



# The Malaysian Culture Group



Like ducks in a row, Explorers members walk along a busy, narrow road to reach Orchid Life for our December excursion.

## ...And Another Interesting Year Begins.

January marks my one year anniversary in Malaysia. I am thankful to members Pam Currie and Randee Duncan for bringing me along at the last moment to an MCG meeting last March. MCG has been key in my settling in so quickly and so well into Kuala Lumpur. I have learned about this diverse and interesting country with its different ethnic and religious cultures, and I have made many friends from all over the world. I have read interesting books and discussed them with interesting women. I hate to be bored--and thanks to the MCG, I haven't been!

Helen Mastache, Newsletter Editor



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## Anyvite Advice

We have had many positive comments about the Anyvite system since we started using the program. *Please remember when you RSVP or change your RSVP, it is a two-step process.* Indicate "YES" or "NO", then be sure to click on the "Save RSVP" button.

## MCG Bookmark

Now available for purchase at your next MCG event for RM10.



# President's Message

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Dear MCG members,

Our Newsletter Editor surprises all of us by sending the January newsletter before Christmas! Your mind is probably more on Christmas and your family. Still, you will enjoy this newsletter and see that MCG has a lot of activities planned for 2015.

**Thaipusam at Batu Caves** and the **Chinese New Year tour in Melaka** are local festivities occurring early in 2015, and are highly recommended! The monthly lectures in the Meritz are lined up for the next few months. *Members' Corner* is coming back. This is an opportunity to enjoy cultural experiences of fellow MCG members in Malaysia and South East Asia. We plan to organize three *Members' Corner* lectures in 2015.

Looking ahead I also like to share the date of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) which will be held on 8<sup>th</sup> April. The AGM itself will be short. An interesting speaker and good lunch will make it a truly memorable event such as last year.

**On a more serious note:**

We need members to participate in the organization of MCG. As usual, a few committee members will step down. Who is interested to pick up the baton from the Secretary (recently departed) and the Treasurer? Other opportunities will arise as well. If you are curious to get a taste of how the Committee works, join one of our monthly Committee meetings on the third Thursday of the month. You may contact Amita Shah, [veep@mcgkl.org](mailto:veep@mcgkl.org) as I will be traveling in January and February.

In 2015 we will also see the launch of our **new website**. Stay tuned!

For those who still have paying **membership fee for 2015** on their to-do list, please do so as soon as possible. Then you can continue to receive our MCG newsletters!

Wishing you all Happy New Year in good health,  
Alexius

January Monthly Lecture

## Islam in Malaysia with Dina Zaman



**DATE:** Wednesday 14th January 2015  
**TIME:** 10:00 am for 10:30 am start  
**PLACE:** Meritz Condo, 19 Jalan Mayang 50450 Kuala Lumpur  
**COST:** RM15 members / RM25 guests  
**RSVP:** <http://anyvite.com/f0c58sp2z5>

MCG programming starts 2015 with a talk by Dina Zaman.

Dina Zaman has had media presence locally and abroad as a columnist since 1994, and as a commentator of current affairs since 2005. She has helmed a number of columns, including: *Off Our Backs* (The Sun, Malaysia in 1995), *Dina's Dalca* (New Straits Time, 1996 to 1998) and *I Am Muslim* ([www.malaysiakini.com](http://www.malaysiakini.com), 2005 to 2006). She writes on religion, society and lifestyle issues, and injects a sense of humour into her writing. She has been interviewed on Al Jazeera's *Everywoman* program.

Ms. Zaman is an award-winning writer of non-fiction, fiction and poetry. A collection of her writings from the *I Am Muslim* column became a best selling book of the same name. Her book of short stories, *King of the Sea*, was long listed for the Frank O'Connor Short Story Award. Ms. Zaman has also experienced expat life. Her childhood was spent in many countries. She studied at universities in the both the US and the UK. More recently she was a recipient of an API Senior Fellowship and was based in Jogjakarta, Indonesia and Thailand in 2013.

January Event

# Thaipusam Festival Tour

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**DATE:** Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015 (Please note this is a public holiday)

**TIME:** 8:45 for a 9:00 am start (Please note the earlier start time)

**PLACE:** Batu Caves

**COST:** Members only RM25, maximum of 15

**RSVP:** *Please register via your personal Anyvite invitation*

The annual festival of Thaipusam will take place from February 3<sup>rd</sup>—5<sup>th</sup>, 2015. This is one of the major Hindu celebrations of the year in Malaysia, during which homage is paid to Lord Murugan as fulfillment of spiritual vows. Thaipusam is known for its loud, all-night revelry, self-mutilation rites and decorative *kavadis*. Based on the success of previous years' MCG Thaipusam programs, Cheryl Hoffmann has once again offered to lead this event to introduce you to the sensory overload that characterizes this festival.

