literary works according to the chronological order. These works deal with the Malay culture that encompasses religious values, Malay customs and traditions, and the impact of modern values on the Malay society. It is important to note that some of these Malay works have been translated into English.

2.1 THE 1920 PERIOD

Syed Syeikh Al-Hadi, a leading member of this group gave literary flesh to his ideas in his novel *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* (1925-1926). He experimented with characterizations and points of view that were not part of classical Malay *hikayat*.

Furthermore, two contemporary issues were woven into the story line featuring two modern-day lovers; firstly, the more liberal relationship between young men and women, and, secondly, the question of education for women and girls.

This is a milestone in Malay prose and was emulated by other writers for its theme and characterization. However, it must be stressed here that the settings, as well as characters were foreign; being based in Egypt and with Arabs as characters.
Ahmad Rashid Talu, in *Kawan Benar* (1927) and *Iakah Salmah*? (1929), found his way into the midst of the Malay readership *Za'aba*, a Malay scholar and almost a contemporary of the author saw positive qualities in his works. He noted that the literary works are marked with a lucid style, a charming purity of language and effective description.

2.2 THE 1930 PERIOD

The thirties were a further development and a confirmation of the beginnings in the twenties. Many of our now famous writers, very interestingly, began to write in the thirties and they were young teachers trained at the Sultan Idris Training College, Tanjung Malim, Perak.

Among the more illustrious were Abdullah and Muhammad Sidek, Harun Aminurrashid, Muhammad Yasin Makmur and Ishak Haji Muhammad. Compared to the writers of the twenties they tend to be more perceptive and even analytical in their approach to the situation of the Malays. The thirties saw literature as an instrument for the discussion of social problems. As writers, they themselves must shoulder the responsibility of setting right the course of that society.

Also high on the list of writers’ themes was the economic predicament especially the dilemma of the Malays and their future. As a result, writers were urging their readers to develop the pioneering spirit of their ancestors who opened up jungles for padi land or rubber holdings.

Abdul Rahim Kajai himself was said to be an influential pioneer in the field of short story writing. His tongue-in-cheek humour and intelligent style of discussing heavier themes of politics, economy and the future of the Malays are found throughout his three posthumous collections of short stories *Pastaka Kajai* (1945), *Banyak Udang Banyak Garam* (1960), and *Lain Padang lain Belalang* (1961).

At this juncture most of the Malay writers generally came from among the Malay educated. The one outstanding exception in these years was *Ishak Haji Muhammad*, who was comparatively successful in the English schools. Ishak dealt with his themes through a play of irony and humor. His *Putera Gunung Tahan* (*Prince of Mount Tahan*, 1937) and *Anak Mat Lela Gila* (*Son of Crazy Mat Lela*, 1941) were more courageous in their criticism of the British than his predecessors or contemporaries. Ishak’s literary works were experiments with the new novel form, which is the satire.

The short story was going through an age of transition when the elements from traditional Malay literature were used, and in some situations, were changed to suit the new themes and styles of writing. Also seen to be present in these works are the
modern elements or the desire on the part of the authors to be modern, to vary the language, and to introduce new aspects to plot and characterization.

2.3 THE 1940 PERIOD

The Japanese invasion of Malaya in 1941 broke up the gathering momentum of literary practice and progress. The Japanese were careful initially to allow the expression of Malay nationalism in local writing if it did not directly support the Japanese government. Literature, without doubt, has helped in the growth of this nationalism before, during and after the war. Except for a few short stories published in the periodicals Semangat Asia, Fajar Asia and the newspaper Berita Malai there was not much literary activity.

2.4 THE 1950 PERIOD

While the period beginning with the twenties and ending in the early forties could be seen as an age of transition, the fifties was totally a new one with a new breed of writers. It was in the late forties the group of young writers came together to later found a literary movement that came to be known as the Angkatan Sasterawan 50 (ASAS 50) or 1950’s Movement of Writers. Malay writers in Singapore initially founded the ASAS 50. Among those involved were Kamaluddin Muhammad (Keris Mas), and Usman Awang to name a few. The general aims of the organization were to ‘extend and develop Malay literature and culture; to protect the rights of all its members and its writers; to modernize Malay literature without destroying the old.’ The ASAS 50 writers saw it as their responsibility to diagnose the social ills of Malay life. Their maxim was ‘Seni Untuk Masyarakat’ (Art for the People/Society) for they were the social realists with a sensitive eye for the underdogs and the down trodden.

Another widely published writer is Abdullah Hussain. He has at least a hundred short stories to date. Two of his first novelettes, Kasih Isteri (A Wife’s Love) and Dia Kekasihku (She’s My Love) were published.

A. Samad Said came into the literary scene in the mid-fifties. Having his roots in the ASAS 50 concept of and commitment to literature, he is also in touch with world literature. He has provided a more modern interpretation of society’s woes.

Shahnon Ahmad, an important short story writer emerged around the mid-fifties. His is best known for the life of hardy characters that came raw from the fields and
forests, walking to us in the mud of their lives. His collection *Selesai Sudah, Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* and *Rentong* contained his best works and fine achievements.

The fifties were prolific years, providing an intellectual, social and economic environment that pushed writers into commitment.

### 2.5 THE 1960 PERIOD

The serious age of ASAS 50 was followed by a kind of antithesis in the late fifties and early sixties.

In the early sixties a young Malay intellectual, socialist in his politics and unsentimental in his writings began to emerge. He is **Kassim Ahmad** who became very controversial in his works and politics. His voice was sophisticated and befittingly rebellious. **Kassim's** perspective is often historical and analytical. He has been very influential and has a greater following even up to the present time.

One of Kassim's contemporaries is **Anis Sahirin**. In the small collection of her works one notices the urban setting and mood. The sixties are a decade of student writers beginning with Kassim Ahmad and Anis Sahirin followed by Norzah (Mohd. Nor Ghani), Hassan Ibrahim, Awang Had Salleh and Ajiik (Ismail Ahmad) as the new talents.

### 2.6 THE 1970 PERIOD AND UP TO THE 80's


**S. Othman Kelantan** has written a number of stories. One of his better works *Perjudian* (1973) and *Juara* (1976) show form and technique that belong to the traditional literature and he is still continuing to refine them.

**Anwar Ridwan**’s stories have been collected in *Parasit* (1976). He has a clean and quiet style of writing, a great improvement from the usually wooly and impulsive style of his contemporaries. Although thematically traditional, stylistically he has achieved a certain maturity that is seen in his patience and care in description and dialogue.

Another short story writer to note is **Ali Majod**. He collected his earlier works in *Dalam Diri* (1974), bringing macrocosms of contemporary life both in the classroom and in the village. He is a careful writer and quite meticulous with his language and style.
Self Assessment Questions

Discuss generally the form and style of translated works (written originally in Malay) especially between 1930 to the contemporary period and what actually has influenced the writing of their literary works?

Response To SAQ

In the pre-war period, the plot is influenced by the structure of traditional stories. There is a beginning, middle and the ending. There were also the modern day writers with a language style influenced by their day-to-day professions, for example Ishak Hj. Muhammad, Abdul Rahim Kajal and Harun Muhammad Amin to name a few.

Writers generally attempted to use a language style suitable to the theme and message of the story. Evidently the writers attempted to choose words which were apt to the atmosphere and attitude emanating from the writers themselves. For instance, words with a romantic quality embroidered with poetic forms such as the pantun and syair were used in stories that discussed love and marriage. A language style that is plaintive, sad, yearning, full of disappointment and anxiety to the extent that sometimes the readers join in and sympathize with the story presented. Also inserted into the story are Quranic verses when dealing with a moral theme.

It is interesting to note the choice of diction by writers. It does not only show the aspect of the writer himself in producing creative literature but also periods that influenced one another. This all at once shows two main elements, the old and the new.

After independence and at present, there are examples for instance the use of metaphor, personification, elements of sarcasm repetition and so forth to create the tone of a piece of writing.
Conclusion

What is important about the translated works is that its contribution is as dynamic as the Malaysian literary works written in English. Both types of writings become active in the years ahead. The contribution of each is very significant in the development of Malaysian literature as a whole although the writers of translated works deliberate on themes about the Malays in particular, they also try to look for a deeper meaning and to note changes within the Malaysian society. Hence, there is a tendency towards human problems and issues in which the writers act as representatives of the Malaysian society.
UNIT 5: TRADITIONS AND BELIEFS

Introduction

The stories "The Banyan Tree" by Zainuddin said and "A Quid of Sirih, A Bowl of Water" by Khadijah Hashim narrate many aspects of the Malay culture, customs and traditional belief with a backdrop of village life, you will encounter the sharp contrast between tradition and modernization. At the same time, you will be exposed to the conflicts between those who want to uphold tradition and those who see the importance of modernization.

Objective

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to identify the importance of objects used symbolically in short stories. You should be able to link incidents from both the real and symbolic point of view.

Content:
Topic 1: The importance of heritage
Sub topics 1.1: the narrative
  1.2: significance of the tree
  1.3: collision of values
Topic 2: Traditional Value in the Malay Society
Sub topics 2.1: the narrative
  2.2: symbolic feature in the narrative
1.1 The synopsis of “The Banyan Tree” (refer to the appendix).

The story starts as the narrator reminisces about an old Banyan (Jejawi) tree that used to grow at the bank of the river. It was the centre of daily village activities. The tree however was held revered by some of the older inhabitants of the village, one of them being Tuk Napiah. He and a group of old villagers defended the tree from being chopped down to make way for a new bridge. Though many shared the aesthetic value that Tuk Napiah had of the tree, in the end, after much coaxing, he had to succumb to the need of modernization in the village. He himself gave the first blow of an axe to topple the tree. Two months later he passed away after being ill. On his grave a new Banyan tree grew...

1.2 Significance of the tree

The Banyan tree represented many different values for the inhabitants of Kampung Jejawi. Because of its abundant foliage, it is an ideal spot for some of the villagers to carry out their daily activities under the tree. The women folk did their washing and bathing while children played there. But for Tuk Napiah, the tree held a more significant place in his heart. To him and the older generation of Kampung Jejawi, the tree represented the memory of their legendary village warrior, Tuk Merah, who died on the spot where the tree grew in defense of the village. This sacred memory drove the elders to defend the tree from being cut down to make way for a bridge.

1.3 Collision of values

From the point of view of the older and younger generations in the village, we could conclude that the whole situation is indeed the clash between tradition and modernization. Tuk Napiah and his circle of the elders of the village defended the tree to preserve their heritage. Bang Yob, the personal representative of the assemblyman, of the village, on the other hand wanted the tree to be rid off to make way for a bridge. This bridge will bring greater benefits to the villagers. As he explains,

"The bridge will serve us well. Our goods will reach the market faster. It will be easier for our children to go to school, and for us to get to the hospital. Even during
floods we will not be cut off from other villages and efforts are being done to ensure the safety of the villagers.”

TOPIC (2) : Traditional Value in the Malay Society

2.1 The narrative: “A Quid of Sirih, A Bowl of Water”

Farid, a first year medical student, has come nearly to the end of his semester break. Still he did not have the chance to eat the roast chicken he was craving for. He is further upset and embarrassed over his father who is a ‘pawang’. Farid claimed that his father was cheating the villagers with his ‘mumbo-jumbo.’ But as a result of his father’s holy water, the headman of the village, Pak Dali whose son was accepted in the army, gave the family a big plate of yellow pulut with roast chicken. All the children enjoyed it including Farid. When it was time for Farid to leave, his father gave him money, saying that it was something conjured up with his ‘mumbo-jumbo.’

