

LATEST DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN KELANTAN

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Abstract

Kelantan is the most popular state in Malaysia in term of the development of Islamic education. It has been known as “Serambi Mekah (Verandah of Mecca)” because of this exceptional development. One of the aspects of this development is the traditional education in Kelantan known as “pondok studies” which started to flourish since early 19th century and manage to exist up to present day. Many studies have been done on the influence of this kind of education in the history of Islamic education in Kelantan. It is admitted that the present situation of pondok studies in Kelantan is not as active as it used to but this traditional system of Islamic education manage to show their present in modern society especially in Kelantan. There are at least 14 pondoks in Kelantan that are still in operation, some are very famous, and some are just newly established in the last two decades. These 14 pondoks still maintain their traditional education methods in the mid of modern Islamic religious school which become the mainstream schools in Malay/Muslim society in Kelantan. This study explores this development and to give some perspectives on their future prospects.

Keywords: Traditional, education, pondok, Kelantan, Islam.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN KELANTAN

The development of Islamic education in Malaysia has been dominated by the State of Kelantan. Among the most notable part that can support this are the traditional religious schools that have played a major role in the growth of Islam in the region. Compared to the other states in Malaysia Kelantan have shown their strength in this aspect up to present day.

Many historians believe that Islamic education started in Kelantan as early as 16th century¹ which evidences were based on the existence of Kampong Laut Mosque (In 1968 this mosque has been moved to Nilam Puri). It is believed that the mosque has been established around that century and believed to be the oldest mosque in Malaysia which became the earliest learning centre for the Muslims.² Historians also believes that in the early stages Islamic education was initiated at the king's palace before gradually started to took place at *suraus* (known in Kelantan as *balaisah*) and mosques. The subjects taught at that time was on *farḍhu ‘ain*³ and the basic knowledge on daily ritual ceremonies which considered the compulsory subject for a Muslim. The Quran also was taught as to how to read and to write the Quranic verses along with the *jawi* writing. Quran was taught differently, that is, on one to one basis in which every student would take turn to study from the teacher.⁴ This method of learning Quran is still maintained up to present day in Muslims countries.

¹ Abdullah Alwi Haji Hassan. 1980. “The Development of Islamic Education in Kelantan” in Lutfi Ibrahim (ed.). *Tamadun Islam di Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia. p. 1990.

² Nik Mohamed Nik Mohd Salleh. 1985. “Perkembangan Pendidikan atau Pengajian Islam di Negeri Kelantan” in Nik Mohamed Nik Mohd Salleh (ed.). *Warisan Kelantan IV* Kota Bharu: Perbadanan Muzium Negeri Kelantan. p. 98.; see also Farid Mat Zain & Ezad Azraai Jamsari. 2007. “Perkembangan Islam di Negeri Kelantan Pada Abad ke-19” in Farid Mat Zain (ed.). *Islam Di Tanah Melayu Abad ke-19*. Shah Alam: Karisma Publications. p. 212.

³ *Fardhu ‘ain* is a subject dealing with the basic knowledge of Islamic religion.

⁴ Nik Mohamed Nik Salleh, *op.cit.*

The Islamic education at that time was on very informal basis and catered primarily for the palace and those who were linked to the palace and also for public. Palace played a major role in the history of Islam in Malay world.

Syaikh Abdul Halim was noted to be the earliest figure to give Islamic education to Muslims in Kelantan in earnest and more appropriate way. He started to deliver his Islamic teachings in palace in the end of 18th century after finishing his study at Mecca. He started the teaching at Kelantan's palace, and also at *suraus* in the capital of Kelantan (at that time the capital was Kota Lama, Kampung Sireh). His ability had been recognized by the palace in which the palace appointed him as the adviser to King Muhammad I (1818 – 1837M). On his advice the King made many efforts to secure the matters relating to muslims affairs in Kelantan such as *suraus*, endowments and shelter houses.⁵ His mission later was extended to his students like Tuan Guru Haji Yaacob, and after him passed to Haji Ahmad bin Yusof and Haji Osman bin Yusof, Tok Semian, Wan Ali Kutan and Haji Omar al Kelantani. These were the figures who shaped the development of Islamic education in Kelantan up to the end of 18th century and early 19th century that later produced the pondok system of Islamic education which based on *talaqqi* method.⁶ Islamic education developed rapidly in 19th and 20th century in Kelantan when the *pondok* system flourished actively⁷ and had shown their strength and capability in promoting Islamic education.

