CHAPTER 3: CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE HADHRAMI ARABS IN RELIGION AND EDUCATION

Introduction

In general, Arabs have played a significant role in the development of Islam in Malaya since the very beginning of their coming to the region. Malays until at least the early Twentieth century regarded Arabs in general as descendants of the holy Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. The majority of them who migrated to Malaya in the 18th and 19th centuries consisted of those from Hadhramaut, Yemen. Many of them were involved in trade while at the same time actively involved in missionary activities, spreading Islam which is part of their duty as Muslims. The early generations of Hadhrami Arabs who migrated to Malaya were learned men and religious scholars. Most of them received education in their homeland before migrating to look for better lives overseas. Many of them also held important positions in the Malay society and were appointed with religious duties as Syaikh al-Islam, mufti and qādī. Missionary activities or dakwah in the region such as in the East Indies, Borneo, Sulu, Mindanao and Malaya were indebted much to the efforts of the Hadhrami Arabs, especially the Sayyids and masyaikh.

The involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the Malay society is also related to the establishment of religious education known as madrasah or popularly called sekolah Arab or Arab schools by the locals. Islam is not only the religion of ritual practices; it also encourages and makes it compulsory to every Muslims to seek knowledge. It is compulsory for every Muslim man and woman to seek knowledge and to learn about the religion as well as other sciences that give benefit to their wellbeing. Early religious education in the Malay society was concentrated on Al-Qur’an learning and fardhu ‘ain. Pondok institution or the traditional system of learning religion was introduced to teach

1 The hadith that obliges every Muslim to seek knowledge is narrated by Ibnu Majah, Al-Baihaqi, Ibnu Abdil Barr and Ibnu Adi, from Anas bin Malik. See also Tarjamah Sunan Ibnu Majah, (trans.) H. Abdullah Shonhaji, Semarang, CV Asy-Syifa’, 1992.
subjects like *tauhid, feqah, nahu, saraf, tafsir, tasawuf* and *hadith*. It was managed by *ustaz* or *Tuan Syaikh* who received religious educations from Makkah and Madinah. The *pondok* education did not have a specific syllabus of learning. It depends on the teachers’ expertise to teach the students.

The early 20\textsuperscript{th} century had witnessed the establishment of *madrasahs* in several Malay states through the initiative of several Hadhrami Arabs who saw the need for a better education system as a way to improve their lives, religiously and socio-economically. In fact, religion and education are two interrelated elements in life. In order for Muslims to have a perfect life according to Islamic Law, they must perform and practice the pure and correct teachings of Islam that can only be achieved through education. That is the agent of change that is needed by Malays at that time to liberate their minds from absurd teachings and practices as well as to free their country from the British colonial rule.

The Hadhrami Arabs also held important positions in states’ administration and were entrusted with high positions in administration to assist the Malays in dealing with matters related to religious affairs in the Malay states. Meanwhile, their extensive knowledge of Islam was also sought to educate the Muslims. The early 20\textsuperscript{th} century had witnessed the establishment of *madrasahs* in several Malay states, including the Straits Settlement. Through the efforts of several prominent Hadhrami Arabs, a number of *madrasahs* were built to provide better education for the Muslims. They also used their wealth to fund all the costs needed for the schools’ construction as well as its maintenance, providing teachers with their salaries. This chapter studies the involvement of the Hadhrami Arabs in religion and Islamic education in Malaya as well as to see the roles played and contributions made by them in the development of Islam in Malaya.
The Roles on Islamisation

In general, Malays associate Islam with Arabs. They believed that it was the Arabs who were responsible for the conversion of their ancestors to Islam. The history of the coming of Islam to this region received serious attention from local scholars as well as Western scholars and ‘orientalists’. However, studies done by Western scholars and ‘orientalists’ are inclined to show that the conversion of the Muslim society in the Malay world to Islam was from the efforts of Muslim missionaries from the Indian subcontinent and not from Hijaz, the land where Islam originated. Even though there are evidences showing Arab influence in the Malay society, strangely they did not receive proper attention and evaluation from researchers in the field, especially Western scholars and orientalists who seem to ignore these historical evidences and tend to reject these sources by highlighting the shortcomings and deficiencies of the sources instead.

Studies on theories and the process of Islamization in the Malay World, particularly in Malaya have long been discussed by historians and scholars from the West as well as locals. Islam has long been established as the official religion in Malaya with the conversion of the first Malacca ruler to the religion ever since the 15th century. Malacca during its height was not only a hub for entrepot, but also as a centre of learning. The other neighbouring country that received Islam earlier than Malacca was Perlak, around the 13th century. A travel account of Marco Polo mentioned about the presence of Saracen merchants who regularly visited Perlak which is situated at the northern part of Sumatra. During his short stay on the island on his way back home

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2 This matter has become an issue among historians and scholars and it was debated at large regarding the theory of the coming of Islam to the Malay World. For further details on the issue discussed by scholars please refer to Ismail Hamid, “A Survey Theories on the Introduction of Islam in the Malay Archipelago”, Islamic Studies, Vol. 21 No. 3, Autumn 1982; See also S.Q. Fatimi, Islam Comes to Malaysia, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963, pp. 4-7, 31-32.

3 There are several scholars who believed that the Arab factors had also contributed to the conversion of the inhabitant in the Malay Archipelago to Islam. Among these factors were trade and missionary activities. Since trade was the inter ocean activities among merchants from all over the world, people wandering from one continent to another continent to find sources and raw materials to fulfill the need of developing industries. Through this contacts, the religious endeavor had also became an agenda of missionaries of every religion be it Islam, Buddha, Hindu or Christianity. This contact had witnessed the close Arab-Malay relation which resulted in the conversion of the people to the religion of Islam. This is proven with the findings of historical remains in the region especially in Malaya. Besides, local literatures also could be used to support the Arab factor in the process of Islamization in Malaya in particular.

4 The term saracen was mostly used by orientalists referring to Muslims regardless of their countries. According to S.Q. Fatimi, the term Saracen could probably derived from the word shayt. Arabic word means ‘easi’. It was a general name used by later Greeks and Romans for the nomads of the Syro-Arabian desert.
from China around the year 1291, he reported about Muslim merchants who preached and spread the teaching of Islam to the town people of Ferlec or Perlak.\(^5\)

However, recent study shows that Perlak had received Islam in the 9\(^{th}\) century long before the conversion of the Malacca ruler to Islam. This record is based on a local manuscript founded in Perlak dated 820 AD. According to Mahayudin Yahaya, there are records discuss about the coming of Islam in the Malay World in particular Sumatra. A manuscript entitled *Izhar al-Haq fi Silsilah Raja Perlak* written by Abu Ishaq al-Mikrani al-Pasi tells about the arrival of some 100 Shiite men who fled away from their homeland after being defeated by the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma’mun. When arrived in Sumatera, they built a Muslim government in Perlak in year 840.\(^6\) Another record, a book entitled *Nihayah al-‘Arab fi Funun al-Adab* by al-Nuwairi also discusses about the coming of a group of Shiite Arab (Alawiyyin) to the Malay World. It is said that they fled to this region after being chased by the Caliph Muawiyyah bin Abi Sufyan’s army.\(^7\)

Although a majority of orientalists and western scholars deny the role played by Arabs in the process of Islamisation in the Malay World, there are several scholars in the field who believe in the Arab factor in the propagation of Islam in the Malay World, particularly in Malaya. Among these scholars are Professor Keyzer from Delf Academy, De Hollander, John Crawfurd, William Marsden, and Diego de Couto.\(^8\) R.O. Winsted recognizes the role played by Arabs in propagating Islam to the Malays. However, he does not believe that Arabs played important roles and were responsible for the conversion of Malays to Islam which rapidly expanded in the Malay World, especially in Malaya. Although at first he was of the opinion that Islam was brought from the Indian subcontinent to the Malay Archipelago, he also stresses on the Arab factor which

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\(^8\) Ismail Hamid, “A Survey of Theories”, p. 93.
helped the rapid growth of Islam in this region after the invention of steamships in the 19th century. He further says that these Arabs were those who came from Hadhramaut, Yemen. This statement has strengthened the theory that Hadhrami Arabs had also played important roles in the process of Islamization of the Malays in Malaya.

Mohd. Taib Osman highlights the role of princely courts as the center of conversion of Malay subjects to Islam. However, this “princely courts” idea alone is not able to win the people’s heart to embrace Islam as suggested by other scholars involved in politics and economics. Rather, it is the nature of the Islam teachings itself that attracted people to convert to this new religion. Moreover, Islam stresses on monotheism and discards the idea of caste and class ranking in society, which appealed to the old Malay society that was segregated and differentiated according to social status. As suggested by al-Attas, the reason behind people’s acceptance to this new religion was the result of “revolution from within”, which is the frustration and discontentment with the Hindu system of life. That was one of the pull factors of people’s conversion to Islam. Islam also promotes equality that makes everyone equal in the eyes of Allah. Moreover, Islam is not only a religion of rituals and rites, but it is a way of life.

