

Power of boarding schools

FEW would disagree that education will always be a potent force to escape the scourge of poverty. This has been proven time and again.

I have personally experienced it myself. I am sure many others have, too. I still remember the days when my family had to struggle to put decent food on the table. Neither of my parents were fully educated, neither went to school. My father eked out a very uncertain income as a barber in a small village in Kelantan.

He was not only the only barber in the village. There was competition. Decent earnings only came closer to Hari Raya and before the start of the school term. Otherwise, the daily takings were just enough to take care of our daily food needs. My mother was a full time housewife and did not earn an income.

We were not alone. There were many other families in similar situations. In the 1950s and 1960s, poverty was endemic in the country. Fortunately, the government then had the good sense to introduce sound policies. Education for the poor was one which made a difference.

I still remember the politicians then were more committed to helping people. In my small village, everyone looked up to the good work that political leaders then were doing. Education was given a lot of emphasis. Of course, in the rural schools like mine, the facilities were nothing much to speak of, but we managed.

Back then, we were told a good education could improve our



Beacon of education: The Malay College Kuala Kangsar building when it first opened. — MCOBA

chances of helping our families escape the clutches of poverty. I was determined to make full use of the opportunity presented to me. So were many of my friends from a similar background.

I benefited a lot from the support given by the government. I would not have made it otherwise. In Primary Two, I was lucky to receive a state scholarship. It was only RM10 a month, but back then breakfast could be bought with 20 sen so RM10 was a big help. In Primary Three, the scholarship was increased to RM40 a month. This was the Federal Minor Scholarship. I had this for the remainder of my schooling days till Form Five.

The biggest break I had, though, was when I was among the lucky 10 from Kelantan to be accepted into the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK), Perak. When told the news, I did not have the slightest clue what MCKK was all about.

However, after spending seven years there, it dawned upon me

how lucky I was to be given the opportunity to study at the MCKK. There I met many schoolmates from different states. Some came from well-to-do families. Quite a number, including myself, were not so well endowed. We very much depended on the RM40 a month Federal Scholarship to scrape through the schooling there.

We were lucky because in my group, the more well-to-do among us were willing to help out when we were in dire straits. That also explains why even to this day we remain bonded in brotherhood after leaving the college more than 50 years ago. Most among us now live comparatively well, may be among the M40 (middle income) bracket. A few have become very rich. But everyone still comes to our frequent gatherings.

For students from the rural areas where proper facilities are hard to come by, a boarding school like the MCKK is definitely a blessing. Our days there were not just rewarding

academically but also helpful in sharpening relevant living skills needed to face the challenges of the real world. That explains why the government decided years ago to build more such boarding schools.

Unfortunately, all these years, very few places were accorded to students from the B40 (lower income) group, whereas the people in this group are the ones who would benefit the most through placement in such boarding schools. They certainly cannot afford to attend the more expensive private schools that have mushroomed in the country.

It is therefore heartening to note that the Education Ministry has decided to increase B40 placings in full board schools to 60%. Kudos to the government.

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