THE ROAR OF THE LION IN THE LITERARY JUNGLES OF THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

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Abstract

This article highlights the relationship of Malay literature in Singapore with literature in Malaysia and other countries within the Malay Archipelago. It examines the effects of the secession of Singapore on the 9th of August, 1965 on Malay literature. Has the political separation of almost 50 years truly severed the literary ties between Malaysia and Singapore as far as Malay literature is concerned? Is there a dividing line that can be drawn between Malay culture in Malaysia and in Singapore, as reflected in the literary works produced? Is there still a continuity of the spirit of a common origin? This article attempts to answer these questions by discussing the development of the shared literature before 1965, the effects and themes of “separation” in these literary works, and the levels of development of literature since 1965, as well as the pattern of the literary relationship between Malaysia and Singapore.

Keywords: Malay literature in Singapore, classical Malay literature, literary bonds, political separation, lion’s roar, jungle of the Malay Archipelago, spirit of common origin
HADIJAH RAHMAT

Politik boleh memisahkan kita, peta sempadan boleh memagari kita, pasport boleh menahan keluar masuk negara, tetapi kebudayaan akan terus menyatukan kita, bahasa dan sastera akan melampaui semua ini kerana ia adalah pengucapan batin yang mempertemukan hati nurani rakyat negara-negara kawasan Nusantara

(Politics may separate us, maps may impose boundaries on us, passports may prevent us from coming and going into a country, but culture will always unite us; language and literature are beyond all this because they are an expression of the spirit which brings together the inner conscience of the people in this archipelago.)

(Usman Awang, 1978)

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Singapore has a close relationship with Malaysia and the other countries in the Malay Archipelago. Singapore was once a part of Malaya/Malaysia and the Malay world. It was influential at least in the field of literature. However, the political ties between Singapore and Malaysia were abruptly severed on 9th August, 1965 when Singapore seceded from Malaysia. What were the effects of this political separation on Malay literature?

Has this political separation of almost 50 years really severed the literary ties between these two countries? Is there still some sense of cultural brotherhood in the works produced? Is there a dividing line that can be drawn between Malay culture in Malaysia and in Singapore, as reflected in the literary works produced? Is there still a continuity of the spirit of a common origin, and if there is, of what shape and form is it?

This paper attempts to answer some of these questions. It consists of five parts, which are:

1. The development of literature before 1965.
2. Effects and the theme of “separation” in literary works.
3. The development of literature after 1965.
4. The ties that bind the literature of Singapore and Malaysia.
5. Comparison of works and conclusion.
A COMMON HISTORY – MALAY LITERATURE IN SINGAPORE BEFORE 1965

Let us look into the past to view the development of Malay literature whose centre before 1965 was Singapore. In actuality, this is a long history and an attempt will be made to include important periods, so that the pattern of development, role and contributions of Singapore on the timeline of Malay literature can be seen.

Before secession from Malaysia, the development of Malay literature can be arranged chronologically into five main periods, which are as follows:

1. The classical period (13th-14th century CE).
2. The British colonial period (1819-1900).
3. The pre-war period (1900-1945).
5. The period of Malayan Independence (1957-1965).

STAGE 1–THE ROAR OF THE LION IN CLASSICAL MALAY TEXTS

Singapore first appears in the pages of historical literature in the 13th century CE as the kingdom of Temasik. The classical text Sejarah Melayu (The Malay Annals) which puts a spotlight on the glory days of the Melaka (Malacca) sultanate devotes a lot of pages to the mention of the Temasik kingdom of the 13th and 14th century CE, considering it to be one of the Malay kingdoms that had a close relationship with the Melaka sultanate. The “roar” of Singaporean literature can first be heard when the ruler of Palembang, Sang Nila Utama or Sri Teri Buana lands on the island of Temasik in 1299, to establish a new kingdom after leaving Palembang in Sumatra. Several interesting episodes that take place in Temasik are presented in this grand literary work, and this shows the amount of attention that was paid to Singapore, as well as the relationship of this island with the history of the Melaka sultanate in general, especially in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula.

Sejarah Melayu explains that although Sri Teri Buana, the first Malay king, first established his kingdom in Bukit Seguntang, in Palembang, Sumatra, he did not deign to remain there. Instead, he became entranced by the beauty
of Temasik—“pasirnya merentang terlalu putih” (its incredibly white sands stretched out) (Abdul Samad Ahmad, 1986:38), to the extent that it compelled him and his entourage to brave the southwesterly winds and great waves in order to cross over. Even going so far as to throw the crown of the kingdom into the ocean, in order to land on the island and establish the kingdom of Temasik. The king was convinced that this was a special place, what more after seeing a lion—an animal known for its bravery—on the island. Hence, he decided to establish his kingdom here and give it the name “Singapura”.

After this historical event:

Negeri Singapura pun telah sudahlah diperbuat orang dengan kota paritnya, dan dengan segala istana dan balairung dalam dan balairung luar; serta sekalian rumah orang, kedai dan pasar; terlalu indah perbuatan negeri Singapura itu.

(The kingdom of Singapore was built, with a fortress and a moat, and a palace and audience halls, and people’s houses, shops and markets; everything was beautifully constructed.)

(A. Samad Ahmad, 1986:41).

Indications of the Beginning and End of the Golden Days of the Malays

The epic *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, although mainly about the great warrior of the Melaka sultanate in the 15th century CE, before the arrival of Western powers, also mentions Singapore as a setting for the life and struggles of this important and highly symbolic figure. Almost every crucial level in the life of Hang Tuah, we are told, takes place in Singapore. Hang Tuah and his four friends encounter pirates in the Straits of Singapore as children, and because of the bravery and wisdom of these five friends, the pirates are defeated. The impressiveness and early success of Hang Tuah as a child is taken note of by Batin Singapura, who then reports the incident to Bendahara Bentan, whose authority extended to Singapore at the time, to the extent that Hang Tuah was taken into the Bendahara’s service. The discovery of Hang Tuah’s talent as a warrior is a kind of foreshowing of his bright future.

This epic also records that although Melaka had become a great kingdom, the king of Melaka enjoyed going to Singapore for rest and play. During one of his visits, the royal crown fell into the Straits of Singapore and when Hang Tuah dove in to retrieve it, his kris was swallowed by a white crocodile. As a result, both the king’s crown and Hang Tuah’s kris were lost.
This interesting event is also of great symbolic meaning, foreshadowing the fall of a Malay kingdom (the symbol of which is the crown) and of Malay warriorship (symbolized by Hang Tuah’s kris) at the hands of Western powers—the Portuguese (represented by a white crocodile).

The author of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* chose the Singapore Straits as the setting for predicting two important points in history, that is, the beginning and the end points in Hang Tuah’s life as a Malay warrior, which also foreshadows the rise and eclipse of the history of the Melaka sultanate, or the glory days of the Melaka Empire of classical times.

**Singapore as the Centre of Malay-Hindu Literature (Translation and Reworkings)**

The importance of Singapore is not only reflected in the two great works of classical Malay literature but during the era of the Malay sultanates, in the 13th and 14th centuries CE, Singapore was the centre for translating and reworking Hindu texts into the Malay language. Teuku Iskandar (1995) \(^3\) sheds explains this in more detail.


Malay literature entered a period of great change during the British colonial era in the Malay world. Printing technology (block printing, lithography and letterpress printing) changed Malay literature, which previously had consisted of handwritten manuscripts. The printing press, which offered a new channel for Malay writing, was introduced in 1817 by William Milne of the London Missionaries Society (LMS). He had brought one to Melaka from Bengal, India in 1816. The Abdullah Munshi was the first local to learn the craft of printing at the age of about 20 years. Abdullah, who helped Reverend Claudius Thomsen with his publishing, produced the first Malay magazine, *Bustan Arifin* from 1821 to 1822.

