

*Zubir  
Said*

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*Zubir  
Said*

THE COMPOSER  
OF MAJULAH SINGAPURA

ROHANA ZUBIR



Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
Singapore

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# *Dedication*

*This biography is dedicated to my father who taught me everything and expected nothing in return.*

*To my mother who taught me the meaning of sacrifice and devotion.*

*To my late husband, Tan Sri Dato' Dr Hj Abdul Hamid Hj Abdul Rahman, the light of my life.*

*To my pride and joy, my children, and their families*

*Khairil Abdul Hamid*

*Dr Suhanna Abdul Hamid and Dr Johan Khong  
Adam and Danial*

*Dr Muhammad Akhlil Abdul Hamid and Dr Laura Fender  
Maia, Jakob Isa and Thea*

*Yohanna Abdul Hamid and Shaiful Zahrin Subhan  
Fariq and Mikail*

*To my siblings Zubaidah, Zuraidah and Soeyono*

*To Salmah Sidin and her entire family*

*To all friends.*

*Thank you for being there for me and for the understanding and help you gave me abundantly.*

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# Majulah Singapura

## MAJULAH SINGAPURA

Mari kita rakyat Singapura  
Sama-sama menuju bahagia  
Cita-cita kita yang mulia  
Berjaya Singapura

Marilah kita bersatu  
Dengan semangat yang baru  
Semua kita berseru  
Majulah Singapura  
Majulah Singapura

## ONWARD SINGAPORE

Come, fellow Singaporeans  
Let us progress towards happiness together  
May our noble aspiration bring  
Singapore success

Come, let us unite  
In a new spirit  
Let our voices soar as one  
Onward Singapore  
Onward Singapore

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English translation from the Government of Singapore website  
<<http://app.www.sg/who/National-Anthem-in-English-124.aspx>> (accessed 16 July 2012).

MAJU-LAH SINGAPURA

SUSUN KATA DAN LAGU  
OLEH ZUBIR SAID

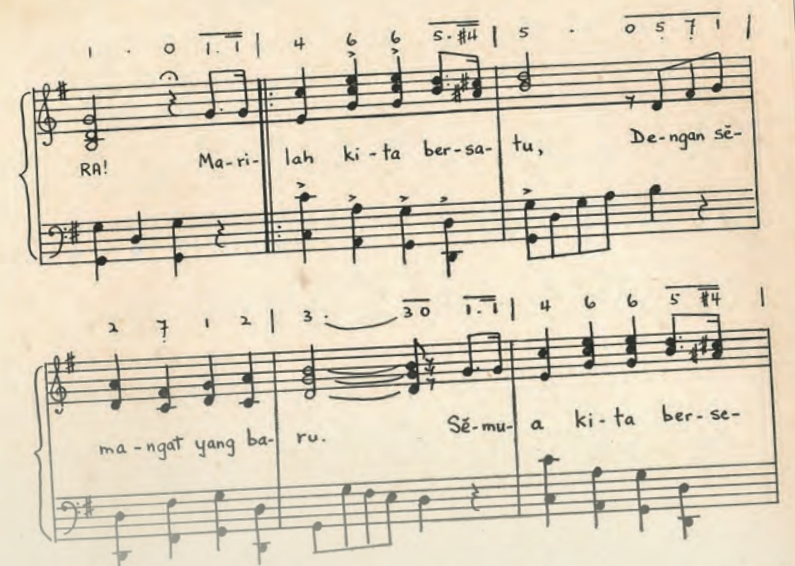
$\text{♩} = 116 (\text{MM})$

Ma-ri ki-ta ra'-yat Si-nga-pu

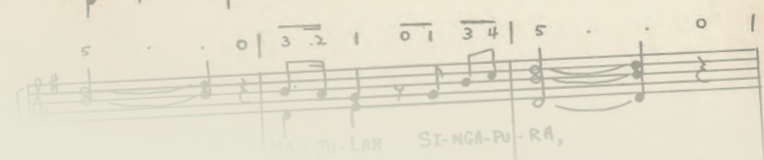


RA! Ma-ri-lah ki-ta ber-sa-tu, De-ngan sē-

ma-ngat yang ba-ru. Sē-mu-a ki-ta ber-se-



MAJU-LAH SI-NGA-PU-RA,



# Foreword

A national anthem sings of a country's soul. It captures what it means to be a citizen, what unites citizens, and what distinguishes them from others. It is also a way of re-dedicating oneself to the Nation and all it stands for. People are urged to rise over passing occasions and be an exalted repository of a nation's deepest aspirations and profoundest dreams. At the same time, the anthem has to be simple enough for ordinary people to understand and relate to. Most of all, it has to appeal to the young — tomorrow's leaders and protectors of the nation who are being moulded in today's world. There are few things more moving than to see and hear peoples and particularly children celebrate their common future around the national flag, which children greet with the national anthem at the beginning of each school day. When abroad on important occasions, the singing of the anthem stirs our emotions even more strongly.