Cheryl will lead us on a walk around the grounds of the festival at Batu Caves. We will also go up into the cave. This is a good day to visit the site, as the festival officially begins the next day and many people will be undertaking their pilgrimage from the riverside, up the stairs to deliver their kavadi to the altar of Lord Murugan. There will be activity but it will be quiet enough that day for us to explore and learn.

Note that February 2<sup>st</sup> is Federal Territory Day. It is a KL city holiday but not a Selangor holiday. This may make it possible to include some members who aren't often able to join weekday events.

Cameras, comfortable shoes and appropriate precautions for the sun are encouraged. We are going to start early to avoid the heat and we will be walking the stairs at the end of the tour for those who wish to learn about what happens in the caves during the festival.

A sample of Cheryl's photos of Thaipusam can be found by browsing around her website at <http://portfolio.cheryljhoffmann.com/>

This tour is usually very popular. If you sign up and then have to cancel, *please inform us so that someone on the waiting list may take your place*. You will receive the meeting place details closer to the event.

# A Look Ahead--Dates to Save

February 27, 2015

## MCG Event for Chinese New Year in Melaka

The MCG events team is planning a wonderful day out in Melaka to coincide with the CNY celebrations as the special guests of Mr. Cedric Tan.

Cedric has generously agreed to open his home to MCG members during the festive period, giving MCG members a unique opportunity to tour his home and view the set-up for the Jade Emperor prayer (a significant event in the CNY celebration). This will be followed by a presentation of the CNY activities of the Peranakans, as well as a guided tour of Cheng Hoon Teng Temple and Chinatown in Melaka.



We will also be hosted to a traditional Peranakan lunch tok panjang style (long table) to complete what is sure to be a wonderful day out!

This event will require an early start from Kuala Lumpur and the cost at present is estimated to be approximately 150/- MYR, including transport both ways and lunch. Times and actual costs will be confirmed closer to the dates.

Space is limited to 25 members for this unique, not to be missed event, so please watch for your personal Anyvite that will be emailed to you soon.

February 11, 2015	Artist's Lecture
March 4, 2015	Lecture on Jewelry by Lily Yew
March 18, 2015	Member's Corner: Papua New Guinea's Goroka Festival with Suparna Kundu
April 8, 2015	Annual General Meeting

Report: November Monthly Lecture

# Natural Dyes and Pua Kumba Weaving

by the weavers of Rumah Garie Longhouse, Sarawak

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The distinctive design that is characteristic of Sarawakian textiles is easily recognisable to many Malaysians and expatriates settled in Malaysia, but few among us are aware of the high level of skill and arduous work involved in producing such exquisite cloth. We were therefore privileged to be joined by Welyne Jehom, senior lecturer at University Malaya: Gender Studies; Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Welyne, who is currently undertaking post doctorate research on the Pua Kumbu weavers of the Rumah Garie Longhouse, Nanga Kain, Sarawak, was eager to share her passion not only for the traditional art of weaving, but also for preserving the heritage of the Iban tribe—an indigenous people of Sarawak.

Welyne started her talk with a colourful slide-show depicting the traditional lifestyle of the Iban tribe: a tight-knit community in which large families live together in a longhouse with only the most basic amenities and certainly no luxuries—a simple life, yet endearing. She then went on to explain that weaving has been pivotal in Iban heritage for generations, and a woman's worth was once determined by her ability to weave; the greater her skill, the higher her position in the hierarchy, with a master-weaver gaining the utmost respect within the community.

The weaving process is known as Ikat—a dye resistant technique: Traditionally, natural dye that has been manually extracted from plants is used to colour brushed cotton or bamboo yarn. Unlike synthetic dye, the colours cannot be exactly reproduced; the result is a subtle variation in hue—adding to its unique quality. Prior to weaving, warp (lengthwise yarn) is tied in knots to resist dye absorption. Once the lengthy dyeing stage is completed, the resist ties are opened and the patterned yarn is painstakingly woven on a back-strap loom. Typically, an average piece of cloth takes around six months to complete.

