

IMAGES OF THE JAWI PERANAKAN OF PENANG

Assimilation of the Jawi Peranakan Community
into the Malay Society



HALIMAH MOHD SAID & ZAINAB ABDUL MAJID

Published by
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris



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Dear Datuk Sri Najib
A group of Malays who
have achieved much!

Salam
Fahimah Jari
8.5.12



اسوسسي لهدايه ساطلي اوسين
PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

2004



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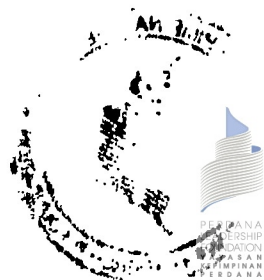


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PUSTAKA PERDANA



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Our heartfelt thanks goes to the interviewees and informants who have generously given of their time and contributed their thoughts, opinions and experiences to enrich the ethnographic data of the study. To all the friends and family members who have given us their support, we would like to say *terima kasih* for allowing us to dig deep into their hearts and minds as well as family albums. Without your contributions we would not have been able to collate the wonderful insights, images and photographs of the *Jawi Peranakan* that have gone into this labour of love.

Last but not least, we would like to thank Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya and Arkib Negara for allowing us to access invaluable references and sources to add to the wealth of information we have gathered for this study.

*Pulau Pinang tiga bersegi
Bertentang dengan tanah seberang
Orang berbudi tidak kan rugi
Harapan juga dikenang orang*

*Pulau Pinang digelar Tanjung
Terkenal juga Pulau Mutiara
Kerja keras menambah untung
Maju bangsa maju negara*

Halimah Mohd Said & Zainab Abdul Majid

FOREWORD

The term 'Malay' in Malaysia differs somewhat in meaning from that used by people from abroad. This is because of the definition of the term given in the Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia, which is culturally rather than ethnically-based. According to the Malaysian Constitution the cultural components that are basic to the Malays are Islam, the Malay language, and the Malay way of life. This being the case, groups which are not ethnically Malay can become Malay as provided for by the Constitution.

This study of the *Jawi Peranakan* of Penang provides us with a clear picture of how people of Indian origin became completely assimilated into the Malay group when they had already professed Islam as their religious faith, when as they settled down in Malaysia they had adopted Malay or a variety of it as their mother tongue, and when in tandem with this language acquisition they had adopted the Malay customs in the conduct of their day to day life.

Datin Halimah Mohd Said and Puan Zainab Abdul Majid discuss the various processes of assimilation into the Malay society that the early Indian Muslim settlers of Penang went through such that their descendants have become completely Malay. At the same time the authors are also able to pick out and delineate traits, though minor, which make the *Jawi Peranakan* distinct from the indigenous Peninsular Malays.

A great number of ethnic and racial groups have made



Malaysia their home. At the same time there are also groups which are not easily defined based on racial or ethnic parameters. The *Jawi Peranakan* group is one of them. Research on the Malaysian peoples should encompass all groups, major or minor, so that we can have a comprehensive picture of the Malaysian citizenry. And together with this information comes our acquaintance with the value systems and ethos of the groups, a knowledge which is pertinent to our nation building.

I wish to congratulate the authors on their work and the Institut Peradaban Melayu, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris for initiating and sponsoring the project which led to the writing of this book, *Images of the Jawi Peranakan of Penang: Assimilation of the Jawi Peranakan Community into the Malay Society*.

Datuk Dr. Muhammad Rais bin Abdul Karim
Vice-Chancellor
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

PREFACE

Working on this book has been a most enriching and fulfilling journey of discovery for the two of us. We did not realise at the outset of our joint endeavour how much information we would be able to uncover from the treasure trove of the *Jawi Peranakan* community until we ploughed into the area of research. It was our complementary synergy and mutual interest which harnessed our desire to delve into the history and evolution of the *Jawi Peranakan* minority group as it moves in the process of gradual assimilation into the larger Malay society.

The *Jawi Peranakan* community which represents the descendants of the Indian Muslim migrants in Penang who married into the local Malay community has a cultural legacy worthy of being recorded and preserved. Through this extended research, we have been able to trace the roots of the *Jawi Peranakan* from the history of their forefathers, their tenacity and fortitude which fostered their early economic success, their contributions towards the socio-economic development of Penang in particular, their geographical spread and impact on the socio-political scene, and the kaleidoscope of shifting images they portray as they evolve and emerge to become a part of the Malay society.

The ethos and salient cultural characteristics of the *Jawi Peranakan* are highlighted in this book from the perspective of their historical development, their social organisation, their value system and their mind and personality. Their resilience and adaptability to the demands of the changing environment from the days of their

progenitors to the present times are looked at within the framework of the broader challenges posed by the other Malay sub-groups and the country's other major ethnic groups, as they oscillate between the need to preserve their own cultural identity on the one hand, and the expedient desire to be fully integrated into the Malay society through the various stages of assimilation, on the other. The extent of an eclectic culture which has evolved among the *Jawi Peranakan*, as a result of the syncretisation of Indian Muslim values and influence enmeshed with Malay cultural traditions are borne out by the study as well.

