



LITERARY AWAKENING THE NATION' S MENTAL AND HUMAN REASON

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INTRODUCTION

My discussion today focuses on the key issues in the formation of the knowledge society. This formation of kind society is inevitable through study, research and, of course, reading. Reading culture is the core of human civilization. Reading plays an important role in human life. This certainly includes the reading of literary texts. For that purpose, so the whole contents of my discussion this time can be divided into two major sub-topics. *Firstly*, about the lazy reading society as they are in a comfortable zone or because they are equipped with all the conveniences of hi-technology. In this context, I call "TV-based society. *Secondly*, knowledge-based society. The formation of high-culture society must go through with the tradition of reading. If we are less reading or lazy, we will belong to the category of TV-based society. But, in contrary, if we are sensitive to knowledge and science then we belong to the knowledge-based society.

THE PROGRAMMATIC ZONE

There are two dilemmas we are facing at the moment. First of all, the lack culture of reading in the community and the second is advanced attacks and hegemony technologies that make us feel comfortable despite many things we lose. The lack of reading culture amongst us is at the level of endangering and necessary for immediate recovery. This situation needs to be taken seriously by us, and of course, by policymakers. The lack of reading culture means our efforts to form a **knowledge-based society** is failed. This means that we become a dark dimension society. As a thinker the main concern is "if we do not read, how will we know?". The most worrying is to that society, especially the younger generation. They will grow incomplete because they will lose the right pearls that they own. Eventually, we will become just like a big bubble from the outside but the truth, we are empty inside. This character should be avoided and replaced by intellectual characters who can dynamically compete with other foreign nations without a sense of inferiority, as the ancestral idiom says "*sits as low, standing as tall.*"

In fact, this phenomenon is related to the era of modern technological attack that tends to form a **lazy reading society**. This is because the sophistication of modern technological tools makes us more comfortable consumers. At the same time, it keeps us from thinking spirit. We are provided with ready-to-use facilities that need only touch and press. And these modern technology tools offer colorful and glorious faces. It easily attracts and affects every user. The result is that we are no longer interested in using our creativity and talent. We are more comfortable in the programmatic zone. This situation is critical as **Chandra Muzaffar** says that "it absorbs the senses but turns off the soul." And also like **John Naisbitt** says that "Technology brings us physical and mental excitement, but our drunkenness towards it makes our souls vacant and push us to increase our quest for life." But it does not mean we have to reject the importance of modern technology tools in today's livelihood. It is even highly necessary in accordance with the current environment. But however, the modern technology tool has pros and cons.

One of the important things to be discussing here is about the growing culture of our society today. Reading rate decreases and deteriorates to a critical stage. Not to mention this era of information technology that creates a new trend of subordinate society and touch screen tabs or mobile only. The world of technology is so fascinating and sparkling as it can attract all human attention to the preparatory program that is unnecessary to think but enough to pay the service charges imposed then we can continue to access whatever we want. This culture is contagious among teenagers around the world. All teens and citizens have the same characterization of the character created by modern technology. Technology generally is not totally wrong or to be blamed for. This is because the negative result will only happen if we misuse it. This is terrible to us because if this phenomenon persists it will lead to the paralysis and disorder of the nation's thinking.

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It is true like Shahnnon Ahmad's famous Malaysian literary writer has stated, among other things, that "the literary nation of mental development.", because the contribution of the field of literature in the formation of the nation's mind is not little. This fact has been widely agreed upon amongst thinkers or scholars around the world. In other words, they almost agree on this. That is, average agreeing to say that literature has a great role in the formation of identity. Denying the role of literature means we deny one of the important aspects of the process of forming a nation's character. When we read the literary masterpiece, we actually go through the history of the past, explore the ideas and aspirations of the nation, and embrace the emotion of the native people themselves. This is because the writer is actually a ruler of the race and at the same time draws a map of the future direction of the nation.

Henry David Thoreau once said;

"Those who have not learned to read the ancient classics in the language in which they were written must have an imperfect knowledge of the history of human race."

(2012:84)

In my view, those who are interested in literature are the special one. This is because reading the literature means we are entering a vast world that provides a perfect dimension of livelihood. It does not only supply us vast human experience but also full of beauty. This dimension of beauty is not available in other fields. The one who reads the fiction about our real society and culture enter the world with a casual but knowledgeable experience.