It was fascinating to learn about the significance of Pua Kumbu in Iban culture: this

sacred cloth, once indicative of tribal head-hunting, continues to be routinely used at festivals of the spirits and at all tribal ceremonies: farming, healing, births, funerals, weddings and home-comings. However, it is the inspiration behind the individual designs that was most intriguing.

The designs often symbolise mythical figures, spirits and legends. The Iban women believe that they receive messages in their dreams, which they then interpret and intricately weave into the cloth. The women take tremendous pride in their creations, the designs of which are closely guarded and passed on only to their family members. Occasionally the 'copyright' is traded with an 'outsider' in the tribe; but only if the design can be replicated to perfection, for anything less would be considered most shameful!

It is perhaps of no surprise that the production of traditional Iban Pau Kumbu is slowly declining. The reason is twofold: deforestation is threatening the homeland of the Iban tribe, and the younger generation's interest in weaving is gradually dwindling. It is hoped that by preserving our beautiful rainforest and supporting the Iban tribe through education and the practice of fair trade, that their heritage will not only be sustained, but flourish.

After the talk, we were invited to take a look at a selection Pua Kumbu. We didn't hesitate in admiring the magnificent skill and artistry, with some members purchasing their favourite piece: the inherent beauty of the cloth and mystical story behind the design will, I'm certain, be cherished for years to come.

We thank Welyne for an informative and enjoyable presentation, and wish her every success in her plight to safeguard the Iban's heritage—a treasured facet of Malaysian culture.

Christine Kemp

## Report: December Explorers

# Orchid Life Sdn Bhd

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Tucked away in an unmarked lot in Kampung Melayu, Sungai Buloh, is an orchid treasure house. The owner of this nursery, Abdul Razak Mohd Isa, was our host, and made orchid growing sound so simple and logical—quite an art.

We had the rare opportunity to learn from an expert. Many areas were demystified—watering, feeding, potting, the root system, propagation and some tips about different varieties.

Razak is founder and chief executive of Orchid Life Sdn Bhd a company that grows orchids on an industrial scale through tissue culturing.

*Stop reading here if you are not interested in some of the finer details of orchid cultivation. This is not an Orchid IOI class, but a record of our EXPLORERS trip. Every effort has been made to be accurate. Please advise of any errors.*

There are two main growth habits of tropical orchids, monopodial and sympodial. Monopodial orchids are sturdier than sympodial orchids, which have more sensitive roots. Knowing which category your orchid fits into is the beginning of understanding how to care for it.

Monopodial orchids have a single main stem. Roots and flower stems emerge at the nodes above each leaf. The aerial roots produced between the leaves are one of the plant's main sources of moisture, taking in moisture and food through their brown tips. The most common type of orchid with this habit is Phalaenopsis and Vanda.

Monopodial orchids can be exposed to direct sunlight, best in the morning between 8:00 am and 11:00 am, when the UV is lower. They should be watered daily in the morning to avoid evening humidity. Feed twice a week at three-day intervals, once with food to encourage flowers (high in phosphates) and once with food to encourage growth (high in nitrogen).

Sympodial orchid varieties are Dendrobium, Oncidium, Cattleya and Cymbidium. Dendrobium orchids require 50% diffused sunlight.

## Report: December Explorers Orchid Life Sdn Bhd (con't)

As amateurs we usually acquire orchids when they are in flower, which is the resting stage in their growth cycle. A common variety is Phalaenopsis.

Perhaps the reason why they are so popular in our (cold) home countries is because they need low temperatures when they are flowering (18 degrees centigrade). Once flowering has finished, the stalk should be cut close to the base.

In the wild most orchids are epiphytic, growing on tree trunks with their aerial roots taking in all the food and moisture. Therefore when they are being cultivated domestically, its best to use a non-soil potting medium, such as carbon. The Phalaenopsis variety generally needs more

moisture and is best grown in sphagnum moss.

The skill is what you do with your orchids once they have flowered. The treatment will vary for different varieties and climates. And if all else fails..."talk to them." Razak was adamant about the benefits of having a dialogue with your plants!

Clutching our new "friends" bought at the nursery, we made our way up the road to a Thai restaurant where we had an excellent lunch.

