Nationhood in Literature: Expressions of Realities

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Towards a Literary Tradition: Malaysian Literature in English

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Introduction

There is a need to document the development of Malaysian writing in English, especially by Malaysians, when there are misreadings by foreign critics. Just to two cite two instances, first, Koh (1994) claimed that there were no Malay novelists writing in English when a novel had been published by Mohd. Tajuddin Samsuddin (1984). Second, Quayum (2002) when describing "the major writers" in English states, "I have highlighted the major writers of this tradition, which amounted to only seven: Lloyd Fernando, Lee Kok Liang, Ee Tiang Hong, Wong Phui Nam, K.S. Maniam, Shirley Lim and Kee Thuan Chye". This critic fails to mention Muhammad Haji Salleh in his list. The critic's omission of Muhammad Haji Salleh from his list could be that of a personal preference. However, Malaysians in general consider Muhammad Haji Salleh a great Malaysian poet who writes both in the English Language and the Malay language and his poems in English are taught at all levels of the Malaysian education system. These omissions and misreading of Malaysian Literature in English indicate a need for Malaysian scholarship on one's own literary tradition.

Origins of Malaysian Literature in English

Malaysian writing in English is a relatively new literary phenomenon; its origin can be traced to the late-1940s (Wong, 1994; Holaday-Chin, 1988), in the activities of the Literary and Debating Society of the King Edward VII Medical College Union which published *The Cauldron*, the first

journal to publish literary work in English in Malaya and Singapore (Koh, 1981). With the establishment of the University of Malaya in 1949, *The Cauldron* was transferred to the university's Raffles Society and it took the name of *The New Cauldron*.

The inauguration of Malaysian and Singaporean writing in English was influenced by a group of literary intellectuals who envisaged the development of a hybrid language that would unite the multiethnic population of Malaya and Singapore. This is reflected in the editorial of *The New Cauldron* (1949-50:4-5):

> To be a nation a people must have a common language ... The people of Malaya are a mixed crowd, but they possess most of the requisites for nationhood. Time must be given for a common language to be evolved. This will come about through increased contact between the different communities. A Malayan language will arise out of the contributions these communities will make to the linguistic meltingpot.

The hybrid language was called "Engmalchin", a conflation of the first syllable of the words "English", "Malay" and "Chinese" (Yeo, 1970: 15). Any work in Engmalchin would then require the use of all three languages. In this sense, it was not truly representative of the multicultural ethnic groups in Malaya and Singapore, as the Indians were not represented (Kirpal Singh, 1994: 958). The dominant language was to be Malay but it was "gradually supplanted by emphasis on English" (Brewster, 1989:4). After a while, it was difficult to decide whether the language was "Malay with a few English words or English with a Malay syntax" (Wang, 1958, quoted in Brewster 1989:4). Poems by Wang Gungwu and short stories by Lloyd Fernando have been cited as examples of writings in Engmalchin.

The response to Engmalchin was not very positive as the language was considered 'broken' English and ungrammatical (Brewster, 1989:5). Brewster explains that Engmalchin poetry met with opposition as it was largely oral poetry which did not conform to "the elitist notion that poetry should address specific subjects in a specific manner and that its language should be appropriately literary and conventionally grammatical" (1989: 6).

The idealistic notion of Engmalchin as a 'common language' was objected to, as it was seen as the language belonging to the illiterate and therefore, from an elitist perspective, it was considered 'gutter language'. The experimentation with this hybrid language lost momentum in the mid-1950s. Its failure to take root and develop is explained in the editorial of *The New Cauldron* (1955:4):

We have assessed previous undergraduate attempts at the creation of an artificial language by an arbitrary mixture of phrases drawn from the existing languages spoken in Malaya. We regret to say that this language, Engmalchin, as its advocates termed it, is a failure if only because of its self-conscious artificiality and the failure of its 'sires' to understand that language can [n]ever be created by edict.

Although Engmalchin failed as a 'common' language, the use of colloquial language grew as English underwent the process of indigenization, and writers unselfconsciously included Malay and Chinese words in their writing (Brewster 1989).

The literary intellectuals who had advocated Engmalchin were also mistaken in their suggestion that "by far the majority felt that English, or some slightly modified form of it, would eventually become the language of Malaya's writers" (Lim 1953, quoted in Brewster 1989:9). Wong Phui Nam (1958, quoted in de Souza 1984:40), a major proponent of using English as a medium of literary expressions in Malaysia, argues that the population in Malaysia (then Malaya) was far from being wholly Malay and that:

> literary medium in spite of its being introduced here by political accident a non-Malay Malayan is doing the valid thing if he appropriates for himself English besides Malay as a tool for expressing his ideas.

