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PROFESSOR EMERITUS TAN SRI DR. M. KAMAL HASSAN

(26 October 1942 – 23 February 2023)

A PEEK INTO THE MIND OF A TRUE *MURABBĪ*

Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dr. M. Kamal Hassan (*Allāh yarḥamuhu*) needed no introduction among many of the older generations of leaders, academics, scholars and students of the Muslim world. He was the third Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia from 1998 to 2006, who contributed immensely to the University for 40 years. For most of us, he was an academic and scholar par excellence, an effective leader, a gentle and caring father figure and big brother, an outstanding pillar, and an internationally renowned teacher and thinker. He was known to walk the talk, always firmly unapologetic in his views on fundamental matters, yet flexible when considering circumstances. A champion of the Ummatic agenda of Islamisation or Islamicisation.

A towering figure, yet selfless and distinctively overflowing with humility. A multiple awards winner and an honourable multiple awards-decliner, never did he ever come near to self-promotion. He was ever watchful of his words, actions and the purity of his heart. His knowledge and experiences were vast, yet he always humbled himself down to reach his students and mad'ū-indeed an excellent example of a true Islamic scholar and *murabbī*.



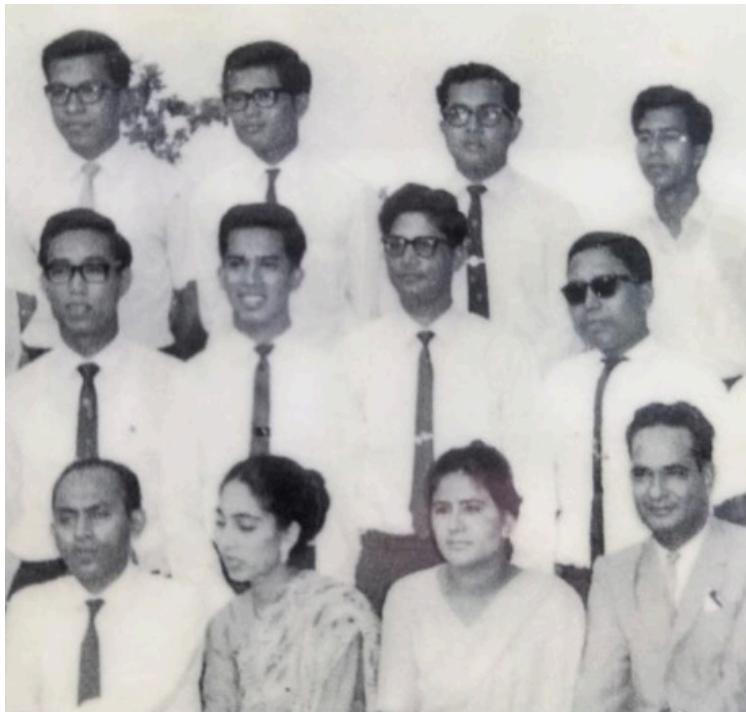
The very young Mohd. Kamal Hassan. Photo left behind in the M. Kamal Hassan Memorial Library by al-Marhum before his passing.

Dr. Nur Jannah Hassan

Head of Scholars Channel (*Qanāt al-Mashāyikh*),
OIFIIR-CENTRIS, IIUM.



It was by Allah's *Subḥānahu wa Ta'ālā* grace, that I was blest with the honour of being his student and working very closely with him throughout the last fourteen years of his life. After his passing, I had decided to conduct a series of sessions to read his poems published in *Salam Kasih dari Ayahanda dan Kakandamu*, from your Father and Brother.



Part of the staff and students of the Department of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya (circa mid. 1960s). Middle row: Kamal Hassan (second from left).

