

BLOOD TIES

For the rich and successful, bloodlines go a long way in determining who gets to inherit what. For many Malaysians, the study of genealogy provides an invaluable link to our past.

Salina Mohamed has the story

Today, social status has more to do with our personal achievement and success than pedigree and lineage. After all, many of Malaysia's millionaires and well-known philanthropists are descendants of labourers and migrants who arrived in old Malaya with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

But the study of ancestry and genealogy remains a curious and fascinating subject. Malaysians, being a mish-mash of everything, are generally curious about their ancestry. The appeal of genealogy lies in the sense of continuity and belonging we feel when we know who our ancestors are. It also plays an important role in the subject of inheritance ~ power, rank and property are usually passed on through the bloodlines. Thus, genealogy ~ defined as the study of ancestry or family lineage ~ does have its fair share of fans.

Genealogists usually show their findings by using pedigree charts or genealogical trees. Their studies may be relevant to history, law and sociology. Most royal families ~ such as the British and Japanese royals ~ can trace their



ancestry right to the time the first ancestor ascended the throne. In recent years, knowing your ancestors has taken on greater meaning for medical reasons as scientists learn more about hereditary diseases.

Lineage was originally transmitted by the oral tradition, but later, literate societies began to write them down. Notable early examples are the tribes of Israel (recorded extensively in the Bible, Torah and Quran), the Greeks, Romans, Sumerians, Egyptians and Chinese.

Ancient societies have been known to compile lists of hereditary kings. Some even claim to be descendants of gods,

legendary heroes, prophets and even animals to secure their "rightful" divine protection and respect.

Though Malaysia has no official genealogical society in the true sense of the word, we do have a number of associations that keep documents of the births, deaths and the whereabouts of community members. Associations such as the Baba Association of Melaka, for example, limit membership to

descendants of a particular historical group. Such groups can help in the search for an ancestor.

Besides clan associations, religious institutions such as churches also collect a lot of genealogical data: Official registers of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and related documents. The Mormons use these records to bring their ancestors posthumously into the church.

Amateur genealogists, with the time and tenacity, can always scour the records to put together the pieces of the puzzle. We feature a few people who have ~ by coincidence or design ~ made a link with their past.

The Raja and Raja Perempuan with some of their children on a visit to Penang Hill (1954)

THE RAJA OF PERLIS TUANKU SYED PUTRA JAMALULLAIL

It is easier for royals to trace their lineage. In Malaysia, the National Archives keeps some of the records and most of the facts can be found right in our history textbooks.

The Royal House of Perlis, for example, can trace its roots back to the 18th century, beginning with the marriage of Syed Harun Jamalullail to Tunku Safiah in 1797. He was appointed the first Penghulu of Arau in the same year.

Unlike other Malay royal houses, members of the Royal House of Perlis inherit the title "Syed" and "Syarifah" instead of "Tengku", and it is the only royal family ~ besides the Brunei royals ~ which actually has a surname due to Arab ancestry.

~Extracted from the book, *Putra*, with the kind permission of the Yayasan Tuanku Syed Putra



Tuanku Syed
Putra Jamalullail

1797: **Syed Harun** (1737-1825), married to Tunku Safiah, is appointed the first Penghulu of Arau.

1843: **Syed Husain** (1805-1873), Syed Harun's son by his other wife, Wan Fatimah, succeeds his father to become the first Raja of Perlis.