Lim, and fellow literary intellectuals (including Wong Phui Nam), in the same way as Le Page (1962), did not foresee how language planning by the government of the newly independent nation of Malaysia would affect the status of English both as a medium of communication and as a creative medium after 1957. Han Suyin, however, foresaw that Malay would emerge as the common language (1966).

The Emergence of a Literary Tradition

Writing in English in Malaysia was initially kept alive "largely through the determination of a few intellectuals, and men of letters" (King 1974:14), both *bumiputera* and Malaysians of immigrant stock. Creative writing in English in Malaysia is very much a developing tradition and has not achieved comparable heights to African, Indian and Caribbean writing in terms of achievement and recognition. There is, however, a body of literary works which are significant contributions to the Malaysian literary tradition in English.

The first generation of Malaysian writers in English emrged in the 1950s. These writers include, Muhammad Haji Salleh, Lloyd Fernando, Omar Mohd. Nor, Lee Kok Liang, Ee Tiong Hong and Wong Phui Nam. These writers had local English-medium secondary school education. Most of these writers continued their education in the University of Malaya in Singapore, and their undergraduate creative writings were published in the literary journals of the university, called *The Cauldron* and later *The NewCauldron*.

Development of Malaysian Literature in English

Malaysian writing in English has developed rather slowly over the last six decades. However, one must acknowledge that there has been a dramatic change in the literary scene in English in Malaysia over the last few years and there is a marked increase in creative writing in English in Malaysia.

There have been developments in writings in English in the major genres like poetry, short story; novel and drama. I will give provide a comprehensive survey on these four genres.

Malaysian Poetry in English

Poetry was the most popular genre in the 1950s and 60s for Malaysian writers in English. It still remains among the more popular genres. Among the earliest Malaysian poets in English were Ee Tiang Hong, Muhammad Haji Salleh, Wong Phui Nam, Wang Gungwu and Omar Mohamed Nor. Their works were published in literary journals and in a few local anthologies, including *Bunga Emas* (Wignesan, 1964), *A Private Landscape* (Omerod, 1967), *The Flowering Tree* (Thumboo, 1970) and *The Second Tongue* (Thumboo, 1976). Ee Tiang Hong, Muhammad Haji Salleh and Wong Phui Nam have published their own anthologies of poems.

A younger group of poets writing in English emerged in the 1960s; among them were Shirley Lim, Hilary Tham, Siew Yue Killingley, Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof and Cecil Rajendra. The 1970s witnessed the emergence of Salleh ben Joned and Kee Thuan Chye. Shirley Lim has received highest international recognition by winning the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1980.

Since the 1980s there have been even more poets writing in English. Among these writers are Charlene Rajendra, Bernice Chauly, Ajmal

Razak, M. SHANmughalingam, Leonard Jeyam and Chin Woon Ping. Some of thhese poets have their own anthologies of poems or their work have been published in more recent anthologies of poems (Vethamani 2003) and poems and fiction (Quayum 2003).

Malaysian Short Story in English

The short story is another popular genre among Malaysian writers. Among the pioneer short story writers in Malaysia were Lee Kok Liang, Lloyd Fernando and Awang Kedua (Wang Gungwu) and their works were collected in *The Compact: A Selection of University of Malaya Short Stories* (Hochstadt, 1959), *Twenty-Two Malaysian Stories* (Fernando, 1968) and *The Flowering Tree* (Thumboo, 1970). Of the three, only Lee Kok Liang published individual collections - *Mutes in the Sun and Other Short Stories* (1964) and *Death Is a Ceremony and Other Short Stories* (1992).

As in the case of poetry, a new generation of short story writers in English emerged in the late 1970s, though Lee Kok Liang continued to be the major force. Their works were collected into *Malaysian Short Stories* by Fernando (1981). K.S. Maniam emerged as the most exciting and prolific writer during this period and remains as such. He has won national short story competitions and has now published his own collections of short stories, *Plot, The Aborting, Parablames and Other Stories* (1989), *Sensuous Horizons* (1994), *Arriving ... and Other Stories* (1995), and *Haunting the Tiger* (1996). Among the other short story writers with their own collection of stories are Shirley Lim, Syed Adam Aljafri, Kris Jitab, Karim Raslan and Tunku Halin.

