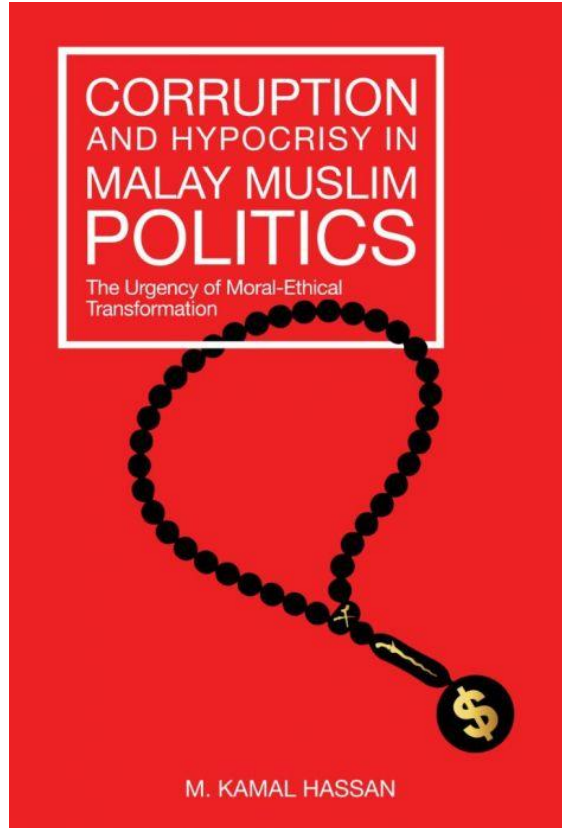


M. Kamal Hassan, *Corruption and Hypocrisy in Malay Muslim Politics: The Urgency of Moral-Ethical Transformation*. Kuala Lumpur: Emir Research, 2021. 276 pp. ISBN: 978-967-26316-0-6.



Corruption and Hypocrisy in Malay Muslim Politics comes at a turbulent time in Malaysian politics – three years after the ruling party Barisan Nasional (BN) was ousted from power after ruling for over six decades. BN was replaced by the new opposing coalition Pakatan Harapan (PH), only to find the latter being toppled by a new temporary alliance called Perikatan Nasional (PN). The political situation continued to be vacillating as PN Prime Minister resigned to give way to a BN Prime Minister. BN is seen as making a return to be the dominant power in the government. This long suffering of political instability has complicated the lives of ordinary people, made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic, fuelling the already devastating socio-psychological condition and the rise of fear, anxiety, and distress in society.

As highlighted by M. Kamal Hassan, the venoms of hate-politics, defamation, slander, political assassination, and acts of treachery have dreadfully

polluted the political atmosphere during these few years. Nothing speaks more clearly of the author's discontentment with the moral-ethical behaviour of, particularly the Malay-Muslim leaders, than the phrase of one of his chapter headings, "Enough is Enough!" Maintaining repeatedly his stature as an independent and non-partisan academic, and humbly describing himself as an armchair scholar despite all the contributions that led to his emeritus professorship and other recognitions, Kamal Hassan presents this book as his intellectual *wasiat* (last will and testament) to the younger generation of educated elites of the Muslim community in Malaysia – the future leaders of the *ummah* – in addition to fulfilling the religious obligation to speak against social evils and unethical phenomena in society.

Going through the first few chapters of this book, one could not help but recall the issue raised in Chanakya's *Arthashastra* (1915), one of the oldest studies on corruption penned. Chanakya was a fourth-century Indian polymath, philosopher, and royal advisor. He maintains: "Just as for the fish moving inside the water, it cannot be known as to when they are drinking water, similarly, for the officers appointed for carrying out works, it cannot be known as to when they are appropriating money (for their own interest) (p.94)." Corruption is something that is difficult to measure, and one may question here the urgency of the solution that Kamal Hassan proposes.

Has the political situation in Malaysia worsened in the past years, or is it an outburst of the author's personal frustration stemming from certain partisan inclinations? Kamal Hassan is quick to prove the shared concern of all citizens, including the monarchs, scholars, leaders, authors, and the public. The first three chapters bring together statements and expressions of concerns from numerous sources: newspapers, local and international books, and research papers. The emphasis on the graveness of the situation, examined from multiple viewpoints, may explain the unequal distribution of pages for the early chapters and their relatively small number compared to the remaining chapters of the book. The author seems to be saying that the problem is undeniably real, but we should not spend too much time in our assessment of the problem. Is there a workable, comprehensive solution?