Singapore's national anthem fulfils all these functions. What is special about it is that it reflects the special nature of Singapore as a country born out of a disrupted flow in history, and yet a country which had to prove that its exceptionalism could survive and succeed. For this, every Singaporean must be grateful to Zubir Said, whose *Majulah Singapura* captures the flowering of the Singapore imagination vividly yet simply.

Our road to Independence began with internal self-government in 1959. That is when the great task of building our Nation awaited us. It was at that time that our national anthem was produced by Zubir Said.

The anthem in the original — that is in the Malay language — is pregnant with exhortations. The wordings are simple, but they evolve a call to our people to look ahead and overcome the challenges ahead, though not specifically stated, in a spirit that is new. The singing of it is a call to all, with a promise of a new dawn. Every pause, every emphasis, every nuance in it is meant to evolve that purpose, with determination. In translation it loses its punch.



It was a great pity that the man who is behind Singapore's most memorable song remained little known to the public. This gap has been filled admirably in this book by his daughter, Dr Rohana Zubir. The book gives both an account and the flavour of a life of transition — from Sumatra, where he was born, to Singapore — and his passionate engagement with his new home.

It is not easy to write about one's own father. But the author has maintained a professional distance from her subject. What make her account riveting are her insights into the life and thoughts of a remarkable man.

Both Singaporeans who lived in Zubir Said's times and those who were born later will benefit immensely from reading this book. It is my hope that younger Singaporeans, in particular, will read it as an account of the Singapore spirit encapsulated in our national anthem and appreciate the depth of its meaning, even if it be not in the English with which we are more familiar.

**S. R. NATHAN**

*Sixth President of the Republic of Singapore*

13 July 2012

# Message

The author, Puan Sri Dr Rohana Zubir, came to see me at ISEAS about three years ago upon the introduction of a mutual friend, Ramon Navaratnam, a retired senior Malaysian civil servant. In the course of the conversation, Dr Rohana disclosed to me that she had been working on a book about her father for some time and that she was looking for help to find a good publisher. When, in response to my query, she said her father was Zubir Said, my ears pricked up. To my generation, the name was easily recognizable as the person who composed Singapore's national anthem.

As I had always been intrigued by the personality of Pak Zubir and the circumstances under which *Majulah Singapura* was conceived, I readily agreed to have the book published by ISEAS. After reading the manuscript, I was even more convinced that it would be a book that would shed light on the broader canvas of the region's post-war history. It was also going to be a story about a teacher who would be instrumental in guiding a whole generation into the world of music.

The story is all the more poignant and moving as it is an account by a daughter, who made the telling of it her lifelong passion. ISEAS Publications Unit, under the redoubtable leadership of Mrs Triena Ong, supported Dr Rohana in her arduous journey to have the book published. The book is accompanied by a CD, produced by Trabye, Raja Mahafaizal Raja Muzaffar, containing some of Zubir Said's musical compositions.

I am happy to have been a part of this recording of Pak Zubir Said's life and achievements.

**K. KESAVAPANY**

*Former Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*

(November 2002–February 2012)

6 July 2012

# Preface

Zubir Said passed away on 16 November 1987 at the age of 80 years. In 1928, at the young age of 21, with only the shirt on his back and a clean towel, he left Sumatra and crossed the seas to make his home in Singapore. For almost 60 years, Singapore was haven for him as he lived and worked by the adage “where the sky above I uphold, the earth beneath I tread”. His dedication and loyalty to his adopted country were unwavering.

From being a violinist in the *bangsawan*, a form of Malay opera, to being a music icon in Singapore, he traversed through life building milestone after milestone, creating a personal history that leaves trails of achievements and legacies. He was a man who left little else but an unblemished character and reputation. He was a man who died leaving his name like the tiger that died leaving its stripes, as the Malay proverb says. His name is, above all, associated with the stirring national anthem of Singapore. He was well-known as a champion of Malay music, the arts and culture that is unadulterated. He once quoted his sentiment as that of Confucius, saying “I am not one who was born in possession of knowledge; I am one who is fond of antiquity and earnest in seeking it there.” This book is about the life and struggle of a man who was insatiable in his search for knowledge — any knowledge — who loved tradition and had a great respect for time-honoured customs and virtues.