The Malaysian Novel in English

As in the case of writing in English in the other genres, the writing of novels in English has been by both *bumiputera* and non-bumiputera Malaysians, contrary to Koh's claim (1994:1135) that "all Malaysian fiction in English is by non-Malays." *The Price Has Been High* (1984) is a novel, an original work in English, written by Mohd. Tajuddin Shamsuddin, a Malay.

If the early novels in English in Malaysia, in the 1950s, were set with the Second World War as the backdrop, the turbulent years after the racial riots in Malaysia have been among the central issues in the

novels since the 1970s. Chin Kee Onn's novel, *Ma-rai-ee* (later titled *The Silent Army* for international publication, 1954), was the first Malaysian novel to have an international publisher. K. Sim's *Malacca Boy* was next published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1957. It took another twenty-four years before another Malaysian novelist, K.S.Maniam, was published by an international publisher. Heinnemann Asia Ltd published his first novel, *The Return* (1981). This novel was republished by another international publisher, Skoob Books Publishing Ltd, in 1993, when it published his second novel, *In A Far Country*.

Most novel writing in English initially dealt with presenting "local colour characters and to chronicle the present or dramatic past" (Koh 1994:1136). The novels of Johnny Ong, *Sugar and Salt* (1964) *Run Tiger Run* (1965) and *The Long White Sands* (1977); B.C. Bhattacharjee's *The Immigrant* (1989) and Yeap Joo Kim's *The Patriach* (1975) fall into this category. These novelists neither experimented with their writing styles nor attempted to present a Malaysian English voice. Koh (1994:1136) describing their works states that "the narratives tend to be straightforward social record, with stereotyped characters, melodramatic plots, and moralistic conclusions." However, publication of the novels of Fernando (1976 (republished in 1992), 1993), K.S. Maniam (1981 (republished in 1993), 1993) and Lee Kok Liang (1981) took the Malaysian novel in English to new literary heights. Kirpal Singh (1994: 958) referring to these novelists states, "it was the work of these three that finally brought the novel its due prominence." Koh (1994:1136) also referring to these novels adds, "because these are consciously crafted works that tell their authors' exploration of urgent and serious issues, they have enjoyed high critical acclaim."

Since the 1990s, more novelists have contributed to this genre. Among these writers is veteran writer Shirley Lim who published her first novel in 2001. Other novelists include Chuah Guat Eng, Tunku Halim, Beth Yap, Alex Ling, Marie Gerrina Louis, Ooi Yang May, Ellina Abdul Majid and Rani Manicka. More Malaysian novelists have had their works published by international publishers. These include: Ooi Yang May (Hodder and Stoughton, 1998 and 2000), Beth Yap (Harper Collins Australia, 1992 and Heinemann Asia,1993) and Rani Manicka (Sceptre, 2002).

Malaysian Drama in English

Drama was once a relatively unpopular genre among Malaysian writers in English. Malaysian English plays emerged in the 1960s and were staged in Kuala Lumpur (Jit, 1994:386). Two volumes of Malaysian plays were compiled by Fernando (1972). Among the early dramatists were Syed Alwi, Lee Joo For, Edward Dorall, K. Das and Patrick Yeoh. Lee Joo For was the first Malaysian dramatist to receive any international recognition. His play, *The Son of Zen* (1970) "is also the only Malaysian play to have been performed in New York's off-off Broadway" (Jit, 1994: 386).

There was a dearth of English plays in the 1970s, but the 1980s saw the emergence of new playwrights in Malaysia, namely, K.S. Maniam, Kee Thuan Chye, Leow Puay Tin and Chin San Sooi (Jit, 1994: 387). Among the foremost Malaysian dramatists of the 1990s were K.S. Maniam, Kee Thuan Chye and Leow Puay Tin. Ramli Ibrahim was a notable newcomer into the drama scene at this time. Despite the small number of Malaysian English plays, they have been described as "dramaturgically adventurous and probe deeply into the non-Malay condition in the new political order. Some of the linguistic experiments of Maniam and Leow are creating a viable Malaysian English voice on stage" (Jit, 1994: 387). Ramli Ibrahim's writing brings to Malaysian drama a "range of language and richness of characters (which) are the perfect representation of the racial, cultural and historical mix that is present-day Malaysia" (McRae, 1993: xiv). The works of these dramatists have been also been staged in Singapore, England, Australia and Japan.