2.2 Symbolic features in the narrative

Many items in the story can be used to give a colourful picture to the Malay culture and way of life. Among them,

- The backdrop is a ‘kampung’ with the presence of people rearing chickens.
- Several food items show typical Malay taste and flavour such as roast chicken, ‘daging rendang’ and yellow ‘pulut.’
- The presence of a ‘pawang’ or traditional medicine man in the village shows that the villagers still believed in the old way of curing illness. Farid argued on the ‘logic’ of the old ways but he apparently had forgotten the strength of faith that people had.

Self Assessment Questions

1. Can you justify the cutting down of the Banyan tree as a need for modernization? How would you look at it from the Malay tradition and custom point of view?
2. What was the dividing factor between Pak Seman and his son Farid?
1. Although some of the villagers held the tree dear to their hearts as it represented the memory of Tuk Merah and the history of the village itself, the need of modernization was also a great issue. It is difficult to sacrifice the crucial needs of many for the sake of a few. In Bang Yob's explanation, he brought in issues such as education for the younger generation, health and help in times of emergency. The villagers slowly began to see these issues as needs in a modern era.

From the traditional point of view, although the tree was a symbolic heritage for the younger generation, it caused many problems in the relationship among the villagers. It caused squabbles between two generations in the village and even caused the narrator to 'hate' his father. The importance of human relationship justifies the cutting of the tree. It is important to note here that an object by itself has no significance, but what it represents. The tree and Tuk Merah left behind a sense of pride in the villagers. Even though, the tree was chopped down, some of the villager (the narrator included) remembers their heritage and Kamal, one of the very young generation during the conflict of the tree, grew up to be an army officer. The author comments,

"Perhaps he was influenced by the fighting spirit of Tuk Merah." As he ends the story.

2. Farid is a medical student and is highly influenced with the modern way of thinking. He is, therefore, embarrassed that his father is practicing traditional healing (pawang). Farid is upset that his father does not seem to see the 'logic' of it all. His father, on the other hand, does his activity out of necessity. Pak Seman said, "What I'm doing is only temporary – while waiting for you to graduate."
Conclusion

- Interesting elements for you to ponder!

i) For “The Banyan Tree”

You have been exposed to the surface exploration of the story, which deals with the reaction of the villagers towards the tree. The underlining meaning of the story, however, portrays something totally different. The Malay culture and tradition do not permit any kind of disrespect or show of arrogance towards the elders. Therefore the author eliminated the source of the trouble – the banyan tree.

Tradition is important, especially to uphold one’s custom and beliefs. But when changes come along the way, one needs to re-evaluate and reconsider their stand. If the changes are for the better, then the past values must make way for new improvements. There should be compromise instead of conflict to ascertain peace and harmony.

ii) For “A Quid of Sirih, A Bowl of Water”

People tend to forget their roots. Farid, although grew up in a ‘kampung’, forgot the importance of some of his father’s activities. He forgot his tradition and wanted to break away into the modern era. He wished to drag his father into the modern world too, but was not successful as the opposite happened. It is interesting to note how the author used the yellow ‘pulut’ and chicken – something very traditional and hold great importance in Malay customs, to bring this city boy back to his senses and roots.
UNIT 6: CULTURAL DILEMMA

Introduction

The stories "The Pelanduk" by K.S. Maniam and "A Question of Dowry" by Siew Yue Killingley show how materialistic obsession often has the upper hand in influencing people's behaviour. In the next story you will learn a little about the Indian way of life and how the dowry system affects their daily lives. This story of course does not depict the Malaysian Indians in general and some of the facts may have been exaggerated but it does show certain traits that exist among the Indian community.

Objectives

1. By the end of this unit, you will be able to identify the features involved in a spiritual obsession of a closed community. The underlying reasons for this obsession are greed, power and material gain.

2. By the end of the Unit you will be able to identify the problems that surface due to material obsession and the limitations to custom and belief pertaining to spiritual obsession and marriage. The underlying reasons for this obsession are greed and power.

Content:
Topic 1: Spiritual Obsession
Sub topics 1.1: cultural presentation of the story
1.2: the major issues of the story
1.3: interesting revelation

Topic 2: Material obsession
Sub topics 2.1: major issues of the story
2.2: interesting revelation of the characters and their cultural behaviours
Topic 1: Spiritual obsession

1.1 Cultural presentation of the story “The Pelanduk”

The culture presented in the story, "The Pelanduk" by K.S. Maniam is different in the sense that it presents a culture developed in isolation and has unique characteristics of its own. Although the basis of the culture of this particular settlement is derived from Hinduism, it is shaped to interlock with the designs of an influential character in the story. As you read the story, do take note of the people's frame of mind, and how they are influenced by the 'culture' they live in.

1.2 The major issues of the story

The settlement which forms the backdrop of this story is isolated from the rest of the world by a literal wall built by the occupants of a nearby "Taman" and by a symbolical wall formed by the dwellers of the settlement themselves. The minds of the people of this Settlement is pre-set by the teachings of the village pundit, Govindasamy, who teaches religion according to his own interpretation of the Hindu Mythology and religion. He leads them to believe that they are in the era of destruction under the influence of the Goddess Kaliamma. Govindasamy then narrates his version of excerpt from the Ramayana where he reveals the evil behind the beauty of the deer or 'Pelanduk'. He then instructs Arokian, a seemingly useless village hunter to go hunting this 'pelanduk' claiming it to be divine decree. Pandian, another villager, slowly emerges from the languid village to be an energetic young man who does many things to make bring about improvements to him. Many of the villagers began to admire him and sought his aid. Arokian noticing that he has had no progress with the 'pelanduk', invites Pandian to go hunting with him. And in the jungle Arokian kills his 'pelanduk', which he made himself to believe that it was Pandian - the human form, which the evil 'pelanduk' had taken to entice others.

1.3 Interesting revelation

When one is driven by obsession in one's belief, for example, religion or other cultural values, there is a great tendency for one to be very irrational in making decision as well as in taking actions. Many a time, one uses religion/traditional practices to justify one's actions although these actions may not be acceptable to other
individuals in the society. Therefore, the outcome is disastrous to not only the individual but also the whole community.

**Topic 2: Material obsession**

2.1 **The major issues of the story “A Question of Dowry”**

The Ramachandran household is in preparation for the engagement of Sivasothie, their daughter. The older couple had prepared a gold necklace to be given as dowry for the girl. But now they could not pay for the necklace as the piece of land, which they planned to sell to finance their daughter’s dowry and the purchase of the necklace, has devalued. Thiruchelvam, the future son-in-law, learning of the devalued land decided to call off the engagement.

2.2 **Interesting revelation of the characters and their cultural behaviours**

The story depicts a typical Indian household. The approaching engagement has sent the whole household into a bustle of activities. Through these activities you could learn a substantial amount on what is common in the Indian culture. The following outline shows some interesting items that are particularly Indian in nature.

- Spicy curries, 'wade' and the excessive use of coconut milk in cooking.
- The dutiful wife attending to the needs of the husband
  "...she managed her husband well - obeying him in the little things with such readiness that he thought himself lord of everything else as well."
- Family jewels kept in iron casks.
- The necklace used as dowry - if possible to be inherited down and used again for the same purpose,
  "...it can be kept for her daughter when she gets married."
- Open superficial flattery.
  *Sivasothie, you are a very lucky girl. You'll have a doctor for your husband and Mrs.Muthu will have a fit from envy. But you are so much better than
her daughter... you're nicely dressed.... He loves you very, very much - his father told your father so."

- Domestic violence.

"...snatched the happy Thamby as he danced into the room and spanked him hard.

- The importance of a good dowry, without which, marriage is seen as improbable.

Self Assessment Questions

1) Were Arokan’s actions driven by the needs of the community, personal satisfaction or divine inspiration?

2) The things the characters say and how it is said reflect many hidden ideas and meanings. Analyze the dialogues among the characters and give your opinion on the underlying meaning.

Response To SAQ

1. The community in this case was led by the teaching of the priest. The priest set into the minds of the people of an age of destruction - the Age of Kaliamma and salvation will only come through the destruction of the 'peelanduk'. The reason behind this interpretation was not given in the text - perhaps it was a noble gesture to give Arokan a sense of importance/significance, which will be a change to his life. The community never really needed this deer sacrifice ritual.

But strangely enough, the happenings between Pandian and the society in the settlement could be symbolically linked to the tale of Maricha the evil magical deer in the Ramayana. Just as Maricha was sent to entice Sita with his beauty, Pandian who was constantly improving his appearance, attracted the ladies who came to him in the
need for money. Maricha was described as being a golden deer with changing hues. Pandian too began buying new clothes and his final possession was a gold chain.

This symbolic representation could have given an idea to Arokian that this Pandian was the evil that has come into the settlement. All these of course, may be taken as coincidences. Arokian could have murdered Pandian due to the increased recognition of the latter and the former may have felt threatened.

2. In this story, the dialogue plays an important part as it provides the readers with a deeper understanding to the characters’ inner feelings. What is said and how something is said give more insights to the readers on the hidden ideas and meanings.

The characters, especially Mrs Ramachandran often places a great deal of importance on superficiality or the outward appearance. She tried hard to keep everything and everyone tidy as the household was expecting a guest. In her words,

"...but don’t dirty your shirt. What will uncle Thiruchelvam think if you’re dirty?"

"Do pin up the jasmine flowers - they’re too drooping on you left side... why did you move? ... you’ve made me ... knock two off - no matter! This looks better - not so crowded.

Mrs Ramachandran is also very concerned on people’s perception on their family, especially when it comes to material concerns. Examples of this may be seen in the following dialogues.

i) When Mr Ramachandran told his wife that they could not pay for the necklace, she exclaimed,

"Oh, be careful, you old man! Do you want people to think that we have no money for our daughter?"

and she ‘hissed’ this in ‘fierce whispers.’ In the Indian custom, it is important for families to provide a good dowry for their daughter. Mrs Ramachandran lowered her voice when saying the statement above to avoid possible embarrassment from the neighbours.

ii) To avoid possible overhearing of the above statement, she continued ‘in a more normal tone’ and ‘inquired loudly’,

‘Which piece of land do you mean? My father gave me four for my dowry, and our second son received three as his wife’s dowry.’

This loud exclamation is meant to impress the neighbours with tremendous amount of wealth that the family possesses. Even though it is learnt later that all of the wealth is
almost depleted, Mrs Ramachandran still had her pride to defend against the neighbours.

iii) Many things were said that reflected the materialistic nature of the characters.

Materialistic possessions are used to differentiate one self from others. For instance, 'Thiruchelvam’s mother and his double-tongued sister can’t possibly mistake the value of this necklace. I’m glad we decided to give this”, said Mrs. Ramachandran referring to the necklace which forms part of the dowry.

Mrs Ramachandran described Thiruchelvam’s mother as ‘grasping’ as she supposedly takes her husband’s salary. She suggests to Mr Ramachandran to have a talk with their future son-in-law not to give too much to his mother and save for his future family. We could trace a sense of self-gain as she could be hoping to reap from her son-in-law herself.

iv) And finally, when the engagement was called off, she said, “there’s more than one doctor in our community”, implying that the son-in-law, should be nothing less than a doctor or someone rich.

Conclusion

The materialistic obsession in this story is so great that it has a story hold over the judgement of the characters. Human relationship is based upon their ability to produce material wealth. The relationship among family members also seems to be controlled by wealth. It is interesting to note that love is mentioned only casually and not given much emphasis.
UNIT 7: MALAYSIAN COMPLEXITIES

Introduction

In this topic you will analyse two stories - “Ab Khaw Goes to Heaven” by A.Samad Ismail and “A Burden of Sin” by Karthigesu-which depict the consequences of the clash of cultures. In the course of the story try to comprehend and sensitise how one treats cultural values of others. Do take note that if one treats the experience negatively, the consequences are not only painful to oneself but to others such as one’s immediate family or friends.

