

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF TAN SRI DATO' DR. M. THAMBIRAJAH, THE  
ACADEMIC, INSPIRER AND REFORMER, 1942 -2025**

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**Early Life and Academic Qualification**

Tan Sri Dato' Dr. M. Thambirajah , was born in Bukit Mertajam, Penang in 1942 and received his early education at High School Bukit Mertajam. With his excellent results he was selected to attend the Malayan Teacher Training College at Kirby, United Kingdom for teacher training between 1960 to 1961. Upon his return, he was posted to Ibrahim School, Sungai Petani, Kedah from 1962 - 1966 and Badlishah School, Kulim from 1963 - 1966. In 1969, he left for further studies at University Malaya. After completing his first-degree majoring in History, he pursued his Master's at University of Washington, United States in 1971 and Ph.D. in 1974. He was awarded the prestigious Boeing Scholarship to pursue his graduate studies. He earned his doctorate in Russian History during the height of the Cold War. His deep understanding of Soviet geopolitics made him a sought-after expert among both academics and policy makers in Malaysia.

**Academic at the History Department**

In 1972, he was employed as a lecturer at the History Department, where he taught Russian History: Kiev to Russian Revolution 1917, History of Russia, 14<sup>th</sup> Century up to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, History of the Soviet Union, Soviet Foreign Policy and Left-Wing Movements in Southeast Asia.

Dr. Thambirajah pursued his passion for law while at the University of Malaya. He earned a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) with Honours from University of London in 1987 and received the Certificate in Legal Practice (CLP) from the Malaysian Legal Profession Qualifying Board in 1988. He was admitted as an Advocate and Solicitor of the High Court of Malaya from 1990 to 2011.

His academic career at the University of Malaya flourished until he decided to retire in 1989 to practice law and to be active in the social organisation called Sri Murugan Centre. He chose to return to his roots - to serve his people and uplift his community.

## **Publications**

Dr. Thambirajah's notable publication is school textbooks for lower secondary students. This was *Malaysia dalam Sejarah*, I, II and III, which were based on a revised syllabus implemented in 1977, which served as the new textbooks for the lower secondary school. It departed from earlier themes that focused on the presence of Europeans in Malaya and other civilisations. He was one of the early history textbook writers who approached history from the indigenous Malaysia-centric perspective, while fostering critical thinking and historical objectivity, benefiting thousands of primary and secondary school students. Lower secondary students around the country utilised this book from 1977 to 1988.

## **Lectures, Seminars and Conferences**

Dr. Thambirajah was also actively involved in delivering lectures, seminars, and conferences when he was an academic at the History Department. He was invited as guest lecturer at Armed Forces Staff College, Police Academy, Kuala Kubu Bharu and Special Branch Training School. He presented papers on "Malaysian view of the Cambodian Crisis" at the Conference of Asean and Cambodia, Bangkok in 1980; "Children Literature in the Third World" in the Conference on Children Literature, Cambridge University, 1982 and participated as speaker in several forums in University Malaya on issues such as Vietnam, Cyprus Crisis, Indians in Malaysia, Domino Theory and Crisis in Leadership.

## **Social and Civic Contributions**

Dr. Thambirajah founded Sri Murugan Centre (SMC) in 1982, a social movement to guide Indian students in education. He strongly believed that only through education the Indian community could succeed in life. To quote him, "If we don't enrich ourselves with education, we will be the cheap labors of a rich country." Began with four centres in 1983, today there are more than 103 physical centres and 125 virtual centres nationwide taking care of about 10,000 students a year at all levels from standard six to STPM. Since 1982, SMC has produced 56,000 graduates to date. The movement has 2,000 volunteers comprising alumni of SMC students. SMC believes that excellence in education is achieved through discipline and such discipline can be attained through values derived from religion.

Dr. Thambirajah was also appointed to the Kuala Lumpur City Hall Advisory Board in 1996, and later the Federal level Social Council (ICU-JPM) under the Prime Minister in 2013. Dr. Thambirajah also served on Malaysia's Special Implementation Task force on the Indian Community in 2011, working to assist undocumented Indian Malaysians to gain legal documentation.

## **Awards**

He was awarded Darjah Kebesaran Setia Mahkota (S.M.S.) by the state of Selangor in 1999; Darjah Setia Pangkuan Negeri (D.S.P.N.) by the state of Penang in 2001, which confers him the title Dato'. The title Tan Sri was awarded by His Majesty the King in 2012. In 2017, the Government of India honoured him with the prestigious Parvasi Bharathiya Saman Award in recognition of SMC's achievements and contributions.

## **Legacy and Impact**

A scholar, educator, and principled changemaker, Tan Sri Thambirajah lived by example. He believed in action over rhetoric, service over self, and solutions over complaints. His legacy is not measured only in awards or titles, but in the countless lives he touched, the communities he uplifted, and the hope he ignited.

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