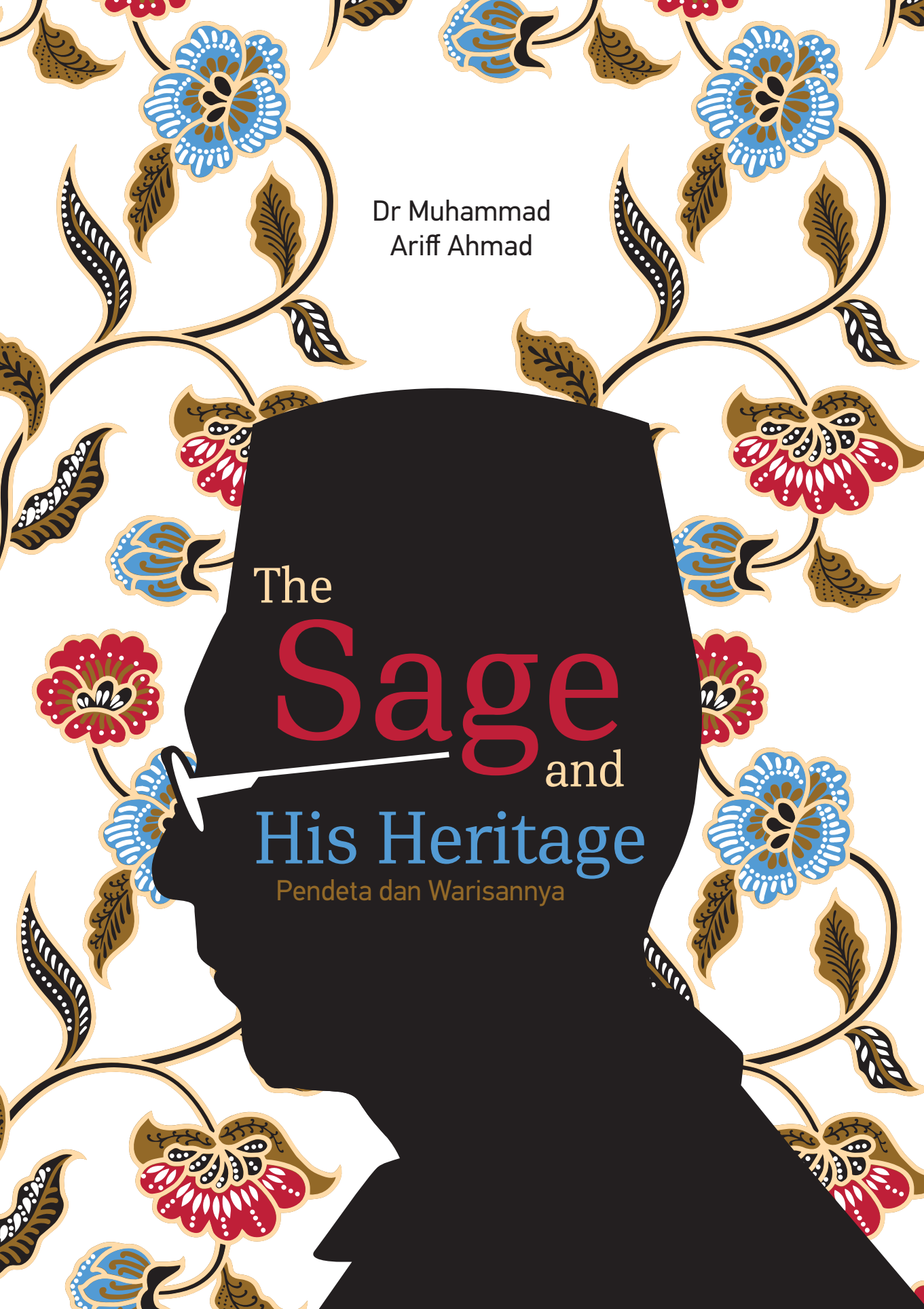




Dr Muhammad
Ariff Ahmad

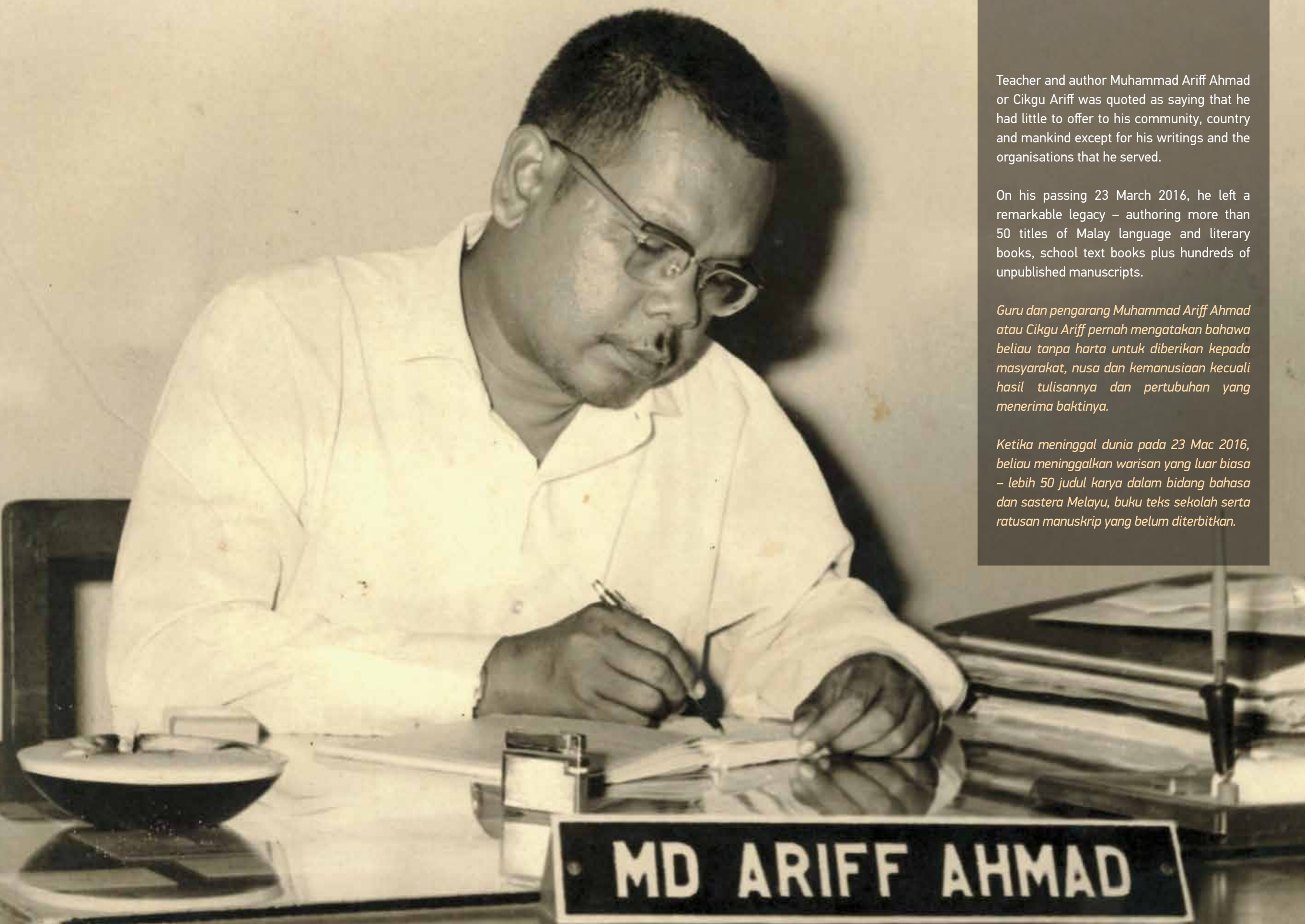
The
Sage
and
His Heritage
Pendeta dan Warisannya

Dr Muhammad Ariff Ahmad

A great contributor to Malay language and literature in Singapore and Southeast Asia

Penyumbang besar kepada bahasa dan persuratan Melayu di Singapura dan Nusantara





Teacher and author Muhammad Ariff Ahmad or Cikgu Ariff was quoted as saying that he had little to offer to his community, country and mankind except for his writings and the organisations that he served.