There are now even more playwrights in English in Malaysia. A number of young playwrights have made their presence felt in this genre since the later part of the 1990s. They led by playwrights like Jit Murad and Huzir Sulaiman. Huzir Sulaiman's work have been recently published, *Eight Plays* (2002).

Today, Malaysian writing in English is vibrant and very much alive. There are more writers than ever before. The writers come from all the races in the country. Today, there are more Malay writers, especially among the younger writers. The younger generation of writers are also venturing into new genres like films and song-writing.

Further Developments for Malaysian Literature in English

1) Publication Opportunities

An important development that has enabled the growth of Malaysian literature in English is the availability of avenues to publish literary works. The means of production of texts is indeed vital for the growth of any literary tradition. In the early day, there was little opportunity to publish one's work. Writers had to depend on journals in English departments in universities to publish their work or resort to self-publication.

Before the 1990s, there were few publishers who published Malaysian writings in English. They were mainly, Heinemann, Oxford University Press and Federal Publications. However, since then there have been more publishers in the literary scene, both local and international who publish works by Malaysian writers in English. Among the international publishers were Skoob Books Publishing Limited based in London, Times Books International based in Singapore and the Feminist Press in the USA. Besides these publishers, mainstream commercial publishers like Hodder and Stoughton and Spectre have also published Malaysian writers. The new local publishers are Pelanduk Publications, Rhino Press, Silverfishbooks, Maya Press and Pearson Malaysia. Local university presses have also begun to publish local writers. University Putra Press is among the more aggressive of these publishers.

There are indeed more opportunities to publish Malaysian writing in English even for novice writers today. There is no longer the need to depend on literary columns in newspapers and literary journals to print their work. Publishers like Silverfishbooks give both budding and established writers an avenue to publish in a series called *New Writings*. This new series was started in 2001.

This interest in publishing Malaysian writing in English augurs well for Malaysian writers and for Malaysian literature in English. Publication of literary works is important to writers. Publishers make the essential connection between writers and readers. The wider the circulation of the publishers the wider it will be the circle of readers for Malaysian writers.

2) Scholarship and Research

In terms of scholarship, there is no denying that a local literary tradition like Malaysian literature in English needs to be institutionalised. Moag states that "local literary activity becomes institutionalized when it becomes regenerative" (Moag ,1982:281). This is achieved through the incorporation into the English curriculum in the education system of writings in English by local writers which act as models for the next generation of writers.

This is already happening in Malaysian universities today. Literary works by Malaysians are incorporated as texts for courses in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. But it was only in 1992, for the first time, the Ministry of Education included a Malaysian poet, Muhammad Haji Salleh, in the secondary school Literature in English curriculum for the Form Five school examination (Edwin, 1992:26).

The study of writings in English by Malaysian writers has resulted in the institutionalization of Malaysian literary works in English. Today, there is much research, both in local and foreign universities, on Malaysian writers. Various publications, like *A Bibliography of Malaysian Literature in English* (Vethamani, 2001), *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader* (Quayum and Wicks (edts.), 2002), *Colonial to Global: Malaysian Women's Writing in English 1940s to 1990s* (Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf and Quayum, 2001), *Reclaiming Place and Space: Issues in New Literatures* (Rusy Suliza Hashim and Ganakumaran Subramaniam (edts), 2003), *Linking Literary Identities: Malaysian Society, Culture and the Other* (Raihanah Mohd. Mydin and Shahizah Ismail Hamdan (edts), 2003), Fadillah Merican, Ruzy Suliza Hashim, Ganakumaran Subramaniam and Raihanah Mohd. Mydin. *Voices of Many Worlds: Malaysian Literature in English* (2004) and other critical studies on Malaysian writing in English provide vital scholarship that is necessary for this literary tradition to grow.

3) Recognition and Awards

Even as Malaysian literature in English continues to develop, recognition for writing in terms of literary awards often serves as a catalyst to its growth. Though there have not been many, it is important to bear in mind that Malaysian are beginning to win awards. International recognition was first given to poetry written in English from Malaysia, when Shirley Lim was awarded the Commonwealth Prize for Poetry in 1980. Another Malaysian, whose work has been recognised for his contribution for writing

in English is K.S. Maniam. He was presented the Raja Rao Award in 2000 for his outstanding contribution to the Literature of the South Asian diaspora. The latest award was given to Rani Manicka for her novel entitled *The Rice Mother*. She won the Best First Book Award in the 2003 Commonwealth Prize, Southeast Asia and South Pacific region.