Historical Background of *Pondok*

Pondok in Malay word refers to a humble small house usually built for a temporary purpose. The term has been used for traditional Islamic education institution to represent the nature of the institution which complex comprises of small houses built surrounding the place of study. This system features three main elements: the teacher known as *tok guru*, the student used to be called *budak pondok* who stay at the *pondok*, and the *talaqqi/halaqah* system of learning.⁸ The *tok guru* is the leader of *pondok*. His speciality is in Islamic knowledge and has a special place in the eyes of the society. Therefore a *pondok* is usually a one man show center. The student/*budak pondok* are those who stay and study at the *pondok* and they come from every level of ages. The *halaqah* system is a system where student is required to sit in front of *tok guru* in receiving teaching.

It is believed that pondok system of education originates from Pattani (now in South Thailand). It developed in Kelantan by the scholars who studied at *pondoks* in Pattani who came back to Kelantan. The knowledge and experiences that they learnt in Pattani influence them to develop the same system of education in their hometown. They also used the books or known as *kitab* translated and authored by Pattani scholars.⁹ The ties between Kelantan and Pattani can be traced back to the 19th century Thai conquest of Pattani which cause the series of immigration of Muslims to Kelantan. Some religious leaders in Kelantan today can trace their families back to Pattani.¹⁰ This historical tie means something very important in the study of the *pondok* in Kelantan and its connection to Pattani.

As said earlier *pondok* in Kelantan can be traced back to early 19th century in which the first *pondok* was established in Pulau Chondong in 1820 by the prominent *tuan guru* Haji Abdul Samad bin Abdullah. It is about 28 kilometer from Kota Bharu, the capital of Kelantan. The *tuan guru* later known as Tok Pulau Chondong. The number of his student grew rapidly who came from around the states in

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶ Ramly Mahmood. 2005. *Peranan Pondok Dalam Pendidikan Islam Kelantan: Suatu Kajian Di Pasir Mas, Kelantan*. Master thesis submitted to Department of History and Islamic Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya. pp. 43 – 44.

⁷ Abdul Halim Ahmad. 1982. "Pendidikan Islam di Kelantan" in Khoo Kay Kim (ed.), *Beberapa Warisan Kelantan*. Kota Bharu: Perbadanan Muzium Kelantan. p. 1.

⁸ Zaidi Hassan. 2001. *Pondok: Keberadaannya di Dalam Peradaban Melayu*, paper presented at at kolokium Peradaban Melayu Kawasan Timur Laut (18 – 20 september 200). Kota Bharu. Organized by DBP. p. 1.

⁹ Nik Mohamed Nik Salleh. *op.cit.* p. 100.

¹⁰ Robert L. Winzler. 1975. "Traditional Islamic Schools in Kelantan". *JMBRAS*. Vol. 48. Part 1. P. 92.

Malaysia and also from Campuchea, Pattani and Kampar. In 1880 his students was approximately 500.¹¹

By the early 20th century there were many *pondoks* existed in Kelantan and among them can be listed as follow; Pondok Tok Pulau Chondong established in 1820, Pondok Tok Bachok in 1900, Pondok Haji Abdul Malek in Sungai Pinang in 1907, Pondok Haji Yusof, Geting, Tumpat in 1908, Pondok Kubang Pasu, Kota Bharu in 1900, Pondok sungai Budor, Kota Bharu, Pondok Kampung Banggol, Kota Bharu, Pondok Tuan Padang, Pondok Kampung Tok Semian (Tuan Tabal), Pondok Tok Selehor in 1912, Pondok Tok Kenali in 1910 and Pondok Haji Hassan, Ketereh in 1916. At the later stage another new *pondoks* had been established such as Pondok Padang Jelapang, Pasir Mas in 1925, Pondok Haji Hassan, Lemal, Pondok Pulau Pisang, Kampung Badang, Kota Bharu in 1930, Pondok Haji Abdullah Tahir, Bunut Payung in 1931, and Pondok Lubok Tapah in 1932¹².

These period of time marks the golden age of *pondok* in Kelantan. They flourished actively and gave contributions to the society. The *tok guru* gained high respect from rom the society and involved not only in education but also in social works.

In the later stage, that is from 1945, known as the era of declination of *pondok* in Kelantan. It is accepted that pondok at this time did not gain a high reputation in society as it used to. This is due to many reasons but the main reason is that there were new development in the education system in Kelantan. The Kelantan government started to establish a new system of religous school. Beside maintaining the pondok curriculum which emphasized on Arabic subject they also introcued many academic subjects. Apart from that these new schools also offered better facilities that can catered the physical needs of the students. They had all the tools and instruments in terms of the system, facilities, curriculums and human resources. In this new development it was hard for the *pondok* to compete with the government religous school or also known as *madrasah*.

