

# The Role of Scholars and Pondok Institutions in the Spotlight of National Independence

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the significant contributions of the ulama (Islamic scholars) to the struggle for Malaya's independence and their role in governance throughout its colonial history. Beginning with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1511, the ulama's influence in guiding Malay society remained central, especially as the sultans relied on their advice in matters of both religion and statecraft. The ulama's leadership and sacrifices during the 19th and 20th centuries, though often invisible, were vital in shaping Malaya's resistance against foreign rule. The article highlights the role of the ulama as advisors to the sultans, their pivotal influence in governance, and their educational contributions through institutions like pondoks and madrasahs. This study employs a historical and qualitative approach, utilizing archival research, primary sources, and secondary literature to analyze the role of the ulama in Malaya's governance and independence movement. The primary sources include historical records, royal decrees, and religious texts that document the ulama's advisory roles and their influence on state affairs. Secondary sources comprise scholarly works and historical accounts that provide context to the colonial and post-colonial periods, focusing on the socio-political dynamics of Malay society. In-depth analysis of these sources allows for a comprehensive understanding of the ulama's contributions to Malaya's religious, educational, and political landscape, particularly their involvement in the Sultan's governance and their resistance efforts during the colonial period. Their humble yet profound leadership in religious, moral, and political realms shaped the development of the nation and its struggle for independence. Through their guidance, the ulama ensured that Islam remained central to governance, promoting justice and piety among the rulers, while also fostering the growth of Islamic education and charitable works. This paper underscores the pivotal role of the ulama in maintaining the spiritual and political fabric of Malaya, both before and after its independence.

**Keywords:** Ulama, Pondok, Islamic Teaching, Contribution, National Independence

## INTRODUCTION

The colonization of Malaya began with the arrival of the Portuguese and their occupation of Malacca in 1511 AD. Starting from 1511, Malaya continued to be colonized, with one state after another falling under foreign control year after year, passing from one non-Islamic power to another. At that time, the Malay society heavily relied on the power of the Sultan and the spirit of struggle led by the scholars (ulama). The ulama were a key reference for all matters, especially in decision-making. This situation continued until the 19th and 20th centuries, during which many prominent scholars emerged, fighting for independence.

The contributions of the scholars (ulama) in fighting for the independence of Malaya are truly remarkable and cannot be measured, as their spirit of struggle was so strong that they were willing to risk their lives, with blood staining the earth, families being persecuted, and relatives being left behind. Their sacrifices may not be visible

or quantifiable by human perception, but the subtle voice of their spirits continues to resonate, responding to the call of the Divine in their efforts to fight for Islam, society, and the nation.

Ulama is a title and status that holds a very high position in society. Ulama are noble individuals among the followers of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The term is synonymous with scholars, but it specifically refers to those who have received education in fields other than religious studies. A pondok is a place of residence for students who are willing to seek knowledge in a simple and modest environment, ensuring that the students can fully absorb the teachings. Education runs smoothly when all forms of luxury are set aside.

Meanwhile, education and learning take place in places known as madrasah, ‘balaisah’, ‘langgar’, ‘surau’, and mosques, which are sacred and specifically dedicated to worship and education, far from vice and entertainment. Some people imagine that the pondok education system takes place in simple, dilapidated houses, yet the reality is that the education takes place in very noble settings, complete with reading materials, study corners, *tasmic* (recitation), *tadarrus* (group recitation), *halaqah* (study circles), and *usrah* (study groups). In fact, around the edges and verandas of these educational buildings, there are designated areas for memorizing the Quran and Hadith, as well as spaces for revision.