By Margo Rosenberg

Photos by Suparna Kundu,  
Jeanie Kennedy, Michelle Pease and Alejandra Barbosa



TENDING TO PLANTS



TIPS OF AERIAL ROOT SYSTEM



MONOPODIAL ORCHID



ONCIDIUM ORCHID



## Report: December Event

# A Morning at the US Embassy Residence with Dato' Bertie Talalla

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On the morning of December 3, 2014, I and 65 members and guests of The Malaysian Culture Group (MCG) were donning respectable attire for a notable event at the US Embassy Residence. As an expatriate in Malaysia for a mere three months, I couldn't help but feel both excitement and trepidation. An invitation to join the presence of Dato' Bertie and have a glimpse of an Embassy residence that many noble and famous have entered was truly an honour and privilege.

Once clearing gate security, the scenery unraveled into an oasis of perfectly manicured flowering hedges, greenery and towering trees. As we walked along the circular drive toward the residence entrance, it was hard not to ponder bygone days and history of such. I thought, if only this house and these trees could talk. Upon entering, we were exposed to a wide foyer with a selection of American art adorning the walls as part of the *Art in Embassies* exhibition. Graciously greeted by Dr. Melanie Billings-Yun, we were led to the dining room to enjoy delicious baked sweets and hot beverages prior to the main event. The Embassy residence staff was quick to offer pleasant assistance.

Promptly, we were seated on satin covered chairs on a marble-floored, enclosed terrace in full view of the beautifully landscaped rear grounds and exterior patio. Salutations by Joseph Yun, US Ambassador to Malaysia, provided a warm, welcoming feeling that we genuinely belonged in his home among his wife, Dr. Melanie Billings-Yun, Dato' Bertie Tallala and Tun Jeanne Abdullah (wife of

Malaysia's former Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi).

A noticeably well-spoken, gentle man who was able to woo and cajole his listeners, Dato' Bertie began with incredible grace to speak fondly of his parents. Believing that he benefited tremendously from his parents' hard work, he recalled specific moments and events contributing to the person he is today.

With intriguing flare, Bertie reminisced of the grand, Great Gatsby style parties his parents hosted when they were the owners of the residence, with only the "cream of the crop" in attendance. With both ears attentive to Bertie, one couldn't help but to gander around the space where we were seated and daydream of the music, frolicking and dancing that must have occurred on the same marble floor right under our chairs. A quick glance to the adjacent exterior provided a beautiful view of the grandeur of the trees, still standing, albeit larger since Bertie's childhood.

Not only did Bertie share the joyful history of the Tallalas, but also recounted some of the unfortunate times. In early 1929, tragedy occurred among the Tallala family when they lost their only daughter to a failed routine surgical procedure. Later in 1929, economic hardship fell upon the family as it had with so many during the Great Depression. Then again, during WWII, when Bertie's two brothers were RAF pilots, one perished during the war.

Somberly, Bertie spoke of the Japanese invasion when his parents and cousins were held in solitary confinement for

## Report: December Event

### A Morning at the US Embassy Residence with Dato' Bertie Talalla (con't)

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16 months. Gasps were heard from the listeners as the room became very quiet. (Bertie's appetizer of Malaysian history during WWII encouraged me to delve further. For those unfamiliar or new to KL, *Kuala Lumpur at War 1939-1945*, by Andrew Barber, is an interesting read.)

Particularly grateful to his mother for the relinquishment of her retirement savings to ensure that Bertie and his younger brother received a proper education, Bertie was fortunate to attend post-secondary school abroad at Trinity College in Dublin. Well-liked and already honing his negotiating skills, he quickly aspired to the presidency of the Malaya Association at Trinity College and the membership ballooned to over 100 students. In 1957, during his tenure as president, he shared his pure excitement and gratitude that Malaya became an independent country. One could only imagine the 1957 celebrations that occurred among Malays at Trinity College.

A year later he arrived home to Malaya with a deep sense of national pride. He went on to share with us the challenges of his many jobs in diplomatic positions. In one of his first jobs upon returning to Malaya, he was appointed to a rather high official position. With a melancholy facial expression, Bertie described an example of receiving an urgent memo from one of his superiors requiring immediate 'action'. Fresh in this new role and unsure of how to respond, he obliged and forwarded the memo to a coworker. Subsequently, when Bertie's superior asked what course of 'action' he had followed, Bertie confirmed that he had, indeed, acted immediately. His

'action' was to pass it on to a colleague. And, he certainly did. Laughter ensued.