Objective

By the end of the topic, you should be able to identify the two sets of cultural values and the attempt of one to dominate the other and the consequences of one’s hasty actions especially when it relates to one’s pride in one’s cultural background or belief.

Content:

Topic 1: Cultural conflicts
Sub topics 1.1: the narrative
   1.2: tolerance and respect in cultural conflicts

Topic 2: Friendship and cultural values
Sub topics 2.1: the narrative
   2.2: the main event
   2.3: interesting revelation
Topic 1 Cultural conflicts

1.1 The narrative: “Ah Khaw Goes to Heaven”

Ah Khaw is a Chinese rickshaw puller who has come to stay with a Malay family in order to be safe from the Japanese. The lady of the house, ‘mother’ slowly tries to persuade Ah Khaw into becoming more of a ‘Malay’ by offering him ‘baju kurung’ and other Malay clothes. The lady’s son, however realizes his mother’s intention; that is, to try and convert Ah Khaw into a Muslim. Later Ah Khaw falls ill. The lady still tries to persuade him into converting. He died as a non-Muslim, and the Malay family could not hold a feast for Ah Khaw’s soul, as he was not a Muslim when he died. Nevertheless, the mother was content as she still hopes that Ah Khaw will enter heaven as he died on a ‘Holy Friday Eve.’

1.2 Tolerance and respect in cultural conflicts

The main theme of the story is the meeting of two different cultures and the level of acceptance that existed on both parts.

In order to convert him in the long run, mother slowly introduced Ah Khaw to Malay lifestyle.

Among other things, she

- made ‘baju kurung’ for him. She went specially to Geylang to buy some Fuji silk and sewed until midnight to make him a suit of Malay clothes. This shows the deep enthusiasm on Mother’s part to slowly change him.

- wanted him "to look over the older widows and divorcees in the kampong" to choose a wife. This is yet another of her attempts to settle him down as a Muslim.

- slowly absorbed Ah Khaw into Malay lifestyle by having him
  1. enjoy rice flavoured with sambal belacan
  2. make his ablutions in water
  3. sit cross legged and generally follow Malay custom

Ah Khaw on the other hand retains his Chinese background and behaviour,
- he prefers background and behaviour
- his Chinese accent did not change
- once he went back to eating Chinese food
- during his illness he asked for his bamboo pipe and tobacco
Ah Khaw nevertheless was a suitable candidate to be converted to Islam. Perhaps 'Mother' saw certain traits in him that urged her on to convert him, 'save' him and ensuring that Ah Khaw goes to heaven.

Ah Khaw showed understanding of the ways of Malays and Muslims. For instance during the fasting month, Ah Khaw would come early in the morning to help Elder Brother. He understood that Elder Brother would be weak from fasting.

Ah Khaw knew and was 'well regarded' by the important people of the village although he had stayed there only for 6 months. Among them are Pak Kasan, the songkok maker, Wak Dol, the caretaker of the mosque and by Tok Lamin, the owner of the coffee shop at the crossroads of the village.

He also made himself useful by helping with the household chores such as cleaning the house etc.

![Image]

**Topic 2 Friendship and cultural values**

2.1 The narrative: “A Burden of Sin” (refer to the appendix)

Velu returned to the village to see his old friend Sulaiman after twenty-five years staying in Kuala Lumpur with his son. He found the village changed in several ways and this disappointed him. Velu’s son Devan and Sulaiman’s daughter Hasnah fell in love twenty-five years ago but Velu did not agree to their relationship. Sulaiman, however, gave in to his daughter’s wish and pleaded with Velu. Velu took the drastic action of moving away to Kuala Lumpur with his family. Both the lovers led miserable lives. Velu came back to the village with the hope to lighten the burden of sin that he carried on his shoulders.

2.2 The main event

- Velu comes back to the village in order to ease the pain he suffered as consequence to his actions twenty-five years ago. He hopes to clear away the burden of sin. Subconsciously he wanted time to turn back twenty-five years ago – to the time when he could correct his mistake of separating the young lovers. He says as soon as he steps down from the trishaw,

  “Nothing has changed...everything is the same”
• Whatever sight meets him proves that time indeed has passed and there is no turning back. Nevertheless, Velu still wants to hold on to the pass. This is seen in his wish to drink the old type of ‘kopi O’ which Sulaiman’s wife used to make.

• He wants to go to the river where he and Sulaiman used to bathe, but that too has changed and is now muddy.

2.3 Interesting revelation

It is interesting to note that although Velu has lost almost everything through his actions, he does not lose the friendship of Sulaiman and his family. There is no indication of a vendetta on Sulaiman’s side, even though his daughter is now living an unfulfilled life. Sulaiman behaves thus because as he says,

“I always think what has happened because God wills it”

Through his actions and words, we can conclude that Sulaiman has forgiven Velu. It is unfortunate that the situation never really forgave Velu and he has “to carry this burden a little while longer” as the saying goes:

“Remorse is the pain of sin”
- Theodore Parker

Self Assessment Questions

1) What are the conflicts faced by the characters and how does these conflicts affect the characters and their reactions towards others in the story.

2) What is Velu’s sin and how is he ‘punished’?
Response to SAQ

1) Mother wanted Ah Khaw to enter 'Heaven'. The only way she could think of is converting him into a Muslim.

The external conflict that she faced here is that her wish was even opposed by Hassan, the Elder Brother. He brought Ah Khaw to give him shelter and feels that it is unfair to burden Ah Khaw with the decision to convert.

The internal conflict that she had was that she knew that Ah Khaw was a good man and had the potential to become a Muslim but she knew that Islam cannot be forced upon a person.

Ah Khaw too had to deal with conflicts. He had to accept the kindness showered upon him. Hence, he could not say much when Islam was proposed to him.

In the end, we are able to conclude that everybody was satisfied with his or her ends.

Ah Khaw died a Chinese and was given a Chinese funeral rites. He was not robbed of his heritage and tradition.

Mother, too was satisfied for her wish that Ah Khaw goes to 'Heaven' may yet be fulfilled as he died on a 'Holy Friday Eve'.

2) Velu prevented his son Devan and Sulaiman's daughter Hasnah from marrying twenty-five years ago. The young couple was in love and the separation brought negative effects to both of them. This is Velu's 'big' sin. Therefore he is 'punished' in the sense that he has to face all sorts of disappointment and regret in life.

- He lost his son to the vice of city life – something Velu could have avoided if he married Devan off to Hasnah.
- He lost his wife who “died out of sorrow”
• Now he learns the news of Hasnah’s miserable life and this adds on to his burden of sin.
• Finally, he does not get to purge himself of sin in the river.

Conclusion

The set of beliefs that each person has is often something, which is held precious and is not something easily parted with. It is an area, which is not easily influenced by changes.

In the story, one culture attempted to impose itself on another culture. Although the imposing culture was in many ways dominant but it was not successful in overcoming or replacing the existing culture. In the end both cultures remained as they were and the author managed to imply that both groups were satisfied although the degree of satisfaction may be falsely imposed.
UNIT 8 : THE MULTI-CULTURAL VOICES

Introduction

The novel, *Scorpion Orchid* by Lloyd Fernando questions the issue on race relation within the society of pre-independent Malaya in the 1950s. One of the important features pinpoints on the multi-cultural voices reconnecting superficial unity devoid of sincerity and honesty in establishing a strong united society of the Malayan people.

Objective

From this unit, you should be able to identify various multi-cultural voices of Malaysian people during the pre-independent period. The voices echoed tension as well disunity among the people.

Content:
Topic 1: The portrayal of the characters and their relationship
Topic 2: The multi-cultural voices and racial consciousness

Topic 1 The portrayal of the characters and their relationship

The novel tells about the friendship of four friends – Sabran, Santinathan, Peter and Guan Kheng. Their friendship symbolises the multicultural races of Malaysian society.

The novel is set in the 1950s; a period of social upheaval before Malaya and Singapore became independent. The narrative revolves around the four undergraduate friends and their bond of friendship, which began during their
student days, came under severe strain as they tried to adjust to the changes that occurred around them.

The story unfolds great complexities by the young man’s associations with the two enigmatic personalities – one, a woman named Sally and the other, an old medium whose identity was unsure and whose message was not easily comprehended.

**Topic 2 The multi-cultural voices and racial consciousness**

Initially, when Sabran, Peter, Santinathan and Guan Kheng talked about their different backgrounds, there was no malice or sign of prejudice as well as racial consciousness. However, the bond became a strain as the country confronted social and political changes. The main reasons are:

- **a.** Sabran, the Malay component in the story unlike his friends had a sense of commitment towards his country. His involvement in the union activities was to free the country from the British.
- **b.** Sabran’s three other friends however did not share his sentiments for the country or society. Peter for example, associated himself with the European as colonials and often spoke of going to England which he regarded his homeland.
- **c.** The friendship between Sabran and Santinathan was tested in the midst of a street riot. The latter’s refusal to get involved in the union’s activities (as he really did not understand Sabran’s social concern) caused a curt retaliation, “you’re a foreigner, too”. To Santinathan, those words were harsh enough to drift them apart.
- **d.** Guan Kheng, however, after seeing Peter being attacked felt that he had been cherishing a false hope and an impossible dream. Although he had discarded much of his culture, he “... never really gave in”. He believed strongly that he should maintain his Chinese identity and heritage.
Self Assessment Questions

Describe the multi-cultural situation of Malaya in 1950s as depicted in Scorpion Orchid.

Response to SAQ

1. The author depicts the bond of friendship among the four undergraduates (Sabran, Sabitathan, Peter and Guan Kheng) as the ideal feature of harmony and understanding in the multi-cultural society of Malaya in 1950s. The four friends never questioned each racial cultural and religions background. If they did talk about their different backgrounds there was neither malice nor sign of prejudice or racial consciousness. Each could be described as a "stayer" of Malaya.

2. However, the friendship began to crumble at the start of the riot when the people clashed with the British Realty. As the riot continued the four friends felt their strained relationship. Sabran, for example discovered the truth because they had not really believed in a common goal. They had never believed they could ever be united. Unity seemed too idealistic in their state of mind. True enough, Guan Kheng echoed the message of disunity, "but who understand himself or his true place in this country? ... The truth is that no one does. We are all strangers to one another." (pg. 75)

Conclusion

Indeed, unity among the multi-cultural society of Malaya in 1950s was mere idealism. It existed when there was peace and harmony in country, but it could not sustain when confronted with social and political problems. Consequently, each communal group tried to safeguard its individual interest and belief. Finally, the author seems to say that race relations and racial identity have to be solved if the nation wants to achieve unity among the various races.
UNIT 9  : SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Introduction

The socio-political scenario in Scorpion Orchid by Lloyd Fernando shows the problems of ethnic diversity of contemporary Malaya. Indeed, the author seems to imply that stability and harmony can be achieved when the people are united and tolerant of the communal cultural behaviour and practice. Furthermore, a united manpower will provide the strength to oppose the common enemy, the colonial rule.

Objective

By studying the unit, you will be able to identify the symbolic representation of Malaya in the form of the female character, Sally whose Malay name is Salmah, and to specify the cause and effect of national disunity and social upheaval among the various ethnic groups.

Content:
Topic 1: Socio-political situation in pre-independent Malaysia
Topic 2: Portrayal of the female character, Sally

Topic 1 Socio-political situation in pre-independent Malaysia

1. The novel features an important viewpoint that the country will be strong socially and politically if the people give an affirmative answer to the question, "Do you want to join the society or not?" (Society here refers to the country). Indeed, the country needs a "stayer" rather than a "drifter" or a "quitter".
2. Looking back at pre-independent Malaya, it was open to all – its assets attracted many people but everyone who came was only after his own vested interest and not the country’s interest at all.