### Scholars Before, During, and After Independence

Many people are unfamiliar with the role of ulama in Malaya's struggle for Islam and the propagation of Islamic teachings. To truly understand an ulama is to cultivate a profound sense of love and respect for them. So, who exactly are the ulama we speak of? They are individuals who are close to the Divine, blessed with knowledge. They study according to the various Islamic schools of thought (*mazhab*), learn from respected scholars (*ulama muktabar*), and teach with the intention of instilling understanding and practical application. Their teaching is simple, dividing knowledge into categories such as *aqidah* (creed), *syariat* (laws), *akhlak-tasawuf* (morality and spirituality), language, and worldly knowledge (*ilmu alat*). They use both Arabic and Malay (the language of the Malay world), employ the Quranic script and *Jawi*, and make handwritten notes to distinguish between the main text (*matan*) and annotations, explanations, or commentary (*huraian/hasyiah*). Their formal teaching environments are usually in sacred spaces or highly respected places, with designated areas for reference materials and study. They also have designated meeting spaces for discussions, decision-making, and receiving guests in a place specially allocated for such purposes.

The ulama are characterized by humility yet firmness, piety yet boldness, gentleness yet strength and energy. They appear to embrace religion with ease, but they have a deep reverence (*khashyah*) for Allah. During the day, they work and strive, while at night, they remain vigilant, preparing to meet the Lord of all worlds. The ulama, with their knowledge, cannot be separated from wisdom; their courage is inseparable from jihad and struggle. Their lives are always intertwined with the community, educating, training, helping, and providing care.

### The Role of Ulama in the Governance Institution

During the traditional Malay kingdoms before 1949, the Sultan was very close to the ulama to seek advice and refer to them for matters related to religion and governance. A special title given to ulama was "Guru Sultan," where they served as advisors to the Sultan and imams at the Sultan's mosque, as well as conducting religious ceremonies (Esmail Hj Mohd Salleh 1980:118). During the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah (1611-1627), he appointed a Bugis prince named Daeng Sulaili to oversee religious affairs. Daeng Sulaili had studied in Mecca and settled in Perak. During the reign of Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain (1756-1770), the Sultan appointed an ulama from Aceh named Fakir Yusuf to manage religious affairs in Sungai Kinta. It is also believed that during this reign, the "99 Laws" were compiled by a descendant from Aceh named Sayid Abu Bakar (Esmail Hj Mohd Salleh 1980:119).

There was also a special position given to ulama known as ‘Sheikhul Islam’. The first ulama to hold this position was an ulama from Kelantan named Haji Wan Muhammad. However, the position of Sheikhul Islam was no longer filled after 1935, as a new position was created, that of the Mufti.

The ulama as advisors to the Sultan is well-documented in the history of Malaya, highlighting that all matters of administration, governance, and religion were referred to the ulama for their opinions and advice. A clear

example of this occurred in 1911 during the reign of Sultan Idris, when Sheikh Mohd Tahir Jalaluddin gained the trust of the Sultan and was invited to accompany the Sultan's delegation to England. He was appointed as an advisor to assist in legal proceedings at the Magistrate Courts in Kuala Kangsar and Taiping (Esmail Hj Mohd Salleh 1980:119).

The contributions of the ulama when they served as advisors to the Sultan were immensely significant. Through their guidance and counsel, they succeeded in transforming governance systems, ensuring that the Sultan became devout and loyal to Allah, as well as just towards the people. A notable example of this is the glorious era of Terengganu during the time of Tokku Paloh, who served as an advisor to the Sultan. He was an ulama who consistently imparted Islamic education to the Sultan and was appointed as Sheikhul Islam during the reign of Sultan Zainal Abidin III. Tokku Paloh served as a reference point for other ulama and national leaders in religious and governance matters. His contributions led to the emergence of many ulama and helped shape Sultan Zainal Abidin III into a pious ruler who strongly adhered to the teachings of Islam (Muhammad Abu Bakar 1980:50).

Tuan Syeikh Haji Abdul Halim was also an advisor to Sultan Muhammad I (1788-1837). His advice to the Sultan played a crucial role in encouraging the Sultan to consistently perform acts of charity for the people, such as establishing madrasahs, suraus, and wakaf (endowments) as places of worship and rest. Following his guidance, the Sultan also ordered the construction of a wakaf house in Mecca, Jeddah, and Medina, financed by the Sultan himself (Abdul Halim Ahmad 1985:40).

