

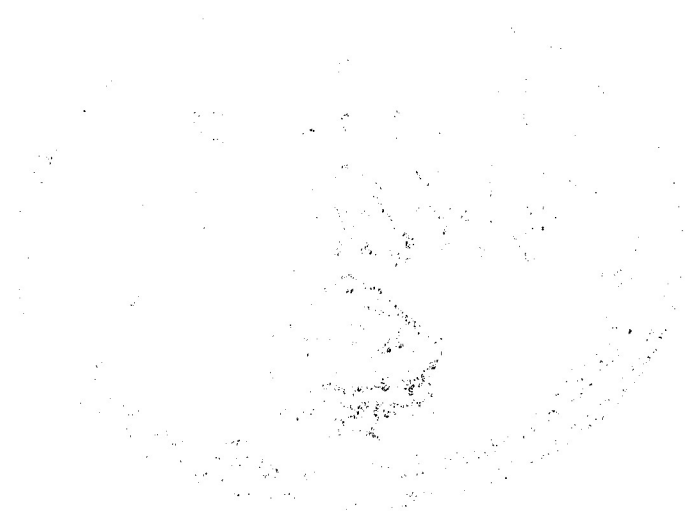


EQUIPPING THE PEOPLE WITH KNOWLEDGE

*The Role of Syed Ahmad bin
Muhammad Semait in Disseminating
Islamic Teachings in Modern Singapore*

Dr. Muhammad Mubarak bin Habib Mohamed

And
THE VIRTUES OF THE AHL AL-BAYT
by
Ustaz Muhammad Mazdiuky Md Ishak

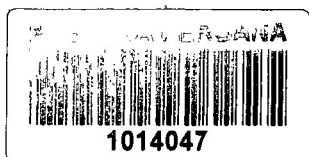


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*The Role of Syed Ahmad bin Muhammad Semait in Disseminating Islamic
Teachings in Modern Singapore*



Dr. Muhammad Mubarak bin Habib Mohamed



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إِنَّ مِمَّا يَلْحَقُ الْمُؤْمِنَ مِنْ عَمَلِهِ، وَحَسَنَاتِهِ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ، عِلْمًا عَلَّمَهُ
 وَنَشْرَهُ، وَوَلَدًا صَالِحًا تَرَكَهُ، وَمُصْحَفًا وَرَثَتَهُ، أَوْ مَسْجِدًا بَنَاهُ، أَوْ بَيْتًا
 لِابْنِ السَّبِيلِ بَنَاهُ، أَوْ نَهْرًا أَجْرَاهُ، أَوْ صَدَقَةً أَخْرَجَهَا مِنْ مَالِهِ فِي
 صِحَّتِهِ وَحَيَاتِهِ يَلْحَقُهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِهِ

Verily among the good deeds that continue to benefit a believer after death are: a knowledge that he taught and disseminated, a righteous child who lived after him, **a book that he left as an inheritance**, a masjid that he built, a (guest) house that he built for the two wayfarers, a stream that he ran, or a sadaqah that he gave from his wealth during his healthy lifetime so that it would reach him (in rewards) after death.¹

To all the sponsors and well-wishers,

Thank you!

¹ Hadith related by Imam Thabarani & Ibnu Abid Dunya. This hadith was declared as hasan in the kitab *Sahih Al-Jaami'*, 176.



Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي قَالَ فِي كِتَابِهِ الْكَرِيمِ بِقَوْلِهِ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ.
وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى أَشْرَفِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ الَّذِي قَالَ بِقَوْلِهِ إِذَا مَاتَ ابْنُ آدَمَ انْقَطَعَ
عَمَلُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ ثَلَاثٍ: صَدَقَةٌ جَارِيَةٌ أَوْ عِلْمٌ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ أَوْ وَالدَّ صَالِحٌ يَدْعُو لَهُ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ
أَجْمَعِينَ فِي كُلِّ لَمْحَةٍ وَنَفْسٍ عَدَدَ مَا وَسِعَهُ عِلْمُ اللَّهِ.

Allah says in Surah Al-'Alaq, verse 4 and 5,

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ. عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ.

Who teacheth by the pen. Teacheth man that which he knew not.

In Allah's Words above is contained the principle of two matters: a lesson and writing, that is, knowledge and the pen. These have been the guiding principles of scholars in spreading knowledge and da'wah. These same principles are the ones exemplified by the figure that is meant in this writing. He is Al-Ustaz Syed Ahmad bin Muhammad Semait رحمه الله.

Al-Ustaz Syed Ahmad is amongst the foremost Malay Nusantara scholars that led the Malay community towards an intellectual and a spiritual resurgence. Therefore books like Dr Mubarak's are most welcomed so that the wider community knows our scholars and their contributions. Our scholars must be valued because scholars are amongst the group that is mentioned by Rasulullah ﷺ,

أَكْرِمُوا الْعُلَمَاءَ فَإِنَّهُمْ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ.

