

**THE PLACE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
IN MALAY SOCIETY
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KELANTAN***

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SINOPSIS

Secara umumnya telah diakui bahawa masyarakat Melayu, sebagaimana juga masyarakat-masyarakat lain, melalui proses perubahan sosial. Dalam kertas ini percubaan dibuat untuk melihat madrasah (sekolah Ugama), sebagai satu-satunya institusi dalam masyarakat Melayu terlibat oleh perubahan-perubahan ekonomik, politik dan sosial.

Sebelum tahun-tahun 1950an madrasah di Kelantan adalah tempat anak orang-orang berada belajar. Selepas anak mereka tamat dari institusi madrasah ini, mereka menghantarkan pula anak mereka itu belajar ugama diluar negeri. Dalam waktu yang sama, keluarga yang miskin hanya mampu menghantar anak mereka ke sekolah Kuran dimana asas pelajaran ugama diberikan.

Tetapi hari ini madrasah menjadi tempat anak-anak dari keluarga miskin belajar.

Madrasah, iaitu sekolah ugama yang formal ini dahulunya khusus memberi matapelajaran ugama sahaja. Tetapi selepas tahun 1958 tumpuan yang besar telah diberikan keatas matapelajaran sekular. Ini dapat dijelaskan dengan melihat polisi kerajaan yang menawarkan jawatan kepada calon-calon yang mempunyai sijil persekolahan Malaysia sahaja. Dan dengan melihatkan diakhir-akhir ini pelajar-pelajar begitu cenderung untuk belajar dan mengambil peperiksaan Sijil Rendah Pelajaran, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia dan Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan, Majlis Ugama Kelantan pada tahun 1970 memasukan matapelajaran sekular kedalam susunan pelajaran sekolah-sekolah ugama. Sistem ini dikenal sebagai "Sistem Baru Persekolahan Ugama."

SYNOPSIS

It is generally agreed that Malay society, like other societies, is undergoing a process of change. An attempt is made in this paper to see madrasah as one of the Malay institutions affected by economic, political and social change.

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Prior to 1950s the madrasah in Kelantan was for the richer Malay. After their sons had graduated from this institution, the richer people could send them to study religion overseas. At the same period, the poor Malays were only able to send their children to Kuranic school which provided them fundamental teaching of Islam. However today, madrasah, is only for the poor.

Madrasah, the formal religious school was formerly specialising in religious subjects. But after 1968, greater attention has been given to secular subjects. This could be explained by the policy of the government that only candidate with government school certificates could apply for jobs. Seeing such keenness and enthusiasm from the students to study and sit for SRP, SPM, and STP, the Kelantan Religious Council in 1970 introduced secular subjects in all religious schools. This system is known as "new religious education system".

INTRODUCTION

Increasing attention has recently been given to the issue of the establishment of an Islamic University in Malaysia. Last year this subject was discussed in a seminar on Islamic Religious Education held by the Faculty of Islam of the National University. However, this paper does not attempt to decide whether or not the establishment of an Islamic University is justified, as one can give reasons for or against the idea of establishing the University. This paper which is based on my field work carried out in Kelantan in late 1971, aims at giving a picture of the future of Islamic Religious Education in Malaysia.

It is generally agreed that Malay Society, like other societies is undergoing a process of change. So an attempt is made to see religious education as one of the Malay institutions affected by economic, political and social change.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Early in the 19th century Kelantan was well known for its religious schools. It provided places for studying the Islamic religion. It was even known as "Serambi Mekah"—the Veranda of Mecca. Kelantan at that period was known for providing religious education not only to local students and students from neighbouring Malay states but also to students from other parts of the Malay archipelago. If this claim is true I believe that these students came to learn religion in *pondok* schools. The *pondok* schools were popular at that period. However it is not known how many *pondok* schools were in operation.

We can classify Islamic religious education into two categories—informal instruction and formal instruction. The former is the oldest form of religious education in Malay society. In this category we place the *pondok*

school and the Kuranic school. In these institutions no examination is required at the end of the course, nor is there a specific length of time of study. One can study from between five to fifteen years in the *pondok* school, while in the Kuranic school one will take between one to three years. In these schools the aim is to teach young boys and girls to read the Kuran and make use of it during prayers.

Many parents, perhaps, were not satisfied with the knowledge obtained by their children through informal religious instruction. They wished therefore religious instruction to be organised more formally like the school system. In Kelantan not until 1917 was formal religious education, *madrrasah*, introduced to Malay society i.e. two years after the Council of Religion and Malay Custom was established. By establishing formal religious education it fulfilled one of its objectives, that is to propagate the Islamic religion. Although formal instruction was now established, informal instruction still continued.