### **The Role as Religious Teachers to the Sultan**

The ulama in Malaya earned the trust of the sultans to serve as their teachers. The sultans viewed the ulama as highly respected individuals within society. The ulama were granted a high status in both societal and religious matters. The Sultan would adhere to the advice and guidance of the ulama, implementing their counsel in accordance with the needs of the people, while ensuring justice in governance.

Sultan Zainal Abidin III was a student of Tokku Paloh, and the Sultan frequently traveled back and forth between the palace and Tokku Paloh's residence. The profound knowledge of Tokku Paloh helped produce notable ulama and Islamic warriors, such as Abdul Rahman Limbong, Tok Janggut (Haji Mat Hassan), and others (Muhammad b. Abu Bakar 1980:49). Similarly, Qadi Yusuf in Melaka was often visited by Sultan Mahmud Shah to study with him. The Sultan would walk to Qadi Yusuf's home and refer to himself humbly as a "fakir."

In the 19th century in Terengganu, Sheikh Abdul Kadir Bukit Bayas became the teacher to Sultan Omar (1839-1876). The Sultan sought to learn from Sheikh Abdul Kadir and was interested in advancing the Muslim community within the state as well as understanding the developments of Islam abroad. Additionally, foreign ulama were also given space and facilities to live in Terengganu (Muhammad b. Abu Bakar 1991:16).

This illustrates that the relationship between the institution of the ulama and the government and palace was highly respected within society. The institution of the ulama was greatly honored and revered by both the people and the rulers. The society was willing to defend anything to uphold the truth and the dignity of the ulama, who remained loyal to the teachings of Islam.

### **As Murabbi Mujahadah Nafs (Teachers of Striving Against the Self)**

The ulama instilled the spirit of love for Islam in the hearts of the Muslim people. This awareness awakened a sense of dissatisfaction towards the colonizers. The ulama actively opposed efforts by the colonizers that sought to undermine the Muslim community, standing firm against actions that would harm or tarnish the faith of Islam.

The ulama boldly stepped forward to implement the demands of Islamic teachings as outlined in the Quran. For example, Haji Yaakob, the son of Sheikh Halim, used the authority granted to him by the Sultan to deliver judgments against criminals in Kelantan. He even carried out the stoning punishment (rejam) for those convicted of adultery. This is evidence that Kelantan once practiced Islamic punishment based on syarak (Islamic law) (Abdul Halim Ahmad 1985:43). Similarly, Haji Wan Sulaiman Wan Sidiq, who was appointed by the Sultan as the Qadi in Kedah, took the initiative to combat superstitions such as beliefs in sacred powers, paying vows at graves, and other practices that were prevalent among the Malay people at that time.

The actions of the ulama in Malaya were firm, fearless, and resolute in their commitment to uphold the truth of Islam, despite facing threats from various parties, especially the colonial authorities. The ulama adhered to their principles to uphold Islam and sought to attain the pleasure of Allah in all their endeavors.

### The Role of Ulama in Producing Works/Manuscripts

Writing is one of the means of da'wah that can last for a long time and can be referred to at any time, if it is not erased. The ulama seized this opportunity as one of their efforts to spread Islamic teachings, educate, raise awareness, and help the people understand the true demands of Islam and its requirements.

The excellence of local ulama in spreading Islamic teachings can be seen through the works they produced, including religious books, whether translations of classical texts or original works written to meet the needs and circumstances of the surrounding community. Some examples of these works include *Kanz al-Ula*, *Jawhar al-Saniyyah*, *Sullam al-Tawfiq*, and *al-Durru al-Fakhirah*, which were written by Tokku Tuan Besar (Khairudin Haji Muhammad 1992:64). Other notable works include *Taclim al-Mutacallim bi al-Jani* by Haji Ahmad bin Haji Mohd Kasim, *Ahkam al-Syariyyah* and *Anwar al-Quran al-Mahiyah li Zulumat Mutanabbi' Fadiyan* by Tuan Guru Dato' Sayyid Alwi al-Haddad, among others. Tuan Haji Husin Kedah (1863-1935) also produced significant works, including *al-Nur al-Mustafid fi Aqa'id Ahl al-Tawhid*, *Bidayat al-Talibin*, *Bunga Geti*, and *Majmu al-Iksir*.