Bertie continued to share tidbits of his professional life. Antics while in respected multi-government positions and travel abroad combined with discussion of political achievements enlightened us. Bertie, using his charming negotiating skills, recalled bringing a few government leaders together through the simple availability of a roofless automobile. He also spoke of his fond memories of Canada's Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, whom he recalls believed in equitable treatment of the Inuit and the French-speaking peoples of Canada. Although disappointed with certain foreign policies regarding the palm industry, he quoted and read aloud a message that referred to a variety of global edible and medicinal oils as satisfactory and useful, but none so very fine as that of the red berry palm oil. Then, Bertie smiled.

For those in attendance that were unfamiliar with Malaysia's history, Bertie provided us with a mini course in Malaysian independence from Britain in 1957 and the subsequent formation in 1963 of what we now call Malaysia.

Overall, it was evident that Bertie's sophistication in matters of diplomacy, his personal recollections of Malaysian history and his natural congeniality has resulted in a potent mix that few can resist. Not only was I left with a new understanding of Malaysia's past and the life Bertie had within it, but also of an individual who gently influenced Malaysian history.

Soon, our enjoyable time, with a man who once lived in this residence, came to an

## Report: December Event

### A Morning at the US Embassy Residence with Dato' Bertie Talalla (con't)

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end. Bertie passed the microphone, but not before sharing information about Carl's Kitchen, the charity of choice that MCG has donated on his behalf (See more information about Carl's Kitchen in this newsletter).

As Bertie sat down, another speaker, also familiar to those who know Malaysian history, took the microphone. Tun Jeanne Abdullah shared her passion for trees and spoke of the many "shades of green" that she often takes note of in our surrounding landscape. She is a strong advocate for maintenance and restoration of Malaysia's fragile and endangered forests through a national organization called Landskap.org.

Although it was sad to say goodbye to new acquaintances and a unique

residence, the walk back along the circular drive among the wise old trees and perfectly manicured yard was fragrant and delicious. And, more interestingly, the drive home to Bukit Jalil provided time to take note of the various "shades of green" that surrounded us everywhere among the Malaysian landscape.

A gracious thank you to Dato' Bertie, US Ambassador Joseph Yun and his wife, Dr. Melanie Billings-Yun, Tun Jeanne Abdullah, and the US Embassy residence staff for taking the time to share a piece of your world with MCG. Kudos to the MCG for making this event a reality! Truly memorable!

By Carole Crowther

# CARL'S KITCHEN



Photo by [www.themalaysianinsider.com](http://www.themalaysianinsider.com)

If you are interested in serving food at Carl's Kitchen, you are most welcome! Please contact Alvin at the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development, Jalan Bukit Nanas, 03-20780239.

On occasion MCG will donate to a charitable organization as a token of thanks to a speaker. In appreciation for Dato Albert "Berie" Talalla's recent talk, MCG has donated RM800 to Carl's Kitchen. This amount of money covers the cost of serving lunch for two days. Carl's Kitchen is a "soup kitchen" located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur that serves hearty lunches to those in need, Monday-Friday. It is run by St. John's Cathedral. Bertie is an alumni of St. John's Institution.

This kitchen was started in 1999 by a small group of friends. One of these friends, Carl D'Cunha, passed away earlier this year, so now the kitchen is officially called Carl's Kitchen. Visitors are called "clients"—no one is turned away and no judgments are passed. Clients from any faith, ethnic background or societal status are treated equally. In addition to lunch, clients have a place to wash up, read newspapers, seek medical help for minor problems and, in some cases, get counseling for various problems they may be facing.

Earlier this year, soup kitchens in the city faced a scare. In July, according to The Star On-line:

