

Mohd. Kamal Hassan, *Salam Kasih dari ayahanda dan kekandamu*. Kuala Lumpur: ITBM, 2017. 87 pp. ISBN 978-967-460-687-9

Dari Ayahanda & Kakandamu
From your Father & Brother



Salam Kasih

M. Kamal Hassan

Lyric poems generally deal with the poet's personal and powerful feelings and, hence, are typically written in the first person narrative. The poems in Mohd. Kamal Hassan's *Salam Kasih dari ayahanda dan kekandamu* (Greetings of Love from Your Father and Brother [2017]) fall into this category. This collection of poems begins with a poem that the poet had written as an undergraduate student at the University of Malaya through the time when two other poems were written when he was Rector of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The bulk of the poems in *Salam Kasih* were written during his retirement from leading the university.

While this book represents a personal memento of the poet's feelings captured in time, it is also an inscription of the dreams that he had for the Muslim ummah and for IIUM, the university that he helped found. Hence, if one were to look for poems that are related to the daily life of Kamal Hassan, one would be disappointed. It would not be too far-fetched to say that this book represents

the poet's personal fears and anxieties for the future of the global Muslim community – a subject that has always remained close to his heart. Yet it is more than this, as on its pages, the poet's fear for the future of IIUM are interspersed with hope and the anxiety that he feels are interrupted by moments of clarity as well as his will to lead the Muslim ummah to greater heights in this world and in the next.

The relevance of his first poem, "Generasiku" (my generation), written in 1960, to this time and age is clear from its clarion call to overthrow the arrogance and conceit that many have for their servitude to western culture. This is followed by two poems, "SMS to Sir Muhammad Iqbal" and "SMS from Iqbal to Brother Kamal" that is obviously patterned after Iqbal's masterpieces, "Shikwa" (or "Complaint" [1909]) and "Jawab-e-Shikwa" (or "Response to the Complaint" [1913]). Similarly, the first of these two poems voices the narrator's disappointments with the downfall of Alhambra, which he blames on Muslims worshipping of worldly pleasures. Likewise, he sees the same attitude and behaviour in the present generation, as it succumbs once again to Westernisation. This is in addition to the present predicament faced by Muslims, as nowadays they are labelled as terrorists by certain groups in the West while Israel is increasingly recognised and lauded as a sovereign state at the expense of Palestine. In the second poem, Iqbal addresses Kamal Hassan, who appears to be anxious on the eve of being given the prestigious award of *Profesor Ulung* (Distinguished Professor), reminding the latter to remain humble and to be emphatic and concerned with the fate and fortune of others, including those who are poor and oppressed by corruption as well as political turmoil, whether at the hands of Israel or Muslims themselves.

The poem, "The Garden in 'The Ship'" (version 2012) is an extended version of a companion piece written in 2006 and traces the development of the idea of IIUM from its conception in the 1950s up until its situation in the 2010s. Kamal Hassan is perhaps the most qualified person to write about the development of IIUM. He not only helped write the first working paper on the establishment of the university, he is also well-versed in the thoughts and ideas of many early Malay-Muslims thinkers, such as Zainal Abidin Ahmad (popularly known as Za'aba [1895-1973]) and Zulkifli Muhammad (1927-64), who had initially mooted the idea of an Islamic institution of higher learning in Malaysia. The poem is not only a celebration of the achievements and aspirations that he had for this university but also a distinct reminder for those who work and study at IIUM that it is incumbent upon them to make it their mission in life to defend and realise the Islamicisation and integration mission of the university. This has become an obligation for all members of IIUM as, according to the poet, the institution is facing threats coming from those who believe that by being similar to other institutions as well as immersing itself in the ranking game where the rules are ever changing, the university is expected to be satisfied with a mediocre

status. The poem ends with the poet's invocation to Allah s.w.t. for His help to protect the university from those who have conveniently and willingly chosen to forget their covenant to Allah s.w.t. to worship Him only as well as to practice the teachings of Islam and have blatantly refused to shoulder the *amanah* (divine responsibility/trust) that Allah has given them on this earth. To the brave captains and commanders of this Garden in a Ship, that is, IIUM, Kamal Hassan's final advice is to view their work at IIUM as a form of *ibadah* (servitude to and worship of God). Indeed, it could be inferred from the poem that those who do their work for either self-glorification or power would truly suffer in the Hereafter because they have forfeited the *amanah* given to them by Allah s.w.t.

