

## **A CRITICAL REVIEW OF SYED HUSIN ALI'S *MEMOIRS OF A POLITICAL STRUGGLE***

*Syed Husin Ali: Memoirs of a Political Struggle*, Syed Husin Ali. Selangor, Malaysia: Strategic Information and Research Development, 2012, 273 pages. ISBN: 9789675832499

### **INTRODUCTION**

The review is a critical analysis of Syed Husin Ali's memoirs, a former University of Malaya academic, a public intellectual, a political activist and currently a second-term Senator at the Dewan Rakyat, entitled *Memoirs of a Political Struggle*. Biographies and memoirs can be valuable political and historical narratives that raise critical economic, political and social issues. They can unlock and fill the lacunae that may exist in our political, economic, social and historical knowledge of the country as well as the individual's representation of the cross-section of his on-going experience in society. Therefore, some do highlight issues that are generally not in the public domain.

Syed Husin Ali's *Memoirs* is a broad scrutiny and a critical intellectual discourse of the country's political process. His objective was to "establish truth and justice for the people", to relate through his "involvement and participation in" and express his "view on several political events that greatly affected people" (p. ix). Therefore, he "chose to concentrate more on the political aspects of" his "life and struggle" (p. x). The *Memoirs*, is as an alternative perspective of the country's highly contested political landscape which had been dominated by United Malays National Organisation (UMNO).

Though the right to freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed, open intellectual discourse of individual struggles has gone out of genre in the country. One can attribute this to the ruling elites' retention of the colonial state's vague and broadly crafted draconian Sedition Act and Internal Security Act (ISA) followed by the successive politically motivated enactments of punitive legislative constraints on freedom of expression. However, Syed Husin Ali in writing his polemical and outspoken *Memoirs* has defied the state imposed legal restrictions and broken away from the shackles of self-imposed censorship practiced by his political contemporaries.

Autobiographical or biographical studies of the nation's prominent left-wing politicians, progressive trade unionists and multiracial as well as communal groups and associations are few and far between. Syed Husin Ali's *Memoirs* of his political struggle is far from a rigorous academic presentation, instead he has taken his narrative outside the realm of his discipline to suit the lay reading public.

## THE SACRIFICIAL STORYLINE

The *Memoirs*' theme is "people's struggle or movement to achieve change" (p. 203) through the advocacy of his ideals of egalitarianism and social justice. His ideals for societal change evolved during his life experience as a student, undergraduate, radical political activist, committed academic researcher, lecturer, academic administrator and now senator. Experiences gathered as a pioneer in higher education development, as a writer, as a ground-level democratic political activist and six-year political detainee, and more importantly as "a pro-people intellectual" (p. 109), propelled him to the advancement of human rights, greater political empowerment of the people, transparency and rule of law, narrowing income gaps and creating greater common good for the common man.

The *Memoirs* chronologically charts the country's political process, thus enhancing our knowledge of the working of the system from a grassroots perspective. In the process, the ensuing political, economic and social issues are telescoped through an alternative ideological and political perspective; a class struggle perspective and not race based struggle. For him "race" is a myth and the "idea is constructed and manipulated by humans themselves, often by small minorities greedy for wealth and power" (Syed Husin Ali, 2008b: 156).

Syed Husin Ali's goal was to create a credible alternative political environment and society to enhance the common man's freedom and justice, their education and jobs, and reduce poverty; a situation in which many Malaysians were entrapped and continue to be trapped in.

Therefore, from a divergent political ideological strength of mind and commitment from those in power, he played an important role in invoking contentious discourses on critical national policy issues, in particular against poverty, cronyism, corruption, popular political participation and free speech. These sustained political struggles bore fruit in the 2008 and 2013 general elections, beginning in 2007 with the anti-toll demonstrations, the Bar Council's Walk for Justice, the mass rallies of BERSIH's for "clean and fair" elections and the Hindu Rights Action Force's call for the legitimate rights for Malaysian Indians (pp. 176–178). These rallies galvanised public discontent and activated the coalition of opposition parties to gain a substantial number of the electoral votes as well as the parliamentary seats. It further deprived UMNO and its coalition partners, the two-thirds parliamentary majority it had since independence, and the popular vote.

## TWISTED INTERPRETATION OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

Malaysians have a distorted understanding of the history of the nationalist movement and its key protagonists according to Syed Husin Ali. He views Ahmad Boestamam, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ishak Haji Muhammad "as

the true fighters for genuine independence. Their contribution to the struggle was of the highest order but they were not accorded due recognition by the government of the day. The mainstream history that has been written is that of the ruling elite, to whom power was bestowed by the British colonialists, and excludes the contributions of these leaders like this noble three" (p. 81).

Therefore, Syed Husin Ali's *Memoirs* to some extent mitigates the pro-state scholars' deliberate attempt to neglect some of the uncelebrated anti-colonial and nationalist heroes. However, Syed Husin Ali's storyline neglects the role played by nationalists like Tan Cheng Lock, James Puthucherry, Samad Ismail, Aziz Ishak, William Kuock, S. Woodhull, Abdullah Majid, Lim Kean Chye, Jamit Singh, Tan Chee Koon, V. David, Karam Singh and many others who were at the centre of the anti-colonial and nationalist struggle. As early as 1926, Tan Cheng Lock said, "our ultimate political goal should be a united self-governing British Malaya" (Tan, 2014).

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

A review of an autobiography or memoirs of a national contemporary public figure has to be set against the fabric of the broader historical affiliations and connectivity. Syed Husin Ali was born in 1936 in Batu Pahat, in the state of Johor (p. 1) then under British rule. Malaya was by then a multiracial country with a predominantly rural-based Malay population. The immigrant Chinese and the "docile" Indians who were brought to toil mainly in the British owned and controlled mines and plantations also made up the country's proletarians, but were treated as a transient population in the colonial state's capital accumulation.

The life story of Syed Husin Ali is intertwined with the country's changing and varied political, economic and social structure. It stretched from the race-class dominated British colonial era to the 1941 Japanese defeat of the British. Japanese imperial occupation for more than three years was brutal and distressing (pp. 6–8). The combination of British defeat and Japanese imperial ambitions touted with their pan-Asian solidarity façade further strengthened the populations' anti-western and anti-colonial sentiments. With the return of colonial rule, the country moved to a tumultuous British Military Administration (BMA) that was quickly replaced by a centralised and directly administered Malayan Union civil government.

