

INTERACTIVE: The Irreplaceable P. Ramlee - A Tribute

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According to the founder of Sembang P. Ramlee blog, Raihani Mohd Saaid, the artiste is so iconic and significant that many of the films produced before the 1970s are referred to those in the "P. Ramlee film era".

"This is despite the fact that P. Ramlee may not necessarily have been involved in those films. P. Ramlee occupies an important place, not only in the history of the development of Malay films and music but also in the construct of the cultural identity of Malaysia and Singapore," she said.

In terms of technical aspects, budget and marketing, P. Ramlee's films certainly could not compete with those from Hollywood, added Raihani.

"But his films are considered to be of high quality because he created works that were suitable for his audience. P. Ramlee's works successfully highlighted the socio-cultural issues in the post-war recovery period," she said.

Rahaini said that in the early 1950s, the world of Malay literature and journalism, which was based in Singapore, had begun to pressure MFP studios to produce films with local identity.

"When P. Ramlee was given the chance to direct his own films, he was asked to choose between a Hindi or Chinese film script to copy and re-enact.

"However, he and his friends insisted on filming an original story based on local culture.

P. Ramlee used a film script or language that was easily understood by the audience - the common man.

"Many were illiterate or had a low level of education at that time," she said.

Raihani added that P. Ramlee had such a big impact because his movies created sentimentality among the community.

There was a sense of familiarity in the iconic songs, dialogue and the characters in his movies.

And that P. Ramlee factor is seen in today's new media too.

"New media practitioners often leverage this sentiment for two purposes - to produce social critiques on current issues and secondly, for commercial purposes.

"This sentiment is also being displayed again in several new media art forms, such as pop songs, advertisements, YouTube content, posters, and animations.

"If there are trending issues in society, especially those related to politics, then elements from P. Ramlee films are still being used as parody in the form of sketches, memes, gifs, and so on," she commented.

"For example, every action or statement by politicians that rankle the people will be accompanied with scenes or dialogues from P. Ramlee films, such as *Musang Berjanggut*, *Ali Baba*, *Bujang Lapok*, *Tiga Abdul* or *Madu Tiga*.

"The criticism or parody that we want to convey is accepted and understood much faster because of our rich collective memory of P. Ramlee," she said.

Raihani, who is completing her PhD with a thesis on P. Ramlee at Universiti Malaya, said although there are other filmmakers with great bodies of work, they do not have the popularity and familiarity factor that P. Ramlee has.

Her interest in P. Ramlee's films began in her childhood while watching films aired every week in the Teater Lagenda slot and then recording these on VHS.

Raihani, who has also pursued diploma-level film studies at the National Arts Academy, did her study of P. Ramlee films for her Bachelor's, Master's, and now PhD degrees.

"For me, P. Ramlee has become institutionalised in the thinking of local society," she said.

One of P. Ramlee's grandchildren, Najua Nasir - better known as Najua P. Ramlee - has never met or known the legend but still admires her grandfather's works.

Najua is the offspring of the only biological child of P. Ramlee, Nasir P. Ramlee.

Through the films and songs produced by her late grandfather, Najua, 37, said she could get to know him more closely.

One of his works that has had a great impact on her life was the film *Ibu Mertuaku* which was produced in 1962.

Najua revealed that the film was actually based on the experience of the artiste himself because when he wanted to move from Penang to Singapore, P. Ramlee's mother seemingly did not approve and cried almost every day.

P. Ramlee's journey also has similarities to that of Najua when she herself was prevented from becoming an artiste by her own father, Nasir P. Ramlee.

"My late father used to say: no need to enter the industry because he saw how difficult P. Ramlee's life was - always working and having no time for family.

"Actually, what my father said was true because that was the experience I had since I was a child. I acted and sacrificed my childhood. But that was my passion," she told *mStar*.

The granddaughter of P. Ramlee - Najua P. Ramlee - posing with some artefacts from her grandfather's collection.

However, Najua said after seeing her perform in the 2008 Tribute Concert for P. Ramlee, her father finally gave her his blessings to pursue her passion as an actress and singer.

In fact, according to Najua, it was actually Nasir who had asked her to use the commercial name of Najua P. Ramlee as a tribute to his father.

"Before this, I would use my real name. But my father said, rather than have others use it, it would better for Allahyarham's real heir to use the name instead," she said.