He was not a poet but as a consummate thinker, he had felt the urgency to make himself heard not only through his books, papers and talks but also through poetic licence. His poetic lines are the harbinger of his deep thoughts, concerns, hopes, aspirations and will for his students, colleagues, brothers and sisters of faith. Those who are familiar with his works will be able to detect the connections between his works and the creative expressions that he had woven into the tapestry of his poems. I take the liberty to reproduce the first of his poems published in *Salam Kasih* and written in Bahasa Melayu here, from which I have humbly translated into English, for the benefit of all readers, hopefully approximating the original meaning in the context of the era it was written, and as close to being poetic as the original.

Generasi Ku Menghadapi Tamaddun Barat²

My Generation Facing Western Civilisation³

*Hari ini mutiara tawhid kau anggap kacha,
Bisa kau hempas dalam debu merata,
Sedang kau merajalela semesta buana,
Khayal dengan chemerlangan intelekmu “Agung”.*

Today the pearl of tawhid you consider as glass
That you toss at will into dust
As you rave away in the universe
Drunkened with high intellect “Your Majesty”.

*Agung intelekmu menelorkan derita,
Agung intelekmu bumi merengkah,
Agung intelekmu menghanchor tamaddun,
Agung intelekmu kemusnahan insan menganga.*

The majesty of your intellect grieves it begets
The majesty of your intellect the earth it cracks
The majesty of your intellect civilisation it razes
The majesty of your intellect humanity it demolishes

*Mengapa tanah liat ini megah sunggoh,
Kerana berhasil memahat Renaissance?
Kerana bertuah melahirkan Darwin?
Kerana berjaya mendarat dibulan tua?
Ataukah lantaran Revolusi Perancis,
Ataukah ‘sinaran’ dari Hegel-Marxis?*

Why is this clay so filled with arrogance,
For the success in chisselling the Renaissance?
For the fortune of begetting Darwin?
For the triumph in landing on the old moon?
Or because of the French Revolution,
Or is it from Hegel-Marxis’ enlightenment?

Patong-patong usang warisan zaman purba,
Pedangmu mematahkan segala.
Tapi ditabalkan BENDA sebagai gantinya.
Dari mu d-takhtakan untok disembah.
Ampun tuanku Tanah Liat nan Agung.

The idols of heritage from antiquity
Your swords break them in totality.
Coronating MATERIAL in their stead.
From you is enthroned to be worshiped.
Pardon us Sire Clay Your Majesty.

Tundokkan kepalamu kepada Hakikat.
Bahwa kamu tidak berdaya menchiptakan sekecil kuman
Pancharkan intelekmu kadalam jiwamu
Nanti akan ketara Rahasia terbenam.

Bow your head down to The Reality
That you are incapable of creating as much as a germ tiny
Enlighten your intellect into your conscience
So as to surface its sunkened Mysteries

Apa sebenar-nya Insan-ini,
Tasek rahasia, untok apa wujudnya,
Bahagia yang kamu rindui,
Bagaimana akan terchapai?

What in reality is this Insan
The oasis of its mysteries, for what is its existence
The happiness that you so yearn
How will it ever be earned?

Dibena akal semata, akan selesaikah persoalan hidup?
Dipupok sains semata, akan terchapaikah damai-kekal?
Dijaga kahendak perut semata, akan bahagiakah insan?
Dibuka pintu nafsu, akan tinggikah tamaddun?

Develop we the mind solely, does this solve all life queries?
Cultivate us the sciences only, can this perpetuate lasting peace?
Satisfy we gastronomic gluts merely, so humanity be truly happy?
Unlocking wide the floodgates of lust, would civilization be lofty?

Dihapuskan Bourgeois-Kapitalis, bereslah konon kekusutan hidup?
Dihambat Imperialis Neo-Kolonialis, wujudlah nanti kestabilan sosial?
Dikejar kesempurnaan materi, nah inikah kesempurnaan abadi?

Annihilate you the Bourgeois-Capitalists, will it resolve life questions?
Hem us in with Imperialists Neo-Colonialists, will this generate social equilibrium?
Pursue us material accomplishment, lo! Is this eternal perfection?