Horace highlights the success of Muslim missionaries in spreading Islam in the Indian Archipelago compared to Christian missionaries and also explains the reasons behind their success in winning the people’s heart. He also criticizes the approaches taken by Christian missionaries that are violent and less friendly to the people, what

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9 R. O. Winstedt, “The Advent of Muhammadanism in the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago”, *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JSBRAS), December 1917, p. 171. Here, Winstedt had referred to an incident where Maktum Sadar, a Muslim *mubaligh* or preacher refused to teach Tun Zainul@Zanul Abidin’s son, Tun Muyidin due to his cheekiness that had caused him to get angry. Winstedt should have not taken this one isolated case to generalize thing which is looks like to him representing the whole character of the Malays who were not so keen in learning the teaching of Islam. Moreover, that was a normal response from a kid in a learning process. He should have also referred to other stories of the Islamisation process of several other sultans of Malaya that recorded in the Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals as well as Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai and not only taking this isolated case as an excuse to reject others. Please also refer to W.G. Shellabear, *Sejarah Melayu*, 17th Edition, Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1984, p. 186.


12 Quoted from Mohd. Taib Osman, “Islamisation of the Malays: A Transformation of Culture”, p. 3.
more to concern about their needs and respect. He compares between the two groups of missionaries and the approaches taken in dealing with new converts.

“The missionaries of the Koran conciliated the natives, acquired their languages, adopted their manners, assumed their costume, intermarried with them, shared their interests, and became part of the people’s nature…. The Europeans, on the other hand, displayed violence, rapacity, pride, and unprincipled disregard of the natural rights enjoyed by the people.” 13

In 14th century Sulu, there was an ‘alim from Arab descent of Hadhrami Sayyids named Makhdum Karim who actively preached Islam in the island. He was also called Tuan Syarif Awliya’. He had converted the king of Sulu and its population to Islam. There was also another Sayyid from Makkah known as Sayyid Abu Bakar who was appointed Sultan of Sulu with the title Sultan Syarif Hashim from 1450 till 1480. He was said to arrive from Johor.14 At this period of time the Kingdoms of Perlak and Malacca were already under the rule of Muslim rulers.

From Sulu, Islam then spread to Mindanao, Philippines in the early 16th century. Two Hadhrami Sayyids who were responsible for the conversion of the people in Mindanao to Islam were Syarif Hassan and Syarif Maraja. They were said to have come from Johor.15 Muhammad bin Ali Zainal Abidin was one of the prominent ‘ulama in the history of Mindanao in the 16th century. He was also called ‘Sharif Kebungsuwan’, where kebungsuwan means the youngest. Sharif Kebungsuwan was said to be responsible for the formation of an Islamic kingdom in Mindanao in the 16th century.16

He departed from Johor and arrived in Maguindanao around late 15th century or early 16th century. His father Syarif ‘Ali Zainal Abidin married Jusul-Asiqin or Jawzul ‘Ashiqin from the royal family of Sultan of Johor.17 Sharif Kebungsuwan travelled to Maguindanao from Johor together with his people that were known as the Samals or Bajau; the sea nomads or orang laut who escorted him and were in service for the sharif.18 He married a princess from Malacca.19

The conversion to Islam of the people and rulers of Sulu were attributed much to the efforts made by Arab scholars originating from Hadhramaut that came from Johor to Sulu. Based on these stories, it can be said that since the 16th century, there were Arab settlements in the Malay Archipelago and in Johor in particular. However, it is generally known that the existence of the Arab people in the Malay Archipelago could have been earlier than that based on the available historical remains and evidences. This study is however trying to highlight the roles and contributions of the Hadhrami Sayyids in the 19th to 20th century Malaya.

It is a fact that a ruler’s faith determines the religion of his subjects in the context of the Malay world. The people regard their ruler as their lord, the only person to whom they should pay their due respect and loyalty. Milner stresses on the issue of loyalty of Malays to their ruler and relates it to their conversion to Islam following their king’s new religion. “The Raja, not only the Malay race or an Islamic Umma (community) was the primary object of loyalty; he was central to every aspect of Malay life.”20 In the Malay society, it has become a custom that when a raja or sultan of a kingdom converts to a new faith, his subjects will follow suit. This scenario can be seen in old Malay literature such as Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa where the king of Kedah, Raja Phra Ong Mahawangsa was converted to Islam by Shaykh Abdullah. Not long

17 Najeeb, M. Saleehy, Studies in Moro History, pp. 52-53.
18 Ibid., pp. 54-55.
19 Ibid., pp. 24, 26-27, 37.
after, his subjects including the palace resident became Muslims. From the story, it is clear that subjects will follow the religion of their ruler without hesitation and query. This could explain why Islam quickly spread among the people in the Malay Archipelago.\textsuperscript{21}

Malay literature had also highlighted the important roles played by several Arab Sheikh and Muslim \textit{da’ie} who were responsible for the conversion of several Malay rulers to Islam such as the sultans of Malacca and \textit{Merong Mahawangsa}. The conversions generally reflected the rapid expansion of religion in Malaya in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Malay traditional literature do highlight on the roles played by Arab Muslims who preach Islam to the Malay kings. They brought the message and teachings of Islam which suited the people’s nature. Moreover, the way Islam was introduced to the society had attracted the people to know more about it and study it in depth. Islam was introduced to the people in peace and it was well accepted and welcomed by the inhabitants in the Malay Archipelago. In fact, the people of Malaya had a long history of old rituals and sacred practices in their lives. Their ancestors once were pagans who believed in natural forces, worshipping the sun and stars, and paying tributes to the mountains and the seas. Then Hindu and Buddha came to the people before they were introduced to the teachings of Islam.\textsuperscript{22}

The use of Malay traditional literature as a source of reference to study local history especially the history of Islamic propagation in the region should be given a proper chance by scholars and researchers in the field. It is undeniable that most Malay traditional literature would include stories of legend and myth as this is a normal method used to dignify and glorify the main character of the story. The same thing also


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
happens in Iliad and Odyssey, the epic poems of the West that saw the intervention of gods and goddesses with supernatural powers.

The Roles in Religious Administration

Malays look with deference to Arab religious scholars. They had for centuries looked with respect upon all Arabs, no matter what their origin are as the successors of the teachings of Islam. The Sayyids were particularly revered as descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. They were believed to possess profound knowledge in Islam and are also known for their piety. They became points of reference and were consulted by fellow Muslims on matters related to religion. Their knowledge of Islam secured them a special position in Malaya in which they were made head of religious affairs, Syaikh al-Islam, or being appointed as mufti, qādī and religious teachers. The appointment of Arab religious scholars into the religious administration of the Malay States in Malaya had helped much in the process of strengthening and consolidating the status of Islam as an official state religion in Malaya.  

19th century Malaya had witnessed the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs, especially the Sayyid families in the religious affairs of the Malay States in Malaya. They managed to place themselves at least at the same level with dignitaries and the ruling class and received a distinguished social status in the society. They were not only known for their scholarship in Islam, but were also committed to trade ventures in the region. Many of them used their wealth for the sake of the ummah by building and maintaining mosques. They also received the highest trust by fellow Muslims to lead the religious affairs of the Malays in Malaya, especially those who descended from

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23 Shaykh al-Islam is one of the honorific titles which appear in the second half of the 4th century A.H. It came into use during the Buyyids time and was applied occasionally as honorific to religious leader of high standing. During the Ottoman Caliphate, the function of Shaykh al-Islam became significant. The Caliph appoints potential individuals to hold the post of Shaykh al-Islam that works in the office of the Mufti of Istanbul. The post was later on abolished in 1942 along with the caliphate itself. See Cyril Glasse, The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam, London: Stacey International, 1989, p. 363. This title also used for ‘ulama and mystic and it also been given to jurists and more particularly to ‘ulama whose fatwa attain certain fame or the approval of great body of jurists. See H. A. R. Gibb & I.H. Kramers, Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, New Delhi, India: Pentagon Press, 2008, p. 736.
‘Alawiyyah Sayyid of Hadhramaut. Their involvements in religious affairs were obvious in several Malay states such as in Kedah, Pahang, Terengganu, Kelantan and Johor.\(^{24}\)

The acceptance of Hadhrami Arabs in the Malay society was largely due to their knowledge and authority in Islam. In the Malay society, one’s intellectual and knowledge in Islam enabled a person to be called an ‘alim or ‘ulama and receive a high recognition from the society, particularly if the person had undergo religious studies in the Haramain; Makkah and Madinah. The Arabs or Hadhrami Arabs have this advantage since they were from the land of Arabs and have mastered the Arabic language. This made them generally accepted by the Malays as the authorities in the religion\(^{25}\), especially when they claimed that they are descendants of the Holy Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. In this respect, many of them were entrusted with important positions in religious administration in Malaya. The Malays’ acceptance of the Hadhrami Arabs enabled them to play a significant role in the Malay states. They had also enjoyed prestige and social status in the society. The involvement of Hadhrami Arab scholars in the administration of religious affairs was obvious in several states in Malaya such as in Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Johor.\(^{26}\)

Perlis’ religious administration was introduced not long after the monarchy system was institutionalized in the state. The position of chief qādī was first introduced in 1873 and it was held by Sayyid Muhammad al-Haddad, a respectable Arab scholar from Hadhramaut, Yemen.\(^{27}\) After his retirement, the position of chief qādī was taken over by a local scholar, Haji Muhammad b. Haji Abdul Latif, who was then replaced by his son, Haji Muhammad Noor bin Haji Muhammad. The Islamic Religious Department of Perlis was established in 1920 with Haji Muhammad Noor as its first mufti. Haji

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\(^{26}\) Ibid.