This research is based on an ethnographic approach which allows us to adopt a systematic method of social observation and description of the group under investigation. Of utmost importance in this methodology is our sensitivity to and familiarity with the environment under study. The fact that we ourselves are members of the *Jawi Peranakan* community – Zainab Abdul Majid a *Jawi Peranakan* by birth, and Halimah Mohd Said by association, being married to a *Jawi Peranakan* for more than three decades – allows for a good rapport to be established with the informants and interviewees, thus facilitating elicitation as well as responsive interaction in the process of data collection. Our impressionistic and subjective perceptions complement well with the inputs gathered from the more objective modes of participant observation and data analysis. The comprehensive library research that was undertaken provides an invaluable source of information which helps to substantiate available data on the theoretical aspects as well as the historical background relevant to this study.

The collection of precious photographs which is included in this book provides a non-linear representation of the historical past and evolution of the *Jawi Peranakan* community. These visual supports which form part of the material culture impart images that vividly depict the lives and times of the people through successive generations. They serve as a dynamic supplement to the research and should allow the reader to gain better insights into the background of the people, as much as to help create a more lasting impression of their rich cultural heritage.

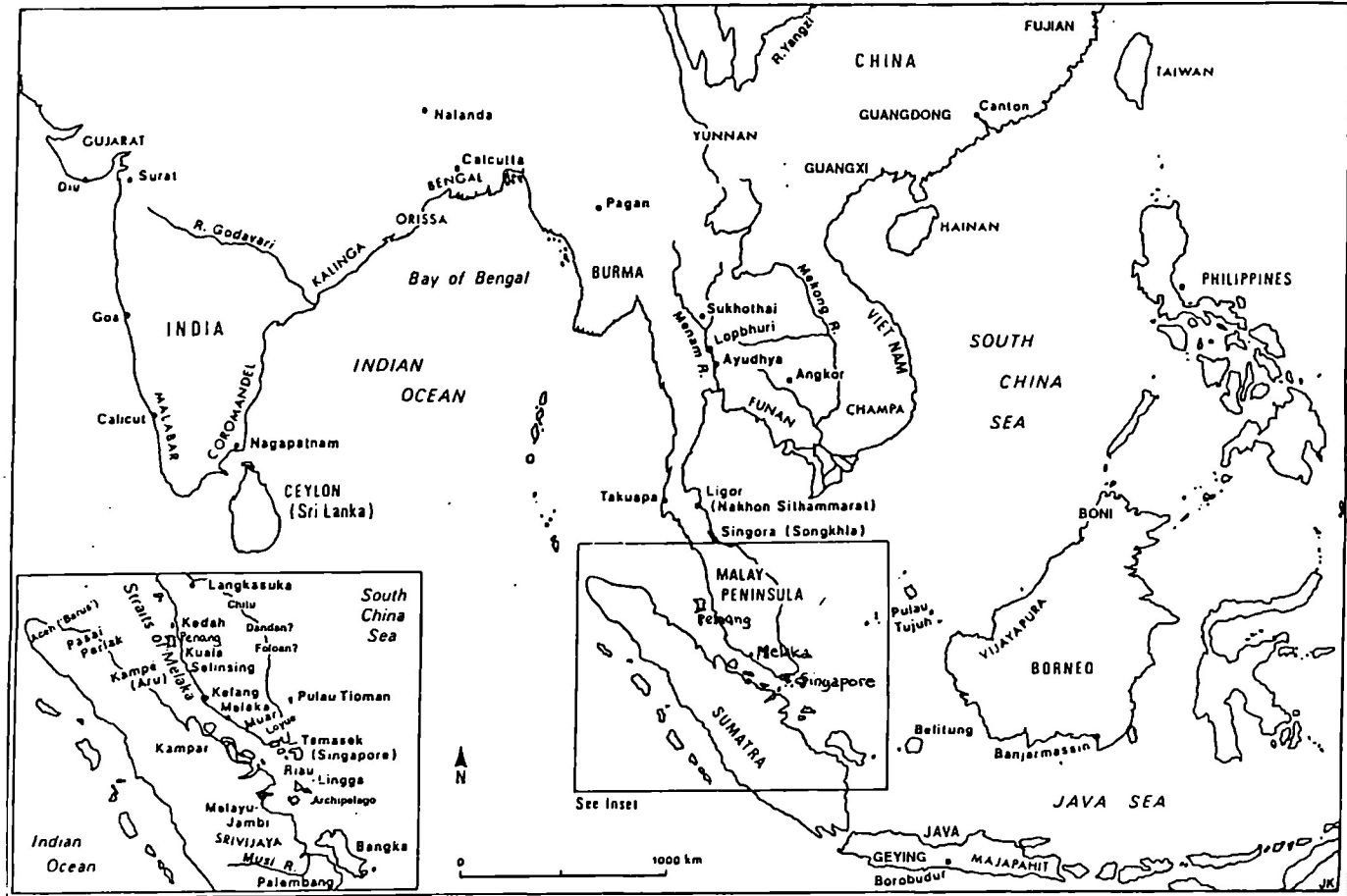
Very few publications are available on the *Jawi Peranakan* community. With the exception of Helen Fujimoto's (1988) research work entitled *The South Indian Muslim Community and the Evolution of the Jawi Peranakan in Penang up to 1948*, not much substantive work has been published on the community thus far. While we do not by any means claim that our work is exhaustive, we hope that it will serve as an updated source of information which will, to a small extent, make up for the paucity of research in the field. This book will be useful to anyone seeking to enrich his knowledge and insights on the *Jawi Peranakan* community in particular, and also to those interested in exploring the sub-disciplines of cultural studies which relate to the area of acculturation and assimilation, ethnicity and identity, and cross-cultural relations in general.