Since its inception, the Religious Council has been trying to expand and increase the number of religious schools. In 1952 the Council had ten *madrrasah* but two of them were closed down, one in 1953 and another in 1964. Until the present the Kelantan Religious Council has had eight *madrrasah*.

Besides the eight Religious Council schools mentioned earlier, there are 102 other Religious schools. These schools are run by public, and usually they are privately owned. The headmaster who is usually the owner of the school, assisted by a school board, is responsible for its management. He decides on the subjects to be taught and the selection of the text-books.

The Religious Council's schools are following the syllabus set by the Religious Council. The public school which are almost ten times the number of Religious Council school in the state are quasi-autonomous. Every school has its own syllabus, organises its own examination and confers its own certificates.

Since 1957, religious subjects have been incorporated into the curriculum of the national schools, at primary, secondary and upper secondary levels. At primary level the pupils are taught the elementary teachings of Islam such as the confession of faith, praying, fasting, paying *zakat* and the performance of *hajj*; Kuran reading and the history of the prophet. The purpose of the teaching of Islam at primary level is to inculcate Islamic ideals and to perpetuate the Islamic faith and practices.

In the secondary school besides the teaching of Kuran and *hadith* the pupils are instructed in faith and belief in God, His inherent attributes, the life and the teaching of the Prophet and the Sacred books, and in the Day of Judgement. The pupils are also required to learn the essential and *sunnah* (commendable) acts of praying. The history of Islam is also introduced at this level. In the upper secondary the syllabus includes Kuran

and Hadith with their translations, specific Arabic texts (in translation) and the history of Islam up to 750 A.D. Religious subjects are offered in the Lower Certificate of Education, School Certificate of Education and Higher School Certificate. All these are government school examinations. Last year there was a suggestion to include *Usuluddin* (Islamic Theology), *Shariah* (Islamic law) and Arabic in HSC. Students passing these subjects may join the Faculty of Islam in the National University of Malaysia or the Department of Islamic Studies in the University of Malaya.

It is interesting to note that Islam has had a place in the National School since 1957. However the learning of Islamic subjects is not compulsory for Malay boys and girls. They can also choose Art or Woodwork or other such subjects. No examination is required in praying procedure. Malay parents who send their children to the national school would be worried if they do not know how to pray, and thus parents usually teach their children the act of praying at home, or send them to a *lebai* (religious man) who is usually an *imam* of the village mosque. It is their responsibility to teach their children to pray.

In Johore the afternoon elementary religious school is very popular. This system enables a young Malay studying in a secular school in the morning to learn the principal teachings of Islam. The introduction of this system was essentially a product of the British colonial era. This system receives much criticism from modern educationists, as this system gives no time for young boys and girls to play.

Malay society must not be understood as a social community only but, it has also to be perceived as a religious community. The fact that every Malay is a Muslim, a Malay society is also a religious society. Muslim society is centered around its *ummat*, the community of believers in the unity of Allah and in the messengership of his prophet Muhammad. As a community it has rules for its individual members and for itself as a whole. All these rules of conduct have to be observed at all times and in all places. The rules and tenets are not confined to the relationship between members only but also the relationship between the members and God. In this situation the main function of Islamic education is to understand the relation of man to God revealed in holy Kuran. Thus the principal function of *madrasah*, is to fit man to lead a moral religious life. It should be realised that Islam, either in Malaysia or in Indonesia, is so dependent upon the religious school. Geertz in observing the role and function of religious education among the *Santri* in Mudjokuto maintained that as a doctrinal religion, Islam must:

“... rely upon a well developed formal school system for its propagation and for its maintenance, and ‘true’ Moslems are in a special position. The doctrinal complexity of their creed, its lack of close

integration with some of the basic social forms and fundamental attitudes of peasant society, and the hostility to it on the part of the most non-*santris* demand that there be a special and persistent effort made to indoctrinate those who wish to be its followers. Religious illiteracy and backsliding,, are central problems for the *ummat*, and the Islamic school system is designed specially to combat them.¹

The main function of religious education, whether informal or formal is to combat religious ignorance. This function becomes one of the activities of some missionary and political bodies in Malaysia today. Every religious organization such as PERKIM (Islamic Welfare Movement of Malaysia) or secular organizations such as the Women's Institute and the Youth Association and Political organizations such as PMIP (Pan Malayan Islamic Party) and UMNO (United Malay National Organization) help to reduce religious illiteracy in Malay society. Perhaps, the inclusion of religious activity into these organizations attracts not only older people to join but also gives parents some confidence in such organization. For, knowing that the organizations are not confined to social activities only but that a little knowledge of religion is given, parents are convinced that their children somehow or other will be familiar with their religion. Also, this will further help to strengthen the place of Islam as an official religion in the country.