Syed Husin Ali's parents were of royal lineage from the Indonesian Sultanate of Siak. Although his parents were devout Muslims and had a strong sense of Islamic identity both in their beliefs and practices, they "were quite liberal and open to new ideas and influence" (p. 4). Similarly, the religious school Syed Husin Ali attended and other religious schools in Johor "did not promote narrow and conservative education" (p. 4). Therefore, Syed Husin Ali though

nurtured as a devout Muslim, was averse to any form of ideology that was anti-secular or anti-religious.

His parents were of modest financial circumstances and on many an occasion experienced financial hardship. On occasions, to put food on the table, the family had to dispose of family valuables, borrow, sell their house ("Rumah Tinggi") and depend on the goodwill of relatives. During these formative years, Syed Husin Ali realised what was correct and what was not. When it needed him to make the sacrifice for a larger purpose, his conviction to uphold the truth was always pre-eminent in spite of the fact that he knew that he had to incur enormous risks to his family and himself. Much later, because of his early imbibed principles, he flatly refused to testify to non-existent plots and incriminate others during his detention under ISA.

The privileged English medium schools he attended were essentially established to provide functional education to meet the manpower needs of the colonial state and its burgeoning economy. Further, the Batu Pahat Student Association and its advisors were mainly responsible for enhancing his interest in English medium education (p. 72). He continued to pursue his higher education at the country's then only publically funded university, University of Malaya in Singapore, which provided full subsidy to academically qualified students without any question of whether their families had the ability to pay.

## **THE WIDER HISTORICAL CONNECTIVITY AND ITS IMPACT**

From the dawn of the 20th century, there set in a growing crisis within the colonial system with the advent of powerful social and political movements against imperialism and for national liberation. In Asia, the economically and militarily rapidly modernising Japan was a key catalyst. Japan with its own imperial ambitions launched its initial anti-Western springboard in May 1905 when a small Japanese fleet annihilated the Russian navy in the narrow Tsushima Straits. For the first time since the Middle Ages a non-European power had vanquished a European power in a major conflict (Mishra, 2012: 1) showing the "white men, conquerors of the world, were no longer invincible" (Mishra, 2012: 3) and further spurred anti-colonial and nationalist movements. Therefore, the 40s, 50s, and 60s represented an age of decolonisation and anti-colonial revolts in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Nearer home, there was a rise in nationalism and a call for freedom from colonialism. Charismatic nationalist leaders, like Sukarno in the Dutch East Indies, Aung San in Burma, Ho Chi Minh in French Indo-China and much earlier Jose Rizal in the Philippines, were spearheading political independence within a largely secular, democratic, equitable and just social structure. Independence underpinned by communalism was also being invoked and articulated by some sections of the national elites. In 1955 the Non-Aligned Nations (NAM) gathered

in Bandung, Indonesia to invoke Afro-Asian solidarity as well as discuss liberation from colonialism and strategise the future of the Third World.

In the late 1940s, America the world's dominant power was at the advent of the Cold War; with it the hysterical paranoia of McCarthyism and the Committee on Un-American Activities. The Committee pursued a nationwide witch hunt to persecute suspected radical intellectuals and academics, devastating many of them. Despite these highly disruptive, anti-communist, anti-democratic and reactionary forces, the surge of potent radical forces against mainstream conservative America sprang into life in 1964. The mass student Free Speech Movement strengthened student rights to use university campuses for political activity and debate, culminating with the movement against the war in Vietnam and apartheid in South Africa. Within the United States, Martin Luther King Jr's "audacious and dramatic" civil rights movement took root and grew. The momentum of student activism spread across continents: into continental Europe, England and through Asia, with London and Paris as their epicentres. Though a minority, groups of "students across the world were taking a stand," (Weiss, 2011: 1) and engaging in radical activism to bring about political, economic and social change. These happenings had an impact on student activities in Malaya and Singapore as well (Weiss, 2011).

Nationalism and freedom from colonialism resulted in the publication of anti-imperial literature by a rising coterie of radical intellectuals, mostly the victims of imperialism both in the colonial centre and the periphery. One of the focal Malayan student centres to be influenced by the flow of the politically potent literature was Kolej Perguruan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Training College, SITC) and in particular two SITC students – Ibrahim Yaakub and Harun Aminurrashid – through their exposure to these literature, became "instilled with the idea and spirit of independence... and in turn influenced other students" (p. 102).

The popular and charismatic Indonesian leader Sukarno and his Marhaenism (socio-economic-democracy) ideology was a phenomenal influence on radical Malay leaders as well as on the nascent Malayan nationalist movement (p. 102). Syed Husin Ali was far from isolated from the influence of these movements. Many intellectuals, trade unionist, political activist and young students were also captivated by the anti-colonial and freedom movements and as a result readily supported and actualised ground level movements calling for independence.

## **ANTI-COLONIAL AND NATIONALIST FERVOUR**

The emergence of despondency with the Japanese occupation and the anti-British sentiments ignited by the Japanese administration's popular slogan "Asia for the

Asians" was potent. It accelerated the development of a burgeoning left wing as well as radical nationalistic, anti-colonial unions and grassroots organisations. Sugata Bose in his seminal biography of his grand uncle Subhas Chandra Bose entitled "His Majesty's Opponent" points to the emergence of these trends and says: "The Indians, the Burmese, the Indonesians, and some Malays and Filipinos took advantage of Japan's undermining of Western colonial authority to advance their own independence movement" (Bose, 2011: 264).

The rising political consciousness among grassroots Malay communities, led to the formation of KMN (Kesatuan Melayu Muda or Young Malays' Association) in 1938, an early Malay political party. The KMM was followed by KMS "Kesatuan Melayu Singapura" or Malay Association of Singapore and "Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya" or Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya (KPMN) in 1945 (p. 101). Preceding the formation of these associations and political parties, Young Turks who had studied in the Middle East, South India, Cairo, Mecca, Lahore, Qadian and Aligarh called for change upon their return in both the country's polity and in Islamic texts and ideas (Muller, 2014: 51). These were political associations and parties with grassroots support and unlike UMNO's aristocratic leadership "led by a new emerging elite not recruited from the traditional aristocratic elite" (Rustam, 2008: 29). Their aim was to propagate anti-colonial struggle sentiments as well as to map a people-oriented post-colonial order in Malaya and in the larger Malay world. Though the movements were confined to the Malays, their anti-colonial aspirations and the growing people-oriented support were a threat not only to the colonial state but a challenge to the established traditional Malay feudal order (pp. 101–103).