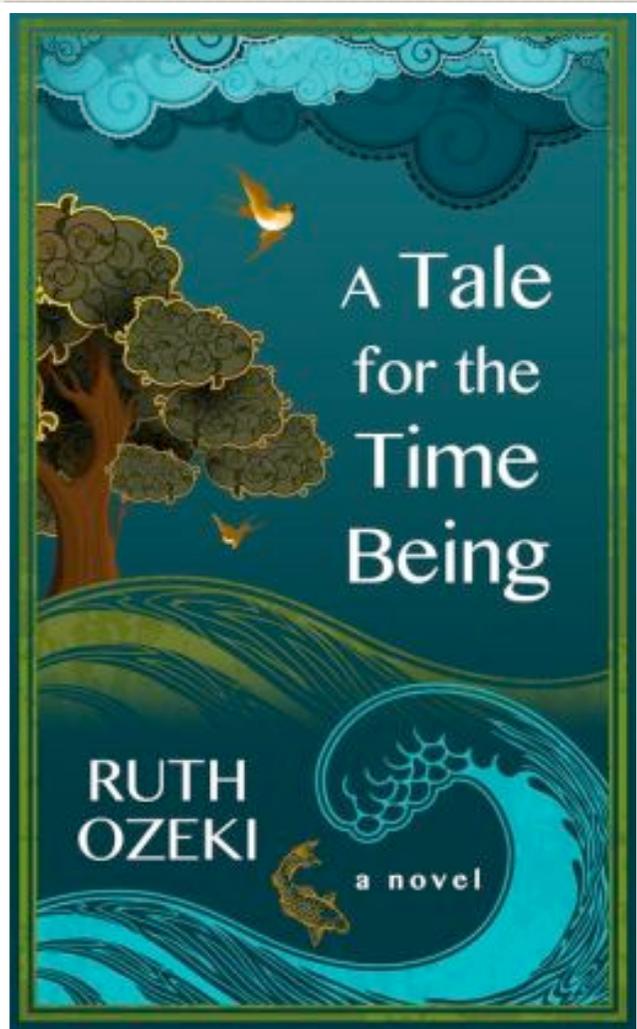
*Federal Territories Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Mansor, announced that soup kitchens in Kuala Lumpur had to move out of the city center. Tengku Adnan said the move was an effort by the Government to rid the city of beggars and homeless people, saying the presence of soup kitchens feeding them tarnished the city's image. Many NGOs slammed the move as "cruel and insensitive".*

This decision was eventually reversed in August.

For a related photo essay, please go to <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/gallery/view/homeless-food-for-thought>

## Review: Book Group 1

# *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki



The discussion of Book Group 1 in July was based on Ruth Ozeki's fascinating novel *A Tale For The Time Being*, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013.

Ruth, a novelist living in a remote island off the coast of British Columbia comes across a Hello Kitty lunchbox washed up on the beach. Inside, within a carved out book of Proust, is the diary of Nao, a Japanese teenager who is about to commit suicide. Nao, is desperate to escape from an unhappy life which includes horrific bullying and a suicidal father. However, she wishes to document the life of her great grandmother, the 104-year-old Buddhist nun Jiko, before she ends her life.

Ruth is hooked by the strangely evocative tale of teenage Nao grappling with her sense of isolation and deep unhappiness. In spite of her circumstances Nao is trying to find a friend, "a reader" who will understand her and the significance of her great grandmother Jiko's life. Caught up with Nao's story, Ruth becomes obsessed to find out how the story ends.

Moving deftly between different "times" for each character. the author explores time, reality and perceptions while dealing with many difficult issues, not least bullying and suicide. Interestingly, the author Ruth Ozeki and character Ruth in the book appear very similar, with the reader left wondering if the novel is autobiographical.

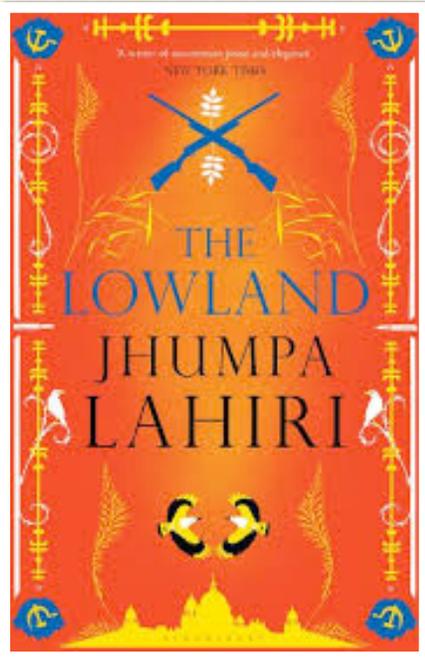
It could have been a difficult read, but written with lightness it is a book that in spite of its weighty topics and lectures on Zen Buddhism manages to command attention. The voice of teenage Nao is crafted with precision, as is the evocation of Japan and its subcultures.

The opinion of the group was that this book is one to read, and to reread.

By Harinie Wijeweera

## Review: Book Group 1

# *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri



For the last meeting of 2014 Book Group 1 read *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri. The book was shortlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction and the Man Booker prize 2013.