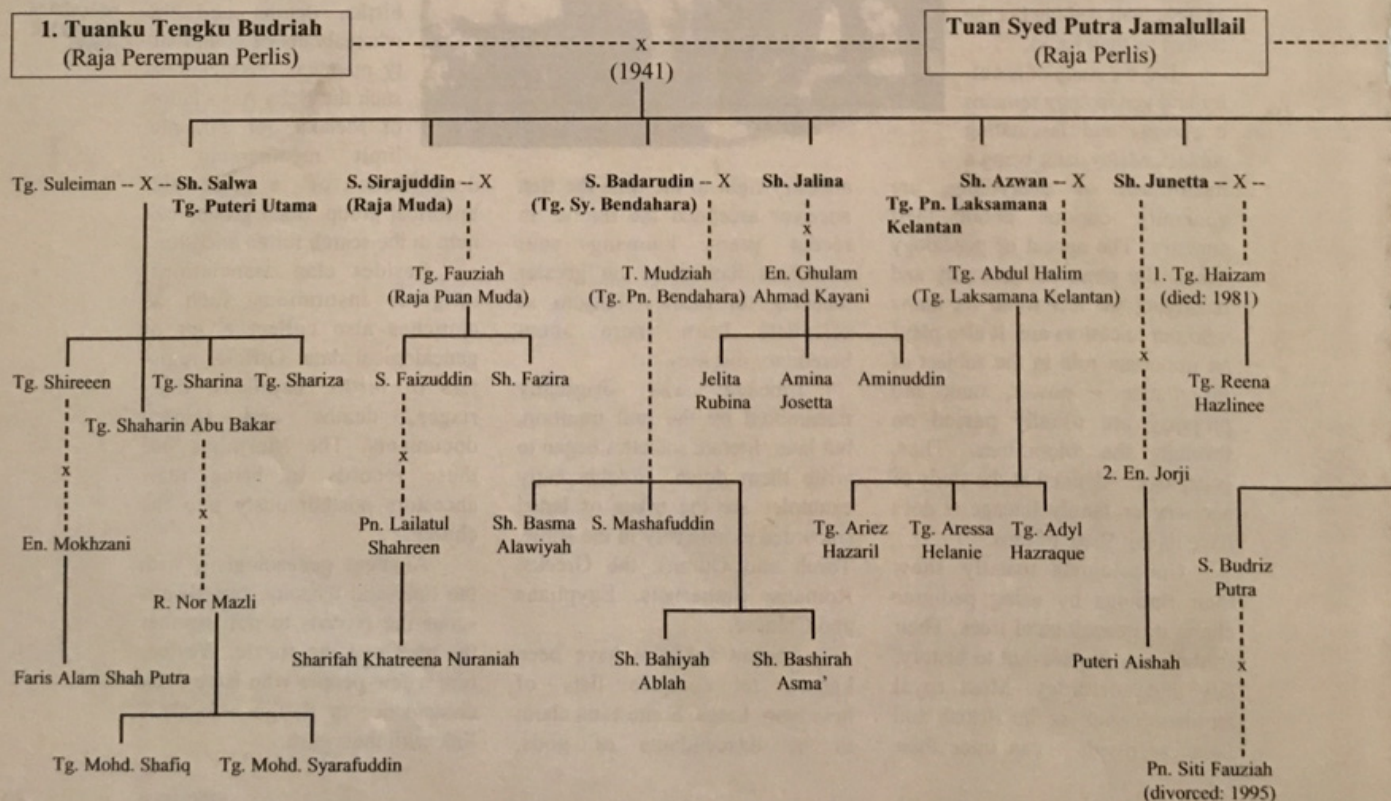
1873: **Syed Ahmad** (1825-1897) succeeds his father to become the second Raja of Perlis in 1873. Married to Sharifah Seha.

1897: **Syed Safi** (1862-1905) ascends the throne, taking over from his grandfather Syed Ahmad. Among his wives are Wan Saadiah and Che Shamsiah.

1905: **Syed Alwi** (1881-1943) ~ Syed Safi's heir through his first wife, Wan Saadiah ~ becomes the fourth Raja of Perlis in 1905.