The Malay-language poems in *Salam Kasih* include "Dari Kalbu Seorang Kakanda" (From the Soul of Your Brother) and a new extended version of "Generasiku." The first of these two poems implores the Muslim ummah to rebuild Andalusia from the burning depths of the desert. The poet invites his readers to "read" the natural world and the Qur'an in the name of Allah s.w.t. Who created them and to destroy the barriers erected by the Neo-Idolaters and those who oppress others. Warning them of the coming of the Neo-Crusaders, he writes that his Muslim brethren can defeat them by virtue of being bequeathed with a legacy of knowledge gained from Baghdad to Cordoba. This, he writes, will empower the people of "The Land of Jawi," or the Malay Archipelago, and they in turn will be the "Mestika Embun" (or the Jewelled Dew), the ceremonial stone used by Malay kings to signify the purity of their intentions to serve Allah s.w.t. as rulers of their countries.

"Generasiku" (version 2012) is aptly placed at the end of this book, as it repeats once again the poet's observation that the land of his forefathers has not been liberated from colonisers, as presently its people have to deal with newer forms of imperialism. These manifest themselves from universities in Malaysia that seek to model themselves after Western institutions of knowledge to leaders who have an insatiable greed for worldly possessions and their subservience to western superpowers. The poet cautions his readers not to follow the Western agenda which forfeit their right to a sovereign nation. He also reminds them that God's Law and the *shariah* must be upheld, as only with "real independence" could the civilisation of Cordoba and Granada experience a renaissance. The poet also regards the Malay Archipelago, or *Nusantara*, as the place where the *Ulul-Albab*, or people of intellect, will realize the truth of Allah s.w.t. and the wisdom to devote themselves to Islam, as a result of which there would herald a new dawn for the Muslim ummah. And it is this achievement that he terms "the real independence" or *Rahmatan li'l-Alamin*, which can be roughly translated as a blessing onto the worlds.

If one were to view *Salam Kasih* simply as a book of poems, one would be dissatisfied. As the abovementioned synopsis of the book clearly shows, much of its contents seems directed at the poet's concerns for the transnational Muslim

community and IIUM. This limitation to the subjects of the poems could have been made clearer if the subjects were mentioned in the book's title. The book ends with a short biography of Kamal Hassan's accomplishments while he was leading IIUM and the various Islamic concepts that he helped clarify and introduce throughout his career in the university.

As an IIUM alumnus and later as a lecturer in the same institution, I would like to add a few words about my personal experience of having known the poet even though only remotely. My first encounter with Kamal Hassan was when he was invited as a speaker at our Taaruf Week or Introduction Week held at IIUM Matriculation Centre at Subang Jaya, Selangor, in 1988. At the beginning of this event, all the new students, myself included, and our speaker performed *zūhr* obligatory prayers together and after praying, Kamal Hassan stood up to give a speech.

He gave us pieces of friendly advice on the correct behaviour to adopt when we experience a certain wardrobe malfunction while praying. It struck me at that time that he knew that some of us did not have sufficient exposure to Islamic teachings or practices at performing obligatory prayers yet he had accepted us into the university. Because of his generous heart and open-mindedness, many students who had come from secular backgrounds, like myself, had been given the opportunity to lead an Islamic life. While there are also many graduates who had lost their way in this life since leaving the university, there are also many others who had been saved for IIUM provided them not only with a degree but also with a way of living that keeps our dignity as Muslims intact. Kamal Hassan's selflessness in preserving and safeguarding the sanctity of IIUM as an Islamic institution is one that is hard to emulate. Yet, it is my sincerest hope that the university would eventually realise his dreams, some of which are articulated in *Salam Kasih*, for the benefit of posterity and for our salvation in the Hereafter.

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