

Call for papers - KALAM Special Issue on Syed Hussein Alatas

This is an invitation to contribute an article to a special focus issue of *Kalam – International Research Journal* on the thought of the Malaysian intellectual and sociologist, Syed Hussein Alatas (1928-2007). We are asking for papers that discuss and critically assess his works. Contributors are asked to deal with at least one of the several areas of research and writing that define the thought of Alatas. The contributors may either theoretically engage Alatas' work, or apply his approach to specific empirical contexts either in the past or in the contemporary world.

The thought of Syed Hussein Alatas encompasses the study of intellectuals, intellectual imperialism and mental captivity, Muslim extremist thought, the sociology of religion, the sociology of corruption, development studies, and the reconstruction of history. Yet there is a continuous thread that runs throughout his works. Despite this variety of interests, there is a continuous thread that runs throughout his works. This is his view that the main factor accounting for the continuity of the state of underdevelopment is intellectual leadership, or rather the lack thereof. Since the 1950s, Alatas had devoted a great deal of his attention to the absence of a functioning group of intellectuals in Malaysia and other developing societies. The task of the intellectual is to think, consider specific problems of society, and attempt to arrive at their solutions. Alatas' attention to the various problems surrounding intellectuals resulted in the appearance of a book entitled *Intellectuals in Developing Societies*.¹ The problems that Alatas felt should be addressed by intellectuals can be divided into two. These are theoretical and practical problems.

Theoretical problems refer to problems that found in the area of knowledge. For Alatas, the foundational theoretical problem of our time were that of the captive mind and intellectual imperialism, both which he theorized.² The logical consequence of the awareness of the problem of the captive mind and intellectual imperialism is the development of an autonomous social science tradition that would function to eliminate or restrict the intellectual demonstration effect or the captive mind³. An autonomous social science tradition is defined as one which independently raises problems, creates concepts and creatively applies methodologies without being intellectually dominated by another tradition.⁴

Alatas does this through his work on the reinterpretation of history. Two examples of his works that come under this category are *Thomas Stamford Raffles*⁵ and *The Myth of the Lazy Native*⁶. In the latter work, Alatas exposes and critiques the ideological function of the colonial view of native indolence in colonial Southeast Asia, and the continuity of this ideology among the native elite themselves.

Alatas believed that intellectual should also be concerned with practical problems, not just theoretical problems of knowledge production. Examples of practical problems he dealt with include Muslim extremism⁷, irrational thought and behaviour, and corruption⁸.

¹ Syed Hussein Alatas, *Intellectuals in Developing Societies*, London: Frank Cass, 1977.

² Syed Hussein Alatas, "The Captive Mind and Creative Development", *International Social Science Journal* 26(4), 1974: 691-700; Syed Hussein Alatas, "The Captive Mind in Development Studies", *International Social Science Journal* 24(1), 1972: 9-25; Syed Hussein Alatas, "Intellectual Imperialism: Definition, Traits and Problems", *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 28(1), 2000: 23-45.

³ Alatas, "The Captive Mind in Development Studies", p. 20; Alatas, "The Development of an Autonomous Social Science Tradition in Asia: Problems and Prospects", *Asian Journal of Social Science* 30(1), 2002: 150-157.

⁴ Alatas, "Intellectual Imperialism: Definition, Traits and Problems", p. 151.

⁵ Syed Hussein Alatas, *Thomas Stamford Raffles 1781-1826: Schemer or Reformer*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971.

⁶ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos, and Javanese from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century and its Functions in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism*, London: Frank Cass, 1977.

⁷ Syed Hussein Alatas, *Kita dengan Islam: Tumbuh Tiada Berbuah*, Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 1979.

⁸ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Sociology of Corruption: The Nature, Function, Causes and Prevention of Corruption*, Singapore: Donald Moore, 1968; *Sosiologi Korupsi: Sebuah Penjelajahan dengan Data Kontemporer*, Jakarta: LP3ES, 1981 (translation of *The Sociology of*

The result of his concern with such practical problems was several proposals that he forwarded. But, in the hierarchy of factors established by him as requiring attention with a view towards dealing effectively with our problems, what stands at the apex is the problem of leadership. This problem was discussed in a number of his works, apart from *Intellectuals in Developing Societies*, including *Kita dengan Islam (Islam and Us)*⁹ and *Cita Sempurna Warisan Sejarah (The Ideals of Excellence, the Legacy of History)*¹⁰. In *Cita Sempurna* four types of leadership based on the ideals of excellence are discussed. The characteristics of these types of leadership are derived from historical personalities, as are those of types of leadership driven by the ideals of malevolence.

Contributors to this issue are invited to write articles that cover various aspects of Syed Hussein Alatas' thought and life. These areas include, but are not restricted to, the study of intellectuals; the problem of intellectual imperialism and mental captivity; the critique and reinterpretation of colonial history; the sociology of corruption; the study of modernization and development; the sociology of religion (including the critique of Muslim ideologies and utopias); and Alatas' promotion of socialism.

Please indicate your interest to be a contributor by sending your abstract to the editor at kalamfac@seu.ac.lk. **The deadline for the full paper submission is on 31st July 2021.** All papers submitted to the special issue will follow double-blind peer-review procedures. The editorial board will make the selection of papers.

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⁹ Alatas, *Kita Dengan Islam*, chap. 8.

¹⁰ Syed Hussein Alatas, *Cita Sempurna Warisan Sejarah*. Syarahan Perdana, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2000.