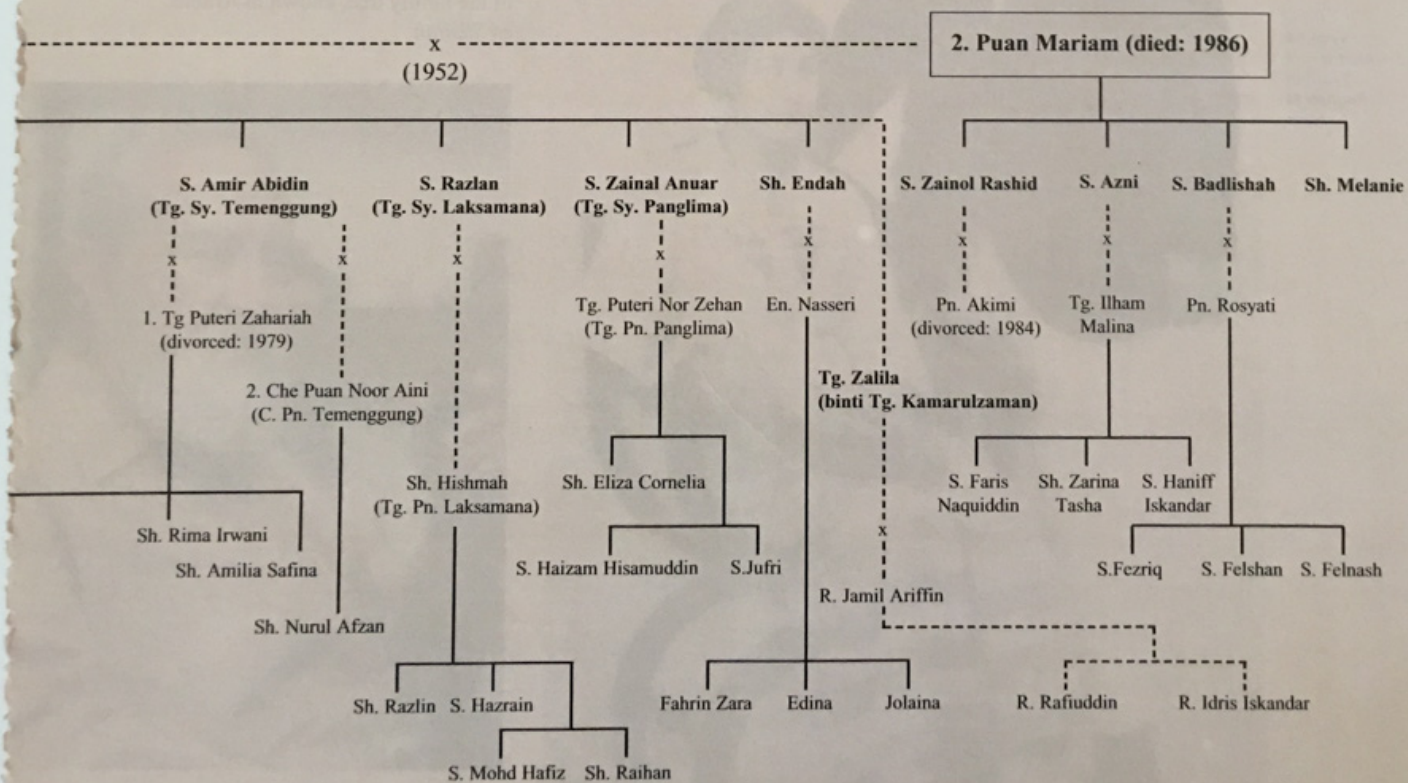
1945: **Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail** (1920-), Syed Safi's son from his second wife Che Shamsiah, inherits the throne. His designated successor, the Raja Muda of Perlis, is Syed Sirajuddin, who is his second child.

The Family of HRH The Raja of Perlis Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail as of June 1995





The Perlis royal family



**PROF DR SYED
HUSSEIN ALATTAS**

Looking through Prof Dr Syed Hussein Alattas's family albums is equivalent to leafing through the pages of our history books. Faces you see in those albums are faces you see on television or in the newspapers every day.

Datuk Onn Jaafar, the founder of Umno, was an uncle, which makes his son, third Prime Minister Datuk Hussein Onn, a cousin. Prof Dr Syed Naguib Alattas is a brother, and his sister is married to Indonesian Foreign Minister Syed Ali Alattas's brother. The ousted Prime Minister of Yemen, Haidar Alattas, is also a distant relative.

The former Vice Chancellor

of Universiti Malaya was born in 1928 and raised in Johor Bahru. He is of the second generation of Arabs who migrated to the Malay Archipelago at the end of the 19th century. His grandfather, Syed Abdullah, hails from South Yemen. His father, Syed Ali, was born in Malaysia.

"We come from a long line of scholars. The first Al-Attas known was a scholar who lived in the 16th century. His tomb is in Hadramaut, Southern Yemen. I have never visited it.

"My grandfather was a religious teacher. He belonged to a Sufi order, the Tareqat Alawiyyah. The Ba'Alwi Mosque in Singapore is dedicated to this Sufi order. His followers still congregate at his *maqam* (shrine)

every Thursday night in Bogor, Indonesia."

His father broke the family tradition by venturing into business. He started a small tea plantation in Java and exported tea to the Middle East.

"Some of the Arabs came to the Malay Archipelago in the 19th century. They settled in Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. They came because of their businesses. Some actually migrated here." Gradually, many assimilated into the Malay community and now consider themselves Malays.

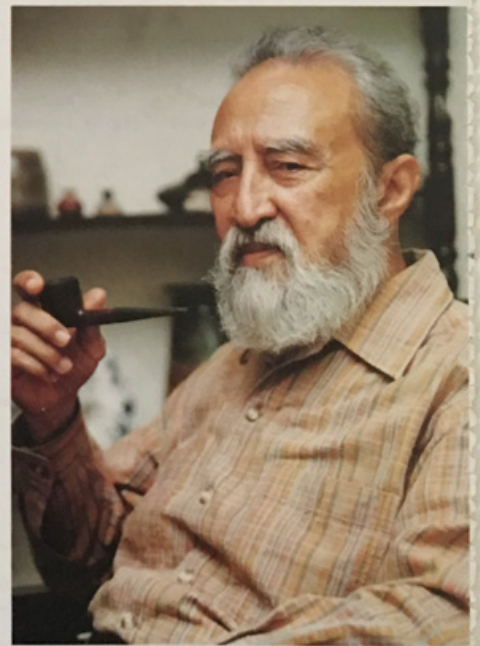
Alattas is not sure whether all Syed families are related to each other. He is distantly related to the Al Idrus family through the same grandfather.