TV-BASED SOCIETY

From my personal point of view, it is true that when **Shahnnon Ahmad**, a Malaysian well-known writer described the crime of television as the main cause of human calamity in one of his sensational novelette's *TIVI* (DBP:1995). Shahnnon reveals the dark side of television and how it destroys social traditions and family institutes. In Shahnnon's novel, the Mat Isa's family whom previously lived a peaceful and harmonious life suddenly changed when the technology exists. When technology in a form of television was introduced into their family, it drastically took control over their lives and a mess. From a happy family, their life becomes miserable following the influx of modern technology, a television, into their home. In other words, technology has become the main cause of damage to family and social institutions. Although this novelette is only an illusion it is able to illustrate the reality of the society of this century and beyond.

Jerry Mander an expert in economy involved with the world marketing has written a very significant book titled *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (Quill, 1977 & 1978). This book stressed out on why television should be eliminated. *Firstly*, the television is a medium that puts the people in the wrong position. *Secondly*, the television is dominated by handfuls of human-interest that are responsible for using the television for the purpose of only fulfilling their interests. Television is the tool for them to create a new environment which leading the human to an unhealthy lifestyle. *Thirdly*, the television badly affects the audience psychologically. It causes the human being in confusion and troubles. *Fourthly*, some the programs on the television have been designed in such way that causes the human flock and break of the pros or cons. In the argument of Jerry Mander, it can be concluded that the television is an intermediate tool that confuses human in determining, which is right and wrong. Jerry Mander also believes that the television is a medium that misleads the human being. They feel they are more knowledgeable whereas, in fact, they are nothing.

While another one in this regard is a book entitled *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call To Action Against TV, Movie & Video Games* written by **Lt. Col. Dave Grossman** and **Gloria DeGaetano**. This book very clearly illustrates the cheap television program that does not help the minds of children to become more intelligent but puzzling their minds instead. Hence, the author of this book suggested stopping the program of the entertainment and changed them to an education program or a program that benefits more children's mental growth.

The trend of paying more attention to the entertainment program is unprofitable. According to **Datuk Dr. Ismail Ibrahim**, a Malaysian thinker and academician, television is the trend of paying more attention to the entertainment program is unprofitable. According to Datuk Dr. Ismail Ibrahim, a Malaysian thinker, and scholar, television is the cause of social illness. The proportion of entertainment and education programs is unbalanced. He concluded by saying "television does not give credit to the knowledge and academics, just as it was given to the artist." (*Mingguan Malaysia*, 16 May 2004). Such phenomena occur nearly the same in the world. This is because television dominated by investors whose their mind priority in financial gain. They do not care about the effects on society. Generally, investors see the audience as customers. Meanwhile, television acts are a source for them to make money.

A study conducted by *Chulalongkorn University* found that in Thai society, television stations encouraged audiences to buy and sell products rather than shaping them to become good citizens who take part in social development. They molded audiences to care only for their own personal interests (*The Bangkok Post*, April 10, 2007). As a result, a society called "*torotas-narom*" or "TV-based society" was born in the generation formed by television as a base. All their behaviors are based on what they enjoy on television. Television is everything. If Television says white we also say white and if television says black we also say black. Or in term of English idiom, it can be said as "Monkey see monkey do". If this kind of phenomenon occurs among us then it is a bad sign for the future of the nation. This is because the ideal personal formation must be based on knowledge, not on cheap entertainment culture and ineffective information that we see and get from the television screen. It would be harmful if the formation of our society is based on the actions seen in a television program that the investors had planned. What matters most to these investors is material gain and not the intellectual development.

Alan Bloom has been predicted the exact situation in his book *The Closing of American Mind*. In that book, he described the dangers of the American people if technology crazy culture persists, especially when this technology is

used only in terms of entertainment. As well as the concerns expressed by **John Naisbitt** in his *High Tech High Touch* book, which acknowledged that era technology is now dominated by entertainment elements only. In the simpler sense, the technology is now redoubled by the mere entertainment trick that has lost its pure functioning.