Muhammad Noor assumed the position of Mufti of Perlis till 1941. All of them were religious scholars who uphold the teachings of Islam and are steadfast with the Shafi’i sect. The Islamic Religious Council and Malay Customs of Perlis was established in 1948.28

In the state of Kedah, the influence of Arab people, especially the Hadhramis in the religious affairs of the state can be traced back to the 12th century when a Yamani Shaykh was responsible for the conversion of its ruler, Raja Phra Ong Mahawangsa29 to Islam. Shaykh Abdullah Yamani also acted as the religious teacher to the sultan and taught him matters related to Islam. During the reign of Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal Abidin Azilin Muazzam Shah II (1710-1778), an ‘alim Shaykh Abdul Jalil al-Mahdan came from San’aa, Yemen to Kedah in 1122 A.H. / 1710 A.D. He was appointed as religious teacher to the sultan. He was also responsible for composing the Thirteen Laws of Kedah. He was appointed as mufti of Kedah and was responsible for legislating rules and regulations for the sultan and officers of the state according to the practice of Caliph and ministers during the Abbasid Period.30

There are several terms used to refer to the positions of religious affairs officers in the State of Kedah such as Syaikh al-Islam, Majma’ Syaikh al-Islam and Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Fatwa before the term mufti is used since 2000 until today. In the early 12th century, the position Syaikh al-Islam was established in Kedah to assist and advise the Sultan in matters related to state religious affairs. Syaikh Muhammad Khayat was the first Arab appointed to hold the post of Syaikh al-Islam from 1901-1903. He was then replaced

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29 From the record of Salasalah Diraja Kedah Darul Aman, Sultan Muzalfal Syah was also known as Sultan Mudzaffar Shah I. He ruled Kedah from 1136 – 1179 A.D. Based on Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa, it is said that the king, Raja Phra Ong Mahawangsa was an idolater. He was converted to Islam by Shaykh Abdullah from Yaman. After his conversion to Islam, Raja Phra Ong Mahawangsa changed his name to Sultan Muzalfal Syah. After the king converted to Islam, the whole palace, his warriors and subjects converted to this new religion. The Shaykh became his religious teacher and teaching him about Islam. Here we can see the role played by an Arab Shaykh converting the non-Muslim ruler to Islam. He was also the first king of Kedah who embraced Islam. Please refer to Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa, Siti Hawa Haji Saleh (Dikaji dan diperkenalkan), Kuala Lumpur: Terbitan Bersama Yayasan Karyawan dan Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1998, pp. 1xxi, 1xxii, 108-111.

by Sayyid Abdullah Dahlan who served as Syaikh al-Islam since 1904 till 1905.\textsuperscript{31} When the British interfered in the state administration of Kedah, the function of Syaikh al-Islam as the highest authority in religious affairs was abolished and replaced with Majma’ Syaikh al-Islam in 1935.\textsuperscript{32}

Penang’s religious institution was led by Arabs. Tengku Sayyid Hussain al-Aidid was among the earliest Arabs to settle on the island in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century. He arrived in Penang from Aceh in 1792. Before the coming of Tengku Sayyid Hussain to Penang, Batu Uban had become an area inhabited by Arabs migrants since the early 18\textsuperscript{th} century when Masjid Kampung Uban was established in 1734. Batu Uban became a focal point of attraction for Arab ships to stopover in Penang. It had also became a centre for learning and spreading Islam. The area became an economic centre for Arab traders. A majority of Imams of Masjid Batu Uban were Arabs. Syaikh al-Makawi, an ‘alim made Batu Uban as a centre for learning and spreading Islam in Penang.\textsuperscript{33}

Tengku Sayyid Hussain was a successful merchant. He owned a warehouse for keeping goods on Acheen Street. He was a reputable person, one of the richest men on the island and a leader of the Malay community.\textsuperscript{34} He built a mosque known as Masjid Melayu or Malay Mosque\textsuperscript{35} on Acheen Street for the use of the Muslim community in the area. He endowed 66,396 square feet of land which include Masjid Melayu and its surrounding areas and also rows of houses on the Lebuh Acheh Road and Chulia Road for the purpose of religion.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{31} Sayyid Abdullah Dahlan was a student of Sayyid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan. He was born in Makkah around 1290H/1874 CE. He studied in Makkah under the guidance of Sayyid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan until his teacher’s death in 1304H/1887CE. He traveled to many countries spreading Islam such as Yemen, Egypt, Ceylon, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. During his stay in Malaya he was appointed as head mufti or Shaykh Islam in Kedah for the period of 1904-1905. He then traveled to other countries. His later sojourn was Indonesia where he spent his lifetime in Desa Ciparaya Girang, Garut, West Java until he passed away in 1943 CE. http://mnaaqibahlulbait.blogspot.com/2011/09/sayyid-muhammad-amin-al-kuth-mufti.html. (Accessed January 17, 2013).
\textsuperscript{34} Nordin Hussin, Trade and Society in the Straits of Malacca: Dutch Melaka and English Penang, 1780-1830, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2007, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{35} Omar Farouk Shaiek Ahmad, “The Arabs in Penang”, p.4.
However, the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent was not so significant in the religious affairs in Penang. It was dominated by a Hadhrami Syaikh, Syaikh Omar Basheer who was a prominent leader among the Malay Muslim community. After the death of Tengku Sayyid Husssain in 1840, his reputable status as Muslim leader in Penang was taken over by Syaikh Omar Basheer. Syaikh Omar Basheer was an Arab born in Penang in 1811 from a Hadhrami Arab father, Basheer bin Hamid bin Bahaman from the Baridzwan and Bafadzal clan. He spent several years studying religious knowledge in Makkah. He was an *imam* of the Lebuh Acheh Melayu Mosque. Before coming to Penang, he was a religious teacher and *qādī* in the district of Demak, Jawa.\(^{37}\) In comparison to Tengku Sayyid Hussain, Syaikh Omar’s involvement in Penang was more obvious from the aspect of religious leadership. Besides becoming an *imam* at the Lebuh Acheh Malay Mosque, he was also the leader of the famous *Tariqah* Naqshabandiyyah in Penang.\(^{38}\)

Meanwhile in the state of Perak, records show that the Arabs, especially the Sayyids had also played a significant role in the religious affairs of the state since the 16\(^{th}\) century. Sayyid Hussain al-Faradz Jamalullail was a respectable religious teacher to Sultan Muzaffar Shah I of Perak of the 16\(^{th}\) century. The Jamalullail families in Perak can also trace their genealogy back to the descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W.\(^{39}\) In Kelantan, the earliest known Arab to serve in the service of a sultan was during the reign of Sultan Muhammad II (1837-1886). Syaikh Daud bin Shaykh Muhammad al-Bahrain was an Arab from Hadhramaut, Yemen. He was appointed to the position of *muftee* from 1845 until 1855.\(^{40}\) The involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the state of Kelantan’s religious administration can be seen during the rule of sultan when reformation and improvement was made to the Islamic judicial system as well as the


state’s administration. In order to implement the new system, Sayyid Ja’afar bin Sayyid Alwi, an Arab from Hadhramaut, Yemen was appointed as the judge of the Criminal Court. During the reign of Sultan Mansor (1891-1900), Sayyid Muhammad bin Sayyid Alwi who has family ties with Sayyid Ja’afar was appointed to the post of qādī. This post was said to be among the important and influential positions in the Kelantan’s state administration at that time after the post of Dato’ Maha Mentri and Dato’ Paduka Raja.

In Terengganu, the role played by the ‘ulama’ is significant and they formed an important element in the Terengganu ruling class. Terengganu had a reputation as the religious centre on the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula. The ‘ulama’ group consisted of religious leaders who were scholars and intellectuals. They consisted of local learnt men who have religious knowledge of the Shariah Law and its doctrine, the Hadhrami Arabs from the Sayyid group of Sadah and the non-Sayyids. The ‘ulama’ of Terengganu enjoyed reputable status in the society and were respected by the aristocrats and ruling class as well as the people. The Hadhrami Arabs in particular the Sayyids received special recognition in the society because of their link as descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. The close relations built with the ruling families and aristocrats through marital bonds was one of the factors that earned them reputable status in the society. The Hadhrami Arabs in Terengganu were also well received by the people. Their religious authority earned them high status and they were entrusted to play

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43 Syarif Abdul Malik b. Abdullah who was popularly known as Tokku Pulau Manis was the first lineage of the ‘ulama’ in Terengganu. He was among the local leaders who welcome Tun Zainal Abidin of Johor to be the first sultan of Terengganu in the early Eighteenth century. Sultan Zainal Abidin I held the throne of Terengganu from 1702-1726. He was the son of Tun Habib Abdul Majid, Bendahara of Johor. See M.C. ff. Sheppard, “A Short History of Trengganu”, Journal of Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS), Vol. 22, Pt. 4, 1949, p. 11. Regarding the lineage of Sultan Trenggananu that is traced back to the first Bendahara of Malacca, Tun Perpatih Besar, uncle of sultan Mohamed Shah.
important positions in the administration of religion in Terengganu, holding high positions such as *Syaikh al-Islam*.45