In response to the call for freedom from colonial bondage and an upsurge of radical nationalistic parties, unions and organisations, the post-war British Labour government realised that the struggle for independence in their colonies that included Malaya was inevitable. Malaya in the 40s and 50s trudged through many complexes, contentious and defining moments in her history. At the national level it was fuelled by the various class and communal tensions, largely exacerbated by Sino-Malay strains, which gathered momentum with the surrender of the Japanese in 1945. Syed Husin Ali pointed out: "Malays were beginning to hate and distrust the Chinese and vice versa" (p. 13). However, he goes on to point out the remarkable and prevalent rooted pattern of the intertwining of race relations at the village (*kampong*) level.

To prevent Malaya, a country on which the British exchequer depended heavily for her foreign exchange earnings, from falling into the hands of radical nationalist parties, Britain introduced in 1946 the Malayan Union Constitution; incubated in the colonial offices when Malaya was under Japanese Imperial occupation. A "positive" approach in Britain's terms was to transform the country into a stable and unitary multiracial parliamentary democracy with equal rights to all who choose to be citizens. The Malayan Union provided everyone regardless of race, and to those born and resident within the union equal citizenship rights.

Syed Husin Ali points out that the Malayan Union Constitution "resulted in the rulers being stripped of their powers" (p. 72). The assertion that Malaya was no more an exclusive Malay country was an anathema to the "Malay preservation" aristocratic elite, who had traditionally been the custodians of Malay culture and guardians of their political sovereignty. In response, Syed Husin Ali says: "A movement emerged among the Malays to fight for the restoration of the position of the sultans as the symbol of Malay unity and sovereignty" (p. 72). It was also to safeguard British economic interests as Malaya's enormous British owned and operated plantation, mining and trading agency assets were of critical importance for the continued survival of the tottering post-war British economy.

To derail the Malayan Union, the Malay aristocracy under the leadership of Onn Jaafar galvanised UMNO, the most powerful communal and potent political majoritarian organisation, with the slogan "Hidup Melayu" (Long live the Malays) to champion the claims of the Malay community (Ratnam, 1965: 144). Backed by mass support, the Malay elite with the connivance of an influential group of ex-British civil servants and vested interests derailed the Malayan Union.

For the British, decolonisation "was to somehow ensure that the way the empire was wound up served the interest of the departing power. The new owners of Britain's properties had to be the right sort of people" (quoted in Ascherson, 2014) and acted as a political buffer to Cold War threats from communism. Undoubtedly for the British vested interests, the Westernised and extremely pro-British aristocratic elite of UMNO's and their Alliance partners (p. 105) were "the right sort of people" to be handed the reins of political power. In return, the Malay aristocratic leadership's main aim was to secure from the British a Malaya that was basically "the country of the Malays" in order to create the birth of a new "Malay" nascent nation-state (Cheah, 2002: 2) under the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement.

Divergent to UMNO's Malay aristocrat-led "Malay preservation" leadership, there emerged in late 1945 onwards a coalition of mostly left-wing intelligentsia from among the Malay, Chinese and Indian nationalist groups PUTERA (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat, the Central Force of the People) and AMCJA (All-Malaya Council of Joint Action). Though PUTERA-AMCJA was an inter-racial national alliance, its membership was overwhelmingly Chinese (p. 104) and ideologically oriented to the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). The coalition of left-wing movements intensified their protests resulting in a "hartal" in 1946, which shook the British administration.

UMNO's "Malay preservation" Federation of Malaya Agreement embedded with stringent citizenship provisions for the non-Malays was unacceptable to many nationalist movements. To oppose the unilaterally imposed provisions an inter-racial alliance led by Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Tan Cheng Lock crystallised itself into a sharp "national togetherness" and "produced a

historic document called the 'Peoples Constitutional Proposal' (p. 103). The British and UMNO were urged that "All persons born in Malaya should automatically be given 'Malayu' citizenship and were to renounce their citizenship rights in any other country" and "All citizens should possess equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic, educational and cultural spheres regardless of race, creed, colour or sex" (Khong, 2003: 165). Syed Husin Ali with his explicit commitment to diversity and pluralistic belief points out: "Unfortunately, the People's Constitutional Proposals were ignored and not given due consideration" (p. 103).

The British and UMNO's elite were intransigent in embracing the People's Constitutional Proposals. The foremost interest of the British was to protect their huge economic interest from "essentially left-wing political parties, labour and other progressive organisations" that "struck terror in the hearts of the British colonialist because it demanded full independence" (p. 103). While, UMNO's elite led by Onn Jaafar and followed by Tunku Abdul Rahman were "extremely pro-British, besides leaning towards feudal and capitalist ideas and practices" (p. 105). UMNO's unequivocal demand was: since the "country was received from the Malays, to the Malays it had to be returned".

The British failure to rescind the Federation of Malaya Agreement, the introduction of draconian anti-democratic laws and the arrests of individuals representing progressive and radical movements, led the MCP to wage the insurgency to dislodge British rule. "When a number of CPM [Communist Party of Malaya] guerrillas attacked British-owned plantations and killed some of their managers, the British proclaimed a state of emergency in June 1948. The communist rebellion thus began in this country" (p. 103). A State of Emergency was enforced throughout the country to militarily crush and exterminate the MCP as well as to eradicate radical political parties and militant trade unions. The goal "was to eliminate the communist and their supporters and restore law and order on its terms" (Rajarao, 2013: 171).

Even the popular multiracial PUTERA-AMCJA coalition, Syed Husin Ali, points out was disbanded by the British (p. 208). "The actions by the British colonial power in suppressing the progressive forces created a vacuum in the political scenario. This provided an opportunity for UMNO, which was formed in 1946, to expand with British support. More government officers were allowed to follow the footsteps of Tunku Abdul Rahman and Razak Hussein to be active in UMNO" (p. 104). The policy sowed the seeds and paved the way for the unhindered growth of the power-wielding Malay political elite: a group that has continuously co-opted and nurtured new members to reinforce the growth of UMNO as the majoritarian mainstream political party and has uninterruptedly continued to dominate the country's governance to the present.



