

ICMR 2019
8th International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research

**SHEIKH ABBAS BAKAR RAFIEE: HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO
MADRASAH AL-MASHOOR PENANG, 1922-1957**

Ahmad Dzulfahmi Muhamad (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) History Section, School of Distance Education, University of Science Malaysia, 11800 USM Penang, Malaysia,
dzulfahmi@usm.my

Abstract

Initially, the Islamic education system in Malaya was based on Pondok institutions but the institution deteriorated following the rapid growth of the madrasah-based Islamic education system as a result of the idea of the Middle East and British occupation. The focus of this study was on the contribution of Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee as the next principal in bringing the Madrasah al-Mashoor's turnover which was previously pioneered by Syed Sheikh al-Hadi in Islamic education especially in Penang. The objective of this study is to examine the contribution of Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee in bringing his idea into the Islamic Education system in Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah. He founded madrasah for women as well as various co-curricular activities to build the credibility of the students to advance the Muslim community. This study uses qualitative research methods based on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources for this study are private letters, souvenirs books and these resources are analyzed using historical approaches. Besides, secondary sources used are articles, journals, books, paper, and theses to obtain information as references. The result of the study found that there were various contributions made by Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee in highlighting this madrasah so well-known and attracted the attention of students not only in Malaya but outside Malaya. This is a consequence of the influence of the Middle East that has been implemented by the principal of this madrasah to ensure that such thought is continuously evolving and appreciated among the Malay Muslim community.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee, Islamic Education, reformation, Madrasah, contribution.



1. Introduction

The development of the Young Faction thoughts in the eradication of Islamic Education in Malaya especially in Penang, was examined when Syed Sheikh al-Hadi brought his reformation thoughts to Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah when he led this madrasah in 1916. Various reforms brought by Syed Sheikh al-Hadi in extending the influence of Islamic reform especially in the field of Islamic Education. After he resigned in 1919 and was replaced by Sheikh Abdullah al-Maghribi until 1921. After that, the Mudir post was filled by Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee, which was period of madrasah progress with his various reforms.

2. Problem Statement

This study aims to address the problem related to the contribution of the Madrasah education system in Malaya. This study focuses on the an importance of madrasah to the Islamic education system which is seen to play an important role in contributing to the awareness and encouragement of Malay people.

3. Research Questions

The questions of this study is to examine the contributions and role of Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee in bringing reformation to the Islamic Education system in Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah. Besides, this study revolves around the importance of madrasah to the Islamic education system which is seen to play an important role in contributing to the awareness encouragement of Malays. In this context, the contribution played by Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee in continuing the legacy of Islamic reforms brought by Syed Sheikh al-Hadi and an important contribution to the development of the history of the Malay community.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to research and evaluate the role and contribution of the third Mudir Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah, Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee in bringing progress and continuing the legacy of Islamic reform in Malaya especially Penang. Not only that, his contribution is seen as making the madrasah a well-known intellectual center and successfully producing caliber community leaders.

5. Research Methods

This study uses qualitative methods that involve the collection and analysis of data. Two research methods have been selected in this research. The first method used is to study the documents and files in the National Archives. This study was conducted by obtaining primary sources to be used as evidence in this writing. The primary sources data used is the work of relational characters such as private letters, madrasah derivative journals, and individual savings collections to obtain the required data. The second method for obtaining the information that will be used in this study is library research. Library research are conducted by obtaining books and other written materials such as newspapers, journals, articles, and magazines. Through this methods, it will be easier for researcher to understand the background of Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah. At the same time, researchers also examined some of the past studies that have

been done on some local historical sources. These resources can be found at National Library, Tun Sri Lanang Library National University of Malaysia, Utama Library University of Malaya, and Hamzah Sendut Library University of Science Malaysia.

