

Interracial Romance:
Character Development of Deddy Haikel and Ling Ko
Mui in the Sociocultural Context of the Multiethnic
Singapore



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SINGAPORE



- a post-colonial country with distressed history.
- a history of communist, followed by the creation of a **fragile and unstable multiracial society**.
- On 9 July 1963, PM Lee Kuan Yew signed the Malaysia Agreement, setting out the terms for establishment of the **Federal of Malaysia**, comprising Singapore, Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah on **31 August 1963**.

The Singapore-Malaysia Union

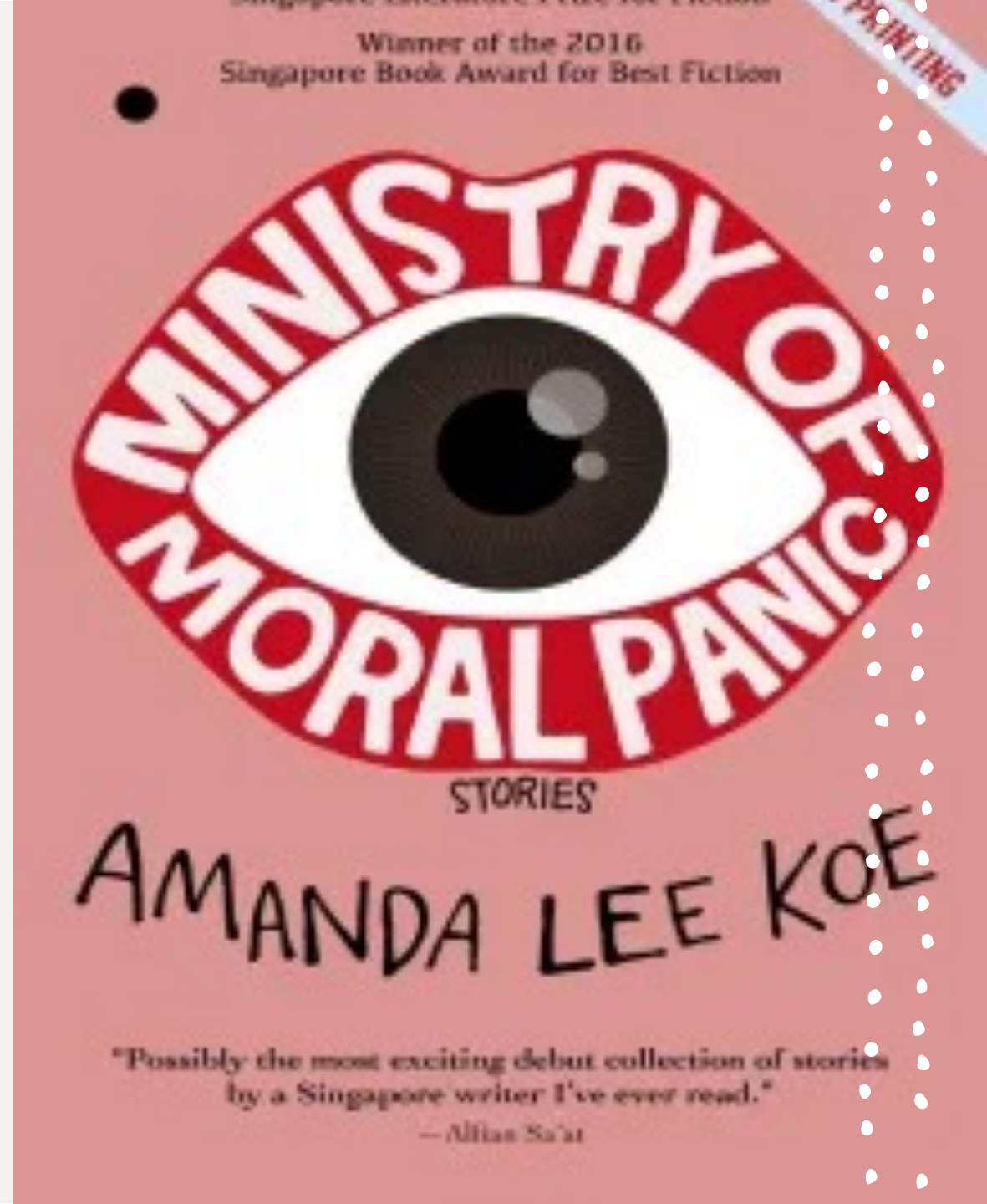


- a difficult union due to the **difference in political approach and economic conditions**.
- severely **imbalanced Malay-Chinese populations** - vulnerable to communal prejudice.
- Political tensions between **PAP** and **UMNO**.
- **The communal riots of 1964** on 21 July and 2 September
- Separation of Singapore from Malaysia on **9 August 1965**.