Guan Kheng’s remark to Ellman, the English lecturer is a clear illustration.

"You talk about how much good you’ve done for us. Do you know how much money you’re sending ‘home’ as you call it?" (Fernando, pg 82)

Ellman replied:

"Not half as much as The Chinese." (pg. 82)

**Topic 2 Portrayal of the female character, Sally**

Focus your attention on the character Sally. Enlist the various events and human conflict related to this particular character and discusses how she is associated to the country’s socio-political situation and how she signifies the national security and stability.

The author’s portrayal of Sally provides an overt symbolic association to the national demand and experience. As Sabran said to Guan Kheng "Sally has no friends. You know that. Only customers." (Fernando, pg. 103).

This emphasises that country was exploited, and similar to the character, Sally, it was so free and open. Sally gave herself to everybody irrespective of race and at times not taking any money. Inspector Adnan aptly said "She was what you might call available for special customers, no race distinctions." (pg.113)

During the riots Sally was raped by a group of people. Here; the author has implied the country being raped by its people, but the people irrespective of race did not really care; otherwise the riots would not have occurred. Thus, Sally retaliation to Sabran’s concern over her tragic experience sounded bitter,

"What gives you the right? You act as if you own me. You don’t. I’m everybody’s remember?" (pg. 120)
The dialogue further implies that the country belongs to everyone and not just to one particular race. She gave love and consolation to her people, yet she did not receive an in return. As lamented by Sally when she was delirious,

"I gave them a little love... They are frightened, all of them, as if they are running away from something... Malay, Chinese, Indian, European, I give them rest..." (pg. 110)

Finally, after all the sufferings Sabran, the Malay counterpart, witnessed the emergence of new spirit in Sally (the country) when she refused his offer to take her home. Her refusal affected Sabran so much that he did not know what to make of someone who had been taken for granted for so long and who suddenly showed a new spirit, the will to survive. This new spirit indicated that there would be a bright future for the country to gain socio-political stability as well as political identity.

Self Assessment Questions

Discuss how the author symbolically uses the character, Sally to signify the socio-political situation of the country?

Response to SAQ

The author initially uses Sally as an ordinary citizen, a prostitute, who socialises with four young undergraduates who also represent the ethnic groups. Through Sally’s identity, a racial mix-up who resembles a Chinese and speaks the language, but uses a Christian name instead of her Malay name “Saimah”, the author seems to suggest that racial integration in Malaya will solve the problems of multi-racial conflicts. Indeed, Sally is the ideal citizen in a multi-racial society.
Through Sally, too, the author professes to achieve true acceptance in multi-racial Malaya, one has to shed part of one’s racial identity to emerge as a Malayan with a new spirit rejecting all forms of racialism and identification by race. True enough, Sally symbolises the nation who is "a giver and not a taker", and undergoes much suffering only to acquire a new spirit – the spirit to survive and to gain the real Malayan identity.

**Conclusion**

*Scorpion Orchid* portrays the social and political instability of pre-independence Malaya. The main cause was racial differences among the various ethnic groups; the sense of loyalty among the emigrants was questionable while the Malays tried to assert ethnocentric fervour. Therefore, the author suggested racial integration as a solution shown symbolically through the character, Sally. She was portrayed as the nation ready to serve, to provide love and shelter but in return she was abused and abandoned. However, the underlying message of the story seems to advocate that the nation is capable of achieving social and political strength if the people exercise genuine love and harmony that transcend the boundary of race and religion.
UNIT 10: PROBLEMS OF THE PAST

Introduction

'We Could *** You, Mr. Birch', is a journey into history; the history of British intervention in Perak, and how it affected the socio-political life of the local society especially the Malays.

Objective

By the end of the unit, you will be able to specify the characters engaged in conflicts and the fight for power. You will also be able to compare and contrast the various social problems faced by the races, why they occur and their effects upon the individual characters.

Content:
Topic 1: The conflicts between the Malays and British
Topic 2: Social issues: the author’s view

Topic 1 The conflicts between the Malays and British

Problems arise when the Malays, namely the chiefs not only have to fight the Chindenmen, the British, but also their own kind who have gone over to the British for their own personal gains.
The fight for power is another major conflict between the British and Malay chiefs, the chiefs themselves, male and female, master and slave and competing media.

Power jockeying in domestic and state politics (which eventually effects the whole peninsula), race, gender and media. And the power play for the enhancement of self-interest is glaringly shown in the play.

**Topic 2 Social issues: the author's view**

The social issues center not only on the Malay community (ruler and general population, master and slaves) but also arise from suspicions between the different races. There is not much trust as each race like to portray themselves to be the other. It is made worse when J.W.W. Birch sort of threw his weight around messing in the local affairs of what the Malays hold on as important and dear to their hearts.

The writer Kee Thuan Chye attempts to present a factual scenario in the face of history. It was a Malaysian life presented way back in the 19th century in order to exploit the problem that still plague the society until today.

Kee thuan Chye tries to depict mankind as vulnerable to the weaknesses of the flesh (master upon slave and slave upon master) and the tortures of the mind. The sense of extreme loyalty results man to succumb to a sense of helplessness and allows himself to surrender to orders without even thinking whether such orders are conducive.

**Self Assessment Question**

List the social issues and the conflicts portrayed in ‘We Could **** You Mr.Birch’
Responses to SAQ

Generally the social issues and conflicts portrayed in the play include:
- culture differences
- suppression
- unfulfillment
- oppression
- no freedom of speech/expression (especially among the slaves to their masters or among genders: male – female)
- poverty versus power
- spiritual versus physical
- sufferings
- religion
- misunderstanding among the different races.

Conclusion

Kee Thuan Chye through ‘We Could **** You Mr.Birch’ observed life as one long struggle; then and now, which brings sorrow and unfulfillment. And most importantly the human predicament has been one long uphill battle.
UNIT 11: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

Introduction

Historical facts may not be the truth. Different writers may have different views for each historical event. If there is any proof, people do not seem to care for a better future.

Objective

By the end of the unit, you could see the past, present and future as an ever-flowing stream. You will be able to transfer the remote past into the immediate present and into the future effortlessly, for, whatever the problem faced or encountered could not be demarcated into the past, present or future.

Content:
Topic 1: History is for the present and the future
Topic 2: Relationship of the past, present and future in the play.

Topic 1: History is for the present and the future

As the reader very well observed in this play, “We Could **** You Mr. Birch”, Kee Thuan Chye subconsciously pointed out that history does not necessary tell the truth about the past. For no one including the characters in the play (when they drop out of character) could justify that.
The emphasis on what is true and important all depends on the writer and the reader to judge on. But one point to consider is that whatever happened in the past could be a lesson to all.

Greed for power, hunger for materialism and exploitation of the stronger onto the weaker are but some of the problems faced by the human race in the past, present and the future.

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**Topic 2: Relationship of the past, present and future in the play**

"We Could **** You Mr. Birch" is a symbolic fantasy which presents and confirms stereotypes of the past which unfortunately linger on to become problematic issues of the present. The past is represented by the characters of the play and the present and future are based on the attitudes and responses of the actors involved in the play as well as the characters who represent the current Malaysian society. The relationship of the three eras depicts the Malaysian mind set that is not change at all. What is striking is that all are wealth oriented.

Indeed, at some level, society is integrated and at some level it is not. Kee Thuan Chye wants us to ask ourselves what is history after all. "We Could **** You Mr. Birch" stresses the fact that we not only have the choice to the past or present but also a responsibility because we can choose how we want to see history.

We look at society as it was at the turning point of history and also at the whole political social spectrum then and now. We indeed are looking at our situation, the way we view the others, the way we view ourselves, and above all, the way we view at a shared history. And as we look at all this, we are constantly urged to ask about the future we want to achieve. The choice is in our hands! The decisions is ours.
Self Assessment Question

Write a list of social issues and conflicts faced by the different races which are similar in the past, the present and possibly the future.

Response to SAQ

The social issues and conflicts faced by the multi-racial community which are similar then and now include:

- Suffering
- Suspicion
- Communicating problems
- Oppression (especially in terms of power and economy)
- Alienation
- Loneliness (with regards to not being able to understand each other’s taboos and cultural beliefs)
- Religion
- Unfulfillment (gender problem: male and female, ruler and follower)
- Suppression (no freedom of speech)
- Poverty vs. materialism
- Spiritual vs. physical

Conclusion

What has been affecting the past characters could well be faced by any present characters and the same goes for any future characters. Nothing is new. History repeats itself. This is the reality around us as humans.
UNIT 12: COLOURFUL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

In this unit you will be exposed to a number of poems which reflects the colourful environment of both the rural and city life. The poems chosen for this unit will give you a picture of what the village and city looked like in the eyes of these poets. Be sure to read beyond the surface meaning as some of the poems dealt with here, while offering a mild surface meaning, may project deeper implications in their underlying meaning.

Objective

By the end of this unit, students will be able to identify various poems concerning the village and the city. Students will be able to identify how certain people felt about these two contrasting places.

Content:
Topic 1: Comparison between the village life and the city
Topic 2: Problems of the city life

Topic 1 Comparison between the village life and the city (refer to the poems in the appendix)

Most of the poems chosen here were written when the nation was recuperating from the aftermath of war. Many people, especially those from the rural areas, suffered. Those in the city, on the other hand, prospered, more so during the later period. But the way of life of the city dwellers was viewed upon as corrupted and morally degrading.
Through Usman Awang’s “Old Uth”, we see an example of the hardship of the rural inhabitants. The poem gives us a glimpse at the old man’s life; with a large family and no wealth. Any ill that befalls the family is faced with strength and faith. The village healer is mentioned as someone who “cures with incantations and magic words.” Belief in healers is one of the traits of the village people. But a deeper implication would be that the villagers are so desperate that they are willing to believe anyone who promises something good.

The same trait is reflected even among the city dwellers. They believe in the “leaders” who promises them prosperity. But the city dwellers too are cheated, just like Old Uth. The poem seems to conclude that the rich remains rich and has an advantage over the naive, and the poor remains poor.

Regardless of the hardships that the poor faces in the rural areas, poets like Dharmavijaya paints a beautiful picture of a village in “My Village”. He has, however, intricately woven the element of sorrow into the beauty of this village.

He describes an undeveloped village with “laterite roads” but his choice of the words “haeaped with dust” shows slight poetic admiration. The children’s anxiety suggests that a shroud of poverty exist here. But their faith for a better future is strong.

The city is given a totally different picture by many poets. There is often a sense of hopelessness in poems that concern the city. A minor example would be the comparison of the meaningless life in the poem “Those Pills from the Family Planning Clinic” by Baha Zain to the happy children in “My Village” by Dharmawijaya. Even Old Uth is blessed with five children while these city dwellers has none.

**Topic 2: Problems of the city life (refer to the poems in the appendix)**

“Toilet Paper City” also by Baha Zain, elaborates the city scenery. He describes how society is bound to routine and how people are self centered, each trying endlessly to achieve. Alcoholism is subtly touched as he describes the coffee house scene. The waitress is also a receptionist, dancer and florist – implying that the hard conditions in a city drove people to have multiple careers to support themselves.

Besides describing the city as “filthy”, his poem ends with the implication of moral degradation in the city.
Another poet addresses the problems of a city in a very creative and interesting way. In his satirical poem “Letter from the Bird Community to the Mayor”, Usman Awang speaks in the voice of the birds in the city. The poem is clear in meaning, which is a call to preserve the environment.