In addition to their involvement in writing religious books, the ulama were also actively engaged in newspaper publications. One of the most popular newspapers in the history of the country was *Al-Imam*. This newspaper was pioneered by four prominent ulama: Sheikh Mohd. Tahir Jalaluddin al-Azhari, Sayid Sheikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi, Haji Abbas bin Mohd Taha, and Sheikh Mohd Salim al-Kalali. They took the initiative to publish *Al-Imam* with the aim of providing guidance and direction to the Malay community, raising awareness, and preventing corruption, among other goals (Abdullah bin Haji Jaafar 1985:85). This newspaper did not solely focus on religious duties and societal issues but covered a wide range of Islamic aspects, including politics, economics, social matters, and education. *Al-Imam* became a groundbreaking publication that introduced new perspectives in the thinking of the Malay community (Dusuki Haji Ahmad 1980:542).

In *Al-Imam* magazine, discussions on politics were featured as a hot topic. The magazine helped foster understanding of Islamic politics among the Malay community by making several revelations in line with the teachings of Islamic law. The Islamic politics discussed emphasized belief in Allah and Prophet Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah, who carries out His duty to guide creation toward the truth. When this belief is upheld, Islamic politics naturally follows. According to *Al-Imam*, Islamic politics must have (Abu Bakar Hamzah 1991:82):

- i. Ummat or Citizens
- ii. A State that Bases Its Laws on the Laws of Allah
- iii. Leaders with the Qualities Suitable for Leadership

*Al-Imam* magazine introduced a historical approach in its writings on Islamic politics. It provided examples of how Islamic countries experienced decline and division due to their neglect of Islam. The magazine faced strong opposition, particularly from the colonizers, which eventually led to the cessation of its publication.

Tok Kenali was also actively involved in writing through magazines such as *Pengasuh* and *al-Hidayah*. His works focused on various aspects, including history, society, economics, and politics (Abdul Rahman al-Ahmadi 1983:95). Tok Kenali's thoughts gained significant attention. His criticism of society, which blindly followed the colonizers, whether Siamese or British, and his questioning of the Malay people for adopting such behavior, played a crucial role in shaping the thinking of the Muslim community.

In Kota Bharu alone, between 1918 and 1941, twelve magazines and newspapers were published. Among the publications that contributed dynamic and sometimes revolutionary ideas were *Pengasuh* and *al-Hikmah* (Alias Muhammad 1977:46). In addition, there were other newspapers and magazines with similar foundations and objectives, such as *Seruan Azhar*, *Pilihan Timur*, *Semangat Islam*, *Al-Ikhwani*, *al-Manar*, *Saudara*, and others.



The works of the ulama contained various teachings and religious knowledge, while also instilling anti-colonial sentiments and advocating for the struggle toward independence based on Islamic principles. They encouraged the development of the nation, criticizing any phenomena or events that contradicted justice, hindered progress, violated Malay customs, and deviated from the essence of Islam (Abdullah Alwi Haji Hassan 1999:6).

### **The ulama played a pivotal role in leading the resistance against the colonizers in Tanah Melayu**

History has shown the aggressive efforts of the colonizers to eradicate Islam and its society in the Malay Peninsula, while simultaneously promoting Christianity and secular ideologies. The colonizers committed numerous injustices and acts of enslavement against the Muslim population throughout their rule, including actions to eliminate Islamic scholars who were fighting for the truth of Islam, the homeland, society, and the nation. In fact, some ulama who opposed the colonizers' actions to seize the rights of the people were captured and killed.