Zubir Said’s life was cloaked in unpretentious modesty. Coming from humble beginnings, totally self-driven all his life, humility and simplicity became second nature to him. He empathized with the less fortunate and the less educated as he himself was. A very significant driving force behind his work was his desire to pass on as much knowledge as he could to these people, especially the young.

This is the story of an extraordinary man charting many facets in his life with total commitment, courage, enthusiasm and candid humour in difficult as well as in good times: a life that was strewn and enriched with his jubilations and his disappointments. He accepted his limits and had gone beyond them.

In 1992, I took early retirement from the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, with the noble intention of devoting my time to writing my father's biography. But procrastination took over for many years I'm ashamed to admit, being caught up in the web of my busy life. When my mother passed away in 2007 in Johor Bahru, I had the sad and painful task of sorting out her belongings. Among these were six boxes of my father's paraphernalia. I brought them to Kuala Lumpur and for the next two years I sifted through the enormous volume of materials that belonged to Papa and organized them in some kind of order: files and files of correspondence, newspaper clippings, music scores, 23 reels of oral history tapes conducted by the National Archives of Singapore, books, old receipts, his log books, his medals and other awards, his favourite pipes and innumerable photographs and some gramophone records. The task was not without its problems because of missing pages in some of his academic papers; some letters were undated, but generally, Papa, being a stickler for discipline, had left enough materials for me to venture to recreate his chequered life into some semblance of his personal history. For example, most of the time he had carbon copies — photocopying was not in vogue then — of letters he received and replied to.

I was very aware that I was duty bound to write my father's biography. It is an honour and a privilege. I have never written a narration before; only academic papers. I had no inkling where to begin, until one day I happened to mention to Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam what I was doing and that I wanted to look for a publisher. He instantly and kindly contacted Ambassador K. Kesavapany, then Director of ISEAS (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) in Singapore. Mr Kesavapany lost no time in e-mailing me and the rest is history.

I felt comfortable that the book would be published by ISEAS of Singapore because Papa had dedicated his entire life to Singapore, and the island state had honoured him in many ways.

Everything in my father's possessions suggested narrative possibilities. The difficulty for me was to piece them together. My task was doubly hard because he wrote mostly in Malay which I had to carefully translate. Understanding his academic papers was for me a monumental effort and a task beyond me. I tried, but decided it was best to leave them untranslated — except those which were already translated.

In writing Papa's biography, I found myself being drawn into a significant part of the book. As I was writing, memories of my life as my father's daughter kept flooding back to my mind. I was facing the dilemma of deciding whether to write quite extensively about my life that was closely linked to that of my father's or leave myself completely out. I felt I was very much a part of the scenario of a life that I was unfolding which was my father's and in which we — my mother, siblings, adoptive relations and for that matter other people who mattered in my father's life — constitute the rubric of Zubir Said's life. In fact, I at first hesitated to include too much about myself, but as they say "the past is best confronted", especially when it served to highlight my relationship with my father.

I have regrets that I did not write sooner, because so many of my father's contemporaries have passed away. Additional input from them would have afforded a greater source of information that would certainly add colour to the man behind his music.

What did I discover in unravelling my father's life through the months of reading and re-reading the volumes of letters and mulling over his artefacts? I discovered the true man behind his music; understanding him better — his exemplary attributes: his generosity and kindness to family and friends, strangers and animals even in lean times; his steadfastness, his firmness; his bravery and decisiveness in the face of danger. The more I read of him the less I felt I knew the real Zubir Said. He appeared an enigma. Unravelling his life 23 years after his demise showed me what an unusual and remarkable man Papa was.

I want to remember him as he was. Asma Naim, a journalist from an Indonesian tabloid, *Haluan*, in its 14 August 1972 edition described him as: “With baritone voice, and a tongue fluent in speaking, interspersed with natural unforced humor, I think there isn’t anyone who will not find themselves hanging on his lips.”

