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 century 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. Historians also believes that in the early stages Islamic education was initiated at the king’s palace before gradually started to take place at suraus (known in Kelantan as balaisah) and mosques. The subjects taught at that time was on fardhu ‘ain which is a subject dealing with the basic knowledge of Islamic religion.


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 Malays 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 surau, endowments and shelter houses. 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 Yusuf, 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. Islamic education developed rapidly in 19th and 20th century in Kelantan when the pondok system flourished actively 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. 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 Patani (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. 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. 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

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9 Nik Mohamed Nik Salleh. *op.cit.* p. 100.
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 gurus 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 religious school. Beside maintaining the pondok curriculum which emphasized on Arabic subject they also introduced 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 religious 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 Diniah Kampung Lalan at Perak, Madrasah Hamidiah at Kedah, Madrasah Muhammediah 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 whereas 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 religious 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

11 Nik Mohamed Nik Salleh. op.cit.
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 *kitāb*, the cross references, and any other remarks given by the *tok guru*. For the Arabic *kitāb* the grammatical explanation of the words in the *kitāb* 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 *kitāb* from page one to the last page before moving to another *kitāb* which again will follow the same process.  

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. This method is actually a continuation of Islamic traditional learning at *al Haram* Mosque in Mecca, 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 Shari'ah law...”.

**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 *kitabs* 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*. They are like *Sabil al Muhtadin*, *Bughyat al Tullab*, *Siyar al Salikin*, *Faridah al Faraid* etc. If we see from the *kitabs* 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.

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


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. 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 Lepan 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 respective tok gurus passed away. However, at the same period of times we also see that new pondok have been established like some pondoks mentioned above, namely, Pondok Gelang Mas, Pondok Lubok Setol, Pondok Bukit Awang and Pondok Lepan 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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