The actions taken by the colonizers failed in intimidating the spirit of resistance among the ulama and their loyal disciples, who remained steadfast in their commitment to Islamic teachings. The ulama were ready to fight against the immorality and oppression of the colonizers. Although Islamic governance had been replaced by colonial rulers, the Western powers found it difficult to impose human-made laws and regulations without first gaining the approval of the influential ulama, who had the authority to issue fatwas and provide the sultans' consent. The Islamic ulama remained firm in their struggle, grounded in the principles of Islamic law in every reform and development (Abdul Aziz Ismail 1996:41).

One of the struggles based on jihad was launched in Pahang after the Malay resistance against the British was defeated and the fighters sought refuge in Kelantan and Terengganu. The religious role instilled by the ulama through the spirit of jihad led to the attack on Jeram Ampai, Pahang, where victory was achieved. This awareness and inspiration came from Sayid Abdul Rahman al-Idrus, also known as Tokku Paloh, in Terengganu (Abdullah Zakaria bin Ghazali 1985:7).

This spirit was also evident in Terengganu when a British adviser was appointed in 1919, and many new regulations, including land taxes and land revenue, were introduced. These regulations were burdensome to the local population. In response, local leaders emerged, such as Haji Zakaria or Haji Kia in Telemong, Mat Zin bin Mat Min, and Tok Janggut or Lebai Deraman. All these leaders acted under the guidance and instructions of Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong, an influential ulama who worked tirelessly to resist the colonizers. Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong was eventually captured by the British and exiled to Mecca.

The religious elements played a very significant role in the anti-British movement led by the freedom fighters. The teachings spread emphasized that anyone who adhered to the new regulations imposed by the British was effectively supporting the infidel (kafir) forces. These regulations were seen as infidel laws. Haji Musa bin Abdul Ghani, during his teachings of religious knowledge and collection of zakat in the Kuala Berang area, would frequently cite Quranic verses and Hadith to support his arguments. Similarly, Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong also stressed that land was the right of Allah and that the administration had no right to tax the land cultivated by the people. Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong's words certainly resonated with the villagers, especially since he was a highly respected and revered ulama.

The efforts of the ulama in fighting for independence became evident as they worked to free the nation and its people from colonial rule, driven by a strong spirit of Islamic-based struggle. They seized every opportunity to form a Muslim community that would fearlessly defend the truth of Islam. Some ulama even used the platform of martial arts (silat) to engage young people in their cause, in addition to instilling noble character and Islamic knowledge in the youth. Through these efforts, the ulama played a crucial role in both the spiritual and physical aspects of the resistance against colonial forces.

### **Scholars Lead the Struggle for Independence**

Every Malay child of the nation cannot deny the involvement of scholars in igniting and driving the spirit of demanding independence from the colonizers. In fact, they were willing to even if it meant bloodshed, in defending the truth of Islam and the homeland. Various steps and methods were undertaken, whether in terms of politics or in raising public awareness about the meaning of independence.

Haji Abdullah Abbas Nasution took the idea to establish the Kedah Ulama Association. He himself stated (Abdul Manaf bin Saad 1980:149):

"It is better for us to establish the Ulama Association. We will set it up on the day of the procession against the Malayan Union, which will take place in just 4 or 5 days."

The Kedah Ulama Association was established to oppose the Malayan Union and the Bintang Tiga Movement, driven by the awareness to (Abdul Manaf bin Saad 1980:152):

1. Spread the teachings of Islam in accordance with the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi mungkar* (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong).
2. Unite the scholars in Kedah and Malaya in general to build and advance the interactions of the Muslim community.
3. Collaborate with the government to establish people's schools and encourage business and industrial schools.

After that, they decided to demonstrate in Kedah Town. As a result, Dato' Onn himself made a statement that the protest in Kedah was the backbone and a key factor in the success of the Malay people's demand to abolish the Malayan Union.