It is generally agreed that every Malay is a Muslim. As an individual he has to know his religion, at least the basic teachings (i.e. confession, praying, fasting, paying *zakat* and *fitrah* and haj) and also *tawhid*. To know this basic teaching he does not have to go to formal school, for the kuranic school, national school and adult classes make available such teachings. In the formal religious school the subjects taught go beyond the basic teaching. The subjects included translation and interpretation of Kuran, history of Islam, jurisprudence, philosophy of religion, *Faraid*, and Arabic. Those who graduate from this formal school are expected not only to use the knowledge for themselves but also to disseminate it among their fellow Muslims. Although every Muslim is a *mubaligh* (missionary), the effort of those people who have undergone formal training would be more effective.

In every district in Kelantan, there are at least six or seven madrasah, and one district has more than ten madrasah (i.e. the district of Kota Baharu). Such a well-distributed number of madrasah in Kelantan have had a great impact on the Malay society. It is not surprising therefore that Islam is deeply rooted among the Malays in the state. A majority of the Malay peasants show a keen interest in their religion. They do not

1 C. Geertz, *Religion of Java*, New York, The Free Press, 1960 p. 177.

hesitate to discuss it with anybody who shows interest in it. Subjects of interest are usually centered around the question of pilgrimage to Mecca, religio-ethical problems and modern inventions and their relation to Islam. Everybody wishes to go to Mecca, at least once in his lifetime if he has money. A few envy their neighbours who have been to Mecca more than once. Since the turn of the century, Kelantan has sent an increasingly large number of students to the Middle East.

The Malays in Kelantan as in anywhere else in Malaysia observe many religious festivals such as Fasting, *Hari Raya Puasa*, *Hari Raya Haji*, Birthday of the prophet, Friday congregation and *Hari Ashura*.² Such calendrical ceremonials are observed in the Malay society. Besides these calendrical ceremonials there are other occasions celebrated by the Malays such as birth, marriage and death. As long as these calendrical ceremonials are celebrated and these occasions occur in the Malay society, there is a need for religious-functionaries such as *imam* and *bilal*. In the olden days, anybody who knew how to read Kuran, the basic teaching of Islam and was considered religious by the community, was chosen to be *imam* or *bilal*. But the situation has changed, at least in Kelantan, so that all religious-functionaries must undergo an oral examination held by the Religious Council. As religious teachers must obtain *tauliah* (letter of authority) to teach, so in order to be religious functionaries one must have a *tauliah* too. However, this rule is not strictly observed, as in the absence of *tauliah imam* other *orang alim* can replace him. The religious-functionaries, besides leading prayers and *doa*, have to perform rituals required by religion. The most qualified people here are graduates from *madrrasah*. The religious-functionaries are the first to be invited to such occasions.

In such occasions *orang beragama* or *orang alim* is required. In critical moments the religious men often take the place of medicine men. The religious men do not use the power of mediums such as *pawang* and *bomoh*,³ but depend on the blessing of God through reading verses of holy Kuran. Religious-functionaries have multiple roles in the society. However, their role as medicine men is seldom required in places where there are health centres and hospitals, but in isolated areas and kampongs they still play this role. Since they can perform religious rituals and acts, and at times act as medicine men, they are well respected in the society. The kampong people will approach them and seek their advice in time of crisis. Their relationship with kampong people is very close. Thus they

2 For detail description of all these celebration see Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, "Malay Festivals: And Some Aspects of Malay Religious Life", *JAMBRAS*, Vol. XXII, Pt. 1, 1944.

3 S. Husin Ali, "Patterns of Rural Leadership in Malaya", *JAMBRAS*. Vol. 41, (Pt.1), 1968, pp. 110-111.

are regarded as their leaders. The Malays respect and follow their leaders. The view and actions of these leaders affect the commoners strongly. Even in the choice of a political party for instance, which ever political party the leaders belong to the commoners tend to follow. Because of their ability and respect many of them are appointed political party chairmen or secretaries at the kampong level. As Islam is very strong in rural areas in Kelantan, every village has a PMIP branch. Many of these religious-functionaries become strong cadres in PMIP. In the recent Tumpat by-election these people have contributed a lot towards retaining the PMIP seat. However, they are not only the target of PMIP but also the target of UMNO. They have been the primary targets of political indoctrination by state and Federal governments which have instigated special meetings and civic courses to inculcate secular and religious views in them.⁴ The political parties are quick to realize that the religious people are respected and influential in the society. By becoming involved in politics they can make use of their positions to spread political opinions. So it is not wrong to say that the *orang alim* or *orang beragama* are at the same time religious leaders and political leaders in villages in Kelantan. Such an observation is also made both in Kerbau and Bagan when Husin Ali noted:

“Religion being sacred, those having any dealing with the sacred were highly revered. As for the members of the society, their Muslim faith demanded their dependence on the *imam* and *mualim* for specific ritualistic functions..... The fact that they had this extra ability and that the value system predominating upheld and respected the role they played, they became important members of the society, with wide command over not only the religious but, also, sometimes, over other matters.”⁵

Friday prayers, communal prayers held in the mosque and *surau* five times a day (at least twice a day for *maghrib* and *isha*), religious festivals such as celebration of prophet birthday, or *kenduri* provide a central basis for social integration and solidarity in Malay society. Such collective solidarity is not only to be found in public prayers and religious festivals but also, through rites related to the village social activities. *Kenduri* is a common feature in Malay village. *Kenduri* is a feast to thank God for recovery from a serious illness, to help someone through their examinations, to enable someone to be promoted or to have a male-child. Malay society sees this collective solidarity as an important phenomenon and as such this activity should continue. But the continuation is interrupted by westernization and modernity. Although changes brought about by westerni-

4 R. Von Der Mahden, “Religion and Politics in Malaysia” *Asian Survey*, vol. 111, No. 2, Dec. 1963.

5 S. Husin Ali, op. cit, p. 121.

zation do not penetrate deep into the social system of Malay society in the rural areas, the Malays feel that they should be vigilant. Thus religious education is necessary to combat all these.

Islamic behaviour acts as a social control in predominantly Malay areas. In Kelantan for instance, the state government controls on the everyday religious behaviour and living habits are very strong. Sosial life is very much restricted. Boys and girls do not mix freely for there is a law against *khalwat* (close proximity between sexes). Lovers' spots such as Pantai Chinta Berahi (Beach of Passionate Love) and Sabak beach, both in Kota Baharu, are deserted after dark. The only amusement park in Kelantan, 'Biaritz' Park, was closed down in 1965. To most religiously oriented leaders, these social controls are justified as Islam is its official religion. Official religion should not be kept only for ceremonial purposes as it is at the Federal level where official religion means that prayers are offered in the Islamic way on official public occasions such as the installation or Birthday of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Independence Day and such similar occasions.⁶

As a religious community, the Malays have to observe many religious sanctions incorporated in Islamic beliefs which are obligatory. These religious sanctions may be positive or negative religious rules. If a negative religious rule is broken, one is considered *berdosa* (one has committed sin), whereas if one fulfils a positive religious sanction one is considered *berpahala* (has acquired merit). To drink alcoholic drink, eat pork, commit adultery are a few examples which when committed one will receive negative religious sanctions. The doers will not only receive punishment in the next world they should also be punished in this world. For instance during the time of Muhammad if a couple was caught in adultery both should receive 100 strokes of rattan. Nevertheless, such punishment does not prevail today. Even in the PMIP government of Kelantan, such offenders only have to pay the *shariah* court between \$75-100. For drinking and eating pork there was no case ever heard in the history of Kelantan's *shariah* court. This does not mean that all Muslims do not drink and eat pork but here we see the intensification on such matters varies. The Muslim community views rather leniently people who drink, except that they are labelled as *kaki botol* (drunkard), although they never get drunk. To those who eat pork the sanction is rather great, such people are dubbed *kafir* (infidel). But, a drinker is never dubbed *kafir*. According to Islam however, both alcohol⁷

6 Suffian Hashin, "The Relationship between Islam and the State of Malaya", *Intisari*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

7 Surah 11, *The Cow*, verse 219 says:

They question thee about strong drink and games of chance.

Say: In both is great sin, and (some) utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness.....

and pork⁸ are prohibited and considered *najis* (unclean). People who go against these religious sanctions must *taubat* (repent) and they are met with ridicule by members of the society. For instance those who are forced to marry because of *khalwat* are called *tangkap basah* (caught in the act of proximity) and the Malays look down upon unmarried mothers. In some way they believe their acts may destroy the desirable harmonious relations with God.