Honour the scholars, for they are the heirs of the Prophets.

May our scholars be included in the group mentioned by Allah ﷻ in Surah Faathir, verse 28,

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ.

Those truly fear God, among His Servants, who have knowledge: for God is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving.

We would like to thank Dr Mubarak and Al-Ustaz Mohammed Mazdiuky for their efforts in producing and publishing this book. May this noble effort be counted in the Prophet's ﷺ words,

إِذَا مَاتَ ابْنُ آدَمَ انْقَطَعَ عَمَلُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ ثَلَاثٍ: صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ، أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ، أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ.

When a son of Adam dies, his actions are cut off except for three: *Sadaqah Jaariyah* (a charity that does not end), Knowledge that benefits, or Righteous Son (or Daughter) who pray for him (or her).

Hopefully, this endeavour will be a catalyst for the asatizah to delve into writing alongside teaching.

USTAZ MOHAMAD HASBI BIN HASSAN

President

Singapore Islamic Scholars & Religious Teachers Association

Foreword

Islam in contemporary Singapore is probably one of the less understood areas in the study of the venture of the world faith in Southeast Asia. There are many reasons that could account for this scholarly lag, foremost being the diminutive size of the island city-state and the small number of Muslims that have resided therein. Muslims in Singapore constitute no more than one-eighth of the largely ethnic Chinese population, and this has been the case since the nineteenth century.

Due to this and the relatively unassuming nature of Islam in the country, there developed a pervasive perception among many observers that an in-depth study of Islam and Muslims in such a small setting would not be instructive to allow for broader observations about the character and progress of religion in the region as whole. Such presumption is strengthened by the fact that Muslims in Singapore has contributed little, if any, to the making and shaping of political and radical activism in the region – a topic that has piqued the minds of many contemporary political analysts and terrorism “experts”.

Hence, until very recently, no proper or detailed studies of Islamic thought and missionary efforts in Singapore have ever been published.

This book on the Syed Ahmad Semait’s role in disseminating Islamic teachings is therefore a notable endeavour at filling the yawning gap in the literature. In directing his angle of vision on a respected ulama and activist whose writings and other missionary efforts have impacted Muslims in Singapore and beyond, Muhammad Mubarak has dispelled the notion that Islam in Singapore is but an appendix to Southeast Asian Islam.

In point of fact, Muslim intellectuals and thinkers in the likes of Syed Ahmad Semait have done much to deepen and widen the horizons of Islamic thought and learning through the various channels which they has tapped so prodigiously.

From the publication of Islamic textbooks, to translating of classical texts into the vernacular, to writing treatises so as to make Islam relevant in the modern world, Syed Ahmad Semait stands tall as someone who almost single-handedly made Islamic knowledge and sciences a living tradition in Southeast Asia.

Indeed, it has become almost impossible to not find books that were written or published by Syed Ahmad Semait in mainstream bookstores in throughout region. The reach of his efforts – as Muhammad Mubarak has expertly shown to us – is so wide that until today, his books are read and taught in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Southern Thailand, a domain rife with conflict but known for being a hub of traditional Islamic learning. This achievement of man hailing from an Arab-Hadrami background would not have been possible without the support and alliances that he had gotten from students and scholars within the Malay-Islamic world itself.

Coupled by his zeal and tireless efforts at ensuring that classical and as well as classical Arabic texts on Islam are made available to the general public, Syed Ahmad Semait have cast a long shadow in the minds of Muslims in Southeast Asia, making him almost unworthy to be forgotten.

And it is for these reasons that this book ought to read by scholars and students alike. For not only has Muhammad Mubarak documented a neglected topic of study in Southeast Asian Islam, this book serves to remind us that future of Islam in the region and the faith of the Muslims

lies not in sound and fury of men in power, but rather, in the ink that have been spent by Muslim thinkers and intellectuals.

DR SYED MUHD KHAIRUDIN ALJUNEID
Associate Professor
National University of Singapore

ALMARHUM USTAZ SYED AHMAD SEMAIT is among the vanguard of Islamic Scholars of the Malay Nusantara who leads the Malay community towards intellectual and spiritual revival. He carried out this agenda through the publication of classical books of the Islamic Intellectual Tradition couched in contemporary Malay language. Ustaz Ahmad was very much aware that the way forward for Muslims in recovering from their spiritual and intellectual malaise is through books as our Islamic civilisation is a civilisation of books.



Books like Dr Mubarak's are most welcomed so that the wider community knows our scholars and their contributions are valued.

USTAZ HASBI HASAN, PRESIDENT

Singapore Islamic Scholars & Religious Teachers Association

(Dr. Mubarak) serves to remind us that future of Islam in the region and the faith of the Muslims lies not in sound and fury of men in power, but rather, in the ink that have been spent by Muslim thinkers and intellectuals.

ASSOC. PROF DR KHAIRUDIN ALJUNIED

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