Abdullah came to Singapore together with Thomsen four months after Singapore permitted the East India Company to open a trading post on the island in 1819. Although Abdullah was born in Melaka and learnt the craft of printing there, he was evidently very creative and productive, as far as writing is concerned, while working and living in Singapore. Most of his great works that are major contributions to the development of literature in the archipelago were produced in Singapore. Stamford Raffles, with the help
of William Farquhar, planned and developed Singapore. One of Raffles’s efforts included the division of land for various development projects. With the help of Abdullah’s expertise in language and publication, he published a proclamation concerning this division of land on 2 December 1822. The publication of this proclamation is a major historical event because it is the first ever publication made in Singapore.

Abdullah’s contributions as a chronicler of Singapore history during the time of Raffles up till the time that it became a trading port is also important, and this is reflected in *Hikayat Abdullah (The Tales of Abdullah)*, a work that offers a comparison between Malay monarchic rule and British colonial administration. *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah (The Story of Abdullah’s Voyage)*, a work about how the civil war in Kelantan affected trade in Singapore, and *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Judah (Abdullah’s Voyage to Jeddah)*, on the other hand, offers a short depiction of Singapore as the hub for hajj pilgrims from the region. His poems, such as *Singapura Terbakar (The Great Singapore Fire)* and *Kampung Gelam Terbakar (The Great Kampung Gelam Fire)* depict how the inhabitant of Singapore are as yet incapable of controlling fires. Meanwhile, *Cerita Kapal Asap (The Story of the Steam Ship)* talks about the introduction of Western technology into Singapore. Abdullah also translated and worked on the production of early Malay-language school texts such as *Ilmu Bintang (Astronomy)* (1840), *Hikayat Dunia (Geography)* (1843), *Hikayat Eropah (European History)* (1843), *Hikayat Kapal Asap (Steamships)* (1843) and *Hikayat Binatang (Natural History)* (1846). In terms of dictionaries, Abdullah, together with Thomsen, compiled and published a *Malay Vocabulary* in Melaka; a second edition was published by the Mission Press in 1827. According to John Bastin, this was “the first Malay dictionary or word-list printed in Singapore” (Bastin, 1983).

These are the contributions of Abdullah Munshi to publishing in Singapore. He was the first person born in the Archipelago to have learnt to master printing technology and used the information technology of his time to produce Malay-language books using techniques and technology that were cutting-edge at the time. He also used his expertise to train a new generation, which subsequently had an important effect on the development of printing and publishing in Southeast Asia.

**The Centre of Islamic Publishing in Southeast Asia (1860-1920)**

The publishing activities pioneered by Abdullah in Singapore progressed greatly after his death in 1854. At the pioneer stage, Abdullah was an
apprentice and helped in a European-owned printing and publishing house. The next stage saw the emergence of Malay/Islamic publications after locals had learned the craft of printing from the Westerners, with locals competing against European and Baba (Peranakan Chinese) publishers. All three of these groups produced Malay-language books of all types, according to their own objectives, interests and literary tastes. For example, the Baba community produced translations from Hokkien in Baba Malay. Apart from introducing new genres of literature which was associated with Chinese popular culture into Malay literature, they also had a liking for other well-known types of Malay literature such as pantun and syair. On the whole, since both Malay and non-Malay publishers produced Malay-language books, it shows that the role and function of Malay was that of a lingua franca in Singapore in the 19th century CE, when its inhabitants were already multiethnic and multicultural.

Malay or Islamic publishers arrived later on the scene than European publishers. The earliest Islamic publishers appeared in Singapore only in 1860. From then until 1880, the publication of religious books in Malay in Singapore grew rapidly, and reached its climax between 1880 and 1900. Although Islamic publishers appeared earlier in Palembang, Indonesia, where they existed as early as 1848, and although there were a number of Javanese publications in the late 1850s and early 1860s, none of these could compete with the position of Singapore. Outside the Malay world, the publication of Islamic books began relatively late, for example, Malay books were published in Bombay in 1874, and in Mecca only in 1884. This made Singapore the main centre of publishing in the 19th century CE, as explained by Proudfoot:

Singapore thus emerges early as the leading centre of Muslim publishing in SEA during the nineteenth century, as the first centre of Malay language Muslim printing anywhere in the world.

(Proudfoot, 1993:27)

Even so, the position of Singapore as the centre for the production of books was affected by the competition from book publishers in Bombay, Mecca, Cairo and Istanbul, and even began to decline between the years 1900 to 1920 as these books flooded the market and were considered of better quality than locally-produced books.

Still, Singapore remained the centre of Malay intellectual activity because publishers, scholars and leaders in Singapore chose to change the focus of
their attention and to contribute to local newspapers and magazines that were beginning to find an audience and to have an influence on the locals. This became the platform for the subsequent development of literature.

**STAGE 3-THE ROAR OF MODERNISM AND MALAY NATIONALISM (1900 – before 1945)**

In the early 20th century, there arose an awareness among the Islamic intellectual elite in Southeast Asia to develop the thinking and lives of their community so that they would not be living in backwardness and be at a disadvantage compared to others who were more advanced in terms of education and standard of living. These Islamic thinkers were influenced by the Islamic reform movements that had begun to come up in the Middle East. Those Islamic scholars who had been educated there and who had been exposed to those Islamic reform movements had returned after completing their studies with the drive to re-evaluate lifestyle and the role of Islam among Malay Muslims in Southeast Asia. At the same time, the education policies of the British and Dutch colonizers, and the political developments in the other colonies such as India and the Middle East raised the awareness of the elite to raise the standard of living of their community and to advocate for independence from the colonial powers. The spirit of reform or modernization and nationalism were further intensified by the effects of the war and the Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia. Therefore, nationalist elements were a main theme in Malay writing and a source of inspiration for Malay literary works of the time.

Among the Malay writers who wrote about nationalist aspirations was Harun Aminurrashid, an educator and literary personality who had graduated from Sultan Idris Training College in Tanjong Malim. He was a prolific Singaporean writer who produced hundreds of works in a variety of genres. As a productive historical novelist, Harun or “Pak Har”, as he was called, produced dozens of works with a historical and social bias that were aimed at imbuing the Malay community with novels that remain well-known are *Panglima Awang* (*Panglima Awang*) (1958), *Anak Panglima Awang* (*The Son of Panglima Awang*) (1961), *Tun Mandak* (*Tun Mandak*) (1963), *Gugur di Lembah Kinabalu* (*Death in the Valley of Mount Kinabalu*) (1963), *Wan Derus* (*Wan Derus*) (1966) and *Peristiwa Laksamana Cheng Ho ke Melaka* (*Admiral Cheng Ho’s Journey to Melaka*) (1969). Harun’s contribution to the development of historical novels was rewarded with international recognition when he was awarded the The Certificate of Merit...
by the Board of Editors of the Dictionary of International Biography that is based in London, and which, in 1968, listed him as one of the major figures in the world. Meanwhile, his novel dealing with a multiethnic society *Simpang Perinang (Simpang Perinang)* (1966) was chosen by UNESCO for translation into English and Urdu.