So much are the problems in the city, that Ee Tiang Hong, in his poem “To” expresses his utter indifferance in not being able to go to Kuala Lumpur. He says that he is not envious of the luxuries of the city. He subtly mocks city dwellers when he rhymes “friends who count” with “friends who mount” giving a rather vulgar implication.

To city dwellers who look down upon the backwardness of the village, Muhammad Haji Salleh, in his poem “Do Not Say” challenges them magnificently. This poem is a splendid elevation and portrayal of the rich village life. He uses clear strong tones to reprimand any who would dare to diminish the spirits of the proud villagers.

But of course, some city dwellers would find in their city, the comfort of home. And in honour of them who have accepted their lot, Muhammad Haji Salleh has given us “The City is My Home.”

Self Assessment Question

The poem “A ‘Modern Movement’ Collage” is a collection of thoughts of the poet Baha Zain. It is written in a patchwork manner, as the title suggests. Analyse the poem and state the implication of the structure in light of a modern city way of life.

Response

The poem is written in short phrases to reflect the quick assumptions that people make in their thoughts. In a city especially, people tend to make instant judgements when they see something.
In the poem, we see is stanzas, collections of related items which have been put together, as the title suggests, in a collage. The first stanza represents the stigmatic city with its pollution and immorality. The second stanza is about the rich and their life at highly classed places. The last stanza depicts the untrustworthiness of the people and completes the picture of a dishonest city.

Conclusion

Life may differ in both these localities. The village may range from beautiful scenery to sorrowful poverty. The city from its highest skyscraper to its lowest moral degradation. But to many people, in the hearts of these places, they find – a home.
UNIT 13: INSIGHTS

Introduction

The Independence was accepted by many throughout the nation with mixed feelings. Some viewed it as a new beginning, but others looked upon the situation as a dormant volcano waiting to re-erupt. Some even found the new government dissatisfying.

The poems written during this time reflect these mixed emotions. The situation of local and foreign politics influenced our poets and their outlook became more universal. Their methods of writing also changed – more free in their approach.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to identify the different emotions which the Malaysian post-war poets reveal in their poems.

Content:
Topic 1: Mixed emotions: insecurity, dissatisfaction, optimism
Topic 2: Submission and sarcasm

Topic 1: Mixed emotions: insecurity, dissatisfaction, optimism

The following poems by Usman Awang and Kassim Ahmad show the different emotions of the society in achieving independence as a national success after the colonial experienced.
The Times by Usman Awang

This is a time of bitterness,
The stench of blood fills the air,
All voices are buried in silent chests.

Beware when you speak to anyone,
Eyes penetrate from between prison cells.

You, the poet, will write all,
Your sharp pen can cut into all suffering!
The times teach you to live in hypocrisy
Or save your skin with nods.

You, the journalist, gather the news of mankind,
Your sharp pen can dig into their follies!
You are silent, hands clasped under the table,
The times force you to write only of the good.

Everything oppresses, because over them is forged iron,
Everything bores, because they are all false.

Dialogue by Kassim Ahmad
(for my mother)
I

calm yourself now, my son
though our field is flooded
this rain is from God
who pours down his blessings.

the sun will rise, it will surely be bright
listen
the frog have stopped calling
tomorrow will be a bright day
our padi will ripen!

II

close your eyes now, mother
we are frail beings
struggling during the day
and worrying at night.
the sun must rise tomorrow
I will go forward
with a thousand rebels of the peasantry
we have long died in loyalty
now we will live in defiance!

Many would view the Independence as a great achievement for the nation but a few saw it as just an event on the calendar and made no difference to their daily, uncertain and risky life. Such feelings proved to be with grounding with the incident of 13 May 69.

Amongst the many poems that depicted the feeling of insecurity and dissatisfaction is Usman Awang’s “Times”. The poem starts with the description of the situation where no one could say or express their feelings. The poet, therefore calls upon other medium such as other poets and journalists to do their share in exposing the truth of the situation.

“Dialogue” by Kassim Ahmad reveals almost similar feelings as the poem above. In this poem, however, two different voices can be heard. The first stanza seem to represent the optimistic, peace loving people that hope that things will pass and life would be better. The second voice in the second stanza represents the brave group of people who dare to go forward to overcome oppression.

Topic 2: Submission and sarcasm

*Malaysian Thanksgiving* by Ee Tiang Hong

Thank you, *Tuan,
For all these little things in life-
Health, family, stable job,
A dream-house on an imagery
Plot of land, and a redeeming conscience.

Given of your bounty,
These I accept with open arms and mind,
Mindful that as I did not know
When they would come, I may not
Choose the hour when they should go.
However, there were some writers who seemed willing to accept any form of oppression. The poem “Malaysian Thanksgiving” by Ee Tiang Hong seems to portray a weak submission to the will of others. The poem is the parody of grace, a prayer said by Christians before and sometimes after a meal to thank God for the food. But in this poem, the first line is “Thank you Tuan” instead of “Thank you Lord”. This shows the level of submission of the people towards their suppressors. Their thankfulness for the “dream house and imaginary plot of land” can be viewed as mild sarcasm on the poet’s part.

Self Assessment Question

The post-war poems often indicate the feelings of the people in relation to the historic events of the nation. Comment briefly some of the poems relating to history of the country, giving emphasis on the feelings of the people towards the situation.

Response to SAQ

Dark events that involved the different ethnic groups of the nation such as the May 13th of ‘69 led poets to write poems that called for unity and harmony among the people. “A Pact” by Kassim Ahmad is an example of such a poem. The poems mention well known names from the different races such as Hang Tuah, Cheng Ho and Rama to represent the three major races of the nation. Using the word “brother” several times suggest an effort to unite the people.

Not all the people felt the uneasiness after the Independence. The poems “Thank You” and “To” by Ee Tiang Hong reflect a feeling of contentment and confidence.
Conclusion

It may be concluded that poems can be used as a channel to convey the feelings of people in regards to events in history. Events such as these tend to change the perception and outlook of poets and therefore the style of writing changes as well.
UNIT 14 : THE JOYS AND WOES OF MALAYSIAN WOMEN

Introduction

This unit presents some representative works which explore issues about Malaysian women in particular. The themes feature the suffering and sacrifice of such women who gained strength for the sake of family and personal achievement. However, the experience is not uncommon to women from other cultural background, too.

Objective

By the end of this unit you will be able to enlist several important issues common to women's experience which may be local and universal.

The local experience is held back by Malaysian cultural values and experience which are often shared by the different ethnic groups.

Content:
Topic 1: Women role in male dominance society
Topic 2: Women within traditional and modern values
Topic 3: Futility and optimism in women's life

Topic 1: Women role in male dominance society

When Words Become A Sin (by Zurinah Hassan)

i wish to record everything tonight
how i slept on your chest
and you moved to dry my tears
but I cannot speak
when my every word
becomes a sin.

when you ask
it’s easy to reply ‘I don’t know’
because to tell the truth
is a sin.

and now what’s left
but silent lips, always,
when my voice
has become dangerous
and words
have become a sin.

Original title: Apabila Kata-kata Menjadi Sebuah Dosa
Translated by: Noor Aini Osman

The above poem draws the reader’s attention on the role of women in the local society, especially the Malay society. The voice “I” in the poem is the representative of all other women who are compelled to succumb to inner conflict upon the suppression of their thoughts and feelings about issues which they need to express. The reason for the suppression according to “I”, “...my every word becomes a sin”, explicates that the social norm does not permit a lady being out-spoken or expressing unnecessary comments, even though if it means telling the truth. It will be an outright sin if there is a deliberate outspokenness between the lady and her spouse; there is an indication of female insubordination, and meanwhile the male’s role implies authority and domination. To avoid any greater conflict, the woman wisely reverts to “silent lips” lest her voice becomes “dangerous” and “...words become a sin”.


Topic 2: Women within traditional and modern values

Mother (by Shirley Lim)

Mother is toothless, sag-skinned,  
Coconut round and brown with scar.  
She knew pantuns, on Mandi Safar,  
Sarong knitted modestly,  
Fell into the sea, milk-fleshed young.  
Ungainly now, unstrung,  
She cannot stand heat, lies snoring  
Under circling breezes.

In her grandfather’s garden  
Extraordinary fruit yearned :  
Red-blossomed banana, yellow  
Chempedak. She washed carefully  
Eggshells to cap the spiky pandan.  
Leached landscape bruised by sun,  
He made it magical  
With edible bushes.  
Sand clean from his garden rubbed  
Into soles, penetrated blood  
Like gold-yellow seeds. They cling  
To our feet. She sits on the floor  
By Scandinavian sofa  
Blond as her gold-washed ring; rising  
She shuffles to the refrigerator  
In search of Malacca sweets.

This poem implies the changes of experience of a woman to due to time and place, and consequently the changes relate to her intellectual and physical self. Mother was once an attractive and active, and was also intellectual enough to appreciate pantun and enjoyed the “mandi safar”. Her heydays were close to nature and she herself was as beautiful as the nature which surrounded her grandfather’s garden which laid out,

“Red-blossomed banana, yellow  
Chempedak...”
However due to change of time, Mother’s encounter with the natural environment moved to modernity in living lifestyle. In spite of that, there seemed to exist a sense of “foreign barrenness” and she reverted to her cultural roots to reach for her “Malacca sweets.”

However, just like time and place, Mother’s physical being and experience changed, too. She is now old, unattractive and weak.

**Topic 3: Futility and optimism in women’s lives**

**I Look For Women** (by Shirley Lim)

*Mid-life stalled, I look for women  
   Where are they my mothers and sisters?  
   I listen for their voices in poems.*

*Help me. I’ve fallen asleep, fallen  
   With sleepers. These women have murdered  
   Themselves, violent, wrenched from home.*

*Grandmother was barren. She died,  
   Tubes in nose and green shankly arm,  
   Hair yellow, a dirty dye, patches  
   Like fungus on a stricken pine.*

*I read terrible stories-  
   Hate, rage, futilities of will-  
   And look for women, the small  
   Sufficient swans, showers of stars.*
“I Look for Women” directs the reader’s attention to the roles of women who have been created as mother, daughter and grandmother. Thus, the poet questions “Where are they?” And the poet wants to hear from them lest they will escape from her thoughts. The poet also examines the role which the women seem to have rejected or seek to change;

“These women have murdered
Themselves, violent, wrenched from home”

Similarly the sense of dejection and unhappiness is patently portrayed in “...grandma was barren- she died”. There seem to be many more who succumb to “hate, rage, futilities of will,” and consequently surrender to suffer in life.

Self Assessment Questions

For the next exercise, read “The Dream of Vasantha” by K.S. Maniam and draw a chart to show the role of Vasantha as a woman who faces many challenges in life, but at the same time still manages to maintain her dignity and integrity.
Response to SAQ

"The Dream of Vasantha"

The Writer's Message

- 
- 
- 

Vasanthi is a strong woman. As a single mother she overcomes humiliation and suffering to raise her son, Ganesh.

Vasantha's Personal Values

- 
- 
- 

* dignity (although being humiliated)
* determination
* sense of responsibility
* she wants to give the best in life to her son materialism and education.

Conclusion

Malaysian women have much to impart about their individual experiences and their gender counterparts. Both Zurinah Hassan and Shirley Lim have strong views about women's role in the society and call for greater recognition and empathy for women as important individuals. K. S Maniam also acknowledges the strength of women in their ability to overcome problems related to their personal lives and families, or the society at large.
Appendix

Old Utih

He has a wife to embrace till he dies
Five children who must eat daily
An ancient hut hung with legends
A piece of barren land to cultivate.

His hand rough as hide
Are ever ready for foil
Old Utih, the noble peasant.

