

## COMMENT

# Wisdom of Malay proverbs

## RICH HERITAGE:

These timeless expressions must be nurtured, used

**M**ALAY proverbs cover all aspects of life and human activities. There are scores of books on Malay proverbs. In schools, one of the subjects that students find fascinating is the study of proverbs when their minds are challenged by metaphors and similes.

During colonial times, British residents and scholars enjoyed collecting proverbs to understand the Malay mind and culture.

E.S. Hose of the Malayan Civil Service published a collection of proverbs in 1933. W. E. Maxwell, Hugh Clifford and J.L. Humphreys had earlier published proverbs in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

R.J. Wilkinson had also published proverbs in his *Malay-English Dictionary* in 1901. Mubin Sheppard edited *The MBRAS Book of more*

than 1,600 Malay proverbs with explanations in English (Monograph 22). William Marsden compiled *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language* in 1812 and Winstedt R. O. wrote *A History of Classical Malay Literature*. Francois-Rene Daillé wrote the *Studies on the Malay Pantun*.

Other compilers include Ahmad Utsman Bajunid, who published *Kamus Peribahasa Melayu-Arab-Inggeris*. Ismet Fanany and Rebecca Fanany conducted research on Malay proverbs and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka published its work entitled *Wisdom of Malay Proverbs*.

The proverbs and *pantun* are all expressions of Malay civilisation encompassing beauty and magic, body and soul, nature and innovation, education, rulers and subjects, relationships and the universal wisdom of the ages.

**DAYUNG sudah di tangan, perahu sudah di air** (the oar is in hand and the boat is in the water). There is preparedness, let us go achieve Vision 2020!

**BAGAI aur dengan tebing** (like the roots and the riverside.) The close relationship between the people in caring for each other;

**BANYAK-BANYAK kucing berlari, mana nak sama kucing belang, Banyak-banyak boleh ku cari, mana nak sama kekasih seorang** (many lovers I can search for but you, my beloved, are the only one I love);

**RINGGAN tulang** (light bones). Helpful and willing to give a hand;

**YANG berat sama di pikul, yang ringan sama dijinging** (working together through thick and thin to achieve a goal);

**MELENTUR buluh biarlah dari rebungunya** (to shape bamboo, begin with the shoot). Educating a person begins from young;

**SEDIKIT-SEDIKIT lama-lama jadi bukit** (little by little, in the end, a hill is built). Patience will ultimately lead to success;

**UKUR baju ikut badan sendiri** (measure your clothes to fit your body). To live within one's own means;

**HARAPAN pagar, pagar makan**

*padi* (you trust the pheasant to chase away other birds but the pheasant itself eats the padi). The betrayal of trust by those who have power;

**BIAR pecah di perut, jangan pecah di mulut** (let it suffer in the stomach but don't let it break at the mouth). No matter what happens, a secret must be kept a secret;

**CACING hendak menjadi naga** (worms want to be dragons). Someone trying to be something greater than himself or herself;

**RAJA adil, raja di sembah; raja zalim raja di sanggah** (a fair king will be saluted and served, a cruel king will be rebelled against). A just leader is a leader to support, an unjust leader must be brought down;

**JANGAN disangka air yang tenang tiada buaya** (do not think that placid water has no crocodiles). A seemingly tranquil facade can hide many dangerous secrets;

**YANG menang menjadi abu, yang kalah menjadi arang** (the winner becomes ashes; the loser becomes coal). Worthless fight for all are losers;

**DIMANA ada kemahuan, di situ ada jalan** (where there is a will, there is a way);

**GAJAH seberang laut nampak, kuman depan mata tak nampak** (elephants across the sea are sighted, germs in sight are not seen). One's evil deeds are not recognised but the weaknesses of others are focused upon; and,

**HARIMAU mati tinggalkan belang, manusia mati tinggalkan nama** (tigers die leaving their stripes, humans die leaving their legacies or deeds).

The genius of formulating apt axioms underwent generations of tests of relevance and meaningfulness, and survived to this day. If citizens possess a treasury of the proverbs of their national language, this treasury will constitute the shared heritage of the genius of the people founded on universal values.

There are many ways to build a collective historical memory of shared experiences and meanings. The reference to such proverbs in ordinary conversations as well as in highly intellectual discourse will nurture the psycho-facts, as well as the socio-facts of the relationship capital among Malaysians. The funded wisdom of Malaysians must be consciously recognised, nurtured and used.

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