## **STUDENT POLITICAL RESISTANCE**

The students at the University of Malaya in Singapore in the late 40s, 50s and 60s were far from oblivious or isolated from these major worldwide and national happenings. The most notable among them was the anti-colonial nationalist, a radical intellectual and political activist James Puthucheary, the author of the pioneering and seminal work on the "Ownership and Control of the Malayan Economy". A handful of the students too came into the university well aware of the political happenings both domestically and internationally. The notable among them were Abdullah Majid, Poh Soo Kai, M. K. Rajakumar, S. Woodhull, Jamit Singh, Lim Hock Siew, A. Mahadeva, Kwa Boo Sun, Lam Khuan Kit, Albert Lim Shee Ping, Thomas Varkey, and P. Arudsothy.

The university was more a training ground for students to be functionaries in the expanding colonial economy than an intellectual institution preparing them to shape the future of their society. Despite this, the miniscule of politically active and committed individuals initiated the formation of the nucleus of an informal nascent, articulate and vocal radical student movement. Importantly, as M. K Rajakumar pointed out, "When the British returned, this generation was no longer willing to accept a subservient role. The young men and women who entered Raffles College and the King Edward VII College of Medicine had lived in the raw, and matured beyond their years. They would take no nonsense from anybody" (quoted in Tan, 2011: 92).

At the initiative of James Puthucheary, the university authorities approved the establishment of political clubs within the university with a belief that "political discussion among students is regarded as both a normal part of university life and a specific contribution to the development of the Malayan nation on the basis of political freedom" (quoted in Loh et al., 2012: 48). The University of Malaya Socialist Club was a spontaneous creation in 1953 by the nucleus of politically agitated group of anti-colonial and nationalist students. The activists were of varied radical political influence – from the reformist marque of Fabianist socialism and the rising European social-democratic theories to the more radical brand of scientific socialism and Marxism. In spite of their diverse outlook, a common unifying political and intellectual thread of the world of socialism brought them together.

To compete and blunt the role and impact of the growing potency of the left-wing Socialist Club, a group of fractious right-wing students formed the Democratic Club. The more active, committed, influential and the fulcrums of political resistance of the two clubs was without any doubt the Socialist Club. It had close relationship with the more radical and influential union leaders of the Middle Road, journalists and some leaders of the Peoples' Action Party (PAP) (p. 78). However, the majority of the students in the university were politically

apathetic and were not prepared to risk the family or sacrifice their future expectations given the repressive nature of the colonial state.

On the other hand, the achievement of a greater egalitarianism, united multiracial democratic Malayan nation state was an attractive proposition to many of the active student intellectuals and the left-wing activists in the University of Malaya Socialist Club. The Socialist Club published the *Fajar* (Arabic word for dawn) to propagate its political ideology. Divergent to the left-wing Socialist Club, the University of Malaya Students' Union (UMSU), the umbrella organisation of all students in the university was led by student leaders who were allied to the International Students Conference (ISC), a right-wing international student body supported by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Weiss, 2011: 9). Simultaneously, American philanthropic NGOs such as the Fulbright, Rockefeller, Asia and the Ford Foundations were covertly co-opting Third World academics, students and potential political leaders to study in American universities to mould their ideas and shape their economic, labour market and political framework and to lure them away from radical ideologies.

## **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COMMITMENTS**

Though Syed Husin Ali was not an affiliate of the Socialist Club, some aspects of the ideological views and the political commitments of the *Fajar* "generation" did resonate and further stimulated his nascent and budding political development. Neither was he oblivious nor free from the pivotal role and influence played by the potent external anti-colonial and radical social and political movements. As a young boy Syed Husin Ali was initiated and schooled into the rudiments of politics and its consciousness through his father's close following of the development in domestic and international politics.

As an undergraduate, Syed Husin Ali was introduced to the middleman's exploitive nature and functioning of the country's rural Malay farmers by Ungku Aziz. He became engrossed in Ungku Aziz's pioneering empirical work and analysis of the causes of poverty and destitution among rural farmers. Apart from the lectures, tutorials and empirical fieldwork in economics, Syed Husin Ali pursued Malay studies and Arabic. His extra-curricular activities straddled the line between Malay political and language concerns and an array of socio-political and economic issues that cut across the country's multiracial landscape.

This led to his close, intimate and active association with the left-leaning and the more politically active multiracial student activists of the University of Malaya Socialist Club (the *Fajar* generation and the members of the Solidarity Committee of the Pan-Malayan Student Federation) and the Malay dominated student-based organisations (University of Malaya Malay Language Society, Gabungan Pelajar Melayu Semenanjung (GPMS-Federation of Malay Students in the Peninsula) as well as with members of the radical Malay writers and literary

movements, like the Angkatan Sastrawan '50 (Asas '50, The '50 Literary Movement). He was also connected with the active left-wing trade union leadership in Singapore, the left-wing luminaries as well as activists of the *Fajar* generation, and significantly with Singapore's left-wing activists. His links with Malay nationalists, journalists, (Samad Ismail, Usman Awang, Kamaludin Muhammad, Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ahmad Boestamam) and intellectuals and political movements including the People's Party's (Parti Rakyat) Cikgu Harun Aminurrashid and Cikgu Amir Omar during his student days in Singapore and in Malaya were equally strong (p. 79).

The varied and extensive network of relationships he forged in these years opened new vistas and contributed enormously to moulding him politically, socially and culturally as well as shaping his mind, his academic career and political activism.

### **TRANSFIGURATION FROM ACADEMIA TO SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHANGE**

Though Syed Husin Ali was a creation of a colonial education system, unlike the majority of his fellow university compatriots of similar educational persuasion and social background, he did not grand stage his humble origins to seek for status, power, money and material comforts. He points out that "Musa once met me to invite me to follow in his footsteps but I declined politely, telling him that I did not share at all UMNO's ways and policies" (pp. 97–98). He instead chose to transform himself from a student activist to academic, intellectual, political and social activist, to steer clear of the lure of wealth and power. He decided to pursue an academic career, joining his Alma Mater, the University of Malaya's Malay Studies Department as an Assistant Lecturer and subsequently to the newly created Department of Anthropology and Sociology.