From the year 1876 until 1941, 147 Malay-language newspapers and magazines were published in the Malay States on the Peninsula and the Straits Settlements. Most of these (a total of 68) were based in Singapore. A large number (a total of 36) were based in Penang. The first Malay-language newspaper produced and published in Singapore was Jawi Peranakan in 1876; it was a weekly paper that also lasted the longest among the pre-war publications (prior to 1941), that is, 19 years (1876-1895). It was a publication begun by the local Indian community that considered themselves Malay, and it concerned itself with the events taking place in the Malay community. At this early stage, the Baba Peranakan or Straits Chinese also published *The Straits Chinese Herald* (1891) which had a Malay-language column, and *Bintang Timor* (1894), which was published entirely in the Baba Malay dialect. In 1906, the monthly magazine *Al-Imam* was published, with Shaykh Mohd Tahir Jalaluddin as its Editor-in-Chief. He was later succeeded by Hj. Abbas b. Mohd Taha. *Al-Imam* was considered the first Islamic reform magazine in Southeast Asia and was influenced by the magazine *Al-Manar* published in Cairo. *Al-Imam* survived until early 1909, after which the bi-weekly *Neraca* appeared on the scene. Its publication ran from 1911 to 1915. This was followed by the publication of *Tunas Melayu* (1913) and *Majallah Al-Islam* (1914-15).

The second stage of Malay journalism lasted from 1906 to 1916, when influential national dailies and reform magazines appeared. *Utusan Melayu* was launched in Singapore in November 1907, with Mohamad Eunos Abdullah as its first Editor-in-Chief. Mohamad Eunos is considered the “Father of Malay Journalism”. This newspaper, which was published thrice weekly, later became a daily newspaper and the only Malay newspaper at the time with a wide circulation on the Peninsula as well as in the Straits Settlements. This was not a translated paper but was the Malay edition of the newspaper published by the Singapore Free Press, which was active until 1918. In the beginning, *Utusan Melayu* was published in the Jawi script but its main story and the Editor’s column were in romanized script. This paper was followed by another daily, *Lembaga Melayu*, in 1914, also edited by Mohd Eunos.
The second level of the development of newspaper and journalism is important because of the emergence of newspapers that were entirely in the Malay language. However, Malay journalism at the time was still very much tied up with English newspapers, because even though they were not translations, these were still the Malay editions of English newspapers. Therefore, these newspapers were not accepted by the community as the true voice of the Malay people, as they were run by people who were close to the British authorities and dependent on funding from non-Malay groups, such as Arab tycoons. This raised the awareness among Malay scholars and thinkers that they should continue to make an effort to establish a newspaper that truly would be the voice of the Malay community and be funded by the Malay community.

The dream to publish a newspaper that would truly be a “Malay voice” began when Onn bin Jaafar, who can be considered as one of a new generation of thinkers, became the first Editor-in-Chief at the Warta Malaya (1930-1941) daily, which was based in Singapore. This newspaper, led by other editors, became an important mouthpiece for the Malay community until its place was taken by Utusan Melayu, which reappeared in 1939. This time around, Utusan Melayu was an effort by the Malay Union of Singapore (KMS), a social quasi-political association that had been established in Singapore by several personalities, such as Yusof Ishak and Embok Soloh, both of whom actively campaigned for special funds for the establishment of a Malay-owned newspaper without help from other communities. The efforts of the KMS to see the Malays act independently resulted in mass donations by the public, including taxi drivers, hawkers and farmers from the East Coast of the Peninsula. This newspaper was led by Abdul Rahim Kajai as its editor. He was a journalist and a literary figure of calibre, and was able to make this newspaper a voice and mouthpiece of the Malay community which was fully run by the Malays themselves.

Syonan – The Sun of the South Sinar and the Beginnings of New Malay Poetry

During the Japanese Occupation, the slogan “Asia for Asians” and “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” were the slogans that resounded to end all kinds of worshipping of the West. The Japanese Occupation was short, only about three and a half years, but it left a lasting impression on Malay thought and literature. Firstly, the Japanese had united Sumatra and Malaya under an administration that was based in Singapore. Many writers from Sumatra worked...
in Singapore as editors of a number of newspapers and magazines, such as the daily Berita Malai (which had been established after the amalgamation of Warta Malaya and Utusan Melayu). Even though press freedom was curtailed by the Japanese, the relationship with Indonesian writers was warm and influenced the subsequent development of language and literature. In terms of language, there arose a strong awareness about the role of language where a national spirit and political aspirations are concerned. The hope for becoming a united nation had arisen before the arrival of the Japanese, but the presence of the Japanese only intensified this nationalistic spirit. The literary works produced, whether in the form of poems, short stories, radio or stage dramas, mostly were aimed at making members of the community realize they had a new responsibility and placed emphasis on the importance of a fighting spirit in life. What is interesting is that melancholic elements and a tone of disappointment and a tendency to discuss poverty and social backwardness, which can be found in the Malay literature of the early 20th century, were overshadowed by works with a patriotic tone, which aimed to plant the seeds of struggle. For example, Masuri SN wrote modern poems with the theme of nationalistic struggle such as “Bunga Sakura” (The Sakura) and “Rosku Puja” (My Beloved Rose). His forays and that of several other poets into modern poetry during the Japanese Occupation were a new stage in the development of Malay poetry.


After the second World War, Singapore remained the centre stage for Malay culture and literature. This was because Singapore had the infrastructure for such activities. Since early on, Singapore had been a port, a city of trade, a military base for the British, and the centre of publishing and printing as well as information. In terms of education, this is also where the teacher training colleges and institutes of higher education were first established, for example, there was a Malay Teacher Training College in Teluk Blangah from 1878 to 1895; The University of Malaya was established in 1949, and Nanyang University in 1955. In fact, the Malay Studies Department and the University of Malaya, Singapore which was established in 1953 was extremely important in terms of language and literary studies, and influenced the quality of works produced by scholars and writers who graduated from here. All these advantages in infrastructure allowed Singapore to function as a cosmopolitan centre of culture, the centre of the film industry, and of
drama performances such as bangsawan, drama and Malay music, apart from remaining the pulse of Malay literature and journalism until the mid-20th century.

The developments in terms of politics, education, economy, society and culture, and Malay journalism are not only important to be looked at in order to see the development of thought and awareness as well as the social and political aspirations of the Malay community, but they are also factors that subsequently had a great impact on culture and new literature produced. Writers modified and experimented, in line with the developments around them and with a new spirit of living; it shaped their forms of communication, became a model for their writing and an inspiration for their art.

At this stage, new forms of writing such as sajak (open form poems), short stories and the like became fashionable among new writers. These new forms began to be explored aside from the traditional stories and Malay poetic forms such as pantun and syair which continued to be popular and continued to be produced. Newspapers and magazines were now the new means for presenting creative works, and these brought about new forms of expression such as serial novels, essays, and the beginnings of literary criticism. Elements of journalism, with an emphasis on issues, current events, and realism, rather than myth and legend, became an important feature of this new kind of literature. On the whole, Malay literature underwent an evolutionary process that developed slowly but naturally, combining innovation and creativity with convention and tradition. Literature consciously became the channel of choice for writers to discuss issues and social problems and thus performed a kind of duty towards society.

**ASAS’ 50 and Social Aspirations**

Perhaps the most interesting phenomenon in Malay literature after the Second World War was the establishment of Angkatan Sasterawan 50, more popularly known as ASAS ’50. ASAS’ 50 was established by 19 young Singaporeans on 6 August, 1950 and was founded on their call and aspiration to bring some reforms to society using literature as their channel. These young writers aspired to destroy the inherent obstacles within their society that prevented progress, justice and social welfare. The objective of ASAS’ 50 was to free the minds of the Malays from the grip of old beliefs that constrained their thinking, from feudal attitudes, as well as old-fashioned teachings and superstitions. Importantly, the appearance of ASAS’50 reflects an idealism and dynamism in Malay literature in the mid-20th century. ASAS’ 50 was established in
Singapore and operated from there, and left its mark in the history of Malay literature; their honest aspirations for society and their excellent spirit for their art captured in their motto “Art for Society”.

