



Mohd Kamal Hassan embodies integration of knowledge

By [Dr Md. Mahmudul Hasan](#) - November 12, 2020 @ 10:48am

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My early interest in Kamal Hassan's scholarly pursuits continued to grow without him knowing it. - NST pic.

EDUCATIONAL philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1931-) is Malaysia's gift to the world of knowledge and learning. Through the concept of Islamisation/dewesternization of knowledge that he articulates in his monumental book *Islam and Secularism* (1978), he participates in the debate on the problems of education and contributes to the discourse of addressing them.

Al-Attas emphasises the importance of producing a well-balanced personality through integration of knowledge. In this essay, I will discuss another contemporary Malaysian educational philosopher, Mohd. Kamal Hassan (1942-), who I believe embodies the concept of integration of knowledge.

In November 2008, I attended a session in Dhaka where the main speaker was Emeritus Professor Osman Bakar (1946-). I was then an Assistant Professor with the Department of English at the University of Dhaka. At one point in his discussion, in reference to the concept of integration of knowledge from Islamic perspectives, Osman Bakar talked about International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and mentioned Mohd. Kamal Hassan who was its Rector from 1998 to 2006. That was the first

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Kamal Hassan who was its Rector from 1998 to 2008. That was the first time I heard about the Profesor Ulung (National Distinguished Professor).

In June 2010, I joined IIUM's Department of English Language and Literature. Gradually, I was becoming more and more familiar with the university culture and academic community and with their perspective on educational issues. In no time, Kamal Hassan emerged in my consciousness as an erudite intellectual who helped shape the character

and course of IIUM. He is also one of the key proponents of the university's philosophy of (re)integrating Islam into mainstream education.

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I found out that he was a big name at IIUM and an extremely likeable person regarded with high esteem by all. He spent a great deal of time giving lectures which were organised by various faculties and other stakeholders of the university. I began attending his talks and noticed that the man was eclectic and versatile in his intellectual interests.

I was amazed to see a professor of Usuluddin and Comparative Religion effortlessly traversing eastern and western philosophies and literatures. An added reason for my delight in his academic accomplishments was his advanced command of both Arabic and English languages.

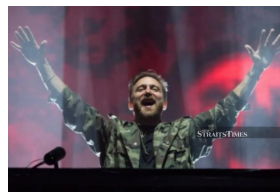
He has set a standard of spoken English which is perhaps difficult for many non-native speakers to attain. It is an immense pleasure to listen to his talks and ask him questions about matters related to them. Later, at a personal level, I became engaged with him intellectually and found him a sophisticated interlocutor and a great communicator.

My early interest in Kamal Hassan's scholarly pursuits continued to grow without him knowing it. At the Department of English Language and Literature at IIUM, I have been teaching on and off a subject what is now named "Islamic Literature in English." One regular assessment component that students are required to complete in this undergraduate course is "Project". To begin with, students form groups of two, three or four and choose a particular writer. Then they study the life and works of their chosen author and present various aspects of his/her ideas that they find significant.

In 2011, I proposed the idea and a group of undergraduate students – Khairul Amin Abd. Rashid, Muhd. Rafique Hafeedzy, Mohd. Ridzuan Mat Zin and Muhammad Norshafiq Jafar – agreed to do their project on Kamal Hassan. They studied the man and his work to some degree, and presented their research to the class. Through their presentation of his life and thought, I became more enlightened about him. These four students' investigation and findings in some ways informed me about the reason for Kamal Hassan's excellent command of Arabic and English languages as well as of Islamic and modern sciences.

While in 2011 I assigned my undergraduate students to study Kamal

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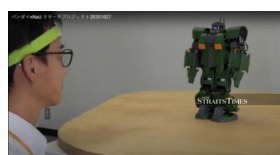
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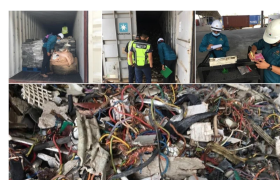


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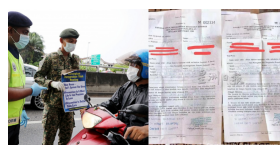


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While in 2011 I assigned my undergraduate students to study Kamal Hassan's life and works in general, three years later I encouraged four of my postgraduate students to do their project on a specific aspect of his thoughts and ideas – his educational philosophy. These students were: Melisa Nurjustina Elwiana Muhd Alwin Liew, Norazah Md. Idrus, Nurul 'Ain Abdullah and Yusra Erinna Md. Yusery.

Their research on Kamal Hassan was far more thorough and detailed. They consulted his writings, visited him in his residence in Bangi and had long conversations with him. Through their presentation to the class, I

came to know the man more fully and became better informed about his admirable personal traits and intellectual inclinations. They discussed in detail his thoughts and ideas on education.

In his conversation with my postgraduate students, Kamal Hassan emphasised the importance of reintegrating knowledge. He highlighted the need to bring religion back into the realm of education. He contended that such a marriage between religion and education in Muslim societies had persisted for more than a thousand years, and added: "But this unity or integration was disrupted by colonial penetration and dominance." Therefore, according to Kamal Hassan, we need to "reintegrate" Islam into mainstream education in Muslim societies.

My long acquaintance with Kamal Hassan and with his works testifies that Kamal Hassan is an embodiment of integration of knowledge. In today's world, most academics are specialists in certain areas of expertise. Various disciplines, such as natural and social sciences as well as human and religious sciences, are distant and scholars are field-specific. Most scholars who are knowledgeable about the humanities and social sciences are inadequately conversant with the religious sciences.

Conversely, many with a thorough grasp of the religious sciences are far removed from knowledge of the humanities and social sciences. Nonetheless, it is fascinating to see in Kamal Hassan a multifaceted scholar with remarkable insights of various subjects – a true embodiment of integration of knowledge. The plurality of his scholarship has remained a source of inspiration for many, especially in IIUM.

It is perhaps pertinent to end this essay with my aforementioned four undergraduate students' warm tribute to Kamal Hassan. After providing a concise account of his life and works, they concluded their presentation to the class in a brilliant denouement, stating:

With his character, personality and works, [Kamal Hassan] has shown to the Muslims how they should react in order to change people's perception of Islam. He promotes intellectual debate instead of emotional reactions. As we can see, his works pervade several fields, such as: philosophy, usuluddin and religious studies.

The writer is with the Department of English Language and Literature at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

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