Observing the five pillars of Islam, helping the poor and helping the cause of Allah such as building a mosque and a *surau* and helping neighbours when they are in difficulty, are a few examples of good deeds which are considered to gain some merit in the next world. Those who faithfully observe the religious sanctions are respected. The Islamic faith and external practices will add to one's status in the society. All these aspects of life ideally are acquired through a long understanding of Islam in religious schools. For such schools only serve to deepen personal faith and extend the influence of religion.

Another important role of the religious school which related to the above discussion is religious-moral concern. Every good Muslim must faithfully observe the Islamic faith. But in the urban areas observance of the prescribed five times of prayer each day is somewhat slack. However, fasting in the month of Ramadan is more strictly observed, since it is a social matter that can be watched in communities where there is little privacy. Also there is a law against non-fasting, and this matter can be taken to the *shariah* court. To be caught doing irreligious deeds will embarrass the family. In fact this is what worries most Malay parents. This tension is strengthened further by the effect of western ways of life, science and discovery. The madrasah is attempting to purify Islam from these competing influences and practices. The modernists believe it is necessary to reform Islamic teaching in the light of modern knowledge. The PER-KIM has shown some concern about European influence and Christian criticism.⁹

The expansion and the influence of westernization also brought a new outlook into Malay society. The greatest influence is experienced in the material side of life. Materialism is strong in the urban areas, for they are the centres of change and they are the first to be exposed to change.

8 Surah V, *The Table Spread*, verse 3 says:

Forbidden unto you (for food) are carrion and blood and swine-flesh, and that which hath been dedicate unto any other than Allah, and the strangled, and the dead through beating, and the dead through falling from a height, and that which hath been killed by (goring of) horns and the doverred of wild beasts, seving that which ye make lawful (by the death-stroke) and that which hath been immolated idols.

9 Hj. Abdul Aziz bin Zain, *Da'wah Dikalangan Orang Cina*, unpublished paper, Kuala Lumpur, 1972.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Malaya saw an expansion of education by Christian missionaries. A few Malay children joined those schools. Although they were not forced to change their religion they were taught Christian scriptures. Many Malay parents objected to this but their voice was not heard. Thus Islamic education based on Kuran and hadith was necessary to promote the cause of modernist Islam and to combat the increasingly aggressive Christian missions as a source of education and to control western influence and materialism.

The vernacular school was also introduced in Malaya after the Penang Free School was opened in 1816. In the early period the number of Malay students was very small as schools were centered in big towns. Thus it was necessary to set up a different type of school to reduce illiteracy among the Malays and also to satisfy the desire for education which could not be satisfied by the government schools.

The *pondok* and *madrasah* have been the institutions for learning in Malay society for five centuries. It is only after the coming of the west that secular education began. As such, most Malays feel that religious schools must continue to grow as long as the social and political conditions remain what they are.

Islamic education is a vital means of shaping Malay religious life. Thus Malay society places high value in religious education. In such a case the Islamic education system is the master institution in the perpetuation of Islamic tradition and the creation of Islamic society, as well as the locus of the most serious present efforts to modernize those traditions and that society.¹⁰ In this context the Islamic way of life embodies values which emanate from the concept of a universe, through principles of truth, justice and benevolence, where human relationships are based on ideals of human brotherhood.¹¹ The Islamic way of life is deeply rooted in religious life.

The desire for religious education whether among young or old is great. In Johore the parents of many Malay pupils are worried as 70% of them are studying in the afternoon (secular) schools.¹² Thus they are unable to attend religious schools which are also held in the afternoon. Every Malay parent wishes his children to be good Muslim (*Muslim yang saleh*), who take their religion seriously, both in worship and in behaviour. In the rural areas especially, if a man does not have religious education he is less respected by people. Secular education is meant for this world only, but religious education can guide one in this world and the world-hereafter. So it is not surprising then that although a certificate given by the religious schools does not have economic value and although the course

10 C. Geertz, "Modernization in a Muslim Society", in R.N. Bella (ed) *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia*, 1965.

11 E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State*, Cambridge, 1965.

12 *Utusan Melayu*, 5th February, 1972.

is very long (especially in the pondok schools) still the Malay sends his children to such institutions. To them learning religion itself is an *ibadah* (religious duty) to God. Although a few students regret having been in a religious school, a majority of them do not show any concern about what their future work will be. They will initiate strikes if the organizer tries to increase the school fees even for the betterment of the schools, but they never put any pressure on the government to guarantee their future.