On his passing 23 March 2016, he left a remarkable legacy – authoring more than 50 titles of Malay language and literary books, school text books plus hundreds of unpublished manuscripts.

Guru dan pengarang Muhammad Ariff Ahmad atau Cikgu Ariff pernah mengatakan bahawa beliau tanpa harta untuk diberikan kepada masyarakat, nusa dan kemanusiaan kecuali hasil tulisannya dan pertubuhan yang menerima baktinya.

Ketika meninggal dunia pada 23 Mac 2016, beliau meninggalkan warisan yang luar biasa – lebih 50 judul karya dalam bidang bahasa dan sastra Melayu, buku teks sekolah serta ratusan manuskrip yang belum diterbitkan.

MD ARIFF AHMAD



In fact, he was regarded as the ‘Father of Malay language and culture in Singapore’. His knowledge of Malay culture was encyclopaedic and this is reflected in *Nilam* (published by Majlis Pusat, 2007) which is hailed by a Malaysian cultural expert, Prof Hashim Musa as a masterpiece of the 21st century.

Muhammad Ariff was born in Singapore on 12 December 1924 but raised for a few years in Batu Pahat, Malaysia. When his mother did not want return to Singapore, his father left her. Fortunately, his paternal grandparents cared for him and his three siblings when his father remarried. From his ‘*kakek*’ (the Javanese word for grandfather) who shared the same room with him, he learnt the art of storytelling.

“My father was too poor to send me to school. Instead, he took me to a Quranic class.” At age 10 and while playing a game of rounders (like baseball) in a field, a male teacher spotted him. Thinking that the lad was playing truant, he took him on his bicycle to Tanglin Besar Malay School – about 5 km away. “My surprised father was summoned to the school. And the rest is history,” he said.

Muhammad Ariff was much older than the rest of the pupils in his primary one class. But through sheer hard work, he received several double promotions and completed Primary 7 at Tanglin Tinggi Malay School. There was no secondary school for Malay education then. He became a trainee teacher and looked forward to study at the famed Sultan Idris Teachers Training College (SITC) in Perak when the 2nd World War broke out and Singapore was invaded by the Japanese army.

Malah, beliau dianggap sebagai ‘Bapa bahasa dan budaya Melayu’ di Singapura. Pengetahuannya mengenai budaya Melayu amat luas yang antara lain tercermin dalam buku Nilam (diterbitkan oleh Majlis Pusat, 2007) yang mendapat pujian pakar kebudayaan Malaysia, Profesor Hashim Musa sebagai adiknya Melayu abad ke-21.

Beliau dilahirkan di Singapura pada 12 Disember 1924 tetapi dibesarkan selama beberapa tahun di Batu Pahat. Apabila ibunya enggan kembali ke Singapura, bapanya meninggalkannya. Mujurlah datuk nenek (sebelah bapanya) menyantuni beliau tiga beradik sesudah bapanya berkahwin lagi. Daripada ‘kakeknya’ (istilah Jawa untuk datuk) yang berkongsi bilik dengannya, beliau belajar seni bercerita.

“Ayah saya terlalu miskin untuk sekolahkan saya. Mujurlah, saya dibawa ke kelas mengaji,” cerita Cikgu Ariff. Pada usia 10 tahun dan ketika bermain bola rondes di laman rumah guru ngajinya, seorang guru lelaki memerhatikannya. Menyangka anak tadi ponteng sekolah, guru itu memboncengkannya ke Sekolah Melayu Tanglin Besar - kira-kira 5 km jauhnya. “Bapa saya terkejut dipanggil ke sekolah itu. Itulah detik perubahan dalam hidup saya,” katanya.