The story begins in Calcutta where Udayan and Subhash live with their parents. The brothers are very close, and although they do almost everything together, they are very different. Subhash, older by 15 months, is very cautious and tries to avoid trouble. Udayan on the other hand is reckless. Both are good students, but in college Udayan gets involved with the Naxalite movement, while Subhash decides to go to university in America and to pursue a life of scientific research.

Udayan eventually gets killed by the police because of his involvement with the Naxalite rebellion. Subhash briefly returns to Calcutta and subsequently marries his brother's pregnant widow before taking her to live in America with him. The marriage is not a happy one, as the unspoken truth about

Udayan's death slowly destroys the family. The marriage eventually breaks up and the truth is revealed to the daughter. As a result of the break up all the characters continue to live strange and lonely lives.

The book received mixed reviews from the members of the book group. The general mood of the book was found to be melancholy, often dull, and the story and characters weak. One strong point of this book is the description of the political background during the Naxalite rebellion. It was felt, however, that this theme was not sufficiently carried through. Something all the members agreed upon was Lahiri's often quite beautiful style of writing, which also gave a very good sense of the place. One of our members had actually visited some of the places in Calcutta that were mentioned in the book, and found them very well described. Some of the chapters were written from the characters' own points of view. This contributed to a much better understanding of the person's true feelings and inner struggles. While the book's main characters lived through much anguish and inner conflict, most readers commented on the absence of proper development of these characters throughout the story, giving the book a rather flat taste without surprise or even resolve. At the end of the book the reader is almost left with a sense of hopelessness.

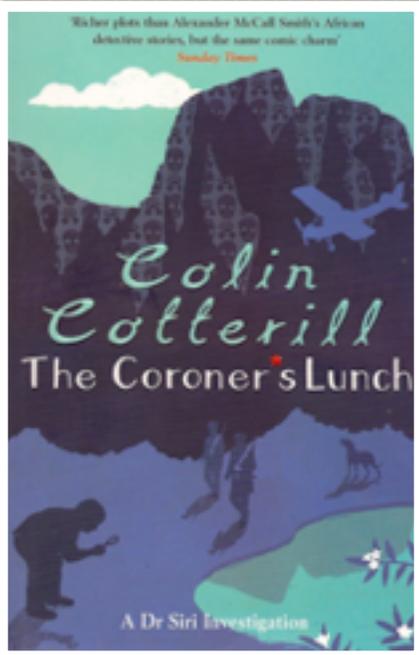
Some of the book group's members had read Lahiri's earlier books and found this novel disappointing in comparison.

Did we like the book? The majority of the group did not. Would we recommend the book? - It is definitely not a 'must read' book, but I could imagine that it would appeal to many readers as it does pose some interesting questions and contains some good writing.

By Marianne Khor

## Review: Book Group 2

# The Coroner's Lunch by Colin Cotterill



In November, Book Group 2 enjoyed *The Coroner's Lunch*. It is the first book in a series based in Laos just after the People's Revolution. Its main character, Dr. Siri, is described as "there (being) nothing fake or added or subtracted about him. He was all himself." We agreed that his age and experience allowed him to push a few standard Communist boundaries, but he was overall a kind and witty fellow.

This series could be compared to the Inspector Singh series by Shamini Flint or Alexander McCall Smith's *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* books. The French Inspector Maigret is even alluded to as a detective whom the doctor enjoyed. Dr. Siri is similarly persistent and determined but also aided by his paranormal visits which the before-mentioned detectives don't tap into.

The book could be appreciated more fully with a bit of review of Laos' history, culture and geography and may encourage some readers to seek out a more information to fully appreciate some of the references.

We did agree that it is a lighthearted mystery novel that would be a welcome read on a beach or on a holiday. To be truthful, I'm off to start Dr. Siri's second adventure, *Thirty Three Teeth*, with a cup of tea and some ginger snaps now!