Syed Husin Ali's empathy for the disadvantaged and the poor obviously drew him to focus on the social, cultural and sociological importance of poverty. He points out "Whether for research, publication or teaching, poverty was the main issue that concerned me. I grew up in a family that experienced a lot of financial difficulties" (p. 238). Therefore, the focus of his empirical research was on social stratification, leadership, economic inequality and poverty among rural Malays and smallholders, as well as issues of economic inequality that gave rise to class and status positions within communities, and race relations. They were anchored as his philosophical, social, moral and political concerns and became his central academic vocation and the theme of his empirical research (see S. Husin Ali, 1964).

Apart from his academic teaching, research and publications, the most significant contribution of Syed Husin Ali's in consultation with M. K.

Rajakumar was to urge the government to build a "National University" as an apex of national education, using Malay as its main medium of instruction (pp. 55–56). Both he and Rajakumar "thought that this was a better thing to do (to meet the national needs as well as making higher education available to a wider range of students) rather than opposing" (p. 55) the Mandarin medium Merdeka University project proposed by many Chinese groups. Syed Husin Ali's initiative was given wide and enthusiastic support and gave rise to the subsequent establishment of the National University, which "received very warm reception, especially among the Malays" (p. 57).

Syed Husin Ali forged a close relationship with other writers and was instrumental in the formation of the country's influential National Writers Association (PENA) and that spearheaded the establishment of several writer associations around the country that propagated and gave a momentum to Malay literary writing as well as a boost to peoples' interest in literature (p. 91). Syed Husin Ali's activities were further merged with local left leaning political activists notable among them were the Socialist Front stalwarts, Tan Chee Koon, V. David, Lim Kean Siew and V. Veerapan (p. 85). The regular meetings and discussions Syed Husin Ali had with these left leaning political activists "were very rigorous and I managed to clarify my mind on many political issues" (p. 85).

Syed Husin Ali was nurtured into socialist ideas both in his academic and political ideologies. However, unlike the rigidly doctrinal and influential Marxist theoreticians of the Arab World, such as Salamah Moussa, Samir Amin and Madhi Amel, Marxism was neither Syed Husin Ali's dedicated dogma nor his theoretical framework. In fact Syed Husin Ali was averse (continues to be so) and critical of the dogmatic and rigid Marxism-Leninism or Maoism doctrinaire and even Scientific Socialism. Therefore, throughout his *Memoirs* one finds a thread of ambivalence of his ideological commitment; to brand him a closet socialist or a Marxist is therefore inappropriate and problematic, as he espoused nothing of the kind.

The University of Malaya had by 1962 severed its ties with the Singapore division and was established as a university in its own right. The university in spite of being state funded to the tune of 95%, did enjoy considerable amount of autonomy and academic freedom. A community of academics governed the university and a mechanism anchored on internal and external peer review regulated academic quality till the passing of the Universities and University Colleges Act of 1971 that came into force in 1972. While the Singapore leadership virtually eroded university autonomy, academic freedom and student political activism from the early 60s, it took the Malaysian political leadership another decade to similarly rein in the country's universities.

In the interim period as Syed Husin Ali points out "lecturers and students were allowed to participate in politics without any restrictions, unlike now" (p. 98). There was a vibrant student political activism in the campus and as expected Syed Husin Ali forged a close and active relationship with student activists. One

sees from the observations of Syed Husin Ali that the student community was harnessing its strength through student unions to pressure the government to promote social, economic and political change for the betterment of the country. Though they refrained from contesting the 1969 elections, the student union campaigned through a student manifesto before the elections for greater democracy, abolition of ISA and release of political detainees. A number of student leaders "went campaigning, speaking at huge rallies that were attended by thousands in a number of big towns" (p. 54).

Syed Husin Ali's strong anti-UMNO stand and close links with growing student activism alarmed the government. The Johor Menteri Besar accused him of not being grateful to the UMNO-backed state government that had awarded him a scholarship, as well as poisoning the minds of students (p. 98). The accusations were given prominent coverage in the widely circulated *Utusan Melayu* the country's leading Malay daily (p. 98). Syed Husin Ali replied through a long article in the *Utusan Melayu* in which he emphasised that he (was thankful to the "rakyat", who were the source of the money for the scholarship, although it was the government that awarded it to me. As such I felt myself to be more obliged to help the "rakyat" in ways I thought best. I did that not because I hated the government, but because I owed it to the people and loved them more) (p. 99). Syed Husin Ali subsequently sued *Utusan Melayu* and was awarded damages (p. 99).

Syed Husin Ali's deep-rooted commitment to the disadvantaged also drew him to active grassroots politics and he immersed himself into full-blooded national politics while he was still an academic. He took over the position of Secretary-General of the crippled left-leaning Malayan People's Party ("Parti Rakyat Malaya", PRM) (p. 120), a party formed in 1955 and rooted in the history and tradition of Marhaenism (p. 103) and the Malay National Party (Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya, PKMM), to continue the national struggle when the party's founders and office bearers Ahmad Boestamam and Tajuddin Kahar were detained under ISA.

## ELITE AND RACE-BASED MAJORITARIAN POLITICS

In the late colonial era, the fervent secular democratic nationalism of the 1940s and 1950s slid into forms of religious or ethnic "majoritarianism" (Bose, 2011: 258). In many multiracial societies including Malaya/Malaysia ethnic "majoritarianism" has been and continued to be a potent weapon used by the ruling elite to consolidate and wield political and economic power. Economically, the country became recognisably capitalist, in coherence with business interest.

The ruling party maintains a claim that in a parliamentary democracy "government authority flows from the will of the people" (Jabatan Penerangan

Malaysia, 1972: 1) and thus through its regular parliamentary elections it legitimises and empowers its political rule. UMNO's leadership through its centralised and unilateral political-bureaucratic authority has progressively become more self-serving and self-perpetuating. This new commitment has naturally discarded their initial pledge according to Syed Husin Ali "in the Sovereignty of the People (Ketuanan Rakyat)" towards the "Sovereignty of the Malays" which has racist overtones (p. 259). He reiterates that "I am ready to accept Malay Sovereignty if it means defending the rights in the lower strata of society while at the same time not ignoring the rights of others from the lower classes of other ethnic groups. In this case, it would not be contrary to the spirit of People's Sovereignty (pp. 259–260).