The al-Aidarus or al-Idrus family was among the most influential Hadhrami Arab families in Terengganu. The family migrated to Terengganu in late 18th century, when Sayyid Zainal Abidin al-Idrus, an Arab merchant who plied between Java and Malay Peninsula trading rice migrated to Terengganu and resided in Paloh. He was among the earliest Hadhrami Arabs to migrate in Terengganu. He then married with a local lady of Hadhrami Arab descent. His son Sayyid Muhamad (1795-1878) who was known as Tukku Tuan Besar was born in Terengganu on 18 February 1795 at Kampung Chabang Tiga, Kuala Terengganu. He travelled to Makkah at the age of 20 to study with prominent ‘ulama’ such as Syaikh Abdul Hamid Syurwani and Imam Syaikh Nawawi. Once returning to Malaya, he stayed at Chabang Tiga, Kuala Terengganu and worked as a religious teacher.46

Sayyid Muhammad bin Zainal Abidin Al-Idrus (1795-1878) was among the earliest family members of Al-Idrus who was assigned the religious title *Syaikh al-‘Ulama* or the Head of Religious Scholars during the reign of Baginda Omar (1831, 1839 - 1876).47 He was also appointed to the position of *mufti* and had held the post from 1860 until 1878.48 Sayyid Muhammad Al-Idrus also held important positions in Terengganu and served as minister or *mentri* with the title *Paduka Raja Indera* during the rule of Sultan Baginda Omar.49 Sayyid Muhammad Al-Idrus also played an important role in the state administration of Terengganu during the reign of Baginda Omar as the *Ketua Dewan* to lead the *Dewan ‘Ulama’* (Scholars Hall). The role of

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‘ulama in Terengganu during that period of time did not only cover the aspect of religion, but also politics and administration.\textsuperscript{50}

Sayyid Muhammad Al-Idrus was also given the title \textit{Bapa Kesuasteraan Terengganu}\textsuperscript{51} (Father of Literature of Terengganu) for his contributions in producing religious poems preaching the attributes of Allah, \textit{Tawhid}, \textit{Fiqh} and \textit{Sirah}. His works are composed in the form of \textit{nazam}\textsuperscript{52} such as \textit{Jawhar al-Saniyyah}, \textit{al-Durrah al-Fakhirah} and \textit{Sullam al-Tawfiq}.\textsuperscript{53} He was also given the title \textit{Tokku Hadis} and the place where he used to teach is known as Kampung Darat Tokku or Kampung Masjid Tok Ku. Tokku Tuan Besar passed away on 22 January 1878 at the age of 84 at Chabang Tiga, Kuala Terengganu. His legacy of religious scholarship was continued by his son Sayyid Abdul Rahman, popularly known as Tok Ku Sayyid Paloh or Tok Ku Paluh, an influential religious figure in Terengganu in the 19\textsuperscript{th} to early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Malaya.\textsuperscript{54}

Sayyid Abdul Rahman bin Sayyid Muhammad Al-Idrus (1817 –1917) was popularly known as Tok Ku Paloh.\textsuperscript{55} He was born in 1817 at Chabang Tiga, Kuala Terengganu. He was the second son of Sayyid Muhammad Al-Idrus from five siblings; Sayyid Zain, Sayyid Ahmad, Sayyid Mustaffa and Sayyid Abu Bakar. He received his early education under the guidance of his father and Haji Wan Abdullah bin Mohd. Amin, popularly known as Tok Syaikh Duyong.\textsuperscript{56} He went to Makkah to pursue his religious studies in \textit{Tafsir}, \textit{Hadis}, \textit{Tawhid}, \textit{Tasawuf} and Arabic under the guidance of Sayyid Ahmad Dahlan and Sayyid Abdullah Ali al-Zawawi. After completing his studies, he returned to Kuala Terengganu and taught at Masjid Tok Ku Chabang Tiga.

\textsuperscript{50} Wan Husin Wan Embong, “Peranan dan Pengaruh Tok Ku Tuan Besar”, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 135. See also Muhammad Salleh bin Haji Awang, Terengganu dari Bentuk Sejarah, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Nazam} is an Arabic word for poem or \textit{puisi} or \textit{syair} in Malay.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., pp. 138-139.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 143.
\textsuperscript{55} He was called Tok Ku Paloh refers to the place where he was residing, Paloh. He was also called Tuan Chik.
\textsuperscript{56} Tok Shaykh Duyong was a \textit{mufti} during the Baginda Omar rule.
He devoted his life to teaching religion and became one of the most influential ‘alim in Terengganu.57

Sayyid Abdul Rahman then moved to Paloh, about eight kilometers from Kuala Terengganu. He married Tuan Nik, daughter of Sayyid Ahmad (Tok Ku Melaka).58 It is said that Sultan Zainal Abidin III awarded Paloh to him. He built a house and a surau59 as a place for him to teach and preach religious sermons. Among his students were Sultan Zainal Abidin III, Haji Abdul Rahman Abdul Hamid, better known as Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong and Lebai Abdul Rahman, better known as Tok Janggut from Patani. Tok Ku Paloh had also written several religious books. His most famous book is *Ma’arij al-Lahfan*, a *tasawwuf* book written in Jawi and Arabic.60

Tok Ku Paloh was a follower of *Tareqat* Naqshabandiyyah. He was also associated with many strange and unusual things or *karamah*.61 He was appointed as *Syaikh al-‘Ulama’* or Head of Religious Scholars during the rule of Sultan Zainal Abidin III. Apart from that, his involvement in the state’s political affairs made him one of the members of the State Council Meeting or *Ahli Majlis Mesyuarat Negeri*.62 Tok Ku Paloh was awarded the title *Syaikh al-Shahada’* or the head of all the Sayyids.63 Tok Ku Paloh’s connection with the royal family of Terengganu was strengthened by his marriage to the sister of Sultan Zainal Abidin III, Tengku Mandak.64 His house became a place of attraction where many people came to pay a visit. The Hadhrami Arab

58 Tuan Nik was the first wife of Sayyid Abdul Rahman (Tok Ku Paloh).
59 *Surau* is a small place used by Muslims to perform *solat*. But the place is not as big as *masjid* where the Friday Prayer is conducted.
60 *Ma’arij al-Lahfan* is a compilation of Tok Ku Paloh’s religious lectures on Tasawuf.
61 It was believed that Tok Ku Paloh possessed special abilities such as knowing one’s intention who is meeting him and in several events it involves a group of British officers who come to see him. After debating on certain issues the officer, Hugh Clifford who wanted to stand up was stuck on the chair. This event gave a big impact to Clifford in which, he was on the opinion that Tok Ku Paloh possessed black magic or a sorcerer. J. M. Gullick also writes cynically prejudice of the life of Tok Ku Paloh. See J.M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political systems of Western Malaya*, London, 1956, p. 140. See also Mohamad b. Abu Bakar, “Sayyid Abdul Rahman”, pp. 35-39, Mitchell to C.O. 18 June, 1895, desp. 241, encl. 1, f. 335, C.O. 273/204.
63 Shahri‘ Talib Robert, “The Terengganu Ruling Class”, p. 39. See footnote 72. This title could be *Shaykh al-Sadah*.
scholars of Terengganu received special status and due respect in the society. They were also given various titles such as Syaikh, Syarif, Engku, Ungku, Tuan, Tunku and Tokku or Tukku attached to their names.\(^{65}\)

The majority of al-Idrus family members were scholars and prominent religious leaders in the service of the Terengganu government during the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) century. Sayyid Mohamad b. Zainal Abidin (Tok Ku Tuan Besar) was appointed as Syaikh al-Ulama and as minister or mentri with title Paduka Raja Indera. His sons became reputable scholars and prominent religious leaders, such as Sayyid Abdul Rahman al-Idrus (Tok Ku Sayyid Paloh) who was appointed as Syaikh al-’Ulama and member of State Council Meeting; Sayyid Mustafa (Tok Ku Tuan Dalam) who was an ’ulama and member of the State Council Meeting and Tuan Embung Abu Bakar (Tok Ku Tuan Kechik), an ’ulama and also member of the State Council Meeting.\(^{66}\) Tok Ku Paloh’s son with Wan Sepiah, Sayyid Abu Bakar was known as Tuan Embong and had held the position of Syaikh al-Ulama’. He was also the head of Pejabat Ugama or Religious Office until he died in 1923.\(^{67}\) Sayyid Akil (Tuan Pengeran) served in the state’s civil service as a civil court magistrate in Kemaman in 1932. Sayyid Saggaf, better known as Tuan Sayyid held the title Engku Kelana di Raja.\(^{68}\) Sayyid Abdul Kadir or Tuan Dagang was another Tok Ku Paloh’s son who was reported to inherit his father’s sacredness or keramat. He had considerable influence in Telemong in the 1930s.\(^{69}\) (See Appendix B: The Genealogy of the Al-Idrus Family in Terengganu).\(^{70}\)

In Pahang, the involvement of Hadhrami Sayyids in the religious affairs of the state can be traced back to late 19\(^{th}\) century. However, the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the administration of religion in Pahang was not so prominent. Sayyid

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\(^{66}\) Ibid., p. 43.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., See footnote no. 85.