Indeed, we do not deny the goodness of modern technological tools that provide a lot of fun and convenience to humans. But bad consequences will happen if we abuse or become slaves to it. It is supposed to be our servant. Who was unlucky enough that most of us had become a slave to it. Such a situation is very worrying. We want to see the construction of a character formed by the knowledge and beauty of local culture. Not generated by external threads. We can take the external experience as enriching our thoughts and our own culture. But do not harm our culture. Do not get rid of the roots of our tradition. The word of the ancestor "*Bila sudah dapat gading bertuah maka tanduk pun tidak berguna lagi*" or in another proverb saying "just sound thunder in the sky do not bulk water in the jars". Not to happen like the fate of Mat Isa and his wife's children need to build strong fortifications based on knowledge.

So that we are not deceived and become fragile so that it can be easily tampered with. For that, we need to revive the reading culture. Just by reading alone we are able to build a superior and powerful personality. Reading is very useful for the construction of human character. Because reading is the gateway to all knowledge. The more we read the more we learn. When we know many things we will be smart and clever. This is a commonplace of nature. In this competitive world, only smart people will survive. As Charles Darwin said, "the survival is the fittest."

What I want to convey here is that we should intelligently balance the use of modern technology by enabling the reading culture. Reading is a bridge of knowledge. And thus we have implemented the concept of knowledge-based society. What we want is to be **knowledge-based society** and not **information-based society**.

Alfred North Whitehead, the English philosopher once said that the only person with information was a very boring man. We do not want to be the man who lost **T-Thought** instead of **T-Technology**. For the purpose in that direction is not impossible for us all. Our zone is also not much different from other worlds. We also have a rich culture of literature. The works of ancestral and contemporary work can be utilized in the context of building a knowledge-based society. It contains a lot of important intentions for the use of the children of the nation. Even the implied philosophy is more suited to local tastes. This is because it is created on the basis of local cultural traditions. I suggest that we all review and re-examine the nation's literary treasures. The literature I mean is not just a historical book but includes all the artworks. This certainly includes the work of high-culture novels. History books only record when and why events happen but never mentioned of people involved in the events. We are not capable of hearing the voice of the people's thought, but this is not the case in the field of literature. By reading a novel we are actually reading a detailed human experience. The detail is rich with the human experience as well as providing a precious corpus of knowledge in order to mobilize a person.

TOWARDS THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY

Every great civilization of the world has its own work which then becomes the pride of their nation. The Russian nation may be incomplete without mentioning the ranks of names of poets such as **Leo Tolstoy**, **Fyodor Dostoyevsky**, **Alexander Pushkin**. Of course, the Russians are proud of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *The Brothers of Karamazov*, *Dr. Zhivago*, *The Idiot*. England can be very proud of having **William Shakespeare** and **Charles Dickens**. The German people are not only remembered because of Hitlers or Mercedes Benz but also because the world admires **Hermann Hesse**, **Goethe**, and **Franz Kafka**. Being a great Japanese is not only about just of Toyota's giant company but because they have great writers like **Yasunari Kawabata**, **Kenzaburo Oe** and today's the best-selling writer like **Haruki Murakami**. The Indian subcontinent is big not because of Taj Mahal alone but because of the existence of their poets such as **Rabindranath Tagore** and **Muhammad Iqbal**. Likewise, American people are not perfect if they are to mention only about Abraham Lincoln or J. F. Kennedy without mentioning some of the great writers such as **Mark Twain**, **John Steinbeck**, **Ernest Hemingway**, **William Faulkner** and others. The Arab world is proud of having poets like **Taha Hussein**, **Naguib Mahfuz**, **Almanfaluti**. And the Latin world has big names like **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**, **Pablo Neruda**, **Jorge Enrique Adoum**, **Mario Vargas Llosa**, while the African continent has **Wole Soyinka**, **Chinua Achebe** and so on.

These special groups of people equip the civilization of each nation. In other words, if without the ranks of the poets, every civilization of the world will be lame or cranky. Through their works, the image and aspirations of the nation are well recorded, diverse and patterned. It does not only capture historical moments but also stores futuristic visions. Then those works are read and studied by later generations to be the basis of movement in the process of forming a world civilization. In a simpler sense, it would be incomplete if the people and leaders ignored the voices of native poets. Our region is also no less than having some great writers who eventually make us proud. Who does not know **Pramoedya Ananta Toer**, **Buya Hamka**, **Usman Awang**, **Keris Mas**, **Sunthon Phu**, **Sri Burapha**, **Luang Wijiwattakarn** and **Sheikh Muhammad Zain Alfaton** (just to mention a few)? Producing a work that is not from a vacuum but from the source of the knowledge of science, the wisdom and the high-mindedness of every nation's culture.