STAGE 5 – THE ROAR OF A NEW UNITED COUNTRY (1957-1965)

The period between 1957 and 1965 was critical in the history of both Singapore and Malaysia. The history of Malay literature is a history of the struggle of the Malays in facing the currents of progress and independence. Literature became the record and reflection of the awareness and the spirit and process of society to build better lives for its people. Their hopes and aspirations to be free from the threat of colonization had been immortalized as early as in classical Malay literature, before the world wars, during the Japanese Occupation, and right up till the time of ASAS’50. The founding of an independent nation is the great dream of every colonized race and country. This dream was achieved when Malaya was given independence on 31 August 1957. Singapore, in turn, was given Self-Government by the British in 1959 and later joined the federation of Malaysia in 1963 with the joint hope that it would be a part of a large and sovereign country.

The Interests of the Non-Malays and the Contributions of Nanyang University in Singapore

In terms of language development, this decade was an interesting phase which promised a higher, wider and grander status and role for the Malay language not only in Malaysia but also in Singapore. Therefore, at this stage there was a greater interest in Malay language and literature among the non-Malay community in Singapore. Proof of this is a Malay language course that was begun in March 1958, Malay 1 dan Malay 2, taught by Rashid Manan, the Indonesian Consul to Singapore and Malaysia. Beginning October 1958, the course was taught by Dr Li Chuan Siu. Many non-Malay students took this course since the Malay language had been chosen to become the national language of Malaysia and Singapore (Li Chuan Siu, 1967:190). NANTAH (the alumni of Nanyang University) produced a magazine titled Ikatan Mahasiswa Universiti Nanyang from December 1958 till the end of 1963; a total of 12 issues that included poems, short stories and student activities. The graduates of NANTAH who contributed often were Yang Quee, Liaw Yock Fang, Tan Chin Kwang, Goh Choo Keng, Chan Maw Woh and Tan Ta Sen. There were also a number of Malay teachers who were enrolled
as undergraduates in Nanyang University in the 1970s, such as Suratman Markasan, Fatimah Mohd Noor dan Juri Wari.

**A Song of Hope for the Progress of Singapore**

The hopes for a united Singapore and Malaysia were also recorded in the song *Singapura Waktu Malam* (*Singapore by Night*) performed by the singer Saloma in the 1962 film *Labu Labi (Labu Labi)* directed by P. Ramlee, now considered a classic movie. The song was composed by P. Ramlee and its lyrics written by S. Sudarmaji. If one looks closely at the lyrics, they contain political aspirations expressed in a form that was popular at the time:

\[
\begin{align*}
Singapore & \text{ will be great and victorious} \\
 & \text{will be peaceful and tranquil} \\
 & \text{will prosper and prosper} \\
 & \text{as a part of Malaysia.}
\end{align*}
\]

Such were the high hopes that are recorded in this sweet *keroncong* song. This dream was achieved when Singapore joined Malaysia in 1963.

**A Song of Love and Combined Hopes for the New Malaysia**

With this dream fulfilled, an atmosphere of joy and happiness ensued upon the formation of Malaysia with Singapore as a part of the “new family”. This joy and happiness that accompanied the new political “family” is recorded in the song *Malaysia Baru (The New Malaysia)* in the film *Kasih Tanpa Sayang (Love without Affection)* directed by Omar Rojik in 1963, that is, after Singapore had joined Malaysia. This song was composed by Kassim Masdor, and the lyrics by Omar Rojik. The singer who performed it was Aziz Jaafar. It was later re-recorded by M. Bakri with a musical accompaniment by The Antarctics in 1965. These are the lyrics:

\[
\begin{align*}
Malaysia Baru \\
Cinta bangsa rasa mulia \\
Cinta wanita rasa bahagia
\end{align*}
\]
Menjadi kita penuh daya
mencipta hidup sempurna.

Oleh itu mari kawanku
berpimpin tangan berganding bahu
Segera capai cita yang satu
di alam Malaysia baru.

(The New Malaysia
Love for the nation brings us pride
The love of a woman brings us happiness
Makes us feel full of energy
To create a perfect life.

Therefore, O my friends,
Let’s hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder
Achieve our single aim
in this new world of Malaysia.)

However, history shows that the tone of joy reflected in the song by this Singaporean artiste, that of a “cita yang satu, di alam Malaysia baru” (single aim, in this new world of Malaysia), a Malaysia in of which Singapore was a part from 1963 to 1965, was only to be enjoyed for a brief moment. This is because the hopes to build the language, peace and economy, as well as an enjoyable life of togetherness, suddenly came to an end as Singapore was made to leave Malaysia. The Malaysian parliament had voted for the expulsion of Singapore. This was the point where the dividing line was drawn between the two countries that had hitherto been united in history and culture.

THE CRY OF PARTITION OF 9 AUGUST 1965

The effect of this partition and independence on the Malay community and literature of Singapore was great. Suddenly, the Malays on this island were a minority in their own homeland, and found themselves cut off from the rest of the Malay cultural world and history of the region under whose umbrella it had been all the while. The bonds of peace and safety that had existed within the greater “family” had come undone and there arose a fear that the Malays of Singapore would find themselves repressed in the new country.

The joy had been only temporary and changed in a split second into sadness and a sense of loss. This sadness and sense of loss can be seen in a
stage drama titled *Sumbangsih (Contribution)* by Rawan Hiba or Rahman B., the pen names of Haji Othman bin Haji Abdullah, who produced this play only a few months after the political split. The performance was directed by Bani Buang and Rawan Hiba himself acted in the main role. The performance was organized by the Singapore Arts Group (Perkumpulan Seni Singapura).

This play is about a pair of lovers, Yahya dan Sapura, who were forced to part because Yahya is a poor boy who has an amputated foot on top of it. It is clear through the dialogue that the two characters are symbolic of the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore. Apart from the plot and dialogue, the lyrics of the theme song also clearly express the feelings of sadness as a result of the separation of these two lovers:

*Kini semua hancur dan musnah*
*Niat bercantum badan berpisah*
*Kembang mawar beri padamu*
*Lambang kita pasti bersatu*

*Oh sumbangsih hati ke hati*
*Nada rindu luahir sejati*
*Kami insan rindu percantuman*
*Kami rindukan keadilan*

(Now everything is destroyed hearts are together but bodies apart a rose I give to you as a symbol that we will one day be united

Oh, it is the giving of one heart to another The tone of real longing We long to be united We long for justice.)

(Lyrics and melody by Zainal S. Abbas)

**TRACING THE LIMITS OF ONE EARTH**

**The Symbol of the Separation of Two Countries**

The secession of Singapore from Malaysia became the theme for a number of literary works in Singapore. In fact, a number of creative works were
produced, whether in the form of poems, songs, plays, short stories or novels, that used this historic event as a setting. However, there has as yet been no effort made to compile and analyse these works although this would be a useful effort to track the development of the national spirit and awareness of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Singaporeans since independence. This article only concerns itself with three works that directly touch upon this event. These three works were produced by Singaporean writers with different backgrounds and from different generations. They are: *Mengesan Jejak Pelayaran Munsiy Abdullah* (Tracing the Journey of Abdullah Munshi) by Harun Aminurrashid (1966); *Batas Langit* (The Sky’s Limit) by Mohd Latiff Mohd (1996) dan *Satu Bumi* (One Earth) by Isa Kamari (1998).