\(^{68}\) Ibid. See footnote no. 86. See also C.L.M. 258/1350: encl. 2.

\(^{69}\) Shahril Talib, “The Terengganu Ruling Class”, p. 43, Bagot to B.A., 20 April 1934, encl. 2, CLM. 258/1350 and Commissioner of Police to CLM, 30 April 1934, CLM. 229/1352.

Abdullah was a religious man from the Hinduan clan who travelled from Hadhramaut to Malaya in the late 19th century. He was appointed as *Qur’an* reciter at the royal shrine in Kampung Marhum, Pekan by Bendahara Ahmad, the ruler of Pahang in 1890. He was recommended by Habib Hassan. Sayyid Abdullah came all alone from Yemen and sailed to Singapore. It was said that the ship that he travelled in was swept by a storm and he was stranded in India. However, he managed to reach Singapore where he met Habib Hassan al-Attas, a famous and successful entrepreneur in Johor and Pahang.\(^71\)

In Johor, records show that many Hadhrami Arabs were involved in the religious administration of the state in positions as qādī, *mufti* and religious teachers. The al-Attas family was among the highly regarded Hadhrami Arab families in Johor in matters related to the religious affairs of the state. They were given priority in dealing with religious matters and assigned the highest positions in state’s religious affairs such as *mufti* and *Syaikh al-Islam*. Sayyid Ahmad al-Attas was appointed as *mufti* of Johor in 1873. Sayyid Salim al-Attas was appointed as Member of the State Assembly or *Ahli Dewan Negeri*\(^72\) by the Maharajah of Johor and was conferred with *Darjah Mahkota Kelas Pertama; Seri Paduka Mahkota Johor* (S.P.M.J.) that brings him the title ‘Datuk’ in 1873. The post of *mufti* was then taken over by Sayyid Mohamed al-Attas in 1883. Meanwhile, Sayyid Salim Ahmad al-Attas was the first to be appointed to the position of *Syaikh al-Islam* in Johor in 1883.\(^73\)

After Sayyid Abdul Kadir Mohsin al-Attas retired from the post of *mufti* in 1934, it was taken over by Sayyid Alwi Tahir al-Haddad. Sayyid Alwi Tahir was the longest and the most famous *mufti* to hold the position.\(^74\) Sayyid Alwi Tahir al-Haddad was one of the 20th century leading ‘ulama’ of Hadhrami Arab origin in the service of the

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\(^72\) *Straits Calendar and Directory*, 1873, p. 12
\(^74\) Sayyid Alwi Tahir al-Haddad held the position of *mufti* of Johor on 8 March 1934, 8 March 1934, Pejabat Agama Johor, 68/34, National Archive, Malaysia (Johor Bahru Branch).
state of Johor. His service as mufti in Johor was halted when Japan invaded Malaya during the Second World War. However, he was again re-appointed to the same position on 28 February 1952, once the war ended. He held this position until December 1961, when he retired at the age of 77.75

The last quarter of the 19th century witnessed British intervention over the Malay States’ administration which had affected Malays’ social lives, the Islamic judicial system, the economy, states’ administration and religious affairs. From that period onwards, the role of religion and religious scholars diminished, leaving the scholars with no absolute authority and control over the administration of religion in the Malay States. When the Pangkor Treaty was signed in 1874, it officially marked the beginning of British’s expansion of power over the Malay States. The British expansion covered all aspects of life, even though there is a clause in the treaty saying that the British will not interfere in matters related to religion and Malay customs. These matters were supposed to be still under the authority of Malay rulers.76

However, things did not turn out as planned. Eventually, the states were controlled by the British residents and advisers. They acted more than just advising the Malay rulers and sultans. The roles of mufti and qādī were less influential and they were no longer engaged in the royal courts. Religious institutions no longer became centres of learning and activity for Muslims. Islamic Shariah was only implemented in some states and was totally disregarded in administration and legal laws.77 For example, in Kedah, the British abolished the post of Syaikh al-‘ulama’ as the highest religious authority in the state and instead, replaced it with Majma’ Syai kh al-Islam in 1935.78 This change means that the British had an upper hand in the state administration of Kedah while the Sultan gradually loses his authority and was eventually deprived of executive power.

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77 Ibid.
In other states such as Selangor, Perlis, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca, the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the administration of religion of these states was not so prominent. In the federated states of Perak, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan, the British residents had an indirect influence over the states’ religious affairs. They had also interfered in the decision-making process of appointing committee members for the religious state council. In Perak, the Council of Chiefs and ‘ulama’ consisted of eight major chiefs. The orang kaya kaya imam tuan was in charge of the state’s religious affairs and played the role of state mufti. The district of Rembau in Negeri Sembilan had also a state qādī in the 1830s who controlled over mosque management in the state.79

However, in the un-federated states of Kedah, Terengganu, Kelantan, and Johor, the religious affairs of Muslims were still under the control of every state. The position of Syaikh al-Islam was put under the State Council. The appointee was in charge of Islamic religious affairs. This scenario applied in Kedah that lasted until at least in 1935, as well as in Terengganu and Perlis. Meanwhile, in Kelantan, the position was put under the Council of Islamic Religion and Malay Customs or Majlis Ugama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu. In Johor, the religious affairs of the state were under the control of the Council of Ministers.80 Most of the Malay states in Malaya were put under British’s direct control from around the first decade of the 20th century.

The Roles in Madrasah Education

Education plays an important role in enhancing the religious and material development of individuals, society and nation. Being an educated person enables an individual to adapt to the ever changing world. Islam is not only a religion of ritual practices; it also encourages Muslims to seek knowledge. It is compulsory for every Muslim man and woman to learn about Islam as well as other sciences that would give benefit to their

well-being. Early religious education in the Malay society was concentrated on the basic learning of Al-Qur’an and Fardhu ‘Ain held in mosques. Pondok was introduced to teach religious subjects such as Tauhid, Feqah, Nahu, Saraf, Tafsir, Tasawuf and Hadith under the guidance of religious teachers called uesta or Tuan Syaikh who mostly received religious educations from Makkah and Madinah.

Early madrasahs established in Malaya were influenced by the religious education system in Egypt. Madrasahs implemented a modern and structured system of schooling compared to pondok schools. The teaching and learning process was conducted in classes equipped with tables and chairs. The subjects taught were not only confined to religion, but also covered other sciences such as mathematics, logics and geography. This system was similar to the vernacular system introduced by the British except for its emphasis on religious orientation.  

Besides having madrasahs based on the Egyptian system of curriculum, there was another type of religious education in Malaya at that time founded by Masjid al-Haram graduates that was also called madrasah. This madrasah based its teachings on the Makkkan style of education, practicing the traditional styles and methods of learning. These institutions are such as Madrasah al-Huda in Penang and Madrasah Idrisiah Kuala Kangsar, Perak. Haji Muhammad Salleh was the first mudir of Madrasah Idrisiah Kuala Kangsar. He received his religious education in Makkah. The purpose of inviting him to be the headmaster of the school was to ensure that the teaching at the madrasah was in line with the Makkkan style. The syllabus and curriculum of the madrasah was also based on what is practiced in Masjid al-Haram, Makkah.  

Late 19th century and early 20th century had witnessed Makkah becoming a focal point for Muslims to study religion. It had attracted many local Malays to pursue their  

\[82\] Madrasah al-Huda was founded by Shaykh Abdullah al-Maghribi after he left Madrasah Idrisiah Kuala Kangsar in 1932 due to controversy over his support of Kaun Muda ideas.  
studies there. The basic education they received in the country is not enough to enable them to become qualified ‘ulama or religious scholars. Parents who realised the importance of Islamic education did not hesitate to send their sons to further their studies in Middle East countries such as in Makkah, Hijaz and also in Egypt. At this period of time, Egypt had also played a considerable influence over Malay students who studied there. Besides having the opportunity to perform hajj at the early age, they would also study and seek knowledge about Islam from prominent religious scholars in Hijaz. Many of them stayed in Makkah for several years before returning home after equipping themselves with religious knowledge. Some would stay for more than ten years, studying in Masjid al-Haram to master the religious knowledge as well as seek advice and acquire knowledge under the guidance of prominent ‘ulama’ in Makkah and Madinah.  

In the early decades of the 20th century, parents still preferred to send their children to pursue religious education in Makkah rather than Egypt because of its reputation and authority as a religious centre. At this time, they did not have a clear picture of the nature of education offered at the al-Azhar University, Egypt. In addition to that, the political atmosphere in Egypt was not so encouraging, causing parents to refuse to send their children to study in Egypt. It was only around the second decade of the 20th century that Malay parents started to send their children to further studies in Egypt which provided a more systematic and organized education compared to the informal system of education offered in Hijaz.