And more: even his grammatical slip-ups, especially when he became excited and animated during conversations on his favourite topics: music, the arts and culture. I deliberately did not doctor his English because his English expressions were quaintly understandable. Whenever I had to translate his Malay into English, I also kept close to the original for fear of infusing my own meaning and interpretation into what is intended in his sentences. Hence the structure of my English translations would definitely not pass off as the Queen’s English. Instead, I have translated his words in the Zubir Said English style.

As I have said, it is an honour and a privilege that my siblings have delegated the writing of the biography to me. I only hope I can do our father justice in this endeavour by one who has never before written a life story of any sort. More importantly, I hope the book may be read by one and all, especially the young who always featured very highly in my father’s groups of favourite people. May the unassuming man, Zubir Said, be a role model and an inspiration to them. Last but not least, may his legacies and his quests be useful platforms for future pursuits in research and development in music, the arts and culture.

I thank Allah SWT for His Guidance and Light to finish this book. Any untoward pitfalls and expressions will be entirely of my own doing and may Allah forgive me for these.



# Acknowledgements

“One can repay a loan of gold but never of a good deed – for it, one dies, forever in debt”

A Malay Proverb

“I can no other answer make, but thanks, and thanks”

William Shakespeare

## My Gratitude

A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step  
Nay, a first step that none could conjecture as yet  
Until that one pleasantly fateful day, a visit, sans prepare  
Out of care for **Puan Sri Samala**

And **Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam** the gracious pair  
A long-forgotten yarn to bare and notes to compare  
Over hot tea and samosa a welcome traditional fare.  
I chanced upon a notion to mention in despair,  
A tunnel long and dim of intent to print I would not dare.  
Three and twenty years lapsed, Zubir Said’s legacies in a heap  
I keep.

Magnanimity thy name, Tan Sri Ramon, technology your game  
Double quick to Ambassador K. Kesavapany of ISEAS  
Your mouse beeped, opened floodgates with simply a click  
With the current, I drifted down the sudden flow  
Embarking on a writing adventure I hardly know.  
No greater words nor deeds can my gratitude say and show.

Our gratitude surpasses words for thee Your Excellency,  
**Mr Sellapan Ramanathan**, President of Singapore previously  
A persona so honourable; exuding calm authority and dignity;  
Mr Nathan, fondly known to all Singapore community,  
Who love and treasure thee, from walks of life out there  
In greatness and affluence, still in commonness adjure  
So generous in act and tribute to Zubir, the father I adore  
We would thank you from the bottom of our hearts but  
For thee our hearts have no bottom, it’s fathomless we assure;  
Zubir Said and family; forever will they cherish and share  
Your kind sentiments, in a Foreword so blessed and rare.

For a lone writer such as I, it was a journey of discovery  
**Ambassador Kesavapany**, a gentleman of simplicity  
Simply “Pany”, is what he likes to be called; it’s chummy  
Confident and decisive; and brevity is his affinity  
In discreet — a shadow of affability, kindness and generosity.  
A word here, a hint there, you have cushioned my stall  
Ever pushing gently to prod me onwards I recall  
“Never lose hope”, “Never give up” you seem to say  
Thank you Pany for the trust; giving me reason not to sway.

**Triena Noeline Ong**, what a pretty unusual name,  
Prestigious, Managing Editor, Head of Publishing,  
The pride of ISEAS and her gender, multitasking her fame,  
Prodigious juggling’s her game; behind the brain  
Passed through her dainty hands, books in a train  
The biography on Zubir Said, yet another  
Painstakingly, her patient careful eyes endeavour  
Noting details, only the experienced eyes discover  
Spotting pitfalls, large and small; making sense of prose  
Triena takes it all in her stride, gently and composed  
Your name in gold I’ll carve, thanking you my beautiful rose.

When despair sets in  
When I knew not where to begin  
Making sense of notes galore, pictures thrown in  
I cry for help I fear no one could hear  
But kind **Noor Azlina Yunus**, she did heed  
You are *nur* lighting my dark path showing the way  
“Even pages on the left, odd pages facing”  
In neat piles you rearranged my jumbled pages  
Into an array of delightful passages  
A master of brevity, you are. This I’m not

Always long-winded twisted in a knot  
Deftly unravelling it with a swish of your pen  
Indeed as an editor you are ten upon ten  
Thank you Azlina.

I have an English daughter-in-law, **Laura** her name  
In Latin, a laurel plant, a symbol of kingly honour, but Laura  
Pediatrics Radiology is her crowning glory  
In sufferance I made her read my maiden draft  
With discerning eyes, the doctor pored on errors replete  
Not missing symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis complete  
With long patience, and TLC, prescribing cure  
With her gentle help I healed, feeling cured and doubly sure  
To recuperate and write some more.  
Thank you my Laura ever more.