In power, the ruling elite denied the people the full legitimate political freedom the populace had aspired to with political independence from the repressive colonial masters. A classic case in point is the heavy-handed use of the ISA to curb political opposition, to the unilateral reordering and the formation of the Malaysian Federation between the British colonial government and the ruling elites of Malaya, Singapore and Borneo territories including Brunei. The architects of the Malaysian Federation as expected faced serious hostility. The Indonesian President Sukarno declared his "Crush Malaysia Policy" (p. 88). From the inception of the mooted of the Malaysian Federation, the Sultan of Brunei being ambivalent of the whole initiative opted out of the scheme (p. 85). While in the Malayan Federation the Socialist Front and the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS) opposed the unilateral formation of the Malaysian Federation and called for a popular endorsement by the people for its formation through a referendum (p. 88).

In Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew with his greater ambition of becoming the future Prime Minister of Malaysian Malaysia went on a "Battle for Merger" war cry. Lee Kuan Yew's merger plan faced rational and resolute opposition from his left-wing party ranks who had split earlier in 1961 with the PAP and formed the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front). Though touting to the "free world" that the island city-state is a people's democracy, in February 1963 Lee Kuan Yew found the ISA his government inherited from the British a useful and potent political weapon in order to crush any opposition to his "Battle for Merger" crusade. He detained 133 of the left-leaning political opponents from the Barisan Sosialis as well as trade unionists and student activists under "Operation Cold Store" (Poh, Tan and Hong, 2013). Henceforth, Lee Kuan Yew was able to consolidate his own autocratic political power and institutionalise a one-party authoritarian rule. Many of the detainees were Syed Husin Ali's close friends of similar political persuasion. As he points out "many of my friends in Singapore fell victim to this repression" (p. 86) of Lee Kuan Yew's ruthless decimation of his opponents. It was a personal blow to Syed Husin Ali. It caused him "great anger and sadness" (p. 86). Therefore, "the mass arrest also raised my political consciousness to new

heights; it made me aware of the injustice and cruelty of the regime in Singapore then and more determined to struggle for justice and democracy" (p. 86).

### MAY 13 AND ITS AFTERMATH

The primary cause of the May '69 racial riots was officially ascribed to the prevailing economic, wealth and employment disparities between the majoritarian *bumiputera* and non-*bumiputera* communities. The perennial malaise in income, wealth and employment disparity and the Malay dominated Alliance/Barisan National government's inability to correct it since independence had resulted in a "growing sense of insecurity among the Malays due to the gap they see between themselves and the non-Malays" (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 1972: 6). The policy changes introduced immediately following the aftermath of the May 13 riots brought about massive structural and institutional changes and from then on became a watershed in the country's political topography and history.

To remedy the malaise, the government initiated the New Economic Policy (NEP) model in 1971. The NEP's primary aim was to bridge the large gap between haves and have nots, particularly between the *bumiputeras* and non-*bumiputeras*.

The anticipated expectation was that the NEP's inclusive state-led development trajectory would drive economic growth. A growth mantra that would eliminate all the country's economic maladies as well as underpin overall income distribution that would result in every Malaysian benefiting with higher living standards. The government had an inbuilt proviso that the NEP's development model would ensure that no particular Malaysian community experiences any loss or feels any sense of deprivation in the process. There was an assurance that the "Chinese and Indians were not required to give up the economic capital and powers that they already had but, for the future economic opportunities were to be divided fairly among all races in Malaysia" (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 1972: ix). In hindsight the NEP's pretentiousness as an inclusive social equaliser and a creator of a just, inclusive and egalitarian Malaysian society is far from realism. Instead, with the introduction of the NEP, UMNO's ruling elite in collaboration with the overwhelming Malay driven bureaucracy began to dominate all aspects of the country's national-decision making, particularly publically funded and driven social, economic, cultural and political activities.

Though the NEP restructured the prevailing imbalance in the racially structured and skewed occupational structure of the country, it also simultaneously through its inextricably intertwining unilateral political institutions produced economic policies that incubated a system of crony

capitalism and corruption for wealth accumulation. This policy and its implementation were further accelerated when the government embraced the highly controversial Washington Consensus' neoliberal recipe of free market and global capitalist system.

The policy was underpinned by deregulation and privatisation, entrapping the country into a top to bottom economic growth with minimal accountability. Within the framework of the NEP and its succeeding development strategies, namely the new National Development Policy (NDP) incorporated within the Second Outline Perspective Plan (1991–2000) and the National Vision Policy (2001–2020). Dr. Mahathir Mohamad during his prime ministership (1982–2003) further accelerated *bumiputera* asset ownership. The hallmark of Mahathir's ambition was the creation of "a new breed of internationally recognised *Bumiputera* capitalist" (Gomez, 2009: 169). Thus through his controversial and unilateral policy of disinvest Mahathir transferred critical national assets at nominal values.

The policy "forces of divergence" has evidently contributed to phenomenal reduction in absolute poverty from almost 50% in the 1970s to a mere 1.7% in 2012. However, there are huge outsized gains, in terms of income and wealth accumulation for the ruling elite and its cronies; while leaving the majority of the country's households to live with stagnant income, escalating inflation and huge household debt.

The case in point was seen in the demonstrations by the slum dwellers in Tasek Utara in Johor Bahru and the hunger march by peasants in Baling led by Hamid Tuah, in the northern state of Kedah. Although, Syed Husin Ali was not in the forefront of the demonstrations and hunger march, he actively gave them support (p. 117). Thus, he was detained in 1974 under ISA initially for two years and since he was considered to be a recalcitrant, his detention was extended by four years. His view was that "the government wanted to make an example of me to warn the other lecturers not to follow in my footsteps" (p. 117). The fear of being detained under the ISA has curbed academic freedom, a prerequisite to foster knowledge and the right to publish so as to open their work to scholastic and public scrutiny. Most academics have refrained from controversial discourses, thus inhibiting the growth of a critical intellectual culture.

Interestingly, Syed Husin Ali points out that "Anwar (Ibrahim) regarded the NEP as having an intrinsic racial character. It could easily be made use of by the ruling groups to encourage accumulation of wealth by their relatives and cronies, all in the name of helping the Malays. He and some leaders of the party agreed that there should be a policy to defend the interests of the poor and low income groups, irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, and provide more aid to them" (pp. 168–169). Anwar had indicated that the NEP "needed to be reviewed as it had been in place for a long time and society had changed. A new policy had to be formulated" (p. 168).