Walaupun jauh lebih tua daripada murid-murid sedarjahnya, beliau rajin belajar dan sering dilompatkan darjah sehingga tamat sekolah dengan cemerlang. Sayangnya, tiada sekolah menengah untuk pendidikan Melayu ketika itu. Beliau menjadi guru pelatih dan berharap dapat belajar di Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris (SITC) di Perak ketika Perang Dunia Kedua tercetus. Singapura diserang tentera Jepun.



Dr Muhammad Ariff's memoirs

During the cruel Japanese Occupation, he was detained as a forced labour for the infamous Siam death railway project but was saved by the Japanese-issued badge he worn. He taught in a Malay school in the morning and attended two Japanese schools in the afternoon. He supplemented his meagre income by selling various products at black market, to support his family. Soon, he was drafted as a Japanese language teacher.

After the war, Muhammad Ariff was selected with a number of Malay trainee teachers including his close friends, Masuri Salikun (pen name Masuri SN) and Suradi Parjo to SITC.

In SITC (1946-1949), he graduated with as a teacher or assistant kadi (solemniser of Muslim marriage). He shone as a teacher and later as lecturer at the Singapore's Teaching Training College (today's National Institute of Education).

SITC enlightened him about the ills of colonialisation, the spirit of independence, leadership and the quest to serve humanity via writing.

Returning to Singapore, he had a big dream to spur the progress of the Malayan people through writing and development of the Malay language and literature. Driven by his passion and supported by 18 like-minded writers including Masuri and Suradi, he formed Angkatan Sasterawan '50 (Asas '50) on the compound of his rented house in Henderson Road.

Semasa Pendudukan Jepun yang kejam, beliau ditangkap dan hendak dibawa ke Siam (Thailand) sebagai buruh paksa landasan kereta api maut. Mujurlah lencana Jepun yang dipakainya telah menyelamatkannya. Beliau mengajar di sekolah Melayu dan meraih pendapatan tambahannya dengan menjual pelbagai barangan di pasar gelap demi menyara keluarganya. Tidak lama kemudian, beliau dikerah menjadi guru bahasa Jepun.

Selepas perang, beliau dipilih dengan beberapa guru pelatih Melayu termasuk kawan-kawannya yang akrab, Masuri Salikun (nama pena Masuri SN) dan Suradi Parjo belajar di SITC.

Di SITC (1946-1949), beliau adalah antara pelajar cemerlang dengan ijazah sebagai guru atau naib kadi. Teryata bintangnya bersinar sebagai guru dan kemudian sebagai pensyarah di Maktab Perguruan Singapura (kini Institut Pendidikan Nasional).

SITC menyedarkannya tentang kemelaratan akibat penjajahan, azam kemerdekaan, kepimpinan dan usaha menyantuni insan melalui tulisan.

Kembali ke Singapura pada 1949, beliau berimpian besar untuk memacu kemajuan rakyat Malaya melalui penulisan dan menjana kemajuan bahasa dan kesusasteraan Melayu. Dek keghairahannya dan dukungan 18 sahabat penulis termasuk Masuri dan Suradi, beliau membentuk Angkatan Sasterawan '50 (Asas '50) di laman rumah sewanya di Henderson Road.



Receiving the State's Public Service Star (Bar) from President S.R. Nathan in the year 2000.

Apart from voicing the plight of the people, Asas '50 was the leading body in forging three Malay language and literary congresses in 1952 (in Singapore), 1954 (Seremban) and 1956 (Johor Bahru and Singapore). Though a government servant, he was undeterred to be among the founders of Majlis Pelajaran Melayu (Malay Education Council) to halt the British plan to phase down Malay stream schools.