But malaria frequently brings them down
Despite a million prayers
The wife calls the village healer
Who cures with incantations and magic words.

The healer returns home with his reward
Money and the trussed pullet.

II

In the city the leaders speak
Of the elections and the people’s freedom-
Of a thousand-fold prosperity in the sovereign state
The golden bridge to the hereafter.

Flushed with their brilliant victory
The leaders proceed in cars, looking expensive
The people wave them.

There are banquets and festivities everywhere
With delicious roasts from the villages
That are promised prosperity.

Old Utih still waits with his prayer.
Where are the leaders going in their limousines?

Usman Awang
Letter from the Bird Community to the Mayor

Lord Mayor,
we the bird community called a meeting
one fine clear morning
on the roof of the deserted Parliament building.

All sent their intellectuals to represent them,
all but the crows, for they were too busy
mourning their loved ones, shot dead
and drifting down the River Klang.

Special guests came as observers,
a delegation of butterflies,
involved in the issue.

Lord Mayor,
though we had no hand in electing you
since franchise is not for the feathered,
still we honoured you for your promise
OF A GREEN CITY.

Alas, they have desecrated THE GREEN of the nature
To worship THE GREEN of dollars
Since Kuala Lumpur's mud turned to concrete

We birds have been the silent sufferers
The late Belatuk was crushed under a felled tree
Merbuk was conned by the name Padang Merbuk
While he and his kind were cooped in cages.

The pipit delegation are protesting
Against the insult in your proverbs
"pipit pekah makan berhujan"
(deaf sparrows feed in the rain)
Pipit and Punai both feel
It’s most improper of you to call
Certain private parts of your anatomy
By their names, when you well know
Your 'pipit' and 'punai' can't fly
(you have deflated our egos in the process of erecting yours).

Lord Mayor,
This letter requests that in your wisdom
You will protect each branch, each root,
Each leaf, each petal, each bower,
For these have been our homes through the centuries,
And it would also be for the good of man,
His health and happiness, his peace of mind,
To let nature and its myriad beauties bloom
In brilliant sun.

Usman Awang

Those Pills from the Family Planning Clinic

I took a long look at my wife
yes, she is like a maiden
and I am submerged in boredom
so I cast a dream
into her womb,
nothing unusual, is it?
a year later
she only imagined it
but could not deliver.

those pills from the family planning clinic
impregnate women in the heads
and make men meaningless riders.

Baha Zain

Toilet Paper City

the city’s feet are the wilderness
its nerves barbed wires
old, rusty and infected with tetanus
that bite into movement and vision
in the smoke of dust and soot
shattering the clarity
of ph.d minds, talents and personalities
become victims in the day’s tangle
the repetition of life’s routine
the white morning to wake up in
then to prostrate before a dark poisonous
night.

this city is a den for grand planners
each to his own lot and direction
programming precise steps
adding — multiplying numbers on a bank card
analysing telex news of coup d’etat
libel suits of politician’s against editors
tracker dogs from a news office
morphine pushers in the coffee house
and everyone recognises the sweet smile of the beer waitress
the receptionist, dancers and florist
as temporary cures
for all that irritates
and hastens anger.

the city is hard rocks
transforming into a region of conflict
the meeting of trouble shooters
students leaders, labourers, administrators and academicians
bricks to the city’s rise
however hopeless the situation
we may not escape from ourselves
that together carry the burden and hate this filthy city
that emerges as cancer to the environment’s greenness

we cannot avoid boredom because it gives us breath for another day
so what then I must do?
collect the tissue paper discarded by nose wipers
manufactured from hundred-year-old trees
or write poems on them
as the last notes
that may be reached by rubbish collectors:
this is paper from toilets
from a tissue-paper civilization
I seek for an answer
perhaps it’s best that I resign tomorrow
and not report to the employment office
apply for a job at a big hotel
because the best and lucrative profession is prostitution.  

My Village

the fountain of my love, my village
how have you fared
laterite roads
hennaed with dust
its field and swamps
in drought, often.

the land of longing, my village
your children
are grown and adult
patiently begging
in the jaws of sorrow
and its festival
bathing the sunshine
adrift alone.

my village
in the soul of your children
waiting in anxiety
for the world’s abundance
will be consumed by silence
and its belief
yes, fills its chest
and prayers sad

my village
has understood
that its children’s happiness
is merely
counting stars
in the bright moonlight

the city is my home

the city is my home,
i don’t have another,
never known another.
these buildings are my walls
and the streets my floor
and the people my family.

but the city is an unkind home,
pushing me into myself
or a crowd I cannot talk with.
the people have fenced up
their small hearts
to live on their reason.
when shall they learn to care
to look into another’s eyes
and find him there?
when shall they love
those who need their love?
only the desolate cares,
because they have dared
themselves to feel,
even between these bare walls,
dared themselves to walk he streets,
in the loneliness of the night,
the week-day beaches
where there are no picnickers,
or sit in the noon of the day
to see the traffic and the rush,
even among these city-cries.

if my people do not learn to care,
to breathe in this air,
this dust and this ozone,
to say this city is their country,
this town is their home,
they shall die from their own estrangement,
and the buildings will crumble,
the streets will crack in the sun.

yet this city is my home,
these people my people.

Mohamad Haji Salleh

A “modern movement” college

petrol fumes, tractor smoke
flats, massage parlours
women & hotel = prostitute
mascara, eye-shadow = floor show

[Beware of Dogs] bungalow
aquarium & orchid, poodle & piano
antique chairs, classical music
status + symbol = modern – progressive
‘cheap sale’ at the new supermarket

---

invitation card
reception
R.S.V.P
tel: 8891
lounge suit
cocktails
b.g ale
whisky soda
et cetera
in a city lane
the artist asks for directions
looking for a gallery
to exhibit his collage

a collector
buys his painting
and in the grand hall
hangs a false collage.

Mohamad Haji Salleh

A Pact
(For the forgotten heroes of the land)

those who are my brothers, come
i don’t care who you are
we have a pact to make
against the enemies of our land.

Admiral Cheng-Ho has returned
with his truth, we don’t care if not in strength
Rama is safe with Sita
his golden bow is strung.

then he let tuah rise and speak
whether of god or jin
whatever our colour or blood
whatever our race
we are born men.

those who are my brothers, step forward
i don’t care for style and parliament
we shall make a pact here in blood
against all the enemies of mankind.

together, together let us march, my brothers
like Tuah and Jebat of old
we have named our sacred land
we ourselves will guard her shores
come then, you busy policemen of the world!

Kassim Ahmad
**do not say**

do not say my people are lazy
because you do not know.
you are only a critic, an onlooker.
you cannot know or judge,
passing the *kampong in your car,
staring at economic data.

do not think my people are weak
because they are gentle
because they do not build skyscrapers.
have you ever worked in a *lading,
or danced the *ronggeng?
can you sing the *dondang sayang?
do not think that we have only music
because we love life.

do not write that we have no literature, culture.
have you ever listened to the *sajak or pantun
stayed a night at the *bangsawan?
have you read the epic *shairs
or the theological theses?
how many times have you wondered about history in the blade
and ancestry in the handle of the *keris,
or felt the pattern of the *songket?
have you lived in a kampong?

do not condemn us as poor
because we have very few banks.
see, here the richness of our people,
the brimful hearts that do not grab or grapple.
we collect humanity from the sun and rain and man,
transcending the business and the money.

do not tell us how to live
or organise such nice associations and bodies.
our society was an entity
before the advent of political philosophy.

do not say—
because you do not know.

Mohamad Haji Salleh
To

Do not think I regret
Failing to go so far
As * Kuala Lumpur:
Top post, prestige, bank account,
Big car, big house, friends who count.

Do not think I envy
Such important people as make
Great show:
Top post, prestige, bank account,
Big car, big house, friends who mount.

Do not mock my drilling the mud
With hardly a prospect
In * Sleepy Hollow

Seeing the stuff they value
In the Capital,
I do not envy.

Ee Tiang Hong
THE BANYAN TREE
Zainuddin Saad

The children of Kampung Jejawi who were of school-going age at the time when
the gained independence surely remembered Tuk Napiah. They could also recall the
banyan tree which once stood grand beside the river bank. I believe that they would not
have known Tuk Merah had it not been for Tuk Napiah. The Banyan tree too would have
no significance had it not been for Tuk Napiah.

The banyan tree is no longer there. Tuk Napiah is gone too, he died about two
months after they chopped the banyan tree. But the memory of Tuk Napiah and the tree
remained in the minds of the children of Kampung Jejawi.

When I was alone, especially at night, I could still hear the cries of Tuk Napiah.
“Don’t anybody dare come near this tree! If you do I will kill you all!”
“I will kill!” He waved the parang in the air.

I was a little boy then, only in standard three. My friends and I were bathing in the
river before going to school. When we heard Tuk Napiah’s shouts, we hastily left the
water without taking our pants that were left in a heap beneath the tree. My cousin Kamal
and I then watch from far what Tuk Napiah was doing.

He stood with a parang at the side of the banyan tree like a warrior defending his
fort. A while later a few other old men armed with all sorts of weapons rushed to his side.
Like brave soldiers, they stood stiffly in one row. Even Tuk Said who was almost a
hundred years old did not want to be left out and stood tottering next to Tuk Napiah. Tuk
Said carried an old keris in his hand.

“If you dare, come forward! Cut the tre. I’ll kill all of you!”

Once he had uttered the challenge Tuk Napiah prepared himself for any
eventuality.

The workers from the Public works department, who had come with their tools to
cut the tree, were surprised. One of the men, apparently their leader, approached Tuk
Napiah.

“We are not here to fight. We were asked...”

Before he could finish his sentence Tuk napiah shouted:
“I know! I know! Go away if you value your life! Go!”

He waved the parang in the air and rushed to the workers. His friends did the
same. The workers fled and quickly ran to the boat that brought them there. They paddled
as fast as they could to the other side of the river.

We children cheered for the victory of Tuk Napiah. Kamal and I jumped up and
down. When Tuk Napiah saw us he smiled. But the smile was a bitter one. The victory
did not mean anything to him. Tuk napiah had won for now but he knew that he would
have to concede defeat eventually.

“They will come back...” Tuk Napiah’s voice was almost inaudible. Sorrow and
regret were written all over his face.

The men dispersed and headed for the paddy-field. We cheered and raced each
other to the river. Soon we forgot the incident. The situation returned to normal, as if
nothing happened.
For as long as I can remember, the banyan tree had stood majestically on the river bank. My father said that it had been there when he was still a little boy. The sun could not penetrate through because of its luxurious leaves. The tree was high, almost reaching the sky. The trunk was huge enough to cover the embrace of two persons. Its shadow reached the other side of the river bank. It was shady and cool beneath the tree. Here the women folk did their washing, bathing, and exchanged gossip like broken engagements, Pak Imam divorced his fourth wife to marry again, a widow was all set to remarry after a certain number of days, another is a bad borrower and all sorts of other gossip.

In the afternoon the tree belonged to the children. We used the long branches that dangled over the river to swing and act like Tarzan. We could climb up the tree and then jump into the river. Our cries broke the afternoon silence. We only returned home at dusk when it was time to pray.

The setting sun splashed its light on the leaves, giving off a golden hue. A gentle breeze that blew from the river mouth rustled the leaves. In the dark night the tree stood watch like a faithful guard over the village. The only sound that could be heard breaking the silence came from the crickets. At times the nightjar struck the branches of the trees. The wind grew stronger, stirring the smaller branches of the banyan tree.

Tuk Napiah was never tired of recounting the history of the banyan tree. He repeated the story constantly. And, on every subsequent occasion, new interesting details were added. We relished the stories with gaping mouths. We concentrated especially on the part when Tuk Merah fought the Punjabi soldier.