Islam, constitutionally, is the official religion of Malaysia. By this the government at least places some priority on Islamic religion compared with other religions in the country. Although the government has given a place to religious education in all secular schools, it is felt by many Malays that the government has not done enough to enhance the status of religious schools. Since the beginning of the history of religious schools in Malaysia it has always been in the hands of individuals. Malay society has shown a keen interest in the institution, whether it is *kuranic* school, *pondok* school or *madrasah*. They feel that it is their duty as Muslim to disseminate the Islamic faith to the young generation. If the younger generation is ignorant of the religious teachings the Malay parents will be blamed, not only in this world but also in the world-here-after. For the teaching of the faith is *fardu al-kifayah*.¹³

In Malay society the socialization process of the individual has to be initiated first of all through the teaching of Islam. From birth to death one has to undergo certain rites and rituals. As long as religious festivals are celebrated, religious-functionaries are required. Religious-functionaries are also called for during critical moments.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE IN KELANTAN

Recently the Kelantanese were able to experience the country's development in the agricultural sector. Four irrigation schemes were built by the Federal government. They are the Kemubu, Lemal, Pasir Mas and Salor irrigation schemes. Kemubu is the largest irrigation area in the state and the second largest in the country. The Kemubu irrigation scheme which costs about M\$75 millions was officially opened in April, 1972. The irrigation will help about 47,000 acres of padi farms in this area to practise double-cropping. The other three irrigation schemes have been in operation since 1965. Lemal, Pasir Mas and Salor irrigation schemes irrigated about 23,000, 5,000 and 4,100 acres of padi farms respectively. The introduction of these irrigation schemes indeed has double the production of padi in the state.

¹³ *Fardu al-Kifayah* is an obligation to the Muslim community like cleaning and praying the dead Muslim before the funeral; unlike *fardu ain* which is obligatory to himself alone such as praying and fasting.

A few fishermen have been able to use diesel engine and modern fishing gears today. Although all this equipment is not theirs, the fishermen have seen what modernization means. Nevertheless, the majority of them are still using methods which can be classified as in between the 'traditional' and 'modern'. *Enjin sangkut* (outboard motors) are used by many fishermen. They hope to own more modern machines to keep pace with *kejayaan* (progress). Though the catch of fish is better now, they do not become rich, because the *enjin sangkut* which helps them to go far from the shore are bought through a hire purchase system. Although this new institution helps the fishermen to possess modern machines, it does not really help him to better himself, economically. This institution benefits the old group of middle-men. They are the people who have money and can afford to sell their goods through a hire purchase. On the other hand, the fishermen have to pay a high interest for the goods.

Besides the political, economic and environmental factors which are more conducive to Malay participation in business, one wonders whether Kelantan was subjected to stronger Islamic reformism than other parts of Malaya. In the field of education, besides government schools, there are five big schools owned privately by the Malays: namely Institut Pendidikan, Maktab Kadir Adabi, Madrasah Al-Islah, Madrasah Al-Naim and Maktab Pengajian Islam. The Institut Pendidikan, Maktab Kadir Adabi and Al-Islah are preparing students for secular colleges and universities in the country as well as overseas, while Madrasah Al-Naim and Maktab Pengajian Islam are preparing students for Islamic universities and colleges. The previously mentioned private higher education both secular and religious which are concentrated in Kota Bharu are unique in that similar institutions do not exist elsewhere (at least on anything like the same scale) in other parts of Malaya. Thus it seems evident that Malay in Kelantan place a higher value on education.

Every year more than 10% of Malay children attend formal religious education. Before 1968 the percentage was even greater. It was unfortunate that we were unable to get the percentage of students attending the informal religious school, the *pondok*. It was estimated by Religious Council at least about 5,000 students attended such schools before 1968, every year. But this number is fast declining today. Although, government secular schools are fast growing, the madrasah school still has a place in Malay society.

In Kelantan, the establishment of Madrasah in the earlier part of 20th century was initiated by wealthy local people. They had studied Islam in the Middle East for several years. In the course of their stay they might have been exposed to reformist and modernist ideas of Mohd. Abduh (1849-1905). Perhaps, besides too desirous of maintaining Islamic tradition in the country as well as of producing efficient teachers and *mubaligh*

(missionaries) educated in Arabic, they wished to bring changes into the society through their new religious education system. They received support from the local people and the Sultan either morally or materially. In the early stage of the development of these religious schools in the country they received free service from the local people if they needed their help to erect the school building, and with not much difficulty they received permission to run the school from the Religious Council. The announcement of establishment of the new madrasah was often made in the mosque on Friday to those who attended the prayers. The local people welcomed the establishment of the new schools, as they will provide education to their children. Usually this type of school charged a very small fee which most villagers could afford.