He wanted to reform the Malay community by writing books on local leaders like Wak Sumang who explored the northeastern side of Singapore. His first novelette, *Sarah Pengarang Kecil*, was hailed as a classic and was used in the teaching of Malay as the National Language of Singapore. The book was about a young girl who aspires to be a great writer. It was translated into Mandarin.

He was highly regarded as a Malay intellectual who politely declined any political post. He was also the key person in organizing the first three Malay Language months in the 1960s.

When Singapore gained independence after the separation from Malaysia, Muhammad Ariff was among those who agonized. The National Language and Culture Agency at the then Ministry of Culture was closed in 1968. The agency was among the resolutions of the third congress.

Selain menyuarakan nasib rakyat, Asas '50 menjadi badan utama dalam menjayakang tiga kongres bahasa dan persuratan Melayu pada tahun 1952 (di Singapura), 1954 (Seremban) dan 1956 (Johor Bahru dan Singapura). Walaupun seorang pegawai kerajaan, beliau tidak gentar menjadi antara pengasas Majlis Pelajaran Melayu untuk menentang rancangan British untuk meniadakan sekolah aliran Melayu.

Beliau ingin memajukan masyarakat Melayu dengan menulis buku mengenai pemimpin tempatan seperti Wak Sumang yang meneroka timur laut Singapura. Noveletnya yang pertama, *Sarah Pengarang Kecil*, dipuji sebagai klasik dan digunakan sebagai teks dalam pengajaran Bahasa Melayu sebagai Bahasa Kebangsaan Singapura. Buku itu mengisahkan seorang gadis remaja yang bercita-cita untuk menjadi seorang penulis yang hebat. Ia diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Mandarin.

Beliau dijulang sebagai cendekiawan Melayu yang secara sopan menolak sebarang jawatan politik. Beliau juga merupakan tokoh penting dalam menganjurkan tiga Bulan Bahasa Melayu yang awal pada dekad 1960-an.

Apabila Singapura merdeka selepas perpisahan daripada Malaysia, beliau antara mereka yang dirundung pilu. Dewan Bahasa dan Kebudayaan Kebangsaan di Kementerian Kebudayaan telah ditutup pada tahun 1968. Agensi itu adalah antara resolusi kongres ketiga.



Receiving the SEA Write Award from the Crown Prince of Thailand in 1993.

He suffered from a heart attack but recovered quickly to reorganize Asas '50 and to assist in the creation of an umbrella body to spur the progress of the Malay community, called Majlis Pusat in 1969.

Muhammad Ariff was closely associated with the formation of several important organisations such as the Singapore Islamic Religious Council, Mendaki Foundation, the Malay Language Council of Singapore and the Malay Heritage Centre.

His creative works, include children books and novels, are subtly laced with advice on future challenges such as the advent of computers and robots. He was quoted: "During its formative years, Asas '50 was embroiled in a polemic to choose one of two slogans – art for society or art for art sake. We chose the former. After independence, I led Asas '50 with the slogan 'literature develops humanity' because I sincerely believe Singapore Malay literature can contribute to world's peace and understanding."

Beliau menderita serangan jantung tetapi pulih dengan cepat untuk menyusun semula Asas '50 dan terlibat dalam pembentukan badan payungan untuk lebih 40 pertubuhan Melayu demi menyelaraskan kemajuan masyarakat Melayu, yang dipanggil Majlis Pusat pada tahun 1969.

Beliau terkait rapat dalam pembentukan beberapa pertubuhan penting seperti Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, Yayasan Mendaki, Majlis Bahasa Melayu Singapura dan Taman Warisan Melayu.

Karya kreatifnya, termasuk buku kanak-kanak dan novel, bersulam nasihat tentang cabaran hari muka termasuk kehadiran komputer dan robot. Beliau ditukil berkata: "Sewaktu zaman awal Asas '50, berlaku polemik untuk memilih dua cogan kata - seni untuk seni dan seni untuk masyarakat. Kami pilih yang kedua. Sesudah merdeka, saya pimpin Asas '50 dengan seruan 'sastera bina manusia' kerana saya percaya sastera Melayu nusa ini dapat turut membangun perdamaian dan persefahaman jagat.