**Dr Ooi Kee Beng**, born, bred and schooled in Malaysia  
Traversed farther in search of knowledge and adventure  
Acquired a PhD in Sinology, from Stockholm University,  
Far away in Sweden a lecturer on Chinese philosophy  
A literate so accomplished, prolific author of books aplenty  
Handpicked “to hold my hand”  
The kindly man with the nimble mind  
Malaysian Politics — Kee Beng’s specialty one of a kind  
The *Reluctant Politician* dedicated to Tun Dr Ismail,  
A biography, one among many, so well opined  
Though the “holding hands” is not sustained,  
You did jump-start my writing when under strain,  
With kind encouraging words my dwindling effort regain.  
Thank you again and again and again.

Penning the biography was a journey of adventure  
An arduous passage strewn with silly mishaps — unsaved texts,  
Misplaced files, a headache and heartache to trace  
Little nitty gritty fundamentals so basic yet complex  
For a novice such as I, fuddled-muddled so perplexed  
Then came two IT angels to save my soul and heart to console  
Constantly at hand at my beck and call, a role you boldly hold  
To solve the slightest nightmarish problems I hated to forestall.

With dutiful patience you ushered me out of my misery  
Righting small errors, big errors with ease and mastery  
Teaching me computer tricks! Behold everything’s easily fixed  
Inserting footnotes, “aha” the “miraculous” that did the trick  
To them I am indebted and deeply gratified with pride  
For one is my daughter **Yohanna**, affectionately Mayang  
A choice pet name from Grandpa Zubir from young.  
Sister to **Khairil**, my first born, the next angel I called  
When his mother stumped, and by the computer trumped  
An urgent knock on his door to cure an ill so minor I recall  
Big or small, thank you both for answering my desperate calls.

190A Joo Chiat Place  
Once a humble abode where Zubir Said  
For three decades stayed,  
Where musical notes floated in the air,  
And musical scores everywhere  
Now a secreted treasure unveiled  
A humble place transformed, given a new face  
Zubir Said’s life and work immortalized  
Collectibles and memorabilia  
Saved for posterity and generations to gaze  
Honorable Judge **Rahim Jalil** unfazed  
Did it all — in the annals of time placed  
190A Joo Chiat Place judiciously in grace  
Our gratitude Hon. Judge, to you all due praise.

**Juliana Lim**, Arts Enthusiast and Advocate  
I have the privilege to meet and befriend  
From the 1980s a friendship entrenched  
You show me care and support that inspires  
When yours truly had much to aspire  
You came to my aid and together we conspire.  
A book *Zubir Said: His Songs* you create  
In quick time, with Berita Harian, it emanates  
In commemoration of Singapore’s 25 years of victory  
With foresight and a mission, to mark in history  
The gifts of a silent unsung hero, a man of simplicity  
A touching tribute to Zubir Said’s memory.



## SEKAPUR SIREH

Setitik tinta sebaris bahasa, titisan peluh membasahi usaha  
Namun, tiada sempurna curahan kata, tiada kelopak dan bunga  
Tanpa desakan ikhlas mu setulus hati menggapai otak fikiran ku  
Ke alam emosi; rencana kian mengalir ilham bersemi.  
Selautan budi jasamu ku kenang, **Safiah Osman** biduanita bukan calang  
Mu lahirkan inspirasi nun dari pelusuk hati murni mu  
Suntingan di celah celah naskah biografi ayahanda tersayang  
**Osman Rani** suami Safiah tercinta, teknologi canggih kepakarannya,  
Nyata, terpaksa terlibat, sama menabur bakti via komputer sendiri  
Allah SWT lah memberkati mu berdua; kelu lidah ku berkata  
Kerana sebak, sesak penuh kasih sayang di dada.

Kesilapan kecil dan besar bertaburan tiada dikesan  
Dengan empat mata ku pun terpintas lalu  
Hanya ketelitianmu, mengecam koma dan nokta,  
Ejaan dan nahu merata bercelaru  
Dikesan oleh mu **Khairiah Ahmad** teman intim sejati ku.  
Perhatian terperinci mu sungguh berharga,  
Ucapan terima kasih ku tak terhingga.