As expected from the author's lifelong history of propagating the subject, Kamal Hassan immediately accentuates the crucial role of a transcendent worldview as the basis for a successful political and cultural transformation. He emphasises "a holistic and overarching ideology that is not based on valorisation of racial origin, ethnicity, or language (p.30)." Being truly dedicated to scholarship, he directs the readers to the works of other prominent scholars who have long systematised and elaborated in detail the worldview of Islam, namely Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1931-), Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA) (1908-1981), and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921-1986).

Kamal Hassan also takes this opportunity to present his own elucidation of key concepts and principles of a transcendent worldview which he calls the worldview of *tanhīd*. Concepts such as *tanhīd*, Divine attributes, the nature and ontology of human being, *khilāfab* (vicegerency), *amānah* (trusteeship), *rahmatan li al-‘ālamīn* (compassion and mercy for All the Worlds), *rahmaniyyah al-Islam* (the compassion of Islam), *insaniyyah al-Islam* (the humanistic teaching of Islam), *ummah* (nationhood), *wasatīyyah* (just-best-balanced community), *ri‘āyah* (responsible leadership), *iṣlāh dhāt al-bayn* (reconciliation between people), etc., are given serious, adequate attention in some of the chapters of the book. Amongst the aims he underlines are nurturing the “politics as ‘*ibādah* paradigm” and having, in course of time, “new breed of ethical and multi-racial Muslim leaders” (p.38-40). The author does not only provide theoretical guidance, but he also makes the best effort to offer a practical framework for this vision. Indeed, he sincerely admits that the current Muslim political leaders should have learned from the example of British Members of Parliament and the office of the Speaker of House of Common in terms of political accountability, maturity, decency, rationality, civility, and etiquette. He also alludes to the excellence of honesty of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel (1954-), and to her superior political and ethical conduct. In so doing, Kamal Hassan reminds Muslim readers that “Wisdom is the lost property of the believer, let him claim it wherever he finds it.” Ultimately, he proposes a framework which he calls as ‘Theocentric Leadership Paradigm (TLP)’ to be embodied by the current and future Malay Muslim political leaders.

Towards the end of the book, Kamal Hassan sticks to his elsewhere idiomatic expression of the condition of the society, “the heart of the problems boils down to the problems of the heart.” He dedicates three chapters to address the subject of the heart which are “The Necessity of *Tarbiyah Rahīyyah* (Spiritual Education) as the Core of the Theocentric Leadership Paradigm,” “Absolute Necessity of *Qalb* Purification Programme as the Foundation of the Theocentric Leadership Paradigm,” and “*Dhikru’llāh* (Remembrance of Allah) as a Fundamental Habit of Muslim Leaders and Followers.” For him, it is of utmost importance that Muslim leaders adorn themselves with *ḥusn al-khulq* (good character). Two main constituents of good character are *taqwā* (God-consciousness) and the sense of *rasa malu* (shamefulness, bashfulness, and humility before God). Kamal Hassan’s repetition of the crucial import of *rasa malu* is perhaps a response to the neglect or loss of *ḥayā’* (*malu*) prevalent amongst the current generation, as manifested particularly on social media. Without the sense of *ḥayā’* before God, political leaders will be more palpable to commit corruption and exhibit hypocrisy in running public affairs.

In a nutshell, the book provides a detailed guidance for Muslim society to undertake a moral-ethical transformation and to keep itself ready in facing the

future of uncertainties, turbulence, trials, and tribulations. Nevertheless, Kamal Hassan as an academic also proposes purely research ideas pertaining to Malay Muslim politics amid his discussion of the conduct of the current political parties (p.25-26). Some may question the fact that the book is written in English though the lower- and middle-class Malaysians are the majority electorate of the country. One possible reason why the author has written the book in English is that most leaders from the elites and the intelligentsia are educated in English and exposed to political philosophies written in that language. They are often exposed to philosophies that contravene the worldview of *tawhīd* or Islamic monotheism. These groups of people are perhaps the primary audience of the book. Nonetheless, the book is replete with Arabic verses of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Prophetic tradition). Despite the critical condition of the society portrayed by the author, the book ultimately leaves us with hope. It promises that with the embodiment of the correct worldview and the honest endeavour in spiritual education, political and ethical transformation of the Malay Muslims can be realised, and victories are possible in the fight against corruption.

Khairil Husaini Bin Jamil
International Islamic University Malaysia
Email: husaini@iium.edu.my