Halimah Mohd Said & Zainab Abdul Majid

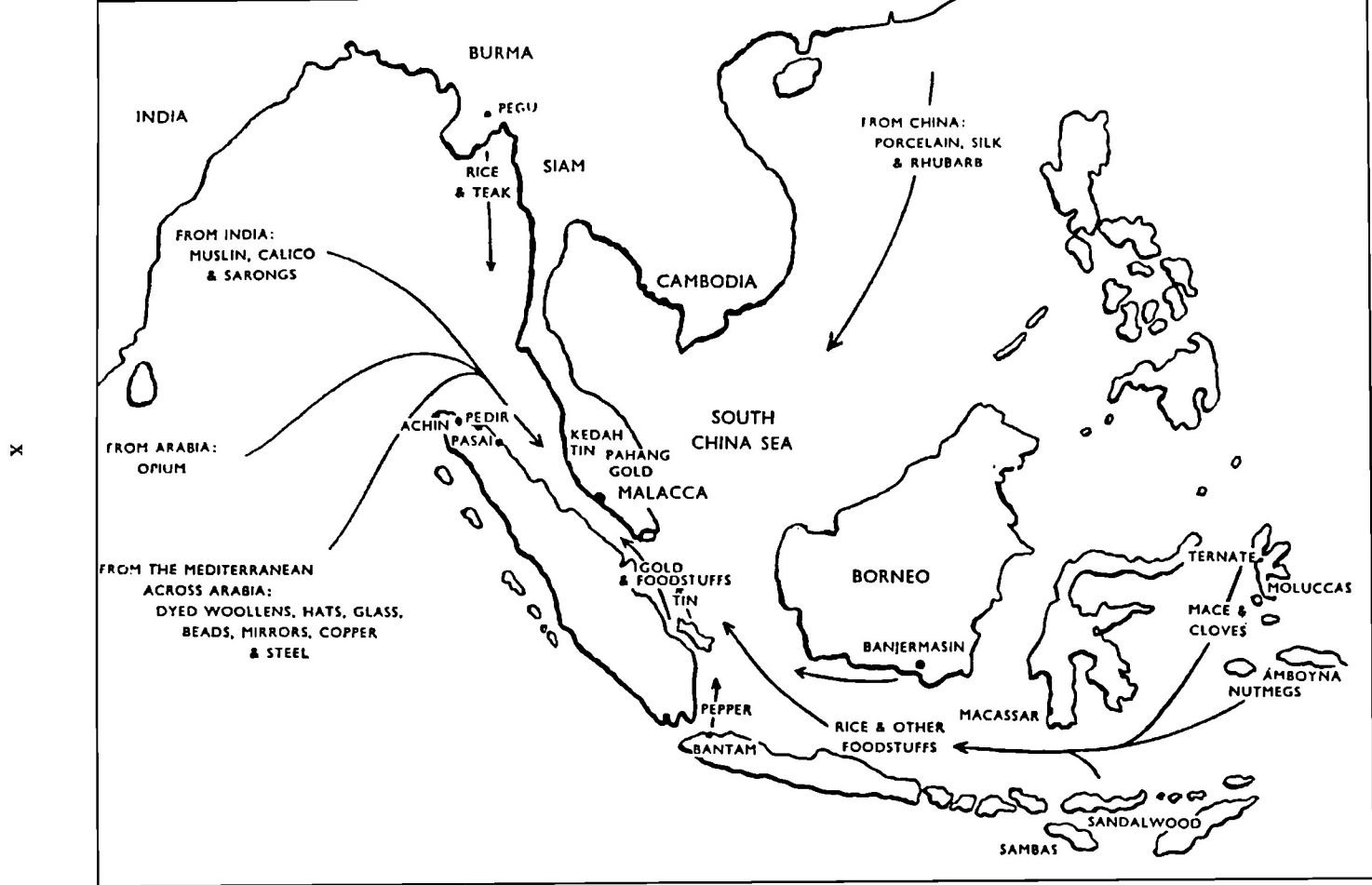
Kuala Lumpur

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