So, if we ignore the message of the nation's poet means we have ignored an important social function. But it is a little bit unfortunate as there is a tendency nowadays in this modern era dominated by modern technology where people are more concerned about a group of people so-called "politician". Because generally, they feel the voice of the politician is more valuable and powerful in determines the sustainability of their nation's lives. Hence the position of a politician is at the top level in the national hierarchy. In the meantime no place for the nationalist poet and writer. The most important question is where are we heading and how to cherish the power of the politician's eyes without being swayed by singing songs? What will happen if a nation only had the means of modern technology creation without any high-end cultural treasures? Can skyscraper and luxurious building be representative of the image of the nation's

civilization? Bear in mind that the formation of any great ancient civilization in the past and in the present day is based on two aspects, namely physical and mental aspect. What is meant by the mental aspect involves the intellectual and thought-making creation, either stored in the form of a book or blended in a living tradition that we called culture? Both are important to human civilization.

In order to shape the personality of the nation, we need to go back and practice the tradition of reading. Our civilization is no less than a masterpiece of great work that is able to generate the mind of the nation's children to grow into a dynamic and dominant human being. If the West has produced by *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, *Peter Pan*, *The Little Prince*, *Tin Tin*, *Hamlet*, *The Old Man and The Sea*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Animal Farm* which have been read and reproduced multiple times. What about our young people? Have they read *Bumi Manusia*, *Anak Semua Bangsa*, *Jejak Langkah*, *Rumah Kaca*, *Bukan Pasar Malam*, *Robohnya Surau Kami*, *Siti Nurbaya*, *Salah Asuhan*, *Tenggelamnya Kapal van der wick*, *Sulalat al-Salatin*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*? These classical masterpieces have a fairly high level of thought. It is unfortunate that we as the natives do not live up to the essence and takes lessons from it to complement our personality and character. The failures to endure means we have lost something valuable in life. How can we grow up perfectly if we get cut off our own roots? No matter how big the tree is but without the roots to support it will surely fall. Choose whether we want to be a strong tree or a stem tree without a root. Ask yourself! *Tepuk dada tanya selera*.

The last point that I want to say here, we should embrace ourselves to the national treasure by appreciating the traditional literature because it contains limitless knowledge as well as valuable lessons. Literature transcribes readers. Because literature is actually a branch of human knowledge and science. It is not even an exaggeration if I say that the literature is part of philosophy. The philosophy is full of wisdom and intellect. Philosophy is the culmination of the corpus of knowledge in human civilization. It also often associated with serious things. But through literary doors, we can enter the field of philosophy easily and relaxed. This is because philosophy in literature becomes softer and pure-faced. In that case, it is no exaggeration to say that people who read literature will quickly become more intelligent, open and wide-ranging. In other words, we can say that philosophy is a pillar of nation's mind.

Therefore, in order to gain a knowledge and wisdom and knowledge, in the way to build a knowledge society, we can re-examine the literary texts. A human who does not read and appreciate traditional literature is a human being who is still not perfect as a nation. Bear in mind that technology has two dimensions. A good one a bad one. If it is wrong to use it will disadvantages. I also hope that we will not always be trapped in the tricks behind the colorful TV program. But what we must do is read and read if we want to be a mature and perfect person. **Francis Bacon** once said, "Reading makes people." And also what **J.K.Rowling** said, "I do believe something very magical can happen when you read a good book."

All that mentioned statements are true when I examine **Karen Armstrong**'s argument in her autobiography *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness* (Anchor Books: 2004). Due to the widespread reading and diligence, she finally broke out of the darkness of life and finally found enlightenment. And led her to find the truth sought. This proves that how the reading and study can give a new dimension that is more refreshing and revealing the dark side that covers our minds.

CONCLUSION

What I want to emphasize here is that in our quest to build a great civilization it is not proper for us to marginal art and literature altogether. So, please read it! Do not just watch. I would like to conclude here by quoting what **Ali Shari'ati** once said; "Arts is not a plaything in his hands; it is not a means for gaining pleasure, for diversion, for stupefaction, for the expenditure of accumulated energy. It is not a servant to sexuality, politics or capital. Arts is the special trust given to man by God."

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