The early 20th century also witnessed the establishment of sekolah Arab that was also known as madrasah in Malaya. The madrasah education was a new and modern concept of education parallel to the vernacular system of education introduced by the

85 Ibid.
British except for its religious orientation. Non-religious subjects such as geography, mathematics, logic and English were also taught at the madrasahs. Among the earliest madrasahs recorded to be established in Malaya was Madrasah Masriyah in Penang in 1906 which was based on the pondok system of education at the early stage of its establishment. Madrasah al-Iqbal Islamiyah established 1908 in Singapore had implemented the Egyptian style of education.86

This period also witnessed the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the Malays’ education system. In the beginning, the Hadhrami Arabs contributed to the development of education in Malaya by establishing mosques that did not only function as houses of worship but also as centres of learning, teaching and spreading Islam.87 The wealth accumulated from business activities was used to develop a better religious education in order to instil the understanding of Islam in the society. By the 20th century, several madrasahs were established through the efforts of wealthy Hadhramis of Sayyid descent in Singapore, Johor, Pahang and Penang. They also bore all expenses involved in the schools’ construction. Meanwhile, the school’s management and teachers salaries were paid from the waqf funds. The madrasahs were also known as sekolah Arab among the Malays where Arabic was taught as a compulsory subject and was used as the medium of instruction. The establishment of madrasah was seen as one of the Hadhrami Arabs’ contributions towards social needs by providing better education for Muslims’ children.88

Many of the successful Hadhrami Sayyids in Malaya were benevolent philanthropists. They were not only actively involved in trade and business ventures in Malaya, but also contributed to the society by establishing madrasahs. Among the famous madrasahs are Madrasah al-Masyhor in Penang, Madrasah al-Sagoff and

86 Ibid.
Madrasah al-Attas al-Arabiyyah in Johor, and Madrasah al-Junied in Singapore. They did not only establish madrasahs, but were also responsible for the maintenance as well as administration and management. They also provided the best teachers that are mostly imported from Middle East countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Hadhramaut, Yemen.89

The emergence of madrasahs in Malaya in the early 20th century had witnessed a relentless effort of Hadhrami Arabs in promoting religious education to the Muslims in the country. The Hadhrami Arabs used their wealth to build schools and establish funds and endowments to maintain the schools’ administration and management. The Al-Azhar University in Egypt became the centre of Muslim education during this period apart from Makkah and Madinah in Hijaz. Many of the madrasah students furthered their studies in Egypt to enhance and master their knowledge in Islam as well as other sciences. After all, madrasahs in Malaya received quite a considerable influence from Egypt. The teachers were also educated and received their training from the Al-Azhar University. The syllabus taught at the madrasahs was also taken from Egypt.90

Ismail Sudin mentions about several historical aspects from the history of Kuala Kangsar on the types of education received by Malay students in the second decade of early 20th century Malaya. In his paper, there was a mention of an Arab school which most probably refer to the madrasah education. According to him, this Arab school operated differently from the pondok system. This Arab school did not only concentrate on religious subjects and the Arabic language only, but also taught additional subjects to the students known as life skill subjects. Ismail Sudin calls this school Sekolah Islah or Reform School.91

90 See The Egyptian Influence in Colonies, FCO 141/7343.
“Sekolah Arab ini menggantikan Sekolah ‘Alwie chara pondok yang diasaskan Tuan Haji Nawawi bin Haji Tahir juga. Sekolah ini bukan sahaja telah keluar daripada sistem pondok bahkan juga memberi pelajaran ‘commercial’ dan ‘perusahaan’. Jadi saya rasa lebih tepat kalau di-panggil Sekolah Islah (Reform).”  

He further says that students were not only taught Arabic and religious subjects but also the Malay language, Mathematics, History and English with additional life skill subjects such as gardening, business and planting paddy. Students were taught on how to be independent by concentrating on their area of interests. These skills should be beneficial for them once they graduated from school and start their lives in the real world.

Besides the pondok institution, there were also vernacular schools. In the state of Pahang, around 206 students attended Malay vernacular schools in the year 1898. Based on the report, there were 6 vernacular schools scattered in Pahang and one English school for the royalties or Rajas at Pekan. This report did not mention about any pondok or religious school that existed in Pahang at that period of time. The formal madrasah education or Arabic school in Pahang was only operated in 1923 when Sayyid Hassan opened Madrasah Al-Attas Ketapang in Pekan. Around 53 students enrolled at the madrasah.

20th century Malaya witnessed significant changes in the educational system of the country. This period had also witnessed the involvement of the Hadhrami Arabs in the Malays’ religious education system. Among the successful Hadhrami Arab traders and entrepreneurs who played significant roles in madrasah education were Sayyid Hassan al-Attas, Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi, Sayyid Mohamed al-Saqqaf and Sayyid Abdul Rahman al-Junied. Through their efforts, the early 20th century also witnessed several

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92 Ibid., 45.
93 Ibid.
religious schools being built in Malaya using the Arabs’ established endowments from whose income these schools were maintained and the teachers were paid. The establishment of madrasahs in Malaya was part of their desire to establish the Arab tradition in the land as well as to produce more efficient teachers educated in the Arabic medium. From these schools the students obtained a proficiency in Arabic which enabled them to understand Arabic text well, thereby prepping them in becoming ‘authorities’ in religious matters and extending better understanding of Islam to fellow Malays.96

One of the most influential Hadhrami Arabs who pioneered the establishment of madrasahs in Malaya was Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi. Influenced by the development of education and political ideas in Egypt inspired him to establish several madrasahs in the Straits Settlement. Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi was born in Malaya of a Malay mother and an Arab father. Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi inherited the Arab bloodline in the family. His descent came from Hadhramaut, Yemen yet he was born in Malacca in 1867. His father, Sayyid Ahmad bin Hassan al-Hadi was also born in Malacca in year 1839 and also his grandfather Sayyid Hassan bin Saggaf al-Hadi. He could be considered as one of the earliest scholars and reformists who promoted intellectual development of the Malays in the early 20th century.97

The first madrasah was established in Singapore in 1908 known as Madrasah al-Iqbal al-Islamiyyah. This school was built in response to the pan-Islam and reformist movement in Egypt from which he was inspired. Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi tried to educate and inculcate religious knowledge and the Arabic language as well as the ideas of reform in the society. However, the madrasah did not receive encouraging response from the public which led to its closure in 1909. Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi then moved to Johor where he was appointed as Shariah Lawyer at the Shariah Court in Johor Bahru. It

was said that the reason for his acceptance was that the state of Johor practiced Shariah Law while Singapore implemented the British secular system of administration that separates religion from the state administration. However, his service with the Johor Shariah Court did not last long as he quit from this post due to political changes in Johor’s state administration in 1916 when the state’s government system was restructured due to British intervention. He was said to be very disappointed with this change which was seen to marginalize the role of Islam in Johor.

Sayyid Syaikh Al-Hadi returned to Malacca where he established Madrasah al-Hadi in Bandar Kaba in year 1917. He taught the students religious subjects and instilled in them the idea of reform. However, old folks and traditional ‘ulama’ cannot accept his ideas and they protested against him. The madrasah operated less than two years before ceasing operations in 1918 due to several reasons such as shortage of skilled and qualified teachers, financial problems and also disappointing feedback from the local people. The people were strongly attached to the long established old-fashioned beliefs and superstitions, making it difficult for them to accept changes and new ideas. The people cannot accept his teachings and the idea of reforms that required rational thought and rejection of irrational ideas and absurd traditions of their ancestors. Sayyid Syaikh received a hostile response from traditional ‘ulama’ or Kaum Tua. The madrasah was closed down after operating less than two years. Due to the incident in Melaka, Sayyid Syaikh then moved to Penang.

In Penang, a daily Qur’an School or Sekolah al-Qur’an (Madrasatul Qur’an) was established by the Arab community located at Masjid Melayu on Acheen Street.

103 According to other source, the school first class was held at a small house used as the school building with 8 students. When the school moved to new location at Kampung Jawa Lama, the number of students had increased to 50. See Rahim Osman, “Madrasah Masyhur al-Islamiyyah”, p. 76.
Its establishment was due to the efforts of several Arabs, among them were Sayyid Mahzar Aidid, Sayyid Ali Bawazir, Sayyid Umar al-Sagoff, Sayyid Umar Mahzar and Sayyid Hassan al-Baghdadi. Sayyid Abdul Rahman al-Habshi was the person in charge of the school. When it was first opened, about 16 students enrolled at this school where mostly were Arab students learning Qur’an and basic *Fardhu ‘Ain*. Due to increasing demand and encouraging response from members of the Muslim community, the Arab community leaders then decided to build a proper Arabic school to meet the needs of the Muslim population in Penang. A new school was established in Kampung Jawa Lama in the year 1916. The school was named *Madrasah al-Masyhur*\(^\text{104}\) in honour of a respected Sayyid in the island, Sayyid Ahmad al-Masyhur who was also known as Ayid Mashoor or Masyhur.\(^\text{105}\)

*Madrasah al-Masyhur* had undergone a new phase of development when Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi joined the school in 1919 as the headmaster. He helped the school to attain a firm footing in religious education by improving its syllabus as well as the school’s management. He managed to persuade Haji Bachik\(^\text{106}\) to offer the use of his house on Tek Soon Street as the new school building. The number of students went to about 300 students. Arabic was used as a medium of instruction and the school textbooks were also in Arabic. Subjects like *Fiqh* or Islamic Jurisprudence, Grammar (*Nahu*), *Tafsir*, *Saraf* and Arabic language were taught with the addition of English language. The teachers were all Arabs, including Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi himself together with other Arabs such as Syaikh Tahir Jalaluddin, Syaikh Abdullah Maghribi,

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\(^{104}\) According to Omar Farouk Shaeikh Ahmad, the Madrasah al-Masyhur got its name after it was moved to new building at Kampung Jawa Lama in 1916, while from Rahim Osman’s writing, it says that the school changed it name to Madrasah al-Masyhur when it moves to new location at Tek Soon Street in 1919. See Omar Farouk Shaeikh Ahmad, “The Arabs in Penang”, p.7; Rahim Osman, “Madrasah Masyhur al-Islamiyyah”, p. 77.