## **AT HELM PRM**

Syed Husin Ali's primary mission was to develop the political consciousness of the people and garner their support to mitigate the policies of a government that "ruled with an iron fist and carried out policies that were contrary to the interest of the people" (p. 114) through an effective and constructive opposition. The PRM, among other activities, conducted political courses to selected leaders and cadres in order to raise the members' understanding of the party ideology and policies as well as held almost weekly road shows and rallies all over the country (pp. 109–111). Syed Husin Ali points out "Wherever we went we stayed in the homes of friends or members, never in a hotel. Our simple ways were appreciated by party members and supporters" (p. 110).

Despite the prevailing profound economic and social disadvantages among Malay rural communities, he says, "political work among Malays in the rural areas has been more difficult than among the urban Chinese. It appears that political consciousness among the urban Chinese (and even urban Malays) is now higher than rural Malays. Traditional outlook influenced by certain feudal and religious values have resulted in the rural Malays being more conservative" (p. 106). The major obstacles the PRM faced in the rural areas was the establishment's spread of propaganda "that the PRM believed in the communist ideology and its leaders did not believe in Islam" (p. 112) and UMNO's constant attempts "to restrict or at least weaken our influence" (p. 111). Therefore, it was "difficult to popularise PSRM and expand the party among the Malays, especially in the rural areas. Among them, a lot of prejudices and fears had already been sown about socialism" (p. 115). In addition, there was a busy overt and covert psychology of fear activity among the people by both the Special Branch and UMNO leaders "alleging that PRM had links with the communist and threatening that anyone who became its member or supporter would be detained under the ISA. Their propaganda and threats were very effective and with the limited resources at our disposal we could not possibly counter them" (p. 112).

In 1990 Syed Husin Ali was elected President of PRM. The presidency cost him his first passion and vocation as an academic. He was forced to retire from his professorship from the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. The university used the 1975 amendments to the University and University Colleges Act that barred lecturers and students from active party politics to force him out of academic life. From then he became a devoted full-time political leader of the poor and the marginalised. He also "believed that if PRM could carry out its activities to fight for the interests of the poor and neglected from all communities effectively, it would certainly be able to expand without necessarily changing its name" (p. 115). However, both the word "socialist" and the ideology of "Scientific Socialism" were dropped from the party's vocabulary and the majority

of the party members wanted PRM to pursue with "wider programmes or policies that were clearly progressive or and pro-people" (p. 119).

Syed Husin Ali's reservation of the acceptability of socialist ideology among the religious conservative and the rural Malays was not far from wrong. When he was nominated to stand as a Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) candidate for the 2004 general elections, Nik Aziz, the Menteri Besar of Kelantan and PAS' spiritual leader, rejected his candidature as he "was a socialist and that socialism was almost akin to communism" (p. 160). A similar streak of conceptual intransigency was also embedded in Syed Husin Ali and on this occasion rightly. When he was approached by intermediaries informally for PRM to join the ruling National Front (Barisan Nasional, BN) (p. 130) he said PRM "should not allow itself to be absorbed or co-opted into any party or movement that did not fight for the interests of the ordinary people but instead suppress them" (p. 131).

## **THE ANWAR FACTOR**

The 1997 Asian financial crisis, its impact and its unprecedented repercussions on the country's economy led to sharp differences between the controversial and divisive Mahathir Mohamad, the prime minister and Anwar Ibrahim his deputy in the policy measures to be taken urgently to mitigate the possibility of an imminent economic calamity. In the ensuing political fall-out Mahathir felt that he was under a political siege. Syed Husin Ali says that Mahathir was "in fact, threatened, seeing the opposition movement against him and also the criticisms by a number of UMNO leaders towards him" (p. 135). Mahathir's outburst of allegations of sexual misbehaviour by Anwar resulted in the latter's sacking. The sacking of, in all likelihood the potential candidate to succeed the PM, on Mahathir's admission, was according to Syed Husin Ali a false accusation and politically motivated (p. 132). Anwar was subsequently convicted and jailed.

It was a well-orchestrated and unashamed conspiracy without any restraint between the authorities and the judiciary, the police, and the media "to politically destroy Anwar" (p. 138). The political destruction of Anwar was unacceptable to Syed Husin Ali. He says, "From that point... my attitude towards Anwar and politics changed" (p. 133). It was an unexpected turning point and a shift in Syed Husin Ali's political affiliation. Though he firmly stuck to his long-term political values, in his new political space he was prepared to straddle his life-long radical philosophical commitments as well as his partisan political space with several of Anwar's political values that Anwar played to his political audience. Henceforth, the disposed UMNO stalwart and the party's rising political star, Anwar and Syed Husin Ali became political bedfellows.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989, perhaps for Syed Husin Ali the future political path for parliamentary success was the liberal-capitalist democracy that Anwar as well as the key partners, particularly the DAP

within the Pakatan espoused. Critics have accused Syed Husin Ali of vacillating and abandoning his long committed political ideology for being a stalwart in Pakatan (p. 259). Syed Husin Ali points out that he has "no problem with this perception". However, for him "what is important is that" he "still holds fast to such ideas as social justice, concern for the poor and national unity, besides opposing unlimited concentration of wealth, corruption and bad governance" (p. 259). To a considerable extent this political conviction did pay dividends as greater democracy was achieved in the 2008 and 2013 general elections.

### **THE *REFORMASI* (REFORMATION) MOVEMENT**

Anwar's shameful arrest, detention, ill-treatment, trial and conviction seriously affected the country's loose multiracial, informal and leaderless *Reformasi* (Reformation) Movement that basically called Malaysians of all ages to agitate for greater democracy at the risk of being tear-gassed and detained. Political parties too led by the PAS President formed a coalition with NGOs called GERAK, to carry out massive protests (p. 137). The *Reformasi* movement despite the absence of an established formal organisation and leadership was able with the help of informal leaders like Azmin Ali, Ezam Mohamad Nor, Tian Chua, N. Gobalakrishnan, Shaari Sungip and Dr. Badrul Amin (pp. 138–139) and others to mobilise political parties, groups and individuals from the left, moderates and even liberals onto the bandwagon to organise or support spontaneous and significant upsurge of demonstrations at regular intervals. This manifested into a new and growing maturity in politicisation, particularly among the youth and in their routine participation in dissent through mass eruptions. Some of the *Reformasi* leaders as anticipated "were accused of planning to overthrow the government" and were subsequently convicted in September 1999. The conviction barred them from standing in the forthcoming general elections in November (p. 139).