"Tuk Merah was a great warrior. He was brave and not afraid of death. So are all descendants of this hero..."

That was how Tuk Napiah normally began his story.

I could still remember the first time he told us the story of Tuk Merah. That day was the seventieth anniversary of the death of Tuk Merah who died in battle at the river bank. In memory of the event Tuk Napiah donated to each of us. We were exhilarated.

"Grow up and be brave like Tuk Merah. He gave his life for this land."

Such were Tuk Napiah’s advice to us when we sat around him beneath the tree. Tuk Napiah would lean against the tree and rolled a tobacco leaf. He then lighted the cigarette, inhaled deeply, and puffed out clouds of smoke. "Tuk Merah was not only brave. He was also invulnerable and skilled in the Malay art of self-defence. This land once belonged to Tuk Merah, it was left to him by his ancestors who worked for the king. The white men often came to buy rice and other agricultural products from the people here. The white men once planned to build a jetty to facilitate transport of the goods to their ships stationed at the river mouth." He pointed his cigarette in the direction of the estuary. Then he threw the cigarette butt into the river and made himself comfortable.

"What happened after that?"

Kamal was impatient to hear the rest of the story even though he had heard it before.

"The white men wanted to buy land but Tuk Merah refused to sell. They wanted to take the land on lease but Tuk Merah again refused. Their leader himself came to
persuade Tuk Merah by bringing tobacco and opium to bribe him. Tuk Merah became very angry because the white men tried to buy the Malay people with tobacco and opium. Later, the white men came again, but this time they brought with them Punjabi soldiers who looked awful with their beards and curled moustache. They threatened Tuk Merah with their rifles. Was Tuk Merah afraid?

“No! No!” we shouted simultaneously.

“Did Tuk Merah tremble?”

“No! No!” we shouted again.

“Yes, he was brave and fearless. He chased them away. Furious, the white men seized the land and put up their flag at the river bank. Tuk Merah rallied his followers and prepared for battle. On the day the white men wanted to set up their base, Tuk Merah and his men ran amok. Many Punjabi soldiers were killed. However Tuk Merah was also killed. He was shot at the chest and his blood spilt on the river bank. It was on this very spot that the banyan tree grew.

He strode the base of the tree and lighted another cigarette.

“But how could Tuk Merah die, he was invulnerable” Kamal was not sure.

“That is true, but the white men knew his secret. Only a silver bullet could kill Tuk Merah. They shot him with one…”

My cousin Kamal nodded.

From that day, whenever we bathed in the river we enacted the battle between Tuk Napiah and the Punjabi soldiers. We always argued over the role of Tuk Merah. As usual Kamal ended up playing Tuk Merah because he knew the art of self-defence. The rest of us became the Punjabi soldiers. I do not know why, but Kamal always chose me to be the Captain Taylor, the white chief. I never squabble with Kamal; because he was accepted as our leader.

When it came to the part of Tuk Merah’s death, Kamal refused to act it out. He reasoned out that Tuk Merah was invulnerable and that he was still alive. He was reported dead as a cover up to prevent him from being captured by the whites.

Like Tuk Napiah, we were also sad to hear that the banyan tree would be cut down to make way for a bridge. Many of the villagers felt the same though they realised that the bridge would be useful to them. Instead they chose to suffer rather than be without the banyan tree. Tuk Napiah was the first to swear that he would protect the tree.

“Our village is called Jejawi village! It is meaningless if we do not have such a tree here.”

Tuk Made made the remark during a meeting at the village headman’s house.

“You are right, the tree is older than our village. Our children and grandchildren can learn the history of our village from it.”

The headman spoke in support of Tuk Napiah.

I notice many others at the meeting nodded their heads in agreement except Bang Yop who was leaning against the door.

Tuk Napiah was happy to see the majority of them supported his motion. I shared his joy.
“We must not let them do as they like. Today they may want our tree, tomorrow they will want to demolish our houses. Later they will take our land. What will be left with only our clothes.

I never realised that Tuk Napiah was such as orator.

The atmosphere was clam. They listened earnestly to Tuk Napiah. My father was normally talkative now appeared deep in thought. His right hand stroked his unshaven chin. Now and then he took off his cap to wipe off the sweat from his head. He had very little hair left. He took a deep breath and uttered a sigh that caught Tuk Napiah’s attention. Tuk Napiah appeared a little uneasy. My father was an ex-police sergeant. He was very well respected and they always listened to him. Even the headman took head of my father’s advice. Tuk Napiah too respected father.

“What do you think Ad?” The headman asked my father.

Father look at Bang Yob. Tuk Napiah became more restless. Father smiles while his elbow nudged me. I was about to help myself to some biscuits but changed my mind because I knew what the nudge meant.

“I agree with Tuk Napiah. The tree has great meaning to our village...”

“Yes! Yes!”

Tuk Napiah heaved a sigh of relief. I too felt elated.

“But...”

Tuk Napiah was startled.

“However much we love the tree, we must remember that the bridge is also important. We must be prepared to make sacrifices and this tree will be our most important sacrifice. I am sure if the tree can speak, it will agree.”

I wanted to shout in protest against my father. I wanted to scream and say that I hated him. But I recalled the lashed I received for interfering in the affairs of elders.

In the dim of light I saw Tuk Napiah’s face turned red. On the other hand Bang Yob was gleaming with hope.

“You are on Yob’s side, Ad?” Tuk Napiah spoke with regrets.

My anger rose. For the first time in my life I hated my father.

I saw Bang Yob grinning, exposing his gold tooth.

“Do not misunderstand me Tuk Napiah, I do not take sides. The headman asked for my opinion and I gave it sincerely.”

My vulnerable mind refused to accept my father’s reasoning.

“What do you think Yob?”

The headman wanted to avoid an argument that might arise.

Bang Yob grinned from ear to ear.

Bang yob was the personal representative of our honourable assemblyman, Mr. Mustakim. Bang Yob had set his heart on politics. The banyan tree issue was a test of his ability and diligence in influencing the villagers. In fact he was the one who brought up the matter about the bridge to Mr. Mustakim.

Tuk Napiah threw sharp looks at Bang Yob. He could not hide his anger.

Bang Yob cleared his throat to speak.

“We have just attained independence...”

Tuk Napiah interrupted.
I know that. Independence should not lead us to better days and not bring trouble. What is use of freedom! What for!"

"The bridge will serve us well. Our goods will reach the market faster. It will be easier for our children to go to school, and for us to get to the hospital. Even during the floods we will not be cut off from other village and efforts are being done to ensure the safety of the villagers."

Tuk Napiah kept quiet. The headman nodded his head. I want Tuk Napiah to speak out but my hopes were shattered.

Bang Yob took out a gold-coloured cigarette case from his pocket. He took out a cigarette and asked the new lighter which Mr. Mustakim gave him to light it. All this while the lighter had been his source of pride. Sometimes when he wanted to assert his authority he would reveal the lighter. It was his way of saying, "I am the personal representative of..."

Mr. Mustakim has argued us to support the government. The cigarette smoke trailed out from his nose and mouth.

"It is vital that we give our fullest co-operation to our government."

The headman was now ready to exercise his authority over this matter.

Tuk Napiah knocked his fist on the wooden floor.

Tuk Said who was leaning half asleep beside Tuk Napiah woke up with a start. He looked right and left and then resumed his sleep.

"Co-operate to dispose of the tree. Destroy our memories of Tuk Merah! Deprive our descendants of knowing their heritage. No! No!"

The headman was speechless. Bang Yob’s smile only infuriated Tuk Napiah.

"Why can’t you build bridge elsewhere?"

My father interrupted as an apparent move to calm an otherwise tense atmosphere.

Bang Yob turned on my father.

"The river is narrowest near the banyan tree. Other parts of the river are too broad and would incur a lot of expenses. The engineer has confirmed it as the ideal spot."

"Yes, I have seen the government engineer you’re referring to. He is a white monkey. Tuk Merah was killed by the same white monkeys. Now they want to kill his tree."

With these words Tuk Napiah left the meeting, followed by his old friends. Tuk Said was woken up from his sleep and trembling he followed the rest.

The headman, my father, Bang Yob and the rest of the villagers continued with the discussion. I quickly helped myself to the biscuits before father noticed.

The meeting left me with a lasting memory. Until today I still remember how the banyan tree stood solid on the river bank as well as in the heart of the villagers.

The banyan tree divided the village into two camps. One camp supported Tuk Napiah while the other sided Bang Yob. Both sides were unrelenting. Development projects in Kampung Jejawi were at a standstill.

About a month later Mr. Mustakim paid us a visit. He was accompanied by Bang Yob who treated him like a faithful dog. The headman welcomed them with friendly gestures. Our honourable assemblyman toured the village, showing most interest in our
welfare. He left without meeting Tuk Napiah although Bang Yob reminded him constantly to do so. Tuk Napiah’s followers cheered when Mr. Mustakim avoided meeting him face to face. Bang Yob felt embarrassed and hid himself in the house for several days.

The Menteri Besar himself came to the village a week later. He was given a grand welcome. Many of us flocked to the mosque to get a glance of him. This was his first visit since he assumed office. After delivering his speech, he proceeded to Tuk Napiah’s house accompanied by Bang Yob and the headman. Tuk Napiah felt uncomfortable when he saw such an important man at the doorstep of his little old hut. However he welcomed the visitors with due respect. The Menteri Besar took off his shoes, washed his feet and ascended the wooden ladder leading to the house. Tuk Napiah seized the Menteri Besar’s hand and kissed them.

The Menteri Besar sat at the doorway. They talked for quite a while. The villagers waited anxiously. They were concerned about Tuk Napiah’s temper. Finally, the Menteri Besar left the hut after shaking hands with Tuk Napiah. The headman and Bang Yob then invited the minister to tea.

I saw Bang Yob explaining something enthusiastically to the Menteri Besar. The latter patted him on the back. Bang Yob grinned with delight. I guessed he was the happiest man that day.

A few days later, the same workers came again with their tools. It was a Saturday and we did not go to school. Kamal was acting the part of Tuk Merah, and we were shooting at him with our wooden guns. He refused to die even though we used silver bullets to fire him.

“Hey, Kamal, when are you going to die?”

One of us was getting very impatient with Kamal but he continued prancing with his wooden keris.

On seeing the workers Kamal ran to Tuk Napiah’s hut while we scrambled to a safe place, away from the banyan tree. There will surely be a big fight. The battle of Tuk Merah would occur again with Tuk Napiah as the leader.

The supervisor was startled. His face turned pale with fear. The rest of the workers ran, leaving their tools behind. The once on the tree suddenly screamed, then jumped in to the river and swam to the opposite bank. The supervisor stood rooted to the spot.

Tuk Napiah’s eyes were red when he confronted the supervisor. Their eyes met. Automatically Tuk Napiah lifted the axe he had brought there. The supervisor quickly retreated. He covered his face with his hands. Tuk Napiah lifted the axe to his shoulder and left the puzzled supervisor. Reluctantly he moved nearer to the tree. He looked up and scrutinized every inch of it right up to its shoots. Suddenly I saw tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Forgive me Tuk Merah!” he said softly, as if speaking himself.

He lifted the axe and hurled it at the lowest part of the tree. The axe stuck in the wood. He repeated the act several times until chips of wood were scattered around. At the same time his face was bathe in tears.
The crowd only watched in silence as no one dared approach him. Tuk said emerged from the crowd. Trembling, he moved closer to Tuk Napiah and placed his hand on his friend’s shoulder. Tuk Napiah stopped what he was doing and looked hard at Tuk Said. He let the axe fall to the ground. He looked exhausted. He embrace Tuk Said and they wept in each other arms.