**The Bud of Life Falls**

Harun Aminurrashid was a nationalist writer who had expressed his love and admiration for Singapore. He was aware of the relationship between Singapore and the Malay world, and held the hope that Singapore would continue to make history and would be well-known throughout the world for its achievements. Harun was a Malay with deep feelings for the Malay world. He is an example of the earlier generation of Singaporeans who had a love for a greater and united Malay homeland. A great Malay homeland with a glorious history was something that he advocated for in most of his works. This is why he was extremely saddened by the separation of Malaysia and Singapore. The Malay land or Malaya was seen by him like the coconut palms that are ubiquitous in the Malay world and that have many uses in Malay culture. While spending time in Kampung Daling Besar Kuantan, his feeling of sadness due to the political separation was to him like the “falling of a coconut shoot”:

*Fikiran saya melayang jauh, kadang2 menjadi tanda-tanya kapada otak saya, berapa ramai agak-nya manusia yg ta’dapat tidor macham saya di-ganggu oleh fikiran di-sebabkan 9 ogos itu? Saya ….Sedang saya mengelamun... tiba2 saya terkejut mendengar bunyi berdebok tidak jauh dari tempat saya berdiri di-tepi tingkap itu. Saya memerhatikan di-chelah2 pokok kelapa itu kalau2 ada orang berjalan...Rupanya tupai yang melompat. Benda yang berdebok itu juga rupanya mumbang kelapa gugur bekas di-makan tupai....

*Kata hati saya, “Rupanya ada juga kawan yang ta’ tidor, tetapi sayang tupai itu ta’dapat di-ajak berbual atau bertukar2 fikiran.”....Kata hati saya kepada tupai yang jatoh, “Sa-pandai2 tupai melompat, ta’ sa-kali2 jatoh juga!”*
HADIJAH RAHMAT

(My thoughts went far off, sometimes they were a question to me, and I wondered how many people could find no sleep, like myself, because of that 9th August? I .... as I was dreaming like this... suddenly I was startles by the sound of something dropping not far off from where I stood by the window. I looked between the coconut trees if there was someone approaching... It turns out that it was just a squirrel jumping. The thing that had made the sound, as it turned out, was a coconut shoot that had been gnawed by the squirrel .... In my heart I thought, “There is someone keeping me company and not sleeping, unfortunately he cannot converse with me or exchange ideas.”.... Inwardly, I addressed the squirrel that had fallen, “As good as you are at jumping, once in a while you will fall down!”)

(1966:179-81)

These notes by Harun are also interesting because apart from recording his personal thoughts concerning the event, he is also recording the general reaction of the public upon hearing the unexpected news.

Saya duduk di-kedai2 kopi....Kesimpulan perbinchangan mereka kerana ta’ puas hati mendengar berita yang mengejutkan itu dan sa-olah2 mengambil keputusan, “Mengapa jadi begitu!”

(I sat at the roadside cafés....The conclusion of their conversations was that they were dissatisfied upon hearing the shocking news and it seemed as if they were of the opinion, “Why did it come to this??”)

(1966:140)

Kejadian besar di-bumi kita telah berlaku dalam masa .....masa hampir sa-minggu sa-lepas terjadi peristiwa 9 ogos itu, keadaan fikiran terganggu dan merasa seperti “kosong” kerana di-penuhi oleh tanda-tanya, terutama orang Melayu S’pura yang seramai kira2 250,000 orang lebih itu, dengan tiba2 tidak lagi menjadi rakyat Malaysia, sekarang menjadi rakyat S’pura yang merdeka, mesti menyingsing lengan baju untuk berjuang dalam hidup bersama dengan saudara-saudaranya rakyat yang bukan Melayu, yang mempunyai taraf sama sebagai rakyat S’pura.

(This big event in our world took place..... about a week after the events of the 9th of August, at a time when people were still disturbed and their minds somewhat “blank” because they were filled with question marks, especially S’pore Malays who numbered around 250,000 people, who were suddenly no longer Malaysians, who were now free Singaporeans, and who had to pull up their sleeves together with their fellow non-Malay citizens, who had the same rights as they did as S’poreans.)
The novel *Batas Langit* (*The Sky’s Limit*) depicts the social problems and poverty of people from various ethnic groups living in a kampung in Geylang Road in Singapore at the time of Independence from the British and separation from Malaysia. The point of view is that of a youth named Adi, who is born into a poor family and faces all kinds of problems. However, Adi is intelligent and independent and is able to find money to help his mother. He also has a strong willingness to study and is encouraged by his neighbour, Abang Dolah. Adi is still a secondary school student and loves Malay literature. He often listens to and thinks about the works of Abang Dolah and this influences him. When Singapore joins Malaysia, Adi hopes his Malay education will offer him a better future.

**The Ficus Tree as a Protection for the Soul**

Adi often climbs a ficus tree and plays there. Adi’s life and that of the other villagers is skillfully drawn using the ficus tree as a symbol. The tree witnesses and keeps many of their secrets, such as the hardship they face as a result of political unrest in the country; it is also a symbol of the life and political entity of Malaysia:


(People said this banyan tree was hundreds of years old. They said it was haunted and people were afraid to walk under it at sunset or at night. The broad leaves and its branches which were as thick as a man’s arm seemed to be sheltering the attap huts beneath it. Its trunk consisted of roots hat were as big as arms, and had marks on them from being carved ….*(p.1)*…Adi had to part with his beloved banyan tree. The tree in front of the house had
been Adi’s friend since before he could read. Its roots and branches were familiar with his smell. The lizards on it were familiar with Adi. Adi had to say goodbye to the neighbours too. He already could feel the sadness he would feel when he would have to leave.)

(1996:126)


(…Adi was very sad when the lorry began to move. Adi looked at the banyan tree for a long time. Adi looked at his house with tears in his eyes. Yesterday he had climbed the banyan tree. The word MALAYSIA that he had carved into the tree could still be seen clearly. Adi felt like he wanted to embrace that tree but of course the tree was much too big for him to embrace.”)

(1996:127)

ISA KAMARI’S SATU BUMI (1998)

The novel Satu Bumi (One Earth) is about the meeting of an engineer name Irman and an old man named Yassir, who works as a gravedigger at Bidadari Mosque in Singapore. The cemetery of Bidadari Mosque where Irman’s grandmother Swee Mei is buried is to be exhumed to make way for a development project, for which the graves are to be moved. During this meeting, Irman tells Yasser the story of his late grandmother, Swee Mei, a Chinese girl. During the Japanese Occupation, his grandmother’s family had left the 18-year-old girl with the family of Pak Durhakim, a Riau Malay, because they were afraid the girl would be raped and tortured by the Japanese. To avoid suspicion form the Japanese, Swee Mei was renamed “Aminah” and became a Muslim, and married off to Malek, Pak Durhakim’s nephew and Irman’s grandfather. Yassir also tells about his life struggle in politics which is full of ups and downs. Both the stories of Aminah and Yassir are presented alternately and run parallel throughout the novel. What is interesting is that the characters in the novel are linked symbolically and philosophically with the history of political upheaval in Singapore as it struggles for independence.
The Separation of Mother and Child-the Mirror of Sadness Shatters

A secondary plot concerns Aminah, the convert, and her life with her foster family, the family of Pak Durhakim, which is peaceful even during the Japanese Occupation. Aminah gives birth to a son named Ilham, and even though she works as a samsui-woman at the Hababot (port) of Singapore, she remains strong in her Islamic faith. Race differences do not become an issue in this unusual family. Interestingly, the close relationship of this family is linked to the relationship between Nusa Selatan and Nusa Secita, the fictional names for Singapore and Malaysia in the novel. However, the joy of being united politically does not last long due to political strife.

Like Nusa Secita, the safety and happiness of Aminah’s and Pak Durhakim’s family is also affected by the ethnic tensions that occur. During a procession to mark the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, a riot occurs and Pak Durhakim is killed. Aminah dies as a result of being brutally raped by a group of young Chinese men who are enraged and insulted when they find that she is a convert to the Islamic faith. This leaves her son, Ilham, alone with his sorrow.

