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IN MEMORIAM

Professor Kernial S. Sandhu, 1929–92

I had heard of Kernial Singh Sandhu before I knew him. He was associated with geography and hockey. He had left the campus by the time I entered the then University of Singapore. But he was talked of as a lecturer one should have studied with.

I met him in 1972 when Professor Sandhu became the first Asian Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. I came to respect and to value him tremendously as a great scholar, and great friend.

It is difficult to capture in full the contribution of Professor Sandhu to the intellectual community of Singapore and Southeast Asia. He took over a research institute which was just starting to get on its feet after a succession of short-term illustrious directors. ISEAS was the first of its kind — a centre for Southeast Asian studies in Southeast Asia. Professor Sandhu brought vision and direction to the Institute and rapidly transformed it with awesome verve and energy. After twenty years at the helm, he leaves behind an institution which is regarded among the best multi-disciplinary research centres of Southeast Asian studies in the world, and certainly the best in Southeast Asia. ISEAS has one of the largest and most comprehensive Southeast Asian collections and a publication record unmatched in the region. It is a *de rigueur* stop for every serious scholar and student of Southeast Asian history, politics, economy, society and culture, not just for the Southeast Asians, but for scholars and students elsewhere — the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, Europe, Japan, India and China.

His legacy of entrepreneurial scholarship, in the best sense of the word, will long be remembered and appreciated, for it was this entrepreneurial spirit of intellectual investigation that led him to initiate a

multitude of programmes and projects bringing Southeast Asian scholars from the ASEAN countries as well as Burma, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, to collaborate with each other and share their knowledge and intellectual traditions. I believe it was largely through his efforts that a sense of community was strengthened among Southeast Asian scholars in Southeast Asia. Other research institutes in the region also made their contribution, for only with their contribution could the intellectual community develop and deepen. But Professor Sandhu was the doyen of them all.

In bringing together so many academics from the region to Singapore, Professor Sandhu played an important role in helping Singapore to strengthen ties with its neighbours.

His own scholarly writings were substantial: *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969); *Early Malaysia: Some Observations on the Nature of Indian Contacts with Pre-British Malaya* (Eastern University Press, 1973); *Melaka*, 2 volumes (Oxford University Press) with Paul Wheatley — a selection of essays; and co-editor of *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore* (ISEAS, 1989).

He will also be remembered as the man who started the Singapore Lecture, the intellectual event of the year. Today, Singaporeans take for granted that intellectual superstars stop by to deliver the occasional lecture, leavening the otherwise practical and down-to-earth spirit in this island state, but when Professor Milton Friedman delivered the first Singapore Lecture, it was a rare treat.

But it was not only in building an institution and programmes that Kernal Sandhu will be remembered for and missed. He will be missed for his authoritative presence and sharp and perceptive interventions in any discussion or meeting. He belonged to that rare group of individuals whose intellectual range was enviable and inimitable. Above all, Professor Sandhu will be greatly missed for his strong sense of integrity and supply of common sense. He could always be counted on as a reliable sounding board for a second opinion.

Professor Sandhu was a very private man. I hesitate to touch on his personal life. But those of us who knew him well, knew of his devotion to his wife Swinder Kaur whom he looked after with exemplary care. He was a prince of a man.

We will all miss him.

Chan Heng Chee

IN MEMORIAM

Professor Kernial S. Sandhu, 1929–92

The academic community in Southeast Asia recently suffered a most unexpected and grievous loss with the death, on 2 December 1992, of Professor Kernial Singh Sandhu, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS). He was 63.

With an academic career spanning more than three decades, Professor Sandhu was considered by many as one of the doyens of Southeast Asian studies.

It was in 1954, at the University of Malaya, that Professor Sandhu commenced his tertiary education. He secured a BA First Class Honours degree in the field of geography. He then went on to pursue postgraduate studies at overseas universities — the University of British Columbia (MA), and the University of London (PhD).

After a teaching stint at the universities of Malaya, Singapore and British Columbia, Professor Sandhu was appointed Director of ISEAS in 1972. This marked a turning point in his career, representing the start of a remarkable association that was to last no less than twenty years. Quite simply, the man and the institution — for which he was to be its first director — suited each other to perfection.

Under Professor Sandhu's directorship, ISEAS evolved into a major research centre on Southeast Asia, a reputation recognized both within and outside the region. The Institute's focus on regional political, economic, and social fields was, by no coincidence, also to be the charter of *Contemporary Southeast Asia* when it was launched in May 1979. Professor Sandhu initially looked upon *Contemporary Southeast Asia* as one of the major channels to disseminate the research findings of the Institute to the rest of Southeast Asia and beyond.

With the growing trend towards specialization in areas of academic research during the 1980s, Professor Sandhu made the timely decision to sharpen the focus of *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. In June 1988, the journal was relaunched as a forum entirely devoted to topics in the area of politics, and including international relations and strategic and defence studies. This was done after the launching by ISEAS of the *ASEAN Economic Bulletin* in July 1984 and *Sojourn* in February 1986, to cover the two other key areas of research at the Institute — economics and social issues respectively — with which the journal was earlier associated.

The success of *Contemporary Southeast Asia* in its present form can be measured by the steady increase in the journal's circulation over the past few years, and the growing number of unsolicited manuscripts it receives for possible publication — a trend that is a marked departure from its early years, and a recognition of the journal's stature, and by extension ISEAS.

Indeed, such has been the Institute's credentials under Professor Sandhu's stewardship that international funding agencies have been much inclined towards offering it research grants. That its Director often came up with new novel ideas and was at the forefront of each research effort was a key element in that regard.

The respect and admiration Professor Sandhu received as a scholar and academic administrator was not confined to the academic community or funding agencies.

Many around Southeast Asia, including political leaders, business élites, and those from the learned professions, were equal in their praise of the man.

This is not to say that he was beyond criticism, and this had to do with his rather cautious style. But even on this, he would surprise colleagues when, on occasion, he allowed an element of daring to creep through his habitual caution.

But there were other sides to the man. Professor Sandhu eschewed the trappings of power. He was very much cast in the mould of the old-style senior civil servant, austere in appearance and expressing little interest in a personal public profile. In essence, he just got on with the task of first establishing and then maintaining ISEAS's reputation as the foremost centre for research on Southeast Asia.

That Professor Sandhu's achievements went beyond scholarship was part and parcel of the elements that were to make him quite an extraordinary person. He was a keen sportsman, with a particular skill for cricket and field hockey, having played the latter for the Malaysian state of Johor in his younger days.

Perhaps above all else, above his work and many achievements, Professor Sandhu approached life with a magnificent élan. Those who had

the opportunity of interacting with him will testify to his enormous conversational range. Even on the most serious of subjects, his conversation was invariably enlivened with a pungent wit. Indeed, on that fateful day of 2 December 1992, the few of us who had the last chance of meeting with him recall that he was unusually cheerful, making many a witty remark as he looked forward to two major Institute events scheduled for the week ahead.

Professor Sandhu will be remembered for leaving us on an upbeat note. His optimism for life and for the Institute he steered for two decades will remain embedded in the memory of many, particularly the younger scholars whom he helped nurture. He was a very avuncular boss, colleague and friend.

Derek da Cunha

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