Towards A Malaysian Literature in English Canon

Even as the number of publications increases in Malaysian literature in English, it does seem valid to consider a Malaysian Literature in English canon. A canon can be said to an authoritative list of books. Today, we may want to consider which works would come to be in such a list. The list may not be long but it would be a beginning. I would like to suggest we consider the works of established writers in the literary tradition like Muhamad Haji Salleh, Lloyd Fernando, Lee Kok Liang, K.S. Maniam, Shirley Lim, Ee Tiang Hong, Wong Phui Nam, Salleh ben Joned, Kee Thuan Chye, Hilary Tham, Omar Mohd. Nor, Wang Gangwu. Besides these writers who write in English, we may even want to consider Malaysian writers whose work have been translated into English. These could include writers like A. Samad Said, Usman Awang, Abdul Ghafar Ibrahim, Latiff Mohidin, Anwar, Lim Swee Tin, Ridhwan, Kemala, Zurinah Hassan and Siti Zainon Ismail.

It is worthwhile considering which works would be in the Malaysian Literature in English canon. It would be the list of the best works ever written in English in Malaysia. Belonging to this canon will confer status to the works. The canon will serve as a valuable guide to what should be read in the literary tradition of Malaysian Literature in English.

Challenges for Malaysian Writers in English

Malaysian literature in English, since its emergence in the 1940s, has not had a safe mooring ground in the country of its birth. The situation, however, is indeed more favourable today. The problematic issues concerning Malaysian literature in English have been related to the English language and its use as a medium for creative expression by Malaysians and its relationship to the national language in Malaysia, Bahasa Malaysia or Bahasa Melayu.

The Position of the Malaysian Writer in English

In Malaysia, the position of the English literary circle has always been less than favourable. Malaysian writers in English have been accused by Malay academics and nationalists of being unpatriotic and even of not having a culture (of their own). Malaysian literature in English is said "not (to) count for much in a nation trying very hard to forget its colonial inheritance" (Zawiah Yahya, 1988: 9). Consequently, K.S.Maniam writes, "To be Malaysian and to write in English can be frustratingly opposing activities" (1993:188). These writers have also been ridden with guilt for writing in English and some have expressed alienation as writers in a society which has been both hostile and indifferent to them (Kee Thuan Chye, 1992: 101; Kee Thuan Chye 1993, recorded interview with the BBC Radio 3; Wong Phui Nam 1993, recorded interview with the BBC Radio 3).

The position of the Malaysian writer in English from immigrant communities has to be viewed in a dual light: first, as one who is an immigrant (though naturalized as a Malaysian), the Other in Malaysian society, and, second, as a writer who uses neither the national language nor his/her mother-tongue but a language which was once the colonial language. Such writers can thus be seen as placing themselves in a doubly or even triply disabling position in Malaysia (Vethamani, 1996).

Status of Malaysian Writing in English

In Malaysia, there is a clear definition of Malaysian National Literature. For any literary work to be considered national literature, it must be written in the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, the Malay language (Mohd. Taib Osman, 1973; Fernando, 1973). Work in any other language is considered sectional literature (Fernando, 1973). The only recourse available to writers whose work is in English is to get the work translated into the national language, if they wish their work to be part of the national literary tradition (Mohd. Taib Osman, 1973).

Mohd. Taib Osman (1984), reflecting the government's stand, states that the Malay language is the only language for national Malaysian literature.

> It is without doubt that the literature in Malay is the most logical choice to provide the foundation for the further development of National Malaysian

> literature. This is not merely because Malay as transformed into Bahasa Malaysia is the national and official language of the country. The more important reason is that, compared to other forms of literature, it has the necessary advantages to make it the foundation for the future development of a national literature for Malaysia.
>
> (Mohd. Taib Osman, 1984:116-117)

He rejects the likes of Engmalchin or the notion "that national Malaysian literature can be created by fusing the literary elements from various literatures. The most facile example ever suggested is a poem in a mixture of English and Malay" (1984:118). For Mohd. Taib Osman there can be no mixing; only the Malay language and literature in Malay can be the basis of national Malaysian literature (1984:119). This view, however, is not held by all Malay intellectuals.

