Interview

The Life and Contributions of a Pioneering Social Scientist and Public Intellectual in Malaya/Malaysia: Interview with Syed Husin Ali

Lai Suat Yan

Interviewer's Note: On 3rd December, 2016 a lunch commemorating Dr. Syed Husin Ali's 80th birthday was held to honour his lifelong contributions as a pioneering social scientist in the production of knowledge and his role as a public intellectual to champion the rights of the downtrodden. Organizations involved in holding this event were The Centre for People's History (Pusat Sejarah Rakyat), Gerakbudaya, Malaysian Social Science Association, Aliran, Inter-Asia School, Usman Awang Foundation and Monsoons Malaysia. In this interview by Lai Suat Yan (SY) for the Malaysian Social Science Association, Syed Husin Ali (SH) reflects on the influences that shape his thinking and commitment to a complete and genuine independence free from social injustices and ethnic polarizations in Malaysia. Spanning from the colonial to postcolonial period, the changing roles of the university in the production of students and research materials are also discussed.

SY: Thank you Dr. Syed Husin Ali for agreeing to the interview. I feel honoured and privileged to speak to you with regards to the state of the academia today since you were instrumental in the setting up of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology in University Malaya (UM) and later on had a hand in the establishment of the National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM).

SH: I would like to put on record two things. Firstly, the setting up of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology.
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