

SOJOURN

SOCIAL ISSUES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Guest Editor: HANS-DIETER EVERS

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Obituary

PROFESSOR KERNIAL S. SANDHU **1929–1992**

I was still an undergraduate at Universiti Malaya when I visited 10 Cluny Road, Singapore, the first “home” of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in early 1973. I walked past ISEAS everyday, then, on my way to the University of Singapore Library where I was doing some background reading for my honours year project paper.

Though it was an unscheduled visit, to my great surprise, I was given an extremely warm welcome by the Director, Professor Kernial S. Sandhu. He not only took the trouble to explain to me the nature and scope of ISEAS’ operations and activities, but also gave me my first copy of an ISEAS publication *The Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975: A Critique* (1972) written by Syed Hussain Alatas. He also encouraged me to come to see him if I needed help, and asked me to consider sending manuscripts to ISEAS for publication in its Occasional Paper series.

As I was very much a “kampung boy” then, interested mainly in Singapore’s bright neon lights, ISEAS soon faded away from my mind, which was overwhelmed by the images of Arab Street and Geylang Serai. But the image of that kind man at ISEAS, who had bothered to talk to an unknown Malaysian undergraduate, remained etched indelibly on my mind.

However, it was not a coincidence that I later embarked on a research project, for a Master’s degree, entitled “Second Malaysia Plan, Objectives and Implementation: A Theoretical Evaluation” (1976). The ISEAS publication presented to me by Professor Sandhu had helped foster an interest in doing further research on the theoretical underpinnings of Malaysia’s New Economic Policy (NEP). Since my study was written

in Malay, I did not submit it to ISEAS for publication. Instead, it was published by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.

It was not until about a decade later, in 1984, that I took up Professor Sandhu's offer to join ISEAS as a research fellow. During my stay at ISEAS I reworked my Ph.D. thesis into a monograph. My thesis essentially built upon my previous master's degree research project on Malaysia's NEP. However, the focus of the thesis was at the grassroots level examining the NEP's impact on the life of rural Malay villagers. It was published by ISEAS in 1986 as a monograph entitled *From British to Bumiputera Rule*. The book launched my international career, projecting my research out into the world, reaching international academic communities of "Southeast Asianists".

By then ISEAS had moved to its present location and established its reputation as one of the world's best, if not the best, research centre/institute on Southeast Asian studies. Its magnificent library, with its diverse and up-to-date collection of indigenous as well as non-indigenous Southeast Asian material and publications, remains the envy of many throughout the world today. I have benefited greatly from ISEAS' comprehensive resources, the product of Professor Sandhu's twenty years of imaginative and solid work.

Throughout the years, I have heard stories from other Southeast Asian scholars which are quite similar to mine, involving Professor Sandhu as one of its main characters. So, my story is not only about myself. It is also about many other indigenous scholars of Southeast Asia who, like me, have benefited tremendously from Professor Sandhu's vision, far-sightedness, hard work, dedication, and a rich sense of creativity. Almost single handedly, within just two decades, Professor Sandhu transformed and brought respectability to the work and scholarship of the indigenous scholars of Southeast Asia ---- which has now become an indispensable part of the corpus of knowledge known throughout the world as "Southeast Asian Studies".

In doing so, Professor Sandhu has always led by example. He has authored, co-authored, edited, and co-edited nine books, numerous articles and chapters in books, and countless conference papers. He has also chaired and participated in a number of international and regional

conferences, as well as served as a member of several advisory and working committees, both at the international and regional levels. He has built ISEAS to what it is today and run it most efficiently and professionally.

Despite his many commitments, he always kept his door open to all of us, junior and senior researchers alike, and even to our family members. He never failed to remind each one of us about the importance of being a disciplined researcher because he believed that quality work could only be produced by “quality” researchers.

We are therefore deeply saddened by his sudden departure. ISEAS has lost its leader and reformer. Malaysia has lost one of its beloved sons and scholars. But our loss is much greater.

We have lost our “local hero”, the founder of Southeast Asian Studies for the Southeast Asians and the true scholar-administrator who tirelessly has represented our academic interest at the highest level for more than two decades as Director of ISEAS from 1972 to 1992. His dedication and achievement forever will be the barometer of our present and future performance.

*Shamsul A.B.
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*

RELIGIOUS REVIVALISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Guest Editor

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