**Siti Zainun, Sulaiman Jeem, Ghani Hamid, Sapiee Ahmad**  
kebanggaan negara, merakam madah pujian menjulang  
Dalam lipatan lipatan madah mu semua tersulam  
Kata hikmah menjunjung tinggi pakar seni ibu pertiwi  
Allahyarham Zubir Said bertuah badan, megah berdiri  
Syabas hai pujangga satria! Anugerahmu ku hormati  
Kan ku rakam dalam sanubariku hingga akhir hayat menanti

**Soeyono, Noryani, Amin, Iskandar Mirza** adik anak tersayang,  
Jauh di seberang jauh lagi Jono di negeri orang  
Alhamdulillah, mempesakai warisan koleksi  
Ilmu Kakek tunjangan abadi terbentang luas dinikmati  
Paduan musik cepak berlilit dijari, bunyian seni dan seri hati  
Kepada adinda dan anakanda,  
Kakek menumpang, belaian kasih berpanjangan  
Terimalah ungkapan terima kasih nan tak terbilang.

Ayahanda Zubir pencipta lagu, prosa dan seloka  
Menyumbang ilmu menghiasi wacana bangsa  
Tertera bagi semua pencinta lagu dan seni  
Haus ingin mencungkil melayari inspirasi,  
Sukar oleh yang buta musik, seperti ku, mentafsirnya  
Tanpa celik akal seorang, **Fakhariah**,  
Pye samarannya, anak kedua Datok **Lokman** Musa,  
Musikologi kehandalannya, seiring selagu dengan Pak Zubir  
Musik mereka unggul tanpa cemaran  
Bersifat tradisi tak luput ditelan zaman  
Terima kasih Cik Pye, aunty khabarkan  
Penjelasan mu pembuka hati dan minda  
Lembaran coretan yang pudar di ingatan  
Kepada intipati catatan Papa yang kian terang.

**Adinda Salmah, seluruh keluarga, anak cucu, adik-adik pun jua**  
Berkat keturunan ayah dan bonda, Sidin dan Hawa  
Keluarga istimewa tiada bandingannya  
Air dicencang takkan putus, Kasih Ilahi terus menerus  
Asam di darat, garam di laut dalam belanga sentiasa berpaut  
Berpaut sesama, budaya kita, susah senang jadikan pahala  
Sunnah Nabi saw dipelihara, silaturahim di antara kita dijaga.  
Prihatin dan bakti mu tanpa jemu sumber kebahagiaan Mama dan Papa  
Allahumma salli 'ailaihim; Allahumma salli 'alaiha,  
Bak permata intan di mahkota, jatuh sebiji sukar diganti  
Patah tiada tumbuh, hilang tiada berganti,  
Jasa mu semua tetap bererti, kasih mu menggunung tinggi,  
Terima kasih ku, selautan pun takkan mencukupi.

**Maryam Andy** adiak Minang tulen  
Sarumpun jo Pak Tuo, gadang di rantau urang  
Elok rupo manih di caliek sayangnyo alah bapunyo  
Buku langkok bahaso Minang sangaik baguno,  
Diagiah sarato di tarimo balandas kasiah sayang  
Mangasah bahaso manjadi kawan sapanjang zaman  
Syukur Alhamdulillah, tarimo kasiah adinda sayang  
Ado tampek batanyo, mancukia kapandaian Maryam

Bahasa Minang uni alah lupuik di ingatan  
 Maalumlah alah lamo indak babahaso Minang.  
**Zaharah Salleh** adiek juo dari Minang  
 Elok bahaso manih di pandang bacampua riang  
 Pandai bacarito al kisah lamo Pak Tuo  
 Baraja piano tiado salero, manangih sajo, cari Mak Tuo  
 Carito lamo amek lucu membuek uni tagalak sajo  
 Manggalitiak diri tagalak, ubek sakik kapalo.  
 Tapi kini panjang langkah jadi guru bahaso  
 Suko dek murik2 tuo dan mudo.  
 Danau Singkarak bakuliliang gunuang  
 Aianyonya dalam tampek kapa balabuah,  
 Indak sampai, uni manyilam  
 Budi mu badua amek dalam  
 Bak kato papatah  
 Nan kuriak lundi  
 Nan sirah sago  
 Nan elok budi  
 Nan indah bahaso — ikolah sipaik tapuji adiek baduo.  
 Bagitu juo sipaik **Ade** sekeluargo