The sorrow of a child separated from his mother through her death is depicted to be similar to the sorrow of the people when Nusa Selatan splits from Nusa Secita:


(His mother and grandfather were not with him when the Prime Minister announced the expulsion of Nusa Selatan from Nusa Secita a year later. The Prime Minister cried. Ilham did not know which was the sadder event. His tears had dried up as he had been separated forever from his mother. The cord that had bound love, politics and history was now broken. The Tebrau Straits would be forever choppy. The 9th of August, 1965 was a reflection of the crack caused by sadness in the mirror of his soul.)

(1998:160)

The Imagery and Meaning of Separation Symbols

On the whole, the separation of Singapore and Malaysia was a great historical shock as it was unexpected and caused different complex reactions in all levels.
of society in both countries, especially among the Malays in Singapore. For writers from the older generation, such as Harun Aminurrashid, although they were sad and disappointed because their dream of living in a great Malay world had come to an end, they had to accept that historical fact with calm. They might have been worried that the Malays were now a minority and still backward, but they were optimistic and hoped that the Malays would use their position by learning from the more successful ethnic groups and would themselves one day become a symbol of Malay progress. Meanwhile, the writers of the second generation, who were Malay-educated, such as Mohd Latiff Mohamad, and who were caught up in the political upheaval prior to the secession, were not only shocked and saddened but extremely disappointed and cynical because they considered themselves as having been cheated and fallen victim to political games. They were so disappointed that they felt their future had been destroyed and looked bleak because Malay education would not guarantee them a good life in the future.

However, the writer of the post-1965 generation, who were English-educated and who had gone through the education system and life of a new country, and who had enjoyed a more stable economic and political climated, such as Isa Kamari, were able to accept the historical fact more openly. In fact, this generation, even though aware of history, and who wished to unearth some secrets of history, no longer carried with them the emotional burden that had constrained the earlier Malay generation. They not only accepted the flow of history but also were in awe of the daring and honest efforts by the early leaders. Interestingly, the post-1965 educated Singapore Malays were confident that Islam was a stronger bridge for social and national unity than nationality or ethnicity.

This is the roar of the lion after feeling the pain of being forced out of the jungles of Malaya.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERATURE AFTER 1965 –THE ROAR OF LITERATURE IN THE MIDST OF THE LION CITY

What was the general situation of literature after the historic events of 1965? The development of literature in Singapore after 1965 can be divided into three further phases. This is just a rough classification based on the pattern of thinking or psychological perspective of writers that can be found in the works produced and not based on a chronological order or the age of the writers. For example, Suratman Markasan, MAS, Mohd Latiff Mohd and Isa Kamari. These are the three phases of literature post-1965:
1. Loss (1965-1980)


3. Rebuilding (2000 – now)

**Loss (1965-1980)**

The period between the years 1965 to 1980 is a phase that is crucial or a crisis phase in Malay literature in Singapore. This is the period of upheaval because the political separation had caused a sense of loss and a feeling of being sidelined because the Malays, from being a race, had now experienced a change of status. The separation caused the Malays to feel sad, frustrated, angry and hurt because they had been politically cast out (Shaharudin Maaruf and Sh. Maznah S. Omar, 2000:113). This psychological condition was further worsened by the development process or urbanization that happened so fast that the Malays felt it “uprooted their life traditions” because they had to move from their traditional village homes to flats. Important writers from this period are Muhd Arif Ahmad (MAS), Masuri SN, Suratman Markasan, Noor S.I. and A.Ghani Hamid. Their works became the main mouthpieces of the community at that time, for example the short story “Ke mana Hati Hendak Kubawa” (Where Shall I Take My Heart) by Fuad Salim and the short story/novella “Penghulu Yang Hilang Segala-galanya” (Suratman Markasan 1973 & 1998). The voice of loss in this community may also be surmised from Suratman Markasan’s poem “Jalan Permulaan”. This veteran writer also headed the ASAS’ 50 movement from 1977 to1986 and 1992 to1994. An excerpt of the poem reads as follows:

*Laut tempatku menangkap ikan<br>Bukit tempatku mencari rambutan<br>sudah menghutan dilanda batu-bata<br>Pak Lasim tak biasa lagi jadi penghulu<br>pulaunya sudah dicabut dari peta kepalanya<br>anak buah sudah terdampar<br>di batu-bata dan pasir-masir hangat.*

*Aku kehilangan lautku<br>aku kehilangan bukitku<br>aku kehilangan diriku.*
(The sea where I caught fish
the hills where I plucked rambutans
have become concrete blocks
Pak Lasim is no longer the headman
his island has been plucked from the map of his mind
his followers are stranded
on the stones and the hot sand.

I have lost my sea
I have lost my hills
I have lost myself.)

(Dewan Sastera, February 1981)

Pessimistic Overtones

Because of the deep feeling of sadness and loss, it can be observed that the voice or tone of the author at this stage tends to be more pessimistic and tends to lack conviction that life will get better. This is quite obvious in most works, including poems, short stories and novels. This pessimistic attitude has been noticed and analysed by a number of literary scholars in Singapore such as Mohd Naim Daipi (1981), Masuri SN (1983), Rasiah Halil (1984), Hadijah Rahmat (1987, 1991), Sharifah Maznah Syed Omar (1992), as well as Shaharudin Maaruf and Sh. Maznah S.Omar (2000).

This has not gone unnoticed by Masuri SN who, in his poems and essays, has advised Singaporean writers not to be bogged down by history and to be more positive in looking at the future. Masuri himself has channelled a positive point of view and attitude in life through his works. Problems and challenges in life are depicted with a constructive attitude and positive perspective. In fact, Masuri vehemently opposes a pessimistic attitude towards life, especially expressions by authors who seem to give up in the face of challenges or complain and reduce literature to a “house of sighs”.

Kita tidak bakal balik
Menjadi perindu yang terus sendu
Sambil merintih keluhan pedih
Kita tidak bakal meneruskan
Gelisah pecah menjadi penghambat

(We will not return
To being the sad laments
Who moan and sigh sorrowfully)
We will not continue like this
A restlessness broken that inhibits us)

[“Kita Tidak Bakal Balik” (We Will Not Return)
Mimpi Panjang Seorang Penyair, 1995:143]

The bitter experiences of separation forced the Malays of Singapore to re-evaluate their practices in life and to find a new perspective and direction in life in a new political climate. The Malays had to rise again to face the changed system of life and to find a way out to improve their achievements in education and the economy. This was a focal point and a new spirit in the next stage.

Searching (1980–2000)

After around 15 years, Malay literature in Singapore finally showed a transition to a new way of thinking from the perspective of citizens of Singapore in the midst of the Malay world. This was the stage of awareness and searching, wherein the society and writers of Singapore compared themselves to their ethnic brothers and sisters in their neighbouring countries to find a continuity between the elements of nationality, and culture or ethnicity. This is obvious in the poem “Melayuku Melayumu” (My Malayness, Your Malayness) by Mohd Latiff Mohammad. These are the lyrics: (1996:126-27)

_Melayuku Melayumu_

_Telah kutafsirkan makna Melayuku_
_Dari mata dan bibir sejarah_
_Yang luka bagai selendang berdarah_
_Yang pilu bagai perawan berduka_
…………………………………..
_Melayumu adalah bulan purnama_
_harum cempaka wangi cendana_
_Melayuku adalah pelamin yang patah_
_pusara yang legam_
_dan malam yang pasrah_

_My Malay, Your Malay_
(I interpret what my Malayness means
From the eyes and lips of history

42
That are hurt like a bleeding shawl
That are sad like a sorrowful maiden

Your Malayness is the full moon
the fragrance of frangipani and of sandalwood
My Malayness is the broken bridal dais
the blackened graves
and the submission of the night)

(Deuan Sastera, March 1983)

Apart from this comparison with their nearest neighbours, the process of searching also took place by viewing the position of the Malays at the world level, using international achievements and universal Islamic values as a yardstick. This is reflected in the poem “Di Tengah Alam” (In the Centre of the World) by Hadijah Rahmat:

Bagaimana dan bila
manusia seperti aku dari bangsa kerdil
di Tengah negara kecil
akan lebih bererti dan disedari di peta dunia
dapat mengukir sebuah bekas di jalanan sejarah
menggantung sebutir kejora di dada cakerawala
sambil mengecap keredaan Allah!