His expertise was very much sought after in Singapore and neighbouring countries. He received many accolades including doctor of literature from his alma mater (now known as Sultan Idris Education University) and the title 'Pendeta' (Sage) from Majlis Pusat.

According to Mdm Chan Maw Woh, a veteran journalist and well-known Malay, Mandarin and English dictionary compiler, Cikgu Ariff was a friendly and humble mentor to those who were keen on learning the Malay language and culture.

In his condolence letter to the family of Cikgu Ariff, PM Lee Hsien Loong wrote:

"He was a giant in the Malay literary world. Cikgu had a deep passion for and proficiency in the Malay language. His views were well sought after, including by the late Mr Zubir Said, in crafting the lyrics of Majulah Singapura. Cikgu founded Angkatan Sasterawan '50 (Asas '50) to nurture interest in Malay literature, in Singapore and the region. He received numerous awards, including the Cultural Medallion for Literature in 1987 and the Long Service Medal in 1989. We are grateful to Cikgu Ariff for his contributions to Singapore and the Malay/Muslim community."

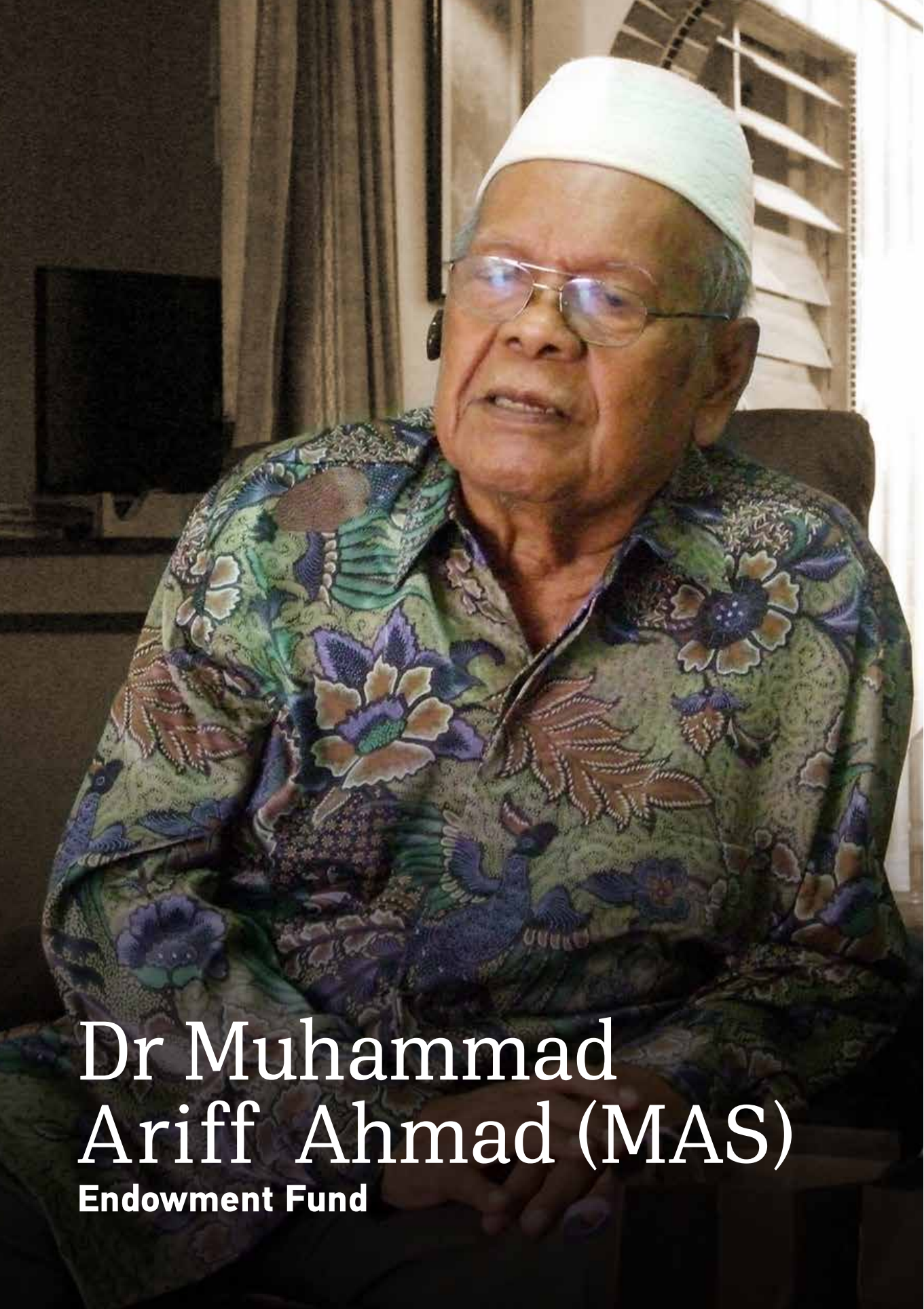
Kepakarannya menjadi rujukan di Singapura dan negara-negara jiran. Beliau menerima banyak sanjungan termasuk anugerah doktor kehormat persuratan daripada maktab lamanya, yang kini dikenali sebagai Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris dan gelar 'Pendeta' (Sage) daripada Majlis Pusat.