How do the Syeds keep track of their ancestry? "There are records to validate the claims," Alattas says. "We have a registry in Jakarta and in Medinah. We keep records of birthplace, birth date, time and surnames of most Syeds. What's registered in Jakarta will be forwarded to the Medinan office. I can trace my family line because there are authentic records."

They can also ask for a copy of the family tree, known in Arabic as *Silsilah*.

(far right)
Prof Dr Syed
Hussein
Alattas

(right)
Syed Ali
Alattas and
Syarifah
Ragnon Al
Idrus





THE HOLLOWAYS

Edwin Claude Holloway knows the Holloway family tree like the back of his hand. He has done his own genealogical research, going to Singapore to look for documents at the local Cathedral of Good Shepherd and St Andrew's Church. "I tried to get more details on my family when I was on holiday in Britain. My son, Stephen, who was studying there, found the Holloway family crest," he says.

The Holloways are of English, Dutch, Indonesian, Indian and Armenian descent. The surname dates back to the 12th century, deriving from two old English words, "holh" and "weg" meaning "dweller by a sunken road". Thus, "holhweg" became "Holeway", which later changed to "Holloway".

The first Holloway on record was Charles Prince (1802-1852). He had three children, the first was Henry (1834-1886) who married Isabella Primrose Leicester. They had nine children.

The eldest child, also named Charles Prince (1864-1901), married Eugenie Zachariah, a Eurasian of Armenian descent. The couple had three children, Henry Charles, Bertha and Archibald Stephen. Archibald married Gladys Burton de Vries, whose father was Dutch-Indonesian; her mother was British-Indonesian.



(top)
The Eurasian community at the wedding of Archibald Stephen Holloway and Gladys Burton de Vries (centre)

They had six children: Theresa, Collin Charles, Joyce Philomena, Edwin Claude, Sheila Mary and Pamela Anne.

"For some odd reason, there are a lot of Holloways in Australia. But we don't keep in touch with the English and Australian relatives much. We have become assimilated into Malaysian society. Therefore, we don't carry any particular English or Dutch customs," says Pamela, now Mrs Raymond Johnson. Her husband is a Eurasian of English, Scottish, Indian and Burmese descent.

"We are related to the Wombecks and the Rozells (the same family as Francis Light's wife) through my husband's family," she explains.



(centre)
The present generation ... Edwin Claude, daughter Jacqueline, Pamela Anne and her daughter, Elaine Johnson Dearmaley

(bottom)
Archibald and sister, Bertha

EDDIN KHOO

It all started at Eddin Khoo's grandmother's funeral. Khoo did not understand a word of Hokkien; neither was he familiar with the Chinese rites and rituals. He remembers feeling a bit odd performing certain rites for his grandmother without understanding their significance. But as the eldest grandson, he had little choice.

The funeral was a blessing in disguise: Khoo ~ of Chinese-Indian parentage ~ woke up to the Chinese "side" within him. "I met my uncles and my cousins, and I became interested in my Chinese ancestry from then on," he says.

Khoo is the eldest son of well-known historian and academic Datuk Prof Dr Khoo Khay Kim and Datin Rathimala. He is the fifth generation in Malaysia from both sides of the family.

From personal research, he knows the first Khoo to reach Malaya was Khoo Soo Cheow, a cook on a merchant ship which docked in Penang. Soo Cheow then ventured into the tin-mining trade in Ipoh.

"It's unclear where he's actually from," Khoo says. "Perhaps somewhere in southern China, in the district of Fuchow."

Khoo Soo Cheow soon made his fortune and set up base in Penang, basing the Khoo clan in the island with the establishment of the Khoo Kongsi. Soo Cheow's subsequent



generations produced Khoo Soo Jin, who married Chuah Geik See. Their son, now Datuk Khoo, married Rathimala Navaratnasingham, who is descended from Ceylonese Tamils from Jaffna.

"My mother's family came with the bureaucracy," Khoo says. "They were in the civil service. The British brought in lots of Tamils and Ceylonese to work on the railways. My great-grandparents were among them."