(How and when
Will people like me from a small race of people
from the midst of a tiny country
be more meaningful and gain their place on the map of the world
be able to carve a vessel on the road of history
hang a Venus on the chest of the firmament
while enjoying the blessings of Allah!)

(Berita Minggu, 8 May 1983)

This process of searching and rebuilding of culture and literature was a fantastic process that became the focus of much literature produced in Singapore and carried out in various ways by writers.

Rebuilding (2000-Now)

The third phase sees the voice of a new generation of Singaporean Malays who have been educated in the Singaporean education system after 1965 and
enjoyed progress equally as other ethnic and cultural groups in Singapore. This is the generation that has the least or no “emotional baggage”, unlike earlier generations. From this generation of writers, there radiates a confident new Malay voice to be born anew and stand tall alongside other writers from other ethnic groups in Singapore and the rest of the Malay world. They display a concern for history, the fate of their people and a sensitivity towards the reality of life in Singapore that is full of challenges. Among the writers in this group are Rafaat Hamzah, Alfian Saat, Alin Mosbit and Hasnah Adam. The voice of this generation can be represented by the poem “Pasak Temasik” (The Anchor of Temasik) by Noor Hasnah Adam which expresses the dualism and the complexities of living in the new Singapore:

\[\text{Pasak Temasik}\]

\begin{verbatim}
Biar beratus tahun berlalu
Binatang itu tak pernah beradu
Pasak itu hanya membisu
Istana itu telah lama tak berlampu
Dan pulau ini masih dara bersemu…
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
(Let a hundred years pass
The animal will never have fought
The anchor will merely remain silent
The palace will not have been lamplit in a long time
And this island will still be a beguiled maiden…)
\end{verbatim}

\section*{The Vision of a Great Literary Figure}

From the eight stages of development before and after 1965 above, we can see that the pulse of Malay literature beats actively even though it has experienced several shocks at the stage or phase of loss. Has Singaporean literature been cut off from that of Malaysian or the archipelago? It appears that the predictions or vision of Usman Awang is true and has become reality! Up till now, there is no real division between the literature of both countries. We can also see the active efforts that have been made to continue the relationship between Singaporean literature and that of the archipelago. Why and how? Let us take a closer look at the steps that have caused this literary phenomenon.
FIVE LITERARY BONDS THAT LINK SINGAPOREAN LITERATURE WITH THAT OF THE ARCHIPELAGO

Literary Bonds Through the Activities of Associations

Literary, language, cultural and educational bodies and associations in Singapore have played an important part in the continued relationship with Malaysia and the rest of the countries in the archipelago in terms of literature and society. This is seen through the efforts of ASAS’ 50 who pioneered the regional writers’ meetings in 1977; the Kemuning Association of Singapore organized drama festivals involving three ASEAN countries in 1980, and a regional drama festival in 1982; The Malay Teachers’ Union of Singapore (KGMS) organized a meeting of teachers from the region in 1985; and the Malay Journalists’ Association of Singapore held the first regional meeting of journalists in 1988. Apart from such initiatives, Singapore continues to be an important partner, participant and supporter of regional literature events that are held from time to time until now.” (Hadijah Rahmat, 2002)

To date, ASAS’50 and KGMS continue to maintain literary relations regionally and bilaterally with GAPENA, the Sultan Idris University of Education in Tanjong Malim (UPSI) and others.9

Literary Bonds through Publication

Writers from Singapore have published in Malaysia, whether with DBP, university publishers and others. Examples are Masuri SN, Suratman Markasan, Isa Kamari, Rohani Din, Peter Augustine Goh, Hadijah Rahmat, Rasiah Halil, Djochar Buang and the young writer, Munirah Jaafar.

Apart from individual works, there are Singaporean writers who have taken the initiative to compile the works of writers from the region and publish them in Malaysia. For example, Suratman Markasan has compiled a book on contemporary short stories from the archipelago and Rohani Din has published compilations of poems by young writers from three countries, Bebas Melata Melantun Kasih (Freely Flowing Mutual Affection) and Bebas Melata Mesra Serumpun (Freely Flowing Cordial Comradeship).

Literary Bonds through Education

Since the establishment of the first Malay school in Singapore in 1961, the Sang Nila Utama Secondary School, the subject of literature has been studied at the secondary and post-secondary level. Literature texts used are
mostly by Malaysian authors: *Kelapa Nan Sebatang*, *Angin dari Gunung*, *Lukisan Zaman*, *Seorang Tua di Kaki Gunung*, *Pulang Gadisku Pulang*, *Dekat Disayang Jauh dikenang* and *Salina*. Malaysian and Indonesian texts often become the main choice for analysis. Only a handful of local works have been included, among them *Sarah Pengarang Kecil*, *Mail Mau Kahwin*, *Tiga Warna Bertemu* and *Subuh Hilang Senja*. Only in 2013 did the Ministry of Education of Singapore provided and select texts by Singaporean writers as texts for Malay literature in secondary schools and at pre-university level (*Tekad* and *Begitulah Kata-kata*). Apart from such, several secondary schools and junior colleges have special literature programmes (EMAS and MLEP) which have strengthened the relationship by organizing study visits to and cooperation with Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. This includes activities by the Kelompok Guru-guru Sastera (Literature Teachers Group) who introduced the writer of the novel *Restu* to students in Malaysia and held a visit to the island of Belitung, off of Sumatra, for the appreciation of the novel *Laskar Pelangi*, as well as a poetry appreciation session in Bali.

At the higher level, at university (NTU, NUS & UniSIM), the teaching of language and literature is still centred on the language and literature of the archipelago, in fact, Singaporean literature is only one of the offered courses. There are scholars who teach at NIE, such as Dr Abdul Rahman Napiah (Mana Sikana), Professor Budi Darma and others who teach introduction to drama and Literary Criticism, including local Literary Theories. There are scholars who are invited to conduct intensive courses, such as Prof Emeritus Dato’ Dr. Asmah Haji Omar.

At the same time, the Singapore National Institute of Education, NIE/NTU, NUS and UNiSIM are also active in organizing language and literature activities involving scholars and writers at the regional and international levels. For example, an international seminar on Masuri SN and conferences on Malay language, literature and culture generally. At the same time, scholars in Malay studies in Singapore also participate in seminars and literary publications that are organized by Malaysia and other countries in the region.

**Literary Bonds through the Government**

Literary activities are also organized among the Malay-speaking countries and those of ASEAN involving the support of the government. The constant involvement by the country is supported by the Singaporean government which
helps this process. For example, the ASEAN literature project and the SEA Write Award. More recently are activities organized through the National Arts Council of Singapore (NAC) which organizes an annual Singaporean writers’ festival and a joint publications project that involves writers from Singapore, the archipelago and ASEAN. One example is a joint translation project between the NAC and Malaysia Institute of Translation and Books (ITBM). The transition of political paradigms where literature is concerned will reanimate and strengthen the historical and literary and also cultural relationship between Singaporean Malays and Malaysia, as well as other countries in the Malay-speaking world. Other government institutions that are also active and contribute to the spread of Malay language and literature are the Singapore Malay Language Council (MBMS) which spearheads the mother tongue language and literature activities on the national level; there is also the efforts by the Ministry of Education, particularly the Malay Language Learning and Promotion Committee (MLLPC) and the National Library Board (NLB).