Among the ardent *Reformasi* activists, there emerged a viewpoint that "a more formal organisation should be established to unite all the *Reformasi* forces" (p. 139). This gave rise to the formation of an NGO called ADIL. This was developed into a political party at the advice of Anwar called National Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Nasional, KEADILAN) which was launched in April 1999. Dr. Wan Azizah (Anwar's wife) was its inaugural president "with the objective of fighting for social justice" (p. 139). PRM and PAS members both gave their active support and participated in activities organised by KEADILAN. A great impetus leading to the growth of the solidarity of the *Reformasi* movement was the news and articles posted on websites and in blogs particularly by Sabri Zain and Raja Petra Kamarudin (p. 140).

The close political working alliance between the leadership of KEADILAN and PRM with the suggestion of the imprisoned Anwar led them to unify both the parties to form the Parti Keadilan Rakyat, KEADILAN (People's Justice Party) which was formalised in August 2003 with Wan Azizah as its president. Syed Husin Ali was elected the party's deputy president. Syed Husin Ali pointed out that in many respects "there were more similarities than differences between the PRM and Keadilan" (p. 145). For Syed Husin Ali the amalgamation of the two parties could mutually reinforce and galvanise the goals of Keadilan (p. 145) and "establish a just society and a democratic state that is progressive and united" (p. 246) with a multi-ethnic membership (p. 145). According to Syed Husin Ali, streams of people came to register as members as soon as the party was launched (p. 141). Others from NGOs like the "Muslim Youth Association (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, ABIM), the Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM), and some other NGOs that had never been involved in party politics before. Not all KeADILan members were Malays. There were a number of Indians and Chinese" (p. 141). Syed Husin Ali points out that the formation of KEADILAN finally was the birth of a "new multi-ethnic party intent on bringing new politics" (p. 156).

Since 1998 a loose and informal coalition of an incongruently oriented ideological parties that are not grounded on a unified, clearly thought-out policy framework on a host of inclusive political, religious, economic, education, health, social, development and governance issues were brought together in opposition to UMNO-BN. The coalition consisted of the Malay/Islam based Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), the multiracial but Chinese dominated Democratic Action Party (DAP), the multiracial Parti Keadilan Nasional (KeADILan) and Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) formed the Barisan Alternative, a loose cooperation/coalition to electorally dislodge the corrupt and incompetent UMNO-BN from power. However, after the promising 2008 general elections they formed the Pakatan Rakyat that led to the formation of the potent Barisan Alternative. The formation of an alternative to the UMNO-BN and to bring changes by political forces outside the government was "the joint objective dreamt of by Boestamam, Ishak and Burhanuddin. They were convinced that change would occur only after the Alliance was replaced. This could be achieved only if the parties outside the government could unite their forces" (p. 210).

#### **A FREE MARKET AND CAPITALISM ORIENTED PAKATAN RAKYAT**

The PKR from its inception had crafted and propagated a political platform that was committed to transform the politically, economically, racially and religiously fast polarising society towards "a just society and democratic state that is progressive and united". This message had both a multiracial and mass appeal.

In contrast, the ruling UMNO-BN was riddled with cronyism, corruption and incompetency. In other words, the NEP though launched as a promise to be "an effective tool to redress serious social and economic inequalities" saw the growth of an educated middle-class but did not fulfil its pledges of narrowing the inequality gap. Instead, it literally developed into an extractive system with wealth flowing upward and concentrating into the hands of the ruling elite as well as their political and business cronies and their vulgar "conspicuous consumption".

The Pakatan Rakyat was a disparate partnership that straddles the line between Islamic fundamentalism and secular ideologies was initially triggered and underpinned by a platform of common solidarity movement to resist the long established UMNO dominated regime and bring about change and *Reformasi* (Reformation). Though, neither the Islamic fundamentalists nor the secularists were able to convert the other, they were able to join forces for a common cause to challenge UMNO's monopoly of domestic political power. The three populist opposition groups seem not to object to differences in wealth as far as they were gained through "honest" means. However, they are opposed to corruption and cronyism and are for greater accountability and transparency.

## CONCLUSION

The goal, to bring change to uplift "the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, and the powerless" occupied centre stage in Syed Husin Ali's ardent and active academic, intellectual, political and social life. Therefore, his *Memoirs* as pointed out earlier with few inherent limitations reflect a broad kaleidoscope of the nation's political, economic, and social stratification system and its resultant contradictions. The storyline narrates Syed Husin Ali's intense dissatisfaction with the exploitative economic and social policies and the politics of both the colonial and post-colonial states. From his school and university days and subsequently through his academic teaching and research, intellectual discourse and role as social and political activist, his sole mission was to rebut the exploitation of the majority of the country's population by the ruling elite.

The *Memoirs'* storyline implicitly portrays a high degree of commitment, passion and devotion of Syed Husin Ali. It records his left-wing leanings in order to increase the common people's inclusive role in the country's democracy and freedom process. In short, he championed in a relentless way to breakdown the sharp communal, class and religious structural divisions that were constructed by the colonial state and with independence by UMNO and its asymmetrical partners. As an ardent nationalist, committed academic and social activist, Syed Husin Ali has shown that throughout his student, academic and political engagement he has been and continues to be busy combating the self-serving

ruling elite to pursue a more proactive policy to eradicate rural and urban poverty and to break-down the communal barriers to achieve greater social justice and a richer life for all Malaysians. There is no guarantee that the dream of Syed Husin Ali for greater social justice and egalitarianism will come to fruition during his lifetime. Neither can it be assumed that they could go unfulfilled forever.

Syed Husin Ali's memoirs are relevant for today's social and political activists as well as for researchers alike. It is a clear and readable account of not only his life but also of the political and intellectual leaders who have contributed or marred the evolution or creation of a progressive, peaceful and united Malaysia. This is an essential read for those seeking to understand the debate and policies of Malaysia, which by their very nature are daunting and challenging. Hence, Syed Husin Ali's *Memoirs* are a lively thought provoking and occasionally a controversial account of Malaysian's struggle towards attaining a full egalitarian, just and free society for the benefit of its citizens. It must also be noted that this narrative is pleasingly enhanced by many photographs revealing important signposts of Syed Husin Ali's life.

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