Menurut Puan Chan Maw Woh, seorang wartawan veteran dan penyusun kamus Melayu, Mandarin dan Inggeris yang terkenal, Cikgu Ariff adalah seorang pengasuh yang ramah dan rendah hati kepada mereka yang bersungguh-sungguh mempelajari bahasa dan budaya Melayu.

Dalam ucapan takziahnya kepada keluarga Cikgu Ariff, PM Lee Hsien Loong menulis:

"Beliau adalah seorang gergasi dalam dunia sastera Melayu. Cikgu mempunyai semangat mendalam dan kemahiran dalam bahasa Melayu. Pandangannya sering dirujuk, termasuk oleh almarhum Zubir Said, dalam menyusun lirik Majulah Singapura. Cikgu mengasaskan Angkatan Sasterawan '50 (Asas '50) untuk memupuk minat dalam kesusasteraan Melayu, di Singapura dan rantau ini. Beliau menerima pelbagai anugerah, termasuk Pingat Budaya bagi Kesusasteraan dan Pingat Bakti Setia pada tahun 1989. Kami berterima kasih kepada Cikgu Ariff atas sumbangannya kepada Singapura dan masyarakat Melayu-Islam."



A portrait of Dr. Muhammad Ariff Ahmad, an elderly man with glasses and a white cap, wearing a colorful batik shirt. He is seated and looking slightly to the side.

Dr Muhammad Ariff Ahmad (MAS) Endowment Fund

In recognition of Dr Muhammad Ariff Ahmad's contributions to the field of Malay language and culture, the MAS Endowment Fund was established to advance Malay Studies through scholarships, research grants and education programmes at the National Institute of Education (NIE).

Demi mengiktiraf sumbangan Dr Muhammad Ariff Ahmad dalam bidang bahasa dan budaya Melayu, Dana Endowmen MAS telah dibentuk untuk memajukan Pengajian Melayu menerusi pemberian biasiswa, geran kajian dan rancangan pendidikan di Institut Pendidikan Kebangsaan (NIE).

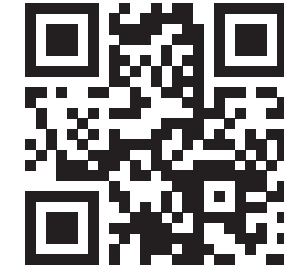
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