The most important involvement and commitment by the government of Singapore has been the joining of Singapore into the Southeast Asian Literature Council (MASTERA) in October 2012. This was a bold and historic step which will strengthen the relationship of Malay literature in Singapore with that of the rest of the Malay literature in Southeast Asia, God willing.

Literary Bonds Through Roots in Malay Classical Literature

Singaporean writers have not forgotten the roots of their culture which they share with writers in the region. The great works of Malay literature such as Sejarah Melayu, Hikayat Hang Tuah, Hikayat Abdullah and Malay folk tales continue to be a source of reference and inspiration to our writers. In fact, the Tun Seri Lanang Award has been made the highest Literary Award for literature in Singapore to acknowledge writers who have made great contributions to the development of literature in Singapore. From the beginnings of the development of literature in Singapore until now, there has been a relationship between the classical Malay texts and Singaporean writing. Writers in Singapore have unearther the roots of Malay literature to discover the history of their country and race, and to gain strength and lessons from it, and to use this literature as a vessel to evaluate the problems of the community and country, and to make critical evaluations of women’s issues, as well as regional and international politics.
The experiences of Singapore prove that classical literature texts can successfully draw the attention of writers from all generation and remains current and relevant to express the “folk stories” of Singapore, especially the Malay community, that struggle greatly in the maelstrom of city life and of this globalized world, that is ever more sophisticated, pulsing and changing at a breathtaking pace; to express the rights of women (Malay and Asian), to criticize the cruelty of the political powers of the world and to defend the rights of citizens of the world as a whole.

The bonds of classical texts are the strong cultural ties that bind literature in Singapore to the literature of the rest of the Malay-speaking world, even if each country and generation of writers has their own interpretation and understanding of the texts, in line with the situation in their own countries.

COMPARISON OF WORKS

Still, there is one other issue that crosses one’s mind. What is the position and quality of the Singaporean works compared to those of writers from Malaysia?

In terms of number, it is impossible or at least difficult for Singapore to produce as many works as those by writers in Malaysia. In fact, even the Malay population of Penang, which numbered 662,782 in 2010, already outnumbers the Malay population of Singapore.15 It would be an impossibility for the Malay community in Singapore, who number less than half a million, to produce more works than writers in Malaysia, whose numbers are more than 17 million—roughly 35 times more than in Singapore!

What about the quality of the works? To study this, some research is necessary to do a complete comparison. This is perhaps a step that can be taken by the scholars of both countries. However, from a general point of view, which needs to be backed up with solid research, I would say that the best of Singaporean writing from all generations is no less of quality than that of their compatriots in Malaysia. So, for example, writers such as Muhd Arif Ahmad (MAS), Masuri SN, Noor S.I., Suratman Markasan, A.Ghani Hamid, Mohd Latiff Mohd, Djamal Tukimin, Kalam Hamidy, Nadiputra, Iswardy, Isa Kamari, Djohar Buang and Rohani Din can be compared with writers from Malaysia such as A. Samad Ahmad, Usman Awang, M. Ghazali & A.S. Amin, Arenawati, Shahnon Ahmad, A. Latiff Mohidin, A. Samad Said, Azizi Haji Abdullah, Baha Zain, Noordin Hassan, Dinsman, Anuar Ridhwan, Azizi Hj Abdullah, Kemala and Khadijah Hashim. Similarly, the younger generation of promising writers such as
Alfian Saat, Rafaat Hamzah, Adlin Alin Mosbit, Saeda Saad, Noor Hasnah Adam, Noridah Kamari, and Munirah Jaafar can be nurtured to be on par with the new generation of writers in the region.

Only in the field of literary criticism and study, Singapore is somewhat lacking and needs encouragement. This field develops more slowly because it was introduced quite late at the tertiary level. Courses in literary criticism were only begun after the Bachelor’s degree programme in Malay Language and Literature was started at the NIE/NTU in 2001. Before this, the emphasis on Malay studies was only at NUS which, even though it offered courses in classical and modern Malay literature, leaned more towards sociology. It is hoped that the field of literary criticism and literary study can be built up with the presence of more postgraduate students from other Singaporean institutes of education such as NTU, NUS and UniSIM.

CONCLUSION – THE LION’S ROAR OF LITERARY AMBITION IN THE GREATER REALM

The secession of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 left a deep impression on the souls and minds of writers, activitists and literature enthusiasts in Singapore. This sense of loss is a psychological effect that was caused by this political development, and it influenced the content, form and tone of writings produced after 9 August 1965.

Even so, the political separation of almost 50 years between the two countries has not severed the ties of Malay literature in Singapore with that of Malaysia, and of other countries in the Malay-speaking world, as there are five kinds of bonds that ensure the continuing relationship between the literature of these kindred countries. Thus far, there is still no or at least no discernible dividing line between the literature of Singapore and Malaysia. In fact, there is still a clear bond in the culture that can be found in the works produced. This proves the truth behind the words and vision that Usman Awang, that great literary figure, who was once active in both countries, expressed around 36 years ago.

Although writers, especially those from the younger generation in Singapore, have a background in an education and the challenges of life after the secession which differs from the experiences of the lives of their compatriots in Malaysia and the rest of the archipelago, there is a kind of continuity in the literature produced in these countries that share common roots. This continuity is the result of a kindred spirit that continues to beat
in the pulse of Singaporean literature because its writers, and its language and literature advocates and leaders possess a spirit of awareness and a strong will to continue to seek knowledge, unearth historical roots, maintain literary ties and to contribute to the development of literature and culture in the greater Malay world. This roar of willpower has the support of the Singaporean government and has been well-received by their compatriots in Malaysia and other countries in the Malay-speaking world. God willing, the roar of sheer willpower and the strong bonds of Malay literature and culture can be maintained as a combined effort to retain the fertile green of the jungle of regional culture for the sake of the survival of the natural beauty of universal humanity.

NOTES

3 See Teuku Iskandar, Kesusasteraan Melayu Sepanjang Abad, published by the Malay Studies Department, Brunei University, 1995, p.37.
5 This song was used creatively by Alfian Saat in his short story titled “Singapore By Night”, in Malay Sketches, 2012:169-73. The theme of separation was also used in several of his plays such as Causeway in the book Prisma Pentas published by MBMS in 2004. The song is also part of the exhibition in the Malay Heritage Park at Kampung Gelam, Singapore, since 2012.
6 Watch Aziz Jaafar performing this song in http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dEWyvUtAUM. For M.Bakri’s version, watch http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hWkypoZKhE
10 To see the complete list of literary texts, refer to Rosnani Suni, “Pendidikan Sastera

12 See *Anthology of ASEAN Literature, The Poetry of Singapore*, Edwin Thumboo, Wong Yoon Wah, Lee Tzu Pheng, Masuri SN & VT Arasu (eds.). Published and sponsored by the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 1985. The project was proposed by the Philippines in 1982 and was approved as an ASEAN project on 2 April 1982. See also Modern Literature of ASEAN, by Budi Darma, (ed.). Jakarta: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 2000.


According to Wikipedia, the number of residents in Penang totalled 1,520,143 pada tahun 2010. Bumiputra 43.6%, Cina 45.6%, India 10.4%, others 0.4% (Wikipedia).

REFERENCES


(Translated by Tanja Jonid)