The growth of Islamic schools in Kelantan, especially in 1950s appeared very encouraging. Every year we saw the number of schools increasing. We saw the same trend in other Malay states, such as in Selangor and Kedah. As a result of this there was always a cry for a higher Islamic institution in the country. This cry was answered in 1955 when the Islamic College in Kelang was established. That year the intake was 55 students. It means less than 1% of the religious school students was able to join this college. The college was aimed at establishing centre for Islamic studies at a higher level, besides training teachers and competent *kathis* for religious courts of Malaya. The college expands its curriculum. The successful students are conferred the diploma of the college, which is recognized by the Ministry of Education. In July 1964 the Federal Government agreed to give a grant of \$2½ million to build an Islamic College at Petaling Jaya, provided that the college would carry out its policy to become the centre for Islamic studies. In 1966 the Islamic College in Petaling Jaya was opened. Besides having its normal course in Islamic theology, the college also offered secular subjects in Science and Arts to prepare students for the university of Malaya and overseas. In 1970 the status of the Islamic college was raised to a faculty within the National University. This ended the short history of the Islamic college in Petaling Jaya.

The Islamic college in Kelang, when its function was taken over by Islamic College in Petaling Jaya, no longer trained students to be teachers and *kathis*. The college prepares students for the Faculty of Islamic studies in the National University or the Department of Islamic studies in the University of Malaya. So again with the closing of the Islamic college, the students of religious schools find no place to further their studies in the country, for the qualification needed to join the Faculty of Islam is a Higher School Certificate with emphasis on Islamic subjects. Most religious schools in the country, however, are not prepared for that.

In Kelantan the students of the religious schools are perhaps luckier than their counterparts in other parts of Malaysia. In 1965, the state gov-

ernment established an institute of Islamic Higher Learning—known as Yayasan Pengajian Tinggi Islam Nilam Puri, Kelantan. The building was an old palace donated by the Sultan. When it was opened in that year it took 43 students. The course takes five years. Last year the number of students was 418.

Although this institution is maintained by the Kelantan government, it also takes students from other states. But the majority of the students are from Kelantan. The graduate of this institution is conferred a B.A. degree, equivalent to a B.A. degree of Al-Azhar University in Cairo. At the end of 1971 there are 17 students from Nilam Puri doing post-graduate studies at al-Azhar University.

At the moment the institution has two departments. They are the Department of *Shariah* (Islamic Law) and the Department of Education.

Degrees from this institution are recognized by the State Government only. Most of the graduates either become teachers teaching religious subjects in the Religious Council School or in public (state) schools, or become state religious officers such as *kathis*. Two batches of students have qualified: 31 in 1969 and 42 in 1970.

Although Yayasan Pengajian Tinggi Islam is looked upon as an institution of higher learning, at this stage it can only take about 2% of the student from the religious schools in the state. Thus it is felt by many that an Islamic University is necessary to give a chance to about 2,000 students who leave religious schools every year. There are about 56,000 students studying in 500 religious school in Malaysia today.¹⁴ (At the moment there are three universities in Malaysia, two of them offer Islamic studies). Many political leaders and nationalists are trying to put across this issue to the government. In the seminar on Religious Education held in April this year the same issue was brought up. The Minister of Education who officially closed the seminar once again rejected this issue. He was quoted as having said in Kota Baharu earlier “the government never promised to establish an Islamic university”¹⁵ He went on to say that the government cannot implement the establishment of the university. Nevertheless, those who support the idea of establishing an Islamic University are still working on this issue and promised those who attended the seminar that they will try in all ways possible to have this university established. Some sympathisers thought it is not time yet for the establishment of the university. They believed that all religious schools throughout the country have to be reorganized and the syllabus has to be standardised first. To them establishing a university is easier than to get students to study in it. They are of the opinion that students in the religious

14 *Majallah NILAM*, Badan Persatuan dan Penerangan P.S.Y.P.I.K., Kota Baharu, 1971.

15 *Utusan Melayu*, 8th July 1970.

schools today do not reach the minimum requirement for a university education as a result of inadequate syllabus, and because there are not enough trained teachers in the schools today.

Prior to 1968, the subjects studied in religious school were highly specialised. The emphasis was laid on religious subjects. Although the National Language (then known Bahasa Melayu) and English could be found in the time-table, these were not really emphasised and often there were no proper teachers for them. There were cases where religious teachers, because they had some knowledge in the languages, were asked by the headmasters to teach. The students were therefore, at a disadvantage. As far as religious subjects were concerned, the students passing out from *madrasah* were well equipped with religious knowledge.