Khoo and his brothers, Rubin and Mavin, are much closer to their mother's family, he reveals. "My siblings were raised as Hindus. That's how Mavin got into Indian classical dance."

Eddin is the only one in the family who actually registered to become a member of the Khoo Kongsi. The idea of a Kongsi was originally to keep the clan together, to establish the temple for ancestors, to support the community and to maintain their identity in a foreign land. Though many of these associations evolved to become *kongsi gelap* (outlawed

secret society), they are now maintained solely for solidarity. It keeps the community together and provides financial aids for young Khoos. The Kongsi keeps birth or death records of community members.

Khoo plans to go to both Fuchow and Jaffna one day to trace his ancestry. He hopes to write a book on this particular journey; he already has a title in mind: *Journey in Search of A Face*.



(top)
Family portrait ... Eddin, Datin Rathimala, Rubin, Datuk Khoo and Mavin

(centre)
Khoo Soo Cheow

(bottom left)
Datin Rathimala and Datuk Khoo Khay Kim on their wedding day (1966)

(bottom right)
Datin Rathimala (centre) and family



DATUK L. KRISHNAN

Datuk L. Krishnan isn't too sure who his forefathers were or what they did. He isn't even sure what his father, Lakshmanan, did for a living. All he has is a vague recollection of the man pulling a cart carrying goods around town. What Datuk Krishnan knows is that Dad, like the men before him, was poor, and he worked hard to earn a decent living.

Datuk Krishnan was born in Madras, India, in 1922, the only son of two children born to Lakshmanan and Chitraywe. The family migrated to Malaya when Krishnan was about five years old. They took a boat from Nagapattinam in Madurai and arrived in Penang. They then settled in Nibong Tebal before moving back to Penang.

The family was separated during the Japanese Occupation. Datuk Krishnan, who had already run away to work at a hotel in Singapore, didn't know that his family had left for India during the Occupation.

After the war, the British

Army sent him with the Indian National Army to India. Life was tough. He had to sleep on the five-foot-way outside the National Indian Congress house because he had nowhere else to go.

The young man was determined to reunite his family. "It wasn't easy tracing my family, but I eventually found them through the people in the village my ancestors came from. In those days, people were still close to one another. I've met people who actually knew my family or relatives. They helped me in my search," he says.

When he finally found his family, he was devastated to learn that his father had passed away. "That's my greatest regret," he says, "My mother got the best of everything because I had already established myself (in the film industry), but my father didn't have the chance to enjoy the fruits of my success."

He met his wife, Selvarani, in Madras. They moved to Singapore when Krishnan became a film director. The couple have two children, Prem and Sitalakshmi. ♦



(above)
Datuk L. Krishnan, Sitalakshmi, Gayatri, Datin Selvarani and in-law, Mrs Sukul

(top)
Prem, Datin Selvarani, Sitalakshmi and Datuk L. Krishnan

How To Trace Your Lineage

Assimilation ~ while it has its rewards, especially for a developing nation ~ also has its casualties. A compromise has to be achieved in order to adjust to the present environment. Those who can't keep up inevitably feel a sense of displacement rather than pride when it comes to their cultural heritage.

Unfortunately, there are no local associations or organisations which specialise in tracing your ancestors. What you know about great-great-grandpa is probably what you heard from the elders. And family folklore is inevitably coloured by funny anecdotes that vary with the character of the teller. For those who want the cold, hard facts, however, there are places to go; you only need to know where to look.

First, speak to your older relatives. For many Malaysians, you need only go back three or four generations to find the first ancestor to arrive in Malaya. Try to find out where he settled, then interview the old people of the district.

Look up the birth or death certificates or citizenship documents at the National Registry, which is open to the public. But as far as our filing system goes, your ancestors' migration into the country wasn't properly recorded until early this century.

If you come from a particularly illustrious family, there's always a possibility that documents pertaining to family members might be kept in the National Archives.

We provide a list of where you might start looking.

- National Registry ~ Tel: 03-7560044, 7560154, 7560213
- National Archives ~ Tel: 03-2562688, 4427444, 6510688
- Roman Catholic Church, Selangor ~ Tel: 03-2388828
- Full Gospel Assembly ~ Tel: 03-7817426, 7814755
- Khoo Kongsi, Penang ~ Tel: 04-2614609
- Chinese Assembly Hall ~ Tel: 03-2300887, 2734035
- Persatuan Kaum India Muslim ~ Tel: 03-3324762
- Chinese clan associations ~ There are over 25 in Wilayah Persekutuan and Selangor. The telephone numbers are available in the directory under "Persatuan"
- Masjid Ba'Alwi, Singapore for the Arab community