Bersambung...
To be continued....

Al-Marhūm Professor Emeritus Dr. M. Kamal Hassan had written these poetic lines way back in 1966 while working at the University of Malaya as a tutor, at the age of twenty-four. It is quite astounding that he had had, at a very young age, such burning questions and a critical outlook on the states of mind and the milieu of the people at the time, three years after the proclamation of Malaysia on September 16th, 1963. The poem is distinct in its painting of the colonised mentality, attitude, culture and practises of the people six years into the country's post-independence from the British imperialist colonisation on August 31st, 1957. The poem was left unfinished for almost five decades, perhaps from uncertainties of the decades, before it was finally completed in September 2015.

No doubt the context of the poem has changed over the decades. However, it takes only a few moments of reflection and introspection to understand the lessons that remain relevant and valid to this day. Such are gems of wisdom from one of the University forebears, a peek into his very young mind, which proved to be, in later years, as that belonging to a true 'ālim and murabbī.

I end this short column with a jotting of a few lines found written on a cue-card tucked in al-Marhūm's retro briefcase that he had received as a participant of the 1977 First Conference on Muslim Education at the Makkah campus of King Abdul Aziz University, Saudi Arabia.

O Tuhan

Bakarlah diriku dalam kalimat Mu Maha Hebat

Bagaikan api melebur besi

O Lord

Burn me in Your Words Supreme

Like flames melting iron

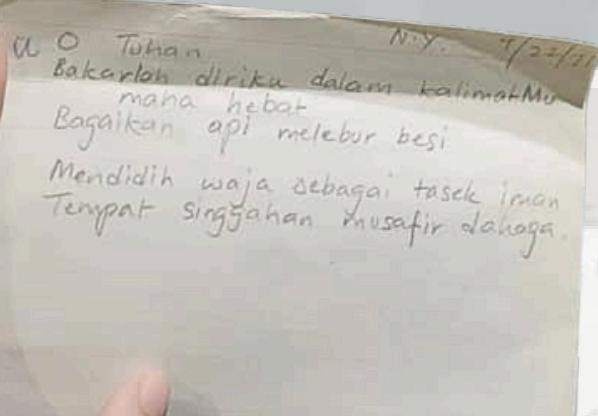
Mendidih waja sebagai tasek iman

Tempat singgahan musafir dahaga.

Boiling steel iron to a lake of iman
A transiting place for the thirsty traveler.

M. Kamal Hassan, New York, November 11th, 1971.

I will leave you in search of the gems of wisdom within these poetic lines in the deep lake of al-Marhūm's thought. May Allah Subhānahū wa Ta'ālā enable us to find the hidden treasures above and tread the path of which al-Marhūm had exemplified in manners par excellence solely for the sake of gaining the Pleasure of The Merciful Creator, Allah ﷺ. May The Almighty shower His Blessings and Mercy on al-Marhūm, grant him 'afā and unite him among those closest to Him with the highest Grace, in Jannat'ul-Firdaus.⁴



N.Y. 7/2/71

melebur besi

a sebagai tasek iman

References

1. M. Kamal Hassan, *Salam Kasih dari Ayahanda dan Kakandamu*, from your Father and Brother, Kuala Lumpur, ITBM: 2017.
2. Written in 1966, while working as a Tutor in the Department of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya. This work was found by the pioneering batch of the IIUM students, and was published in The Class of 1987, The Pioneers: International Islamic University Malaysia, (1988). This poem has been edited and published in M. Kamal Hassan, *Salam Kasih* (2017).
3. Translation done by the author of this column.
4. Tan Sri Professor Emeritus Dr. M. Kamal Hassan had passed on at the age of eighty, at the wee hour of 23rd February 2023, at Selayang Hospital, Selangor, Malaysia. He never gained consciousness from the induced coma in lieu of the complications post-pancreatic surgery that he underwent.