A prominent scholar, Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Baqir, founded an organization named Hizbul Muslimin (Organization of the Muslim Community), or its abbreviation HAMIM. The core principle of HAMIM was to achieve the independence of the Malay people while creating a society based on Islam and establishing Darul Islam (Ku Halim Ku Yahya 1985:142). The role of the scholars in the struggle for independence was significant. They succeeded in awakening the Malay community while instilling the spirit of jihad to resist the colonizers and preserve the Islamic faith. The institutions of mosques, prayer halls, and family units were used as platforms to convey the message of Islam and the spirit of the struggle.

### **The Institution of Pondok as a Center of Education**

Religious education in the early stages was conducted in the homes of scholars or religious teachers, 'suraus', 'langgars', 'balaisahs', mosques, and madrasahs (most of which are now known as Maahad). After the arrival of the colonialists, who prioritized secular education, Islamic education was sidelined, prompting scholars to establish the pondok school system. This pondok school system became one of the higher education systems, where after completing their studies, students would continue their education in the Middle East.

The scholars realized that religious education was the most important factor in uniting the Malay people. They took the initiative to build more pondok schools and invited scholars from the Middle East to become religious teachers and educators. The establishment of these pondok schools also aimed to rival the secular school system sponsored by the colonizers.

The first pondok in Kelantan is believed to have been built in 1820 by Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Samad bin Abdullah in Pulau Chondong. He was a pioneer in introducing the pondok-based religious education system in Kelantan. He even donated his land to be used as a place for students to build their pondok (Abdul Halim Ahmad 1985:45).

Haji Abdul Samad bin Mohamad Salleh al-Kelantani expanded traditional Islamic education in Kelantan by opening and developing the teachings of Sufism in the region. The pondok education system reached its peak in the 20th century due to the efforts of previous scholars who successfully produced students with great capabilities and instilled a love for religion. This development became more prominent when religious scholars and teachers wrote books and translated works by earlier scholars (Abdul Halim Ahmad 1985:49). The growth of pondok schools further accelerated in Kelantan after the return of Haji Mohd Yusuf bin Ahmad, more commonly known as Tok Kenali, in 1908. His contributions were immense, leading to the establishment of the Kelantan Islamic Religious and Malay Custom Council.

When the scholars realized the importance of awakening the Muslim community from the distractions of the colonizers, the pondok institution began to serve as a place for them to exert influence and instil the strength to fight for the truth. According to Muhammad Abu Bakar (1985:319-322), the involvement of the pondok

institution in elections in Kelantan began when the institution was seen as passive, with teachers who were not politically aware. It was visited by politicians, and political activities requiring public support for political parties were carried out, leading to a more active involvement as elections approached. An example of this is Tuan Haji Wan Musa, a scholar said to have received many teachings from the Tariqat al-Shaziliyah, who had a reformist and radical mindset and was also inclined towards politics.

Although the pondok education system had been operating actively, the scholars remained steadfast in conducting teaching activities in mosques, suraus, 'balaisahs', and their own homes, as this represented informal education that was practiced continuously. This can be proven by the increase in the number of 'suraus' and 'balaisahs' near the homes of religious teachers, which reflected their dedication to carrying out dakwah activities. Meanwhile, the response from the people showed that they were eager for knowledge from the scholars. The areas where scholars conducted their teaching and education transformed into regions with Islamic culture, with mosques serving as centers for gatherings, worship, community administration, and other activities. The pondok areas, in turn, evolved into Islamic villages or pondok villages.