From historical point of view, many suggest that this development was part of the missions of reforms movement which started to influence Malay society by early 20th century. Among the earliest madrasah established were Madrasah al Masyhur al Islamiyyah at Pulau Pinang, Madrasah al Hadi at Melaka, Madrasah Idrisiah and Madrasah al Diniyah Kampung Lalang at Perak, Madrasah Hamidiah at Kedah, Madrasah Muhammadiyah at Kelantan, etc.¹³ The development of madrasah was not only pressing down the pondok but created the parallel development of both institutions. In the rural areas pondok maintained their existence wheras in the urban and suburban areas madrasah became rivals to pondok. In areas where no pondok were established the madrasah became preferable to society.¹⁴

It is accepted that at this stage of time as mentioned *pondok* was not a primary choice in society given that the *madrasahs* and religous schools were by far the best place for Islamic education. However, there were still *pondoks* established at this time, that is after 1945, such as Pondok Haji Muhd Noor, Kampung But, established in 1946, Pondok Darul Ulum Ahmadiyyah Kampung Kolam Bachok in 1950, Pondok Terusan Pasir Tumboh in 1954 and Pondok Sungai Durian in 1958. So despite the high competition *pondok* still manage to exist at that period of time and up to present day there are still *pondok* that exist in Kelantan.

GENERAL FEATURES OF PONDOK SYSTEM

Method of Learning

It is the method of learning that always becomes subject of interest for many researchers. The method that they use is the *kitāb*-based teaching method and the *halaqah* method. Under these methods the *tok guru* will use a certain book as the text (known as *kitāb*) and it is a compulsory for student to own a *kitab* for every classes attended. In the process of teaching the *tok guru* will explain word by word of the topic discussed in the *kitab*. At the meantime students are expected to make

¹¹Nik Mohamed Nik Salleh. *op.cit.*

¹² Nik Mohamed Nik Salleh. *ibid. pp. 104 – 105.*

¹³ Mohamad Abu Bakar. 1995. "Dari Pusat ke Pinggiran:Institusi Pondok Di Malaysia" in Ismail Hussein, A.Aziz Deraman & Abdul Rahman Ahmad. *Tamadun Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur:DBP. vol. 3, p. 1172.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1175.

notes (known as *dhabit*) on all of the explanations given by the *tok guru* and normally the notes are made at the periphery of the *kitab*. The notes taken include explanation of the words, errors that occur in the *kitab*, the cross references, and any other remarks given by the *tok guru*. For the Arabic *kitab* the grammatical explanation of the words in the *kitab* will be also taught by the *tok guru*. This notes are very important because it will be a primary references for the student when they are qualified to teach. It is because of this method that studying in pondok will take a long time to finish. For the students, they have to finish the *kitab* from page one to the last page before moving to another *kitab* which again will follow the same process.¹⁵

The teaching is conducted in *halaqah* which method requires the students to sit in front of the *tok guru* whereby a direct lecture is conducted. This *halaqah* normally take place in the mosques or *balai sah* and both are actually considered as parts of the system since the congregational prayer is a compulsory for the student in pondok and classes normally conducted immediately after every five daily prayers.¹⁶ This method is actually a continuation of Islamic traditional learning at *al Haram* Mosque in Mecca,¹⁷ a learning centre which had produced many *tok gurus* who established pondok in Malay world. It is this learning centre with that kind of traditional method of learning that shapes the intellectual credibility and capability of the *tok gurus* which influence them in running the pondok. Kamal Hassan asserts that "This system of traditional learning has helped to preserve religious knowledge intact as it has been inherited from the classical authorities, thereby contributing to the strong commitment to religious values and the perpetuation of Shariah law..."¹⁸