6. Findings

6.1. Background

Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee was born in Makkah and got his education in Madrasah al-Falah Hijaz. He was a student of Sheikh Abdullah al-Maghribi while study in Mecca. Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee was taught at several places in Mecca and India before migrating to Penang. The migration of Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee to Penang is the initiative of Sheikh Abdullah al-Maghribi when he was requested by the Committee of Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah to find his successor (Ahmad Dzulfahmi, 2016). The main reason Sheikh Abdullah al-Maghribi want to resign as a mudir is that the committee of madrasah fails to pay his salary (Muhammad, 1980).

This problem is due to the financial problems faced by the committee and the payment of Sheikh Abdullah al-Maghribi's salary has been solved after receiving financial assistance from some donors (Mohd Sarim, 1975). Before Sheikh Abdullah al-Maghribi resignation, he has held a mudir post from 1919 to 1922. After his resignation, the mudir post was temporarily replaced by Hafiz Ghulam Sharwar to ensure the administration of the madrasah goes smoothly while waiting for the arrival Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee from Hyderabad, India (Omar Farouk, 1978). Upon arrival of Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee to Penang, he was trained first by Sheikh Abdullah al-Maghribi to become a teacher and then as mudir in this madrasah. Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee has held his post as a mudir from 1922 until 1957 and reached the golden age during his administration (Latifah, 2017).

6.2. Strengthening the Administration System and the Curriculum

After the committee of madrasah recognized Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee as teacher and became mudir Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah in 1922, he was assisted by Sheikh Ibrahim al-Biari as his deputy. While holding the mudir post, Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee has made various reforms by strengthening the administrative system and curriculum. He has reorganized the administrative structure by giving special tasks to the teacher staffs. Syllabus has been improved, enhanced and updated the teaching accordingly (Mohammad Redzuan, 2012). Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee has also introduced new subjects and empowered their students discipline. Not only that, he also has a madrasah song and its lyrics in Arabic. Besides that, Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee has played an important role in shaping the reformation idea of its students. This idea is very influential among his students at the madrasah (Saliha, 1986).

In the early stages of its administration, there were only three teachers in this madrasah and there are 150 students at that time. Committee of madrasah requested Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee looking some teachers to accommodate the increase of students. To accommodate the increasing students, several new teachers were recruited including Sheikh Ibrahim al-Masri and Abdul Aziz Utaiqi (Amini, 1997). Committee of madrasah has requested Sheikh Abbas to find more teachers from Arabs too to accommodate increasing student growth. In 1923, Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee contacted his best friend Sheikh Muhamad Syatar and his brother Sheikh Mohd Hussein Bakar Rafiee who was in Mecca to become teacher at

Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah (Ahmad Dzulfahmi, 2019). However, only his brother Sheikh Mohd Hussein Bakar Rafiee accepted Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee offer as a teacher while Sheikh Muhamad Syatar rejected it because an unsatisfactory salary (Muhammad, 1980).

Sheikh Mohd Hussein Bakar Rafiee who has been a teacher in Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah has worked with Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee to develop this madrasah. There are also Arab-Malay, Malay, and Patani teachers who also contribute to the development of madrasah. There are 50 teachers at this madrasah during Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee administration and the majority of madrasah teachers are brought in from the Middle East (Ahmad Dzulfahmi, 2016). The enrolment of the madrasah began to increase with students coming from all over Peninsular Malaya, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, The Philippines, Indonesia, and even India. Many students enrolled at this madrasah in preparation for further studies at the Middle East especially Arab countries. Besides that, many scholarships for further studies in the Arab countries were made available by the Saudi Arabian government. Not only that, the madrasah emerged as a preparatory center for higher education in the Middle East (Omar Farouk, 1978).

In that regard, in 1925, at the initiative Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee, he contacted the al-Azhar University of Egypt to accept five madrasah students to further their studies when they finished. The university agreed to accept the application and agree to pay for educational expenses and stay in hostels for free in Egypt. This students also received a scholarship and was given financial assistance. Idaran Zaman Press mentioned that some choose to pursue their studies in Egypt such as Muhamad Tamin Sawi, Ismail Basri, Yusuf Naim, and Abu Bakar al-Asyaari. That press also reported that a total of twelve students who have continued their studies to al-Azhar University and various universities in Saudi Arabia (Muhammad, 1980). About 25 scholarships are offered annually to Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah students to further their studies in the Middle East (Rahim, 1980).