The earliest pondoks identified in Kedah include Pondok Sungai Dua in 1875 (Haji Zainal / Tuan Minal), Pondok Alor Belat, Butterworth in 1880 (Haji Mahmud Taha), Pondok Sungai Dereka Seberang Prai Tengah in 1880 (Fakih Daim), Pondok Permatang Jaggus Kepala Batas, Seberang Perai Tengah in 1885 (Tok Sheikh Aceh), Pondok Lalang Bukit Mertajam in 1890 (Haji Ahmad Padang Lalang), Pondok Al-Masriyyah Bukit Mertajam in 1906 (Haji Salleh al-Misri), Pondok Kubang Semang Seberang Prai Tengah in 1920 (Haji Mahmud Taib), Pondok Pokok Sena Kepala Batas Seberang Prai in 1934, and Pondok Padang Lumat, Batu 16, Gurun from 1924 to 1929 (Haji Husin Mohd Nasir / Tuan Haji Husin Kedah). Other pondoks include Pondok Alor Ganu from 1887 to 1890; Bohor (1890 to 1912); Bagan Ulu, Pantai Merdeka (1912 to 1920); Pondok in Selengkoh, Sungai Limau (1920 to 1924); and finally, Al-Madrasah al-Khairiyah al-Islamiyah, Kampung Pokok Sena, Kepala Batas, Seberang Perai from 1929 to 1936, and Pondok Pak Ya Junid.

It should be recognized that the perception in society, even today, is still influenced by Western thinking, which views the pondok education system as taking place in humble, dilapidated houses. However, the reality is that the studies are conducted in highly respected places, equipped with reading materials and spaces for studying, tasmic, tadarrus, halaqah, and usrah. In fact, around the building, a veranda was built as part of the preparation for these studies, serving as a place for memorizing the Quran and Hadith, as well as for revision.

### **Scholars and the Pondok**

The pondok is one of the places used by scholars to work and write, particularly in responding to current issues and new laws arising in society. In addition to being a primary educational center for delivering religious and general knowledge, the pondok serves as a place for meetings and decision-making, a library, and a place of worship for all Muslims who come to perform religious duties. Through the pondok education system, scholars have successfully produced students and followers who are punctual, loyal, respectful of Islamic teachings and their teachers, disciplined, and orderly.

Indeed, the nobility of the soul and principles of a scholar cannot be compared to what is seen with the eyes and views. Their sincerity and purity are evident when observing that the presence of students in the pondok school is part of the children who could not be taught by school and college teachers. The various behaviors and attitudes of the students have been shaped by them, even though they had to sleep side by side with their students. These students have been molded to become religious teachers, imams, and those who lead in the struggle for religion, nation, and homeland.

The pondok education system encompasses all the contemporary needs of mainstream education, including tahfiz education, curriculum/academics, co-curricular activities, leadership training, and community service. The pondok education system has been recognized, whether consciously or not, by the government. Some of its qualifications are now equivalent to a diploma or certificate level. Graduates of the pondok education system can now apply directly for undergraduate degree programs, even if they have not yet obtained an SPM or STPM qualification. They are eligible to sit for the APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) examination, and upon passing, they can continue their studies at the appropriate level.

## CONCLUSION

The Malay Muslim community once enjoyed the blessings of justice, peace, and happiness, even though they had to face customary practices that needed to be changed. This situation was the result of the efforts of the scholars who led the community, and the protection of Islamic law practiced in daily life. The implementation of Islamic law is inseparable from the responsibility of scholars and rulers who are devout and God-fearing. However, after the arrival of the colonizers, the Muslim community in Malaya began to face various pressures and obstacles from the colonial powers. These challenges were faced with resilience under the leadership of scholars who continuously awakened and guided the people towards independence and freedom from colonization.

The responsibility borne by the scholars was immense, as they sought to unite the Muslim ummah and advise the leaders to always act according to the principles of Islam. A great scholar, at any given time, fully utilized his intellect and attention for the benefit of Islam, offering mutual advice, reminders, and sharing. The light of faith shone brightly in their hearts. Besides organizing religious practices and moral development, they were also able to strategize and write on contemporary issues affecting society. In their communities, they were noble and respected leaders; in the mosque, they acted as imams and teachers; in the field of struggle, they were commanders of the fight; in politics, they were respected and admired politicians; and in governance, they served as sources of reference and advisors in decision-making.

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