

# Leaders of hearts and minds

## LITERARY LESSONS:

The works of these writers offer constructive insight into nation-building

**W**HEN lesser leaders preach revisionist history and the rhetoric of hate, truth suffers and authentic development of the character of the younger generation becomes distorted because of the propaganda of falsehood. In the midst of such confusion and distortions of history and contemporary life, real thought leaders plod on to make their constructive contributions.

There are so many of these real people who do good deeds and invite others down the straight path of graceful living. Noting a few of these thought leaders will not suffice, but is necessary to map the journey of respect for indigenous contributions.

Shaari Isa, a teacher turned accountant, is a prolific writer. He has to his credit more than 60 academic works, creative fiction, short stories and books on accountability. Among his works, are *A Voice in the Woods*, a discussion on the Malaysian political scene; *Release Me Back to the Sea*, *Lives and Loves* and *Did It Really Happen?*

Mother Mangalam wrote poignant poetry about a moral society. She is a role model, a selfless person devoted to service, acknowledging divine reality. Her sacrifices and perseverance centre on caring for the underprivileged, marginalised and neglected. Her poetry in *Mother* reflects a lifetime of adventures of the heart, of deeds touching the recesses of the mind and the networks of the soul.

Tan Sri Radin Soenarno has died but left an unfinished manuscript that his wife Zabidah Awang Ngah edited and published to ensure that his story is told.

Radin's story is inspiring, capturing turning points in Malaysia's history and the complexity of government machinery and inner circles of governmental and political drama of decision-makers. His is the story of courage and a fulfilling career and life, working with the nation's elites and the ordinary people. Radin's memoir *Dare to Dream* invites Malaysians to live a balanced life with honour, kindness, moderation, gratefulness and wisdom.

*The Times and Chimes of Joe Chelliah*, a reflective personal biography, invites readers, to weigh mindfully the matters that matter most in life. The narrative locates individual and family history and contributions within the mainstream of national history, providing understanding of the acts and sacrifices made by unknown and unsung individuals, who contributed mean-



(Clockwise from top left) Tan Sri Radin Soenarno, Professor Hussein Ahmad, Tan Sri Omar Hashim, Shaari Isa, Mother Mangalam and Joe Chelliah.

ingfully and significantly to affect other lives in other times and spaces.

It is about an educator, who struggles to share personal and professional passion for teaching and for music education.

The work, which straddles intellectual, personal and family history as an integral dimension of nation-building and human diaspora, is a pioneering effort in educational memoir writing.

The contributions of these writers are not stand-alone, isolated contributions but are interwoven with the history of the nation and its various transformations, cultures,

polices and strategic documents.

For instance, to make sense of the human dimension of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, leaders must read works like those by Tan Sri Omar Hashim and Professor Hussein Ahmad.

Omar has been prolific in his writings through the years. His magnum opus is a memoir that chronicles education development across the decades, from the perspective of a leader inside the system involved in major policy decisions in education during his time. His work *Menongkah Gelombang Pendidikan* (Riding the Waves of Educational Change) pro-

vides an intimate history of a thought leader, practitioner and policymaker.

Hussein had written several seminal works before writing his magnum opus, *The Mission of Public Education in Malaysia*. Hussein is a researcher, a profound thinker, an intellectual who is recognised internationally and had contributed in international institutions like United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Education policymakers, planners and other stakeholders do injustice to society and the nation if they do not read and internalise ideas, insights and virtues scoured from such books.

Authentic leaders are substantive and inspirational. Their blood, sweat and tears over their careers are directed towards some sacred purpose. In humble ways, incrementally and painstakingly, they contribute to identify lessons learned, search for best practices, explore elegant solutions, generate ideas and strategies for problem-solving, and share ideas openly with no covert motives.

These writers deal with different subject matters but the underlying unity of their works is about sharing and educating the generations. Whether they write fiction or fact, there is much analysis, and hope, and, unlike lesser leaders, they do not incite hatred. At appropriate levels and in appropriate subjects, the education system should meaningfully use such emerging, rich, diverse and illuminating indigenous works to nurture the collective historical and literary memory of Malaysians.

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