\(^{106}\) Haji Bachik was a Malaccan philanthrophist who had offered the use of his house at Tek Soon Street as a new building for the madrasah to meet the increasing number of students. It is said that Haji Bachik also gave a helping hand when Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi was in Malacca running Madrasah al-Hadi in Banda Kaba. When Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi left Malacca, Haji Bachik continued Sayyid Shaykh’s work spreading the ideology of Young Faction or *Kaum Muda* through the establishment of an Arab school at Jalan Chan Kun Ching, Banda Kaba, Malacca. See Rahim Osman, “Madrasah al-Masyhur al-Islamiyyah”, p. 77.
Syaikh Mohamed Radzi, Abdul Rahman Firdaus, Sayyid Ahmad, Abdul Hady and Sayyid Ali Zakir. 107

It was a tradition at Madrasah al-Masyhur to maintain Arabs as the majority of its teaching staff. The tradition resulted in a high standard of Arabic being taught; in fact it was about the best in Southeast Asia. 108 The high reputation attained by Madrasah al-Masyhur led to a rapid increase in its enrolment, with students coming from all over Malaya, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Brunei, the Philippines, Indonesia and even India. This distinction enabled the school to emerge as a leading centre for Arabic and Islamic education in Southeast Asia before the Second World War. 109

In addition to having the majority of its teachers imported from Arabia, Madrasah al-Masyhur through the support given by wealthy Arabs, also maintained, from its establishment, a tradition of appointing Arabs as mudir (principal). After Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi the first mudir of the madrasah resigned in 1919, he was replaced by Syaikh Abdullah al-Maghribi. Syaikh Abdullah al-Maghribi served as the headmaster for three years until he was replaced by Syaikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee. 110 During the tenure of Syaikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee as the mudir of the school in the 1920s and 1930s, the madrasah was at its peak time where it was regarded as the period of the school’s highest reputation. Syaikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee was assisted by his brother Syaikh Mohd. Hussein Rafiee and they managed to open a new branch of Al-Masyhur school for girls that was first located at his own house on Macalister Road in 1934. After two years operating at his house, the madrasah then moved to its permanent building that was located on Burmah Road. 111

Madrasah Al-Masyhur also succeeded to open new branches in Sabak Bernam, Selangor in 1938 and in Balik Pulau, Pulau Pinang in 1939. The number of students enrolled in Madrasah Al-Masyhur had increased since it was opened in 1918. When the

108 Ibid., p. 8.
109 Ibid.
110 Before Shaykh Abbas Bakar Rafaiee takes over the headmastership of the school, Ghulam Sawar acted as the headmaster of the school while waiting for the arrival of Shaykh Abbas Bakar Rafiee.
A madrasah was located on Tek Soon Street, the students were around 100. However, when the new branch of madrasah for girls was opened in the 1930s, the number of students had increased to more than 200. Students who completed their studies at Madrasah Al-Masyhur continued their studies in the Middle East countries. In the 1930s, Madrasah Al-Masyhur offered scholarships from Saudi Arabia for students to further their studies in Arab countries. Around 25 scholarships were offered every year.\textsuperscript{112} This improvement shows that the madrasah managed to cater to the needs of students from all around Malaya. It became a famous centre of religious knowledge in the country before the Second World War. The students were not only taught religious and secular subjects, but they were also exposed to the idea of nationalism and to observe the political aspects of Malaya under colonial rule. In 1957, Sayyid Abdullah al-Saqqaf appealed to Government of Malaysia for financial assistance and the school was provided with two new buildings, one at Tek Soon Street and the other at Lunas Road. Besides that, the school also received donations from Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Kuwait in the form of cash and goods to school.\textsuperscript{113}

When Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi joined the madrasah in 1918, he brought a big change to the Madrasah. The school administration and management was improved and the syllabus was revised by introducing a modern type of education. Starting from a Qur’an and Fardhu ‘Ain school, the madrasah progressed to providing a new, modern syllabus comprising of secular or non-religious subjects and religious subjects such as Qur'an, Tafsir, Tawheed and Hadith. The school is now at par with the English medium schools run by the colonials. Students no longer sit on the floor in a circle surrounding the ustaz or teacher. Instead, they were provided with chairs and tables. Arabic was used as

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., pp. 80-84.
\textsuperscript{113} Omar Farouk Shaeikh Ahmad, “The Arabs in Penang”, p. 9.
the medium of instruction at the madrasah. English was also taught together with other subjects such as mathematics and geography.\textsuperscript{114}

The establishment of the madrasah received positive and encouraging response from the Malay society.\textsuperscript{115} Parents had a better choice of education for their children. Books and teaching materials were imported from Egypt, meaning that the syllabus and all matters related to teaching in the madrasah were taken from there. Many of the madrasah graduates continued their studies in Egypt.\textsuperscript{116} The school managed to maintain its entire Arab teaching staff in particular the mudir, the school headmaster. When Syaikh Abbas Rafiee retired in 1956, he was replaced by his brother Syaikh Hussain Bakar Rafiee who was in service until 1971. The school management was then taken over by Syaikh Ahmad Bajunid. The school started to employ non-Arab teachers only when it started using Malay as medium of instruction in 1969.\textsuperscript{117}

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\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{115} Private Letter Collection, SP. 10/20. ANM.
\textsuperscript{116} One of the students of the madrasah who through the initiative of Shaykh Abu Bakar al-Rafī‘ was provided with a scholarship to further his study in Cairo was Abu Bakar Ashaari. See Ar-Rajaa, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1 August 1928, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{117} Omar Farouk Shaykh Ahmad, “The Arabs in Penang”, p. 9.
Students did not only learn religious subjects, but also Arabic and English. The Malay language was also introduced and taught at the school in the 1930s. Students were also introduced to debates and lectures. Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi together with the help of his comrades managed to run this madrasah successfully. This madrasah managed to produce future intellectuals, reformist and nationalists who continued his struggle towards building the nation and upholding the idea of reforms and Pan-Islamism in the society.118

Another important Arab who played a significant role in establishing madrasah in Malaya was Sayyid @ Habib Hassan al-Attas (1832-1932). Sayyid Hassan was born in 1832. He received part of his education at the al-Azhar University in Cairo and had lived in Egypt for 12 years. Upon his departure from Egypt, he returned to Singapore where he taught at Madrasah al-Saggoff for two years before he moved to Garoet in the Praeanger Residency to teach at a school there. He died on 21 March 1932.119 He founded Madrasah al-Attas al-Arabiyyah Johor in 1913. All the cost for the madrasah’s construction was paid by him using his own money. This madrasah was the first religious school being established in Johor. When it first opened, the school was located at Bukit Timbalan. It accommodated about 80 students. The school then had to move to a new location due to the increasing number of students. Lastly, a permanent building was founded at Kampung Wadi Hassan (Kampung Habib Hassan).120 Apart from this school, Sayyid Hassan also established a religious school for girls at Wadi Hassan, Madrasah al-Attas lil Banat or Al-Attas Girls School.121

118 Among the students who studied at this madrasah were Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, the famous nationalist and Haji Abu Bakar Ashaari the famous religious scholar in Perlis. Rahim Osman, “Madrasah Masyhur al-Islamiyyah”, p. 83.

119 For his life and contributions to Islamic life in Malay society, see Sayyid Ali Mohammad al-Attas, Almarhum Sayyid Hassan Ahmad al-Attas. Seorang Mujahid dan Pembangun Ummah, Johor Bahru: Wakaf Almarhum Syed Hassan bin Ahmad Alattas, 1984, pp. 11-32; Mahayuddin Haji Yahaya, Sejarah Orang Syed di Pahang, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980, pp. 90-91. See also CO 537/931, Marriot (Governor’s Deputy) to Amery, 1 April 1925; enclosure The Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence, No. 28, April 1925.