Pak Zubir, perwira musik sanjungan tua dan muda pada eranya  
 Contoh dan teladan bagi mereka yang senada, sealiran, serasa,  
 Seimpian dan seilham menjiwai hati nurani insan, jauh lebih muda  
**Raja Mahafaizal**, Trabye nama samarannya sama perjuangan  
 Mendokong cita rasa budayawan Melayu sejati di hamparan dunia  
 Pemusik handalan disukai ramai, penggubah lagu beraneka  
 Usaha mu berlipat ganda menyediakan CD kumpulan nada  
 Music lama dan baru Allahyarham Zubir, perwira bangsa  
 Budi baik mu menolong ku, tersemat di kalbu tiada luntur oleh masa.

Asiah Aman biduanita terkenal dicorong mikrofon dan perfileman  
 Isteri tercinta Ismail Kassim, ibu kebanggaan icon musik,  
 Iskandar Mirza  
 Kedua ayah serta bonda pelakon veteran dan penyanyi pujaan masa  
**Nona Asiah** nama “glamour” nya, diberi Pak Zubir ketika  
 rupawan  
 Suaru merdu bak buluh perindu, ayunan burung bulbul berkicauan  
 Melagu cinta di ambang bulan mendayu merindui mawar merah  
 menawan  
 Dari mu, cerita lama Pak Zubir terkupas satu persatu,  
 Pak Zubir mentor mu dari kecil hingga bintang di langit kecapaian  
 Kini usia lapan puluh tahun kata mu! Namun wajah mu gah  
 menyerlah  
 Syukur, Alhamdulillah, kita dapat bertemu bersebang lama  
 kisah dulu  
 Terima kasih bertalu talu sejarah Papa disingkap jadi bahan buku ku  
 Semoga Kak Nona terus direstui Allah, panjang umur sihat selalu.

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 book. I dedicate it to you all. There are persons whose names I have  
 perhaps inadvertently left out. I do apologize and thank you all.

# Prologue

*Majulah Singapura* (Onward Singapore) mirrors the patriotic fervour of the composer, who earnestly wished to infuse the future generations of Singapore with a sense of urgency to work towards a progressive and dynamic, post-independent nation. It was his deep conviction and emotional drive which led, more than fifty years ago, to the birth of the country's national anthem. Such were the prophetic thoughts he documented then.

Although it is said that our country and our people are not as yet independent in the *true*<sup>1</sup> sense of the word, we will work optimally towards such *true* independence. We will think forward, of success, so that we can achieve *true* independence *faster*. The ways after independence:

Before, straw was discarded, now it becomes paper.

Before, scrap iron was thrown away, now it becomes a commercial commodity.

Before, we throw away chicken fluff, now it becomes mattresses and pillows.

Before, seaweed was only for food, now it becomes film, medicine, etc.

Before, time was wasted, now time becomes very valuable.<sup>2</sup>

My late father, Pak Zubir Said, as he was affectionately known to one and all, was a man in a hurry. He was in great haste to see Singapore emerge as a truly independent country. To him time was the essence of everything and time was such a valuable commodity. He was clear in his thoughts and his vision that the country needed to forge ahead and work with courage and fortitude towards achieving independence in the true sense of the word. To this end, he encapsulated, in the Singapore anthem, aspirations and dreams of a people, calling them to rise and move forward in unity. But in this endeavour, Papa had to traverse a stormy journey. The highs and lows in my father's life were linked to the national anthem of Singapore, *Majulah Singapura*. In composing it, he experienced both elation and despair.

#### NOTES

1. True independence came to Singapore in 1965. *Majulah Singapura* was composed in 1958 and was adapted to become the national anthem in 1959 when Singapore became a self-governing nation.
2. The original Malay version of these prophetic words: “Walaupun bangsa kita dan negeri kita dikatakan orang belum sempurna merdeka, tetapi kita akan berkerja sesuai dengan kemerdekaan yang sempurna. Kita akan berfikir lebih maju supaya kesempurnaan tercapai lekas. Cara sesudah merdeka:  
Dulu jerami dibuang sekarang jadi kertas  
Dulu besi buruk dibuang sekarang jadi bahan perdagangan  
Dulu bulu ayam di buang sekarang jadi tilam, bantal  
Dulu agar-agar hanya untuk dimakan sekarang jadi filem, ubat, kertas dsb  
Dulu waktu dibuang-buang, sekarang waktu amat berharga.”

*Source: Private Collections.*