We were speechless. I looked at my father. It was the first time I saw him cry.

Bang Yob bowed his head. The headman felt uneasy, unsure of what to do next.

On that very same day the tree fell to the ground and was uprooted. Three days later there was not even a trace of the tree. Following that we no longer enjoyed bathing in the river.

Tuk Napiah suddenly fell ill and his condition became worse each day. Few of the villagers believed he had a relapse after cutting the tree. Others said he was overcome with grief. About two months later he died.

Strangely, a banyan tree grew on his grave. It is believed that the tree now big and leafy and provides shade to the grave especially during the hot season.

Many of us have left the village but we still remember parts of it. Kamal is now an army officer. Perhaps he was influenced by the fighting spirit of Tuk Merah.

Translated by Farida Haji Abdul Kadir
"Sini...sini sudah."

Velu stopped the trishaw got down and paid the trishaw man. The trishaw man counted his money and peddled away. Velu looked around the Malay Kampung from where he stood.

"Nothing had changed....." he thought to himself. "Everything is the same." He thought of the life he had lived there twenty-five years ago. His Sundry shop — a small atap hut he had used for the purpose — still stood there, but only more dilapidated. He wondered who lived there now.

He could see Sulaiman's house at a distance. Velu started walking towards it. The rubber trees at the side of the road were young. He assumed that the old trees must have been felled and the replanted trees must have grown to this size. The latex had dried to a golden yellow at the place where it had been tapped.

Velu had reached Sulaiman's house and stopped just outside. He noted that Sulaiman had renovated his house. There was a shinning zinc roof in place of the old atap one. Even the planks on the walls looked new. But the structure had not changed a bit. The staircase, the broad living room, and even the mengkuang mats were there.

"Cari siapa Encik?"

Velu looked at the senile figure that came out with the question. "Is that Sulaiman? My! What a change!" he thought. Is this the same Sulaiman who used to climb up coconut trees like a monkey with a heavy parang at his side? Velu could not believe his eyes.

"Cari siapa Encik?" Sulaiman repeated his question. "He does not recognize me" thought Velu. No wonder. The age that has distorted Sulaiman's figure so much would not have spared him too. No wonder Sulaiman does not recognize.

"Tak kenal saya Sulaiman?" Velu asked. Sulaiman came near him and examined his face closely.

"La'ilah .... Velu? Awak kah Velu? ..... la'ilah sudah berapa tahun?" Sulaiman hailed both of Velu's hands firmly. "Saya ta'boleh percaya saya punya mata" he said. Velu looked at the old man who was rubbing his arms and shoulders so passionately, just short of embracing him. Tears misted his eyes.
"Sudah lama Sulaiman. Sudah dua puluh lima tahun" he said.

"Sulaiman looked inside and shouted. "Ya... mari tengah siapa datang... "Ya..." He pulled Velu by the hands and ran inside. His wife Rokiya came running down from the kitchen thinking something must be wrong. She did not recognize Velu either.

"Ta'kenal 'Ya. Insi siapa ta'kenal? Insi Velu lah ..." Sulaiman was at the top of his voice.

"Velu... ya Velu. Apa sudah jadi tua macam ini Velu?" Rokiah asked.

"Sudah dua puluh lima tahun, tak 'ya" Velu replied calmly. He did not know what more to say. Nobody did. They all wanted to close the twenty-five year gap in two minutes. But nobody knew what to do.

"You both sit here and chat. I will bring you some coffee." Rokiya left for the kitchen.

Velu ran his eyes around the house. The Mengkuang mat on which he was seated was cool and comfortable. He wanted to say something to break the silence. "I see you have renovated the house ..." he said.

Sulaiman laughed aloud. "What do you expect ah? You expect the house to remain the same after twenty-five years? The planks were getting rotten one by one. The roof was leaking badly too. So I repaired them and changed a few things here and there. That was five years ago too," he said.

"To start with I never forgot this Kampung. I had to come back to it one day. You know, however far a bird flies it has to come back to the nest." Velu replied.

"Ah, you even speak Malay well ... just like the old days ..." Sulaiman said and laughed again. Velu smiled and kept silent. Rokiya appeared with the coffee for all of them. It must have been some latest brand of coffee... such aroma and condensed milk too ... .

"Mak' Ya. I came here to drink your kopi 'O' with a lot of serbok, you remember. Why do you give me this coffee of which I got tired in the town?" he asked.

"You still remember that ah? I thought you would have forgotten. Nevermind drink this first. Later I will bring that coffee also," she said. And she continued.

"Tell me Velu. How is your wife Janaki? Why didn't you bring her? And how is your son?"

Velu hesitated for a moment and said. "My son is well ... He is now a Doctor you know. Has his own clinic in Kuala Lumpur. But ..." he stopped for a while.
"Janaki is gone. Gone five years ago."

Rokiya lowered her head and looked at the mat blankly. Was she thinking of the good old days when she and Janaki sat washing their clothes near the Kampong well and shared the Kampong gossip between them? Or was she thinking of the days when they exchanged Malay and Indian cakes at every festival? Velu wondered ... ... ... ......

"Your son is Doctor ah? I am so happy. Where did he go to study?" Sulaiman asked.

"I sent him to Madras. He has been a Doctor now for fifteen years you know?" said Velu.

"Ah, imagine that. He was spinning tops and flying kites in this Kampong. Now a Doctor." Sulaiman beamed with happiness.

A motorcycle came and stopped outside and Rokiya got up. "The fishmonger is here. You two keep talking. I will go and get some fish for cooking." She went out.

Velu got up too. "I feel like walking around the Kampong. Will you come with me?" he asked Sulaiman.

Sulaiman got up and put on his shirt. They both stepped outside. "Let's go along the river. I want to see those places where we used to climb up the tree and jump into the water." Velu said.

"OK.OK" Sulaiman replied. But don't you think the place is the same."

"Why what happened?" Velu wanted to know.

"You remember Lee Choon don't you? The man who owned the rubber estate."

He discovered there was tin ore somewhere up there. So he is starting a mine. The red earth was dissolved and started mixing with the river. So the river became muddy too. Now nobody goes up to bath there. The bank is full of lalang too."

Velu did not reply. But there was disappointment on his face. It appeared as though the few pleasant memories left in his life were also turning muddy and muddled.

The two old men kept walking in silence. It was again Sulaiman who got the conversation going. "Now don't think I am poking my head unnecessarily. Many things could have happened in twenty-five years. But I only see sorrow in your face. Aren't you happy?" Sulaiman asked.
Velu smiled at him. "Well you have always been a frank person. I can understand the directness in your question. I will tell you everything Sulaiman. In fact I came here to tell you everything so that I can lighten my burden."

But he did not say what he wanted to say. He kept walking and Sulaiman followed. They came to the spot that Velu was looking for. They had to walk through thick lalang and other bushes making their own path.

The river was indeed muddy. Velu reminisced the days he used to bathe in this river. The tree from which he used to jump into the water was still there. But the branch had gone. It must have broken and fallen into the river.

"Let us sit here" said Velu. They sat on a small patch of sand. Velu kept looking at the flow of the muddy river. Then he looked up at Sulaiman.

"Sulaiman. I ran away from this Kampong twenty-five years ago. I refused your pleas and was adamant. But then because I moved away I could form a big shop in the city. I educated my son and made him into a man. But only..." he stopped for a while and continued, "but only I would have been happier if I had stayed here."

"Thinking of old day ah? Well everything depends on Allah. What can we do?" said Sulaiman.

"Tell me" asked Velu. "How is you daughter Hasnah?"

Sulaiman's expression changed into a solemn one. He said, "Why she is alive of course. She must be ... let me see... 40 years old now. She has four children."

All very sickly... She is sick too you know."

Velu sighed. "Sulaiman you are a wise man. You recognized the deep love that developed between your daughter and my son. But I was a fool. I refused to recognize it. See what I have done to their lives!"

"I thought you said your son was doing well," said Sulaiman.

"I did not tell you the whole story," said Velu, and began telling him. As he was narrating, Sulaiman went back on his own memories as to what happened to his own daughter. He remembers how she and Velu's son Devan, as children use to run round the Kampong together.

At first the whole thing was child-play. Tops, kites, cowboy, Tarzan and what you have. Sulaiman did not mind really. Velu's shop had been in that Kampong for so long that he
and his family was completely accepted in the Kampong. But, then Hassnah was rapidly becoming a pretty young woman. Devan had started going to an English Secondary School. It is proper for them to be seen together. Sulaiman indirectly warned his daughter. Velu vaguely cautioned his son. But, they could do nothing to stop them from getting together when the backs of the parents were turned.

There was gossip in the Kampong and it reached Sulaiman’s ears too. One day he dragged his daughter into the room and lashed her with a rotan. But Hassnah was frank and open. She said she wanted to marry Devan. Sulaiman had no alternative. Hassnah was his only daughter. So he decided to plead to Velu. That very night he went to see Velu.

Velu refused to entertain his request. Said Sulaiman, "Look Velu, I know that the children are determined. We have to bring them together. We have lived here as though we are of the same blood. So do not be adamant and do not magnify our differences now."

Velu listened in stony silence and finally said, "I will give you my answer next week." Sulaiman left.

The next morning a small lorry arrived at Velu’s place. Things were loaded in a hurry. Velu boarded the lorry without a word even to Sulaiman with whom he had moves as though they were of one family. Janaki came and held Rokiya’s hands with tears flowing from her eyes. Hassnah stood behind the barred window and sobbed helplessly. Devan looked up just once with misty eyes. Only Velu was unmoved as a rock.

The lorry left. Hassnah fainted. All this was twenty five years ago. After that Sulaiman was witness to only one side of the tragic story. Hassnah did not eat properly for weeks, and was weeping incessantly. A bomoh was brought on the advice of some friends and he treated her for months. After a few months Sulaiman married her off to a Malay youth from a family he had known. But Hassnah kept fighting with him all the time that he divorced her after some time. After that she was married twice but she could not live with any of her husbands. Lately she had started living alone with her four children. Now and then she will come to visit her parents, and that is all they get to see her.

Sulaiman was indeed very anxious to find out the other side of the story. So he listened keenly to what Velu was saying.

"Sulaiman, I should not have separated these children the way I did. My son picked up wrong company in the city, you know, the gay type, girls, nightclub-goers and so on. So I sent him off to Madras. There he studied and became a Doctor alright. But he refused to get married and get settled in life. He frequented nightclub and finally got married to a cabaret girl. They both turned my house into a nightclub. My wife could bear this no
more and died out of sorrow. I did not wish to live with my son too. So I walked out. Went round to see my old friends; let me say, I am in search of peace." There were drops of tears in his eyes. But he asked "Tell me, how is Hasnah now?"

Sulaiman told him. Velu listened with a grief stricken face, and then said, "I should have listened to you Sulaiman, and let these young people choose their own destiny. I wrecked their lives, and the burden of these sins are on me."

Sulaiman was in deep thought. "I don't know Velu, I really don't know. But you know I am a very religious man. I always think what has happened because God wills it. Who knows? We think all this happened because the wedding did not take place. I think he knows better."

They both sat together for sometime. They did not have very much to talk but had a lot to ponder. And then they both got up and returned home.

Although Sulaiman insisted, Velu refused to stay there for the night. "In our Hindu religion we say one must go to the River Ganges to wash one's sins. I thought I can come and wash my sins in this beloved Kampong river. But I was not able to do so. Perhaps I have to carry this burden a little while longer. Please let me go out and wander."

Sulaiman held both Velu's hands firmly. "Please do not keep thinking about what has passed. You are always welcome to our place." He said. Velu walked away.