by Barb Angell

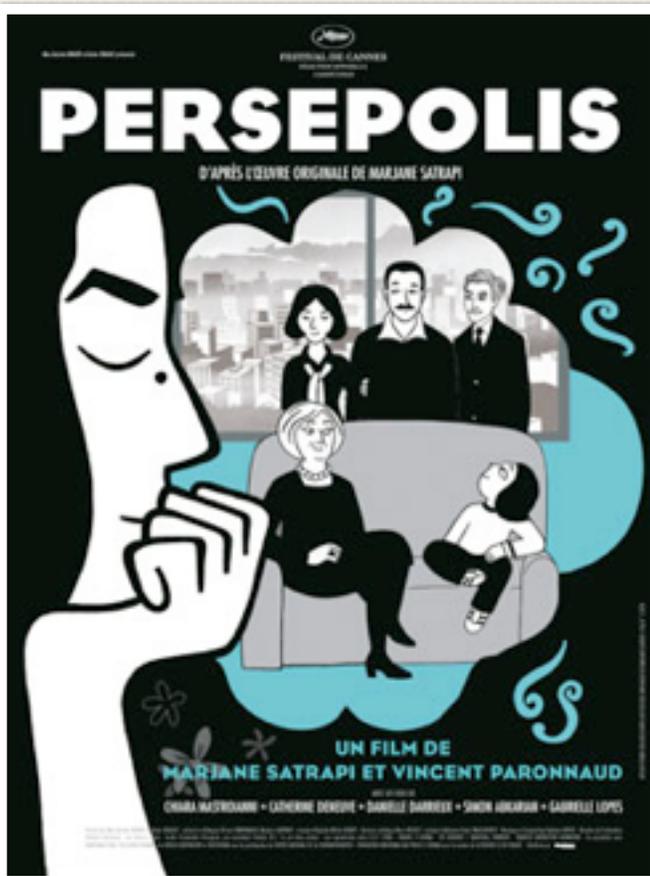


Members of Book Group 2

## Review: Book Group 2

# Persepolis Part 1:

## *The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi



*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* is the first of two autobiographical graphic novels written by Marjane Satrapi. Marji's story of her childhood in Iran under the Islamic revolution is told in graphic black and white comic strip format.

This book generated considerable discussion and debate from our book group covering a wide range of topics such as genre, history, cultural context, gender, target audience, religion and state.

*Persepolis* has been described, by the New York Times as 'the latest and one of the most delectable examples of a booming postmodern genre: autobiography by comic book.' For the majority of our book group members this was their first introduction to the medium. Although most agreed that the format was perhaps not first choice preference in reading an autobiography. It was unanimous that the way that Satrapi was able to convey so simply and eloquently her life story in such bold, stark, black and white

drawings using a minimum of words was an incredible achievement. Comparison was made by those in the group, who had read *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, another graphic memoir.

*Persepolis* is told through the eyes of a child. We follow nine-year old Marji through her day-to-day life in Iran from the start of the Islamic revolution in 1979 until her parents sent her away to safety at the age of 14. As she grows up, Marji learns about her family history and watches first hand how her liberal parents and family cope with a regime that, although initially welcomed when it ousted the Shah, then becomes an increasingly oppressive and fundamentalist regime.

It is Satrapi's ability to personalize Marji's story that makes *Persepolis* such a powerful memoir. In simple graphic format she uses humour and recounts her day-to-day typical teenage experiences at home and at school. Satrapi humanizes our understanding of the Iranian conflict and its totalitarian regime. Although terrorism and war form the basis of Marji's childhood experience, we learn through her story that the actions of a few extremists do not reflect the attitude of an entire nation.

by Susan Millar

Report: Enak!

# Selangor Sikh Union Kelab Aman



**ENAK! Thursday, December 9, 2014**  
Selangor Sikh Union Kelab Aman Restaurant  
No. 4 Lorong Damai 5 (off Jalan Damai)  
55100 Kuala Lumpur

With the holidays rapidly approaching, the ENAKERS had quite a successful showing for the December 9th lunch. There were 16 members and four guests at the Selangor Sikh Union Kelab Aman Restaurant, the country's oldest Sikh sports club with a clubhouse serving typical and tasty Punjabi food. We heard a short talk on the history of the cricket club as we toured of the facilities. We learned that the cricket club was built on the site of a former tin mine. The club restaurant is open to all to eat and watch a cricket game, as long as you arrive between 11am and 3pm. Every other Saturday they have scheduled cricket matches as well as the occasional football game.

The food is predominantly Punjabi food and was quite tasty. We sampled dishes such as butter chicken, tandoori chicken, methi fish and vegetarian dishes such as palak paneer, dum aloo, tadka dal with egg and raita. We accompanied the dishes with some very delicious garlic and butter naan and jeera rice. All present enjoyed the food and conversation.

If you didn't get a chance to join us for this lunch, I would highly recommend checking out this club where you can have a fantastic meal and have the bonus of watching a traditional game of cricket.

By Sally Nelson

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VACANCY!  
VOLUNTEER NEEDED  
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