In 1956 Malay secondary schools were established. They were in English medium. After 1958 the Malay secondary schools were using Malay as medium of instruction. A boy went to such a school surely had thought of some ambitions such as what he would be after finishing his studies. If he didn't his parent certainly would. Anyway, he had good prospects, as long as he studied hard and passed all his examinations. He might become a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer, but the prospects for the boy who went to a religious school seemed less promising. Malays in Kelantan as well as in other parts of Malaysia place a high value on education. Islam, further emphasises the importance of knowledge and highly praises the search for it. Thus as many of the Malays see education as a means of uplifting their economic and social status, there were also Malay students involved in or participating in religious education for the sake of the knowledge and spiritual gains. Thus to them the value of religious education is just the same as the value of secular education.

It did not take the Religious Council long to realise that the *madrasah* or modern religious system was not successful in bringing rapid change to the Malay society in Kelantan. The role of *madrasah* in improving the economic and class position of the Malays was less effective. In this matter, I strongly believe that Western secular education had contributed more.

So long as the religious education system is not improved, education as such will not be able to change the life of the Malay children who attended the religious schools.

Thus in 1968 it had already become the objective of the Religious Council in particular and Malay society in general, to see effective changes in the field of religious education. They realised that previous education system was incompatible with the Malaysian Education Policy and thus students passing out from *madrasah* were not able to contribute much towards nation building. Not only that, it was regretted for more than fifty years, the *madrasah* had kept students too long in school. It was felt that a change in the system itself was necessary. In 1970 a new *madrasah*

system was introduced. In this new system the emphasis is on secular education. About 70% of the time of studies is for secular subjects and about 30% only is spent on religious subjects. But this new religious education system is received with a mixed-feeling by many parents. Since the new madrasah system emphasizes secular subjects, they are concerned that their children will be ignorant of their own religion. But sending their children to *pondok* school, does not guarantee them a future. Shall they keep their children in the modern madrasah? Here they have to consider two factors—firstly, how much money they have to pay for school fees, examination fees and book money for new sets of text books every year, secondly, if they have money can this new *madrasah* system offer them good education? These questions have been answered elsewhere in this paper. Thus for these two reasons many parents decide to stop their children from studying. These factors contribute to the decreasing number of religious school students. Religious school today have become the resort of those students who cannot find a place to study anywhere else. Those who are really very poor and cannot afford to go to private school and those who have failed several times in government school examinations will join religious schools.

The Religious Council is also worried that the number of students keep on decreasing. For those who really need financial aid, the council is subsidising them with the payment of school fees. In this respect the demand exceeds the fund available.

This new system, if it is properly implemented, though offering a better future for students, is the major cause of the declining number of students in religious school in Kelantan today. The introduction of the new religious education system has generated some mixed-feelings among the school organizers, parents and students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by way of summary I suggest that the change in the content of religious school has also brought change in the type of students attending the institutions. Prior to 1950 the madrasah in Kelantan was for the richer Malay. After their sons had graduated from this institution, the richer people could send them to study overseas. On their return they would get job in the Religious Council. This trend had already changed somewhat. As the number of graduates multiply and few vacancies exist, such employment is becoming much more difficult for such graduates to obtain. Furthermore to become a religious man is not a path to wealth and respect in the society. Prior to 1950s the poor Malays on the other hand were only able to send their children to *Kuranic* school which provide them fundamental teaching of Islam.

Although, today we still see in the primary religious schools a number of children of the wealthy, after finishing primary level the children are sent to national secondary. The poor Malays retain their children in religious schools. A poor Malay is unable to send his children to national secondary, although he knows such a school would provide a better future for them.

However, the religious school, I maintain still has its place in Malay society. But, it is only for the poor. To them religious schools also provide education for their children. As long as their children are not illiterate the Malay parents are quite happy. Because of their economic backwardness they have to rely on religious schools. Furthermore, to many Malays, secular and religious education are synonymous. The central question here is, should they improve their economic position, will they still send their children to religious schools? I think the answer is no. Even the religious teacher, the *imam* and the *bilal* in the village, who are economically better off than the rest, send their children to secular schools.

If we go a step further, the change in the content of religious subjects would further change the outlook of Malay society. First, we would expect to see a new generation of Malays who will not be so conservative toward religion as their parents were. They would be more rational in their approach towards religious issues. The new subject's content in religious school will change their world view. This has been proved for instance with the coming of the secular education, the Malays in the urban areas who benefit most from this institution, do rationalise their views on certain issues. Finally, however, one can say that if there is a place for Islamic religion in Malay society, surely there is a place for religious education.