Not only that, in 1946 Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee held talks with the Saudi Arabian Government on the scholarship offer for Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah students. As the result, the Saudi Arabian Government agreed to offer scholarship to five students each year from 1948 until 1955. This scholarship offer for students are pursuing studies in Shariah and Usuluddin. Some students receive scholarship from the Saudi Arabian Government are Ahmad Syukri, Harun Rauzi, Ishak Muhamad, Ali Taib, Muhamad Romzi, Abu Bakar Qasim, Abdullah Abdul Wahab, Yunus Yatim, Muhammad Bakar, and Ahmad Mahmood (Muhammad, 1980).

6.3. The Establishment Madrasah for Women

Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah leads to a new era in the aspect of reforming its Islamic education system when Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee organized and established madrasah for women in 1934 (Omar Farouk, 1978). The agenda to champion women's rights especially in the field of education was initiated by Syed Sheikh al-Hadi. He is the one who opens the opportunity for female students to study together with the male students in this madrasah during his administration.

Initially, the female students was forced to learn together with the male students in the same class due to limited building classes and the most of these female students live near the madrasah. After the construction of a new building near Haji Bachik's house, the female students were placed in the new building. This is due to isolate them to avoid any unwanted things happening to the female students. Before

setting up madrasah for female students, Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee held a meeting with student mothers to get their views on this matter. The mothers agreed with the establishment of madrasah for women only because they worried about their unwanted things to their daughters (Ahmad Dzulfahmi, 2019).

The growing number of female students has caused Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee to hold discussions with the committee of madrasah on the establishment madrasah for women. The committee agreed to open the madrasah for women but they give a condition that the committee will not be paid teachers salaries that teaching at the madrasah. Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee was forced to accept the condition for survival the female students and used his house at Macalister Road as a temporary building (Muhammad, 1980). A year after the establishment of this madrasah, the enrollment has been increase to 120 students from around the Penand Island and Seberang Perai. In 1936, the administration and schooling between the female and the male students were completely segregated but retained the name of Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah (Shohana, 2016).

6.4. Opening the New Branches

Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee contribution to the reform of madrasah institution can also be seen during his administration when successfully opening the madrasah branch. The first branch was opened in 1938 at Sabak Bernam, Selangor. This is a branch outside Penang and this opening is the result of Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee discussions with some local figures there. The establishment of this madrasah branch have received encouraging and positive response from the Malay community (Latifah, 2017). This madrasah was named “Madrasah Muhamadiyah al-Sabakiyah”, a branch of Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah. Saudara Press was reported that the madrasah was led by Haji Muhammad Ali who was formerly Chieftain of Sabak Bernam. Sheikh Ali Baladram was appointed temporary mudir while Karim Isa becomes his assistant.

In 1940, the second branch of Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah was in Balik Pulau, Penang and Sheikh Ahmad Baladram appointed as the first mudir for that branch. Before opening the a branch in Balik Pulau, Sheikh Mohd Hussein Bakar Rafiee was assigned by his brother to hold a discussion with the village head. Sheikh Mohd Hussein Bakar Rafiee has discussed with the chieftain and twelve Village Head of the Balik Pulau community about the establishment of madrasah branch. After the discussion, a branch of this madrasah was established on March 3, 1940. The opening of the branch was conducted by Haji Mohd Noh and Tuan Mohd Hassan Abdul Halim. The opening ceremony was attended by nearly 500 residents (Muhammad, 1980).

The enrollment of students at Balik Pulau branch was increased to 154 students after a month the madrasah opened. This shows the support of the Malay community on the reform agenda carried out by Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah administration. Some teachers from headquarters were sent to Balik Pulau branch to give training to the new teachers especially to teach English. The establishment of this madrasah branch has received encouraging response from the Malay Muslims to ensure their children get as much knowledge as possible.

However, Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah had to be closed after the Japanese occupation in 1941 but the both branches in Sabak Bernam and Balik Pulau could not be continued after the World War Two due to financial and administrative problems. Within 20 years, this madrasah has successfully opened its

three branches in Malaya. In 1957, Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee retired as a mudir and returned to Mecca. His post was taken over by his brother Syekh Mohd Hussein Bakar Rafiee until 1970.

7. Conclusion

The success and excellence of Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah as a center of Islamic learning in Malaya in the ten years before World War Two cannot be denied. Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee and his brother Sheikh Mohd Hussein Bakar Rafiee succeeded in developing this madrasah to be recognized by several Islamic higher learning institutions in the Middle East and North Africa including the al-Azhar University, Egypt.

A significant achievement for Sheikh Abbas Bakar Rafiee is that the establishment of madrasah for women has demonstrated the foresight in the quest to advance the local community regardless of men or women. Besides, he has also undertaken various transformations regardless of any resistance because he want to see the belief that is supported by Syed Sheikh al-Hadi becomes reality. He also streamlined the curriculum structure and madrasah administration system to ensure that the madrasah can continue to grow and becomes famous.

Not only that, the role of Sheikh Mohd Hussein Bakar Rafiee was actively spreading to Islam dan he also developed Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah to be recognized by several Islamic higher learning institutions in the Middle East and Africa. Also, he has been a trigger for more Arab community to create the Arab Jawi Peranakan community.

Acknowledgments

This paper is part of the ongoing research project supported by the Universiti Sains Malaysia under short-term research grant (304/PJJAUH/6315255).

References

- Ahmad Dzulfahmi, M. (2016). Pengaruh Timur Tengah Terhadap Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah. *Sains Humanika Journal UTM*, 8(3-2), 109-115.
- Ahmad Dzulfahmi, M. (2019). Sumbangan Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah Pulau Pinang dalam Sistem Pendidikan Islam di Tanah Melayu, 1916-1972. In Ishak Saat, Ku Boon Dar (Eds.), *Sejarah dan Rencam Warisan Alam Melayu*. Batu Pahat: Penerbit UTHM.
- Amini, A. A. (1997). Madrasah Al-Mashoor Al-Islamiah Pulau Pinang: Pengaruh dan Perkembangan. *Jurnal Penyelidikan Sejarah Islam Pulau Pinang*, 3(3), 29-49.
- Latifah, A. L. (2017). Sumbangan Orang Arab dalam Pendidikan Agama@Madrasah di Malaysia. In *Conference proceeding of International Conference of Empowering Islamic Civilization*. UniSZA.
- Mohammad Redzuan, O. (2012). Sumbangan Masyarakat Arab Hadrami dalam bidang Agama di Malaysia. In *Seminar Diaspora Arab Nusantara: Peranan dan Sumbangan*. Kedah: Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Kedah.
- Mohd Sarim, M. (1975). Syed Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi: Pendidik dan Kaum Muda, in Mohd Yusof Ibrahim. *Jurnal Sejarah UKM*, 5(6), 1-15.
- Muhammad, D. (1980). *Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiah Pulau Pinang: 1916-1969*. Latihan Ilmiah Jabatan Sejarah Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Omar Farouk, S. A. (1978). The Arabs in Penang. *Malaysia in History*, 22(2), 1-16.

- Rahim, O. (1980). Madrasah Masyhur Al-Islamiyyah. In Khoo Kay Kim (Ed.), *Islam di Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.
- Saliha, H. (1986). Dr Burhanuddin al-Helmi, 1911-1969. In *Seminar Biografi Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya.
- Shohana, H. (2016). Tokoh dan Institusi Pendidikan Islam di Pulau Pinang. In Muhammad Haji Salleh & Mahani Musa (Eds), *Masyarakat Melayu Pulau Pinang dalam Arus Sejarah*. Pulau Pinang: Penerbit USM.