The stage of
Amanda Lee Koe's
Flamingo Valley

The turbulent Singapore in 1960s

The Development of two main characters – Deddy Haikel (a male Malay Singaporean) and Ling Ko Mui (a female Chinese Singaporean) over the course of the story will be examined and discussed in 5 major phases.



LING KO MUI

① Young & innocent

- Deddy described her as “a young Chinese girl in full white skirt, prim on a bar stool” (38)
- “full white skirt” symbolizes purity and innocence.
- “prim on a bar stool” suggests that she is not relaxed, not used to being in a bar.

② Bold & curious

- greets and praises a stranger guitarist (Haikel) at the bar “You’re very good” (38)
- requests Deddy to bring her for a meal
- “Listen, I’m starving – will you take me to eat? I saw that you ride a motorbike. I’ve never been on one” (38)

Phase 1: First Meet in 1964



①
They
know very
little
about
each
other’s
culture

DEDDY HAIKEL

① Young & impoverished

- as a guitarist in a small pub run by Ling’s father
- getting paid only \$5 per night.
- he is using a guitar that he’d “saved up a year and a half to purchase, delivering newspapers on weekends.” (38).

Both characters show strong race consciousness, the “we-are-different” consciousness, as well as having strong racial stereotypes.

- “The only thing I don’t understand is why it’s always only the Eurasians and you Malays. We don’t ever have Chinese Musicians coming in to play.” (38)
- “You Chinese are too busy trying to be businessmen. Making real money. It’s how your father can give me \$5 for playing tonight’s set.” (38)

Race Consciousness



- Pitts regarded race conscious behavior as a phenomenon which has influenced race relations since World War II and it is a normative behavior that emerge in society with racial stratification (667).
- One of the characteristics of those who are race conscious, according to Brown, is a sense of obligations to their race (92).
- Race consciousness in Ling and Deddy is playing an important role in the subsequent development of their characters, particularly in their choice of marriage.

LING KO MUI

- ① Strong cultural curiosity
 - “Is there a technique?” she asked
 - “To?”
 - “To eating with your hands?” (38)
- ② Open to learning about Deddy’s cultural practice
 - her action of joining Deddy to eat with her hands (38)
- ③ A supportive girl friend
 - encourages Deddy that “he ought to get a backing band, that he ought to write his own songs, that she could help with the lyrics (39).

Phase 2: The courtship of Ling and Deddy



②
They become
more open
towards
learning each
other’s culture

DEDDY HAIKEL

- ① A patient boyfriend
 - playing the role as a bridge between Ling and Malay culture
 - “He showed her how to gather the rice into a loose ball, packing it more tightly as he went along. She joined him with her hands.” (38)
 - “Only with your right hand,” he said, “The left is unclean.” “I could wash it.” “No, not like that. The right hand is for eating, and the left hand is for...” He looks down briefly (39).
- ② Insecure and anxious about where their relationship might lead them to
 - “Could he give up the Quran for her? Would she give her own parents up for him, the way he was prepared to give his up for her?”(39).
- ③ Racial performativity
 - Deddy considered the cutlery briefly, then reached in with his right hand as he normally would (38).

Both characters show development in their open-mindedness and willingness in learning each other’s culture.

- “They would sneak out for supper on his motorbike – Malay food one week, Chinese food the next” (39).

Racial performativity



- People who conform to racial performativity is, as explained by Nagel, people who act according to what they perceive as culturally and socially appropriate to their ethnicity (52).
- Racial performativity of Deddy could have made the interracial relationship more challenging as it creates a sense of absurdity whenever he does something which is deemed to be out of his own cultural and social norms.