121 Will letter from Sayyid Hassan to his Trustee on 24 may 1931,SS 2289/1941; See also Aminuddin bin Abd. Rashid, Syed Hassan bin Ahmad al-Attas, p. 91.
Besides the primary and secondary schools, Sayyid Hassan al-Attas also opened a training college for teachers and qāḍī in Johor Bahru known as Kuliyyah al-Attas\textsuperscript{122} to cater to the increasing demand for higher education. This college was built on 8 June 1931. The college was aimed to produce skilled and knowledgeable workers, especially in religion. The college received encouraging response from the public when it managed to attract students from other states in Malaya, such as Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang. Students from overseas also attended this college such as from Langkat, Palembang, Indragiri and Brunei.\textsuperscript{123} Students were charged RM20.00 fees per year of study. The school did not last long when it was closed down in 1938 after eight years of operations.\textsuperscript{124}

Apart from formal education, Sayyid Hassan al-Attas also introduced long distance education or pendidikan jarak jauh via post in 1929. The courses offered were Arabic and English with a monthly fee of RM 1.00. Those who registered using coupons available in magazine Jasa only had to pay 75 cents. About 626 students registered for the course in 1930.\textsuperscript{125}

Sayyid Hassan also founded two madrasahs in Pahang. The first was Madrasah al-Attas Ketapang in Pekan which was built in 1923. It was the earliest Arabic religious school established in Pahang. When it first opened, the school received about 53 student enrolments. Sayyid Hassan again opened another Arabic school in Kuala Tekal, Temerloh in 1925. Most of the teachers who taught at this school were Arabs who were knowledgeable in religious knowledge and Arabic language. The school’s first headmaster was Sayyid Abu Bakar bin Abdullah al-Khirid, a graduate from Madrasah al-Attas al-Arabiyyah Johor.\textsuperscript{126} The teachers of this madrasah were mostly graduates from Al-Azhar University, Egypt and Hadhramaut, Yemen. The syllabus used in this madrasah

\textsuperscript{123} Aminuddin bin. Abd. Rashid, Syed Hassan bin Ahmad al-Attas, pp. 93-96.
\textsuperscript{125} Jasa, 16 May 1929, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 90.
and Madrasah al-Attas Ketapang was taken from Madrasah al-Attas Al-Arabiyyah Johor.\(^{127}\)

In addition to that, Sayyid Hassan also spent his money to buy a building in Cairo for the use of students from Malaya who further their studies in Egypt. The three storey-building situated in the city of Cairo was bought in 1926 for 10,000 pounds. The building was then rented to Malay students in Cairo for RM15 to RM60 per month.\(^{128}\)

Madrasah al-Junied al-Islamiyyah in Singapore was built in 1927 through the efforts of Sayyid Abdul Rahman bin Sayyid Junied bin Umar al-Junied. All costs for the school construction was funded from the \textit{waqf} revenue of the Kampung Glam Funeral site that belonged to Sayyid Umar bin Ali al-Junied. The school also received admissions from overseas students such as from Indonesia, Solo Island, Philippines and Brunei.\(^{129}\) This \textit{madrasah} also offered admissions to a special class of students who were qualified from the Malay States, Java, Sumatera and Borneo as well as other neighbouring Muslim countries in the region.\(^{130}\)

![Old Building of Madrasah al-Junied al-Islamiyyah.](image)

Figure 3.2. Old Building of Madrasah al-Junied al-Islamiyyah.


\(^{128}\) GA 506/1929. Letters between High Commissioner Singapore and GA dated from 27 August until 5 September 1929.


\(^{130}\) An advertisement from \textit{Madrasah Al-Junied Islamiyyah} offers admission to further study at special class. Arkib Negara Malaysia (ANM), ANM 2006/01542.
Madrasah al-Sagoff or al-Saqqaf is another madrasah built by Hadhrami Arabs in Singapore. The madrasah was named after the family name al-Saqqaf. Sayyid Mohamed bin Ahmed bin Abdul Rahman al-Saqqaf was the one responsible for the establishment of this madrasah. He was a wealthy and benevolent Arab in Singapore. He founded Madrasah al-Sagoff in 1912 in Jalan Sultan, Singapore. The construction of the school was funded using the waqf revenue of Sayyid Mohamed bin Ahmed bin Abdul Rahman al-Saqqaf. Sayyid Abdul Rahman b. Taha Al-Saqqaf\textsuperscript{131} was the person responsible for administering and supervising the running of the madrasah. He was also made the trustee of the Al-Saqqaf Arab School in Jalan Sultan, Singapore from 1912 until 1954.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{131} Sayyid Abdul Rahman bin Taha Al-Sagoff was son in-law of the late Sayyid Mohamed bin Ahmed Al-Sagoff.

Figure 3.4. Madrasah AlSagoff al-Arabiyyah

Figure 3.5. A Close View of the Madrasah Facade

The madrasah education introduced in Malaya played quite a considerable role in enhancing the knowledge of Islam among the Malay students. The students were not
only exposed to religious subjects, but also other sciences such as mathematics, geography and English. The so called secular subjects were seen as added value subjects to the Malay students, enabling them to apply to jobs in the government sector once they completed their studies apart from being a religious teacher or imam. In addition, many Malay students who completed their studies at the madrasah furthered their studies in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt. In Egypt, these students were exposed to the idea of reform and pan-Islamism that had influenced their political thoughts.

“...these boys, when they returned, became a small and rather frustrated Malay Intelligentsia, circulating (in private) magazines in Arabic and Malay that dealt with forbidden topics of nationalism and the politics of the Middle East. They established literary associations and small debating societies which though denied overt political influence, created small circles of friends that were to form nuclei, thirty of more years later, of political bodies”.  

Conclusion

The involvement of the Hadhrami Arabs in the religious administration of the Malay states in Malaya had helped much in the process of making Islam as a religion of practice in the country. Earlier generations of the migrated Hadhrami Arabs were known for their authority and credibility in Islam. They were also respected scholars in society whose opinion and ideas were sought by Muslims and rulers alike. Their integrity was respected by friends and foe. It is undeniable that religion and education are two components that are interrelated to each other. Islam is not only a religion of ritual practices, but also a way of life. Islam guides its believers to achieve the highest degree of life goals. Islam makes it compulsory for its believers to seek religious knowledge and encourages them to learn the worldly sciences for the sake of human beings.

The personality and credibility shown by the early generations of Hadhrami Arab scholars in dealing with the religious affairs of the Malay states had strengthened the people’s trust and confidence in them to propagate Islam in the country. The general impression of the Malays towards the Hadhrami Arabs as the descendants of Holy Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. earned them a reputable status in the society. They were looked upon with deference and respect by fellow Muslims. They were chosen to lead the Muslim society in matters related to Islam. Through their efforts and contributions, the religious institution in Malaya managed to strengthen its position as a body that monitors and supervises Muslims’ religious affairs in the country until today. Thus, Islam remains as the official religion of the country until today.

The involvement of the Hadhrami Arabs in the administration of religious affairs was well received by the Muslims as they were believed to be descendants of the holy Prophet. Some of them taught at pondok and others gave lectures and talks at mosques, spreading Islam and teaching religious knowledge to the society. The close connection between these scholars and the society is strengthened when Makkah was made an important destination for every Muslim to perform hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam. Makkah was also an important centre of learning to pursue religious knowledge. The early 20th century witnessed a new and reformed system of religious education in Malaya when the first madrasah, Madrasah Al-Iqbal (1908) was established in Singapore under the supervision of a Hadhrami Arab, Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi. This achievement marked a new era of improvement in the country’s religious education system which all the while was left behind compared to the secular system of education introduced by the British.

The Islamization of Malays by the Arabs had indirectly brought the Arabs’ intellect and culture into the Malay society which created and rebuilt a new and civilized society with Islam as its foundation. The culture of knowledge emphasized by Islam had coined a new script based on Arab alphabets known as Jawi. Jawi is the
product of Arabic script with several additional letters taken from the Persian language. *Jawi* uses Arabic alphabets that have been modified and refined from time to time to suit the tongue of the Malays.

The Hadhrami Arabs’ involvement in the field of religion did not become the responsibility of the religious group alone. There were Hadhrami Arab merchants and entrepreneurs who were generous and kind, building mosques using their own money. They also use their wealth to establish Sekolah Arab or madrasahs to meet the needs of the Muslims children. It is in line with their efforts to educate the community with religious knowledge through a better and structured system of education. Through the efforts of the Hadhrami Arabs, the early 20th century had witnessed several religious schools being built in Malaya. The Arabs used their wealth to establish endowments from whose income these schools were maintained and the teachers were paid. The establishment of the religious schools popularly known as Sekolah Arab or madrasah was part of their aspiration to establish Arabic tradition in Malaya as well as to produce more proficient teachers educated in the Arabic medium. Students with Arabic proficiency would be able to understand Arabic texts well, helping them to become better ‘authorities’ in religious matters. Therefore, the process of propagating Islam to fellow Muslims would become easier and more effective.

In the 1920s and 1930s more madrasahs were established due to the improvement in the education system in Malaya. Pondok schools also started to improve its teaching method and adopted a more systematic way of learning. The madrasah also managed to produce qualified religious scholars and figures. They worked hard for the country’s freedom against the colonial rule in Malaya and petitioned for independence. They also played significant roles in promoting the idea of nationalism through reforms in the country. The long lasting contribution of madrasah education has succeeded in producing future intellectuals, reformists and nationalists.
who struggled for the country’s independence, upholding the idea of reforms and Pan-Islamism in the society. Most importantly, the madrasahs had managed to change people’s perception and awareness towards the importance of education. The education revolution introduced by Muslim reformists who were mostly educated from the Middle East has indeed left a great impact on the religious understanding of the Muslim society in Malaya.