The Curriculum

The curriculum used in pondok is limited to religious subjects only. The nature of study and the limited resources that they have makes the curriculum cannot be expanded to non-religious subjects. The focus of the curriculum is mainly on all of the subjects in Islamic studies ranging from *fiqh*, *usul al fiqh*, *tasawwuf*, *nahw* and *sarf*, *balaghah*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, and theology. Among the *kitab*s for the mentioned subjects that are used as text are *Fath al Mu'in (fiqh)*, *Hasyiah Qalyubi wa Umairah (fiqh)*, *Tafsir al Jalalayn*, *Sunan al Tirmizi*, *Syarh al Waraqat (Usul al fiqh)*, *Syarh Ibn 'Aqil (nahw)*, *Syarh al Hikam (tasawwuf)* etc. These are some of them and all are Arabic texts. Apart from that there are also *jawi* inscriptions used as the texts and mostly the major works of Pattani scholars like Sheikh Dawud, Sheikh Muhammad Zain and Sheikh Arsyad al Banjari, in which, most of the *kitab* are in the field of *fiqh*, theology and *tasawwuf*.¹⁹ They are like *Sabil al Muhtadin*, *Bughyat al Tullab*, *Siyar al Salikin*, *Faridah al Faraid* etc. If we see from the *kitab*s as listed, especially the Arabic ones, they actually represent the mainstream and notable texts for the mentioned field of Islamic studies. This is another characteristic of *pondok* system of learning. It is also observed that the curriculum has strengthened the position of Shafi'i school of law and the Asya'ari and Maturidi thought in theology in Malaysia.

CURRENT SITUATION OF PONDOK

It is accepted that at present day the mainstreamline of education is not *pondok* due to the reasons as discussed. However, in Kelantan we find that pondoks are still actively operating in the way that they used to but with new building and more comfortable facilities. Almost every pondok that operate in Kelantan now in the stages of constructing their *pondok* with new modern building.

¹⁵ Ahmad Hidayat Buang, Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor & Luqman Abdullah (2010), "The Madrasa System in Malaysia: Its Contribution To The nation And Challenges", in International Conference Proceeding on *New Horizons in Islamic Studies*, Kuala Lumpur: Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, p. 128-129.

¹⁶ Ahmad Hidayat Buang, Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor & Luqman Abdullah, *ibid*.

¹⁷ Mohamad Redzuan Othman (2007), "Masjid al Haram Sebagai Sebuah Institusi Pengajian: Perannya Dalam Perkembangan Awal Pendidikan dan Intelektualisme Melayu", in Farid Mat mat Zain (ed.), *Islam Di Tanah Melayu Abad Ke 19*, Shah Alam: Karisma Publication, p. 52.

¹⁸ M. Kamal Hassan (1996), *Towards Actualizing Islamic Ethical And Educational Principles In Malaysia Society: Some Critical Obseravtions*, Petaling Jaya: ABIM, p. 10.

¹⁹ Ahmad Hidayat Buang, Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor & Luqman Abdullah, *op.cit*, pp. 130-131.

It is admitted that in other states pondok in its original form of method of learning and curriculum can be said to have died of but in Kelantan pondok still exists and manage at least to show their present in the society. Out of the names of *pondoks* mentioned above three of them are still in operating, they are Pondok Lubuk tapah, Pondok Pasir Tumboh and Pondok Sungai Durian. The rest died of by 1960's to 1980's or converted to religious school like Pondok Bunut Payung.

In the latest development they have established an appropriate institution named as The Center For The Development of Pondok Studies Ltd which patronize 14 pondoks in Kelantan.²⁰ At least we can say that there are 14 pondok in Kelantan which maintain their traditional method of learning, with an exemption to Pondok Sungai Durian which manage to develop dual systems at the same time, pondok and madrasa. Among these 14, Pondok Lubok Tapah is the oldest (established in 1931) one followed by Pondok Pasir Tumboh(1954), Pondok Sungai Durian (1958) and Pondok Beta Hilir (1966). The rest have been established later and there are also newly established pondok like Pondok Neting (2004), Pondok Lubok Setol (2000) and Pondok Bukit Awang (2000). Years before that Pondok Lapan Bola has been established (1997) and Pondok Gelang Mas (1987).

The history of pondok in Kelantan shows that in 1980's and years before there were many pondok died of like Pondok Lati, Pondok Kubang Bemban, Pondok Banggol Kulim and Pondok Kampung Dangar when their respetive *tok guru* passed away. However, at the same period of times we also see that new pandok have been established like some pondoks mentioned above, namely, Pondok Gelang Mas, Pondok Lubok Setol, Pondok Bukit Awang and Pondok Lapan Bola.

Looking at this development we can say that in the era where the mainstream does not in supporting pondok there are still pondok in Kelantan which manage to survive. This show that the demand is still there but not as higher as before in history due to the reasons that we have discussed. In our opinion this trend and development will be maintained at least up to next some decades. For the future, the survival of pondok will depend on the management of present pondok and their players who will determine the continuation of pondok system.

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²⁰ <http://epondok.tripod.com/ahlipondok.htm>

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