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A plea for
Empathy

The Quest for Malaysian Unity

Chandra Muzaffar

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zubedy ideahouse sdn. bhd.
Kuala Lumpur
PUSTAKA PERDANA



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TEL: 03 - 7727 0758

TEL: 03 - 7727 0759

info@zubedy.com

www.zubedy.com

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While acknowledging the help received, I must emphasize that I am solely responsible for the book's shortcomings.

C.M.

18 March 2010.

PREFACE

This is the first time that I have put together in book form a number of my articles on national unity written over a period of 34 years.

Issues pertaining to national unity have been among my most passionate concerns from my secondary school days. My articles have appeared in newspapers, popular magazines, academic journals and books published at home and abroad. A whole section of my 1989 book *Challenges and Choices in Malaysian Politics and Society* is devoted to this subject.

However, the present volume which focuses exclusively upon national unity covers a much wider range of topics than my 1989 endeavor. I look at language, culture, religion, the economy, politics, human rights, education, ethnic accommodation, ethnic conflict, and trends in ethnic relations over the decades. While the book does not include all my writings on national unity in the English language --- there have also been many articles in Malay-- this collection embodies the essence of my thoughts on the causes of disunity and the solutions that are possible at this juncture of the Malaysian journey towards nationhood.

To put it differently, the analysis of the ethnic situation in the country, and some of the remedies that we should seek, are important dimensions of this work. This book also offers some insights on how ethnic challenges have emerged and evolved over a long period of time. The perennial and the transient in the interaction among the different communities become obvious as we move from chapter to chapter. At the same time, we catch a glimpse of the complexity of the Malaysian ethnic landscape.

There is perhaps something else that this book will reveal to the reader. It will show that my fundamental perspectives on national unity in Malaysia have not changed since the early seventies. I argue that at a basic psychological level, there is a very little empathy within community X for the hopes and fears of community Y. A lot of Malaysians of Chinese and Indian origin for instance do not appreciate why Malays and other indigenous communities feel the way they do about the history and the identity of the land and what it implies for the present and the future. Likewise, there are not many Malays who understand the aspirations of Chinese and Indian Malaysians for political equality in a nation which has also been their home for generations. Closing this psychological gap between the communities is one of the most formidable challenges facing Malaysia today.

It is to underscore the significance of this challenge that this book is entitled A Plea for Empathy-The Quest for Malaysian Unity.

Finally, a note about how this book has been put together. The 23 articles have been arranged in chronological order, beginning with a 1974 paper and ending with a 2008 piece. Given the evolution of ethnic concerns and trends, this arrangement makes sense. References to specific events and personalities--- whenever they occur--- have also been left as they are. In some instances they help to buttress the context in which a certain ethnic issue expressed itself. In other instances, these time-bound references serve to highlight the significance of larger ethnic trends in the country.

Chandra Muzaffar

Petaling Jaya,

Malaysia.

25 March 2010.



SOURCE REFERENCES

The chapters in this book were sourced from the following publications:

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