LING KO MUI

- ① It can be inferred from the text that she is not informed of the conflict between Leong Heng and Deddy.
- “ I wondered why you’d stopped coming around to the pub. I’d thought maybe you lost interest in music.” (42)
- “Well, I guess our pub got too small for you.” (43)

Phase 3: The conflict



③
Hurt pride to
becoming a
Rockstar

DEDDY HAIKEL

- ① Conflict between Deddy and Leong Heng
 - The disapproval from Leong Heng, son of a wealthy dried sundries merchant, for his courtship with Ling.
 - The humiliation from Leong Heng has aggravated Deddy’s insecurity, forcing him away from Ling.
“You’re nothing. You’re just a Malay loafer, sitting in the shade of palm tree, playing your stupid songs to ten people in a pub.” (40).
- ② The humiliation also serving as negative motivator that drives him to become a successful musician.



Interracial Marriage in Singapore

- According to Lee, interracial marriage rate remains static at low level at 5% to 6% over a period of 30 years, from 1955 to 1984 (255). Chinese participates least in interracial marriage (262).
- Index of interracial marriage distance for Malay-Chinese pair is the highest among all, suggesting a wide social distance between Chinese and Malays, with religion as one of the major factors as fewer Chinese are willing to convert to Islam, or there is no alternative mechanism (such as similar social status) that encourages interracial marriage between this pair (Lee 263).
- According to Mutalib, Malays (about 14% of the population) have comparatively lower socioeconomic status (33).



Why Deddy gave up on his relationship with Ling?

① Different socioeconomic status

Although Deddy is wealthier and is having higher social status after becoming a successful musician, he was once a poor guitarist when he was dating Ling.

② Religion and race

Different lifestyle and religious orientation of Malays, who see religion as an “all-encompassing way of life” (Mutalib 45).

LING KO MUI

- ① married to Leong Heng
- ② becomes a rich attractive matured woman
 - "...when a Rolls Royce pulled up in front of them. The backseat window rolled down" (42)
 - "Ling Ko Mui was smiling, shining. The schoolgirl bob had been replaced by long, finger-waved curls, and her face was lightly made-up" (42)

Phase 4: Maturity



④

Moving on to a
new phase of
life

DEDDY HAIKEL

- ① becomes a successful rebellious Rockstar.
 - one whose motorcycle is flagged down by constable for wearing inappropriate attire – pants that are too tight (41).
- ② demonstrates detestation towards the Chinese constable who confiscated his jeans.
 - "He hopes they don't discard them, that secretly back at HQ they squeeze their fat Chinese calves into the jeans, checking themselves out in the mirror, wishing they too could adopt these vistas of fashion, music, rebellion (41).
- ③ demonstrates a sense of superiority
 - "Tomorrow, he will be paid to make girls panic as he sings. (42)
 - "Don't you know who I am? Tomorrow I play the National Theatre. A sold-out show" (42).

LING KO MUI

- ① becomes a senile widow
- ② has a daughter and a grandson
- ③ meets Deddy again at the hospital but couldn't remember him.
- ④ miraculously recovers from her dementia, after Deddy spoke to her about their memory. She has recovered her faculties but not any memory of her family.

Phase 5: Life in old age



⑤
Experiencing
aging and
illness

DEDDY HAIKEL

- ① having health issue
 - “Deddy Haikel says to the young nurse, as she listens to his heartbeat, assessing the damage of this second heart attack” (40).
- ② having a happy and harmonious family, with three wives and seven children.
 - “This is the problem with having three wives. Sure the rotational sex was good, but the three wives got along so well that they frequently corralled against him” (43).
- ③ meets Ling again in the hospital and helps her to recover from her dementia.

- It could be interpreted from Ling's and Deddy's reaction that they still love and care for each other.
- Being a Muslim who can marry up to four wives, as well as knowing the fact that Leong Heng has passed away, Deddy has no intention to marry Ling at the age of 70.
 - “I can't be with you now. I have children, wives; a family” (50).

Conclusion

- Examining the development of Deddy Haikel and Ling Ko Mui in "Flamingo Valley" provokes deep thought concerning the sensitive issue of race and religion in the multiracial Singapore.
- Reinforcement of law (The Sedition Act of Singapore and Penal Code Chapter 224) might appear useful in reducing overt displays of racism, it is unable to address the extended racial disparities in education and economic status.
- According to Mathews, a survey of 2000 Singaporeans reviews that Singaporeans are reluctant to discuss racial issue, with 53% of the population believes that racism is no longer an important issue in Singapore.
- It is unlikely that racial disparities will be resolved in the near future.