In contrast to Mohd. Taib Osman's view is Han Suyin's perception of Malaysian literature. In her Foreword to the English translation of Malaysian Chinese short stories, Han Suyin (1966) defines Malaysian literature as:

> ... those writings (drama, novel, short story, and verse) which by emotion, identification, description, social context and involvement relate to Malaysia ..., whether written in Malay, Chinese, Tamil or English, the four accepted main 'streams of languages' of Malaysia....
>
> (Han Suyin, 1966:5)

For Han Suyin, the content of the writing is the major criterion, whereas for Mohd. Taib Osman it is the linguistic medium. His arguments for the Malay language as the medium for national Malaysian literature is essentially political, not literary, as he fails to recognise cultural and linguistic pluralism in Malaysian society (Tham, 1981:235). This restrictive notion of national literature is also perceived as an attempt to "restrict national identity to a monocultural and monolinguistic position" (Lim, 1994: 37).

Lim (1991:87) explains that Malaysians' choice of English as their creative medium is because of its ethnic neutrality and international character. She suggests that for writers who use English, it is a means to "counter(s) a national language/cultural dominance to express fragmentations resulting from exclusions and suppressions". She also views these writers' use of English as their attempt to be included in an international culture, after having been marginalized in their own country. However, many Malaysian writers remain outsiders both at home and

abroad. To date, very few Malaysians writing in English have achieved much international recognition.

Reception of writings in English in Malaysia was once of hostility and near indifference by the majority of Malaysians. Today, there is a more positive attitude towards Malaysian writers in English. Malaysian writers continue to persevere in writing in English. Some of these writers, like K.S. Maniam, Wong Phui Nam and Kee Thuan Chye have openly stated that it is not just a preferred medium but also the only medium through which they can channel their creativity most efficiently (Vethamani, 1996). As such, the English language remains their only means of literary expression.

As in the case of national Malaysian culture and National Ideology, the Malaysian government has also instituted the concept of national literature. This concept is also closely linked with the implementation of the National Language policy.

In Malaysia, writings by Malaysians are considered as Malaysian literature. However, there is a clear distinction on what is considered national literature. For any literary work to be considered national literature, it must be written in the national language, Bahasa Malaysia (Mohd. Taib Osman,1973; Fernando,1973). Works in any other language are considered sectional literature (Fernando, 1973). If these works are to be absorbed into the national literary tradition, they will have to be translated into Bahasa Malaysia (Mohd. Taib Osman,1973). To date, there is one anthology of poems presented in a bilingual format and one novel which has been translated from English into Bahasa Malaysia. No other work by Malaysians from any of the other genres has been translated into Bahasa Malaysia.

The notion of national and sectional literature has been objected to even by *bumiputera* writers like Salleh ben Joned. He states:

> I personally think it is enough to have a National Language without having a National Literature as well. The very idea of a National Literature is dubious and serves no civilised purpose, certainly not that of true "nation building." As far as I know, this is the only country in the world that feels it needs one, and the need suggests a feeling of insecurity.
>
> (Salleh ben Joned, 1992:27)

Still, there are no two ways about this situation. The cultural hegemony is explicit and Malaysian writers who use English enter the literary arena with this knowledge. There is resentment towards anyone

writing in English who would even dare to consider their writing to be part of the national literary tradition. This is clearly expressed by Malaysian academic and literary critic, Mohd. Taib Osman:

> They (writers who write in languages besides Bahasa Malaysia) even unabashedly tried to project their literary works as Malaysian national literature, even if their claims were made indirectly.
> (my parenthesis; Mohd. Taib Osman 1973: 110)

I believe Malaysian writers in English or any other language make a valid contribution to the Malaysian literary tradition. They present a Malaysian worldview which is relevant and integral in a multi-ethnic/ multi-racial/mixed population like Malaysia.

These writers, in adopting the English language as the medium for their creativity, have not shed all traces of their essential identity and donned some false skin. Yet, the Malaysian writing in English marginalizes himself in his creative act. Whether he is indigenous or immigrant is immaterial. All writings which are not in Bahasa Malaysia remain outside what is considered national literature.

Most Malaysian writers in English have to be viewed in a dual light: first, as *non-bumiputera* Malaysians, the Other in Malaysian society (like the rest of their ethnic group), and second as writers who use neither the national language nor their mother-tongue but a language which was the colonial language. Their position can thus be viewed as being in a double or even triple disabling position.

Conclusion

One may ask if there is a way forward for Malaysian writers in English or if it there a way out of the space that has been allocated to them. There are no clear answers for these questions. Despite the challenges faced by Malaysian writers in English, Malaysian literature in English continues to develop. Today there are more Malaysian writers from all ethnic backgrounds writing in English. The sheer force of the creative writing in English will bring to it the recognition that it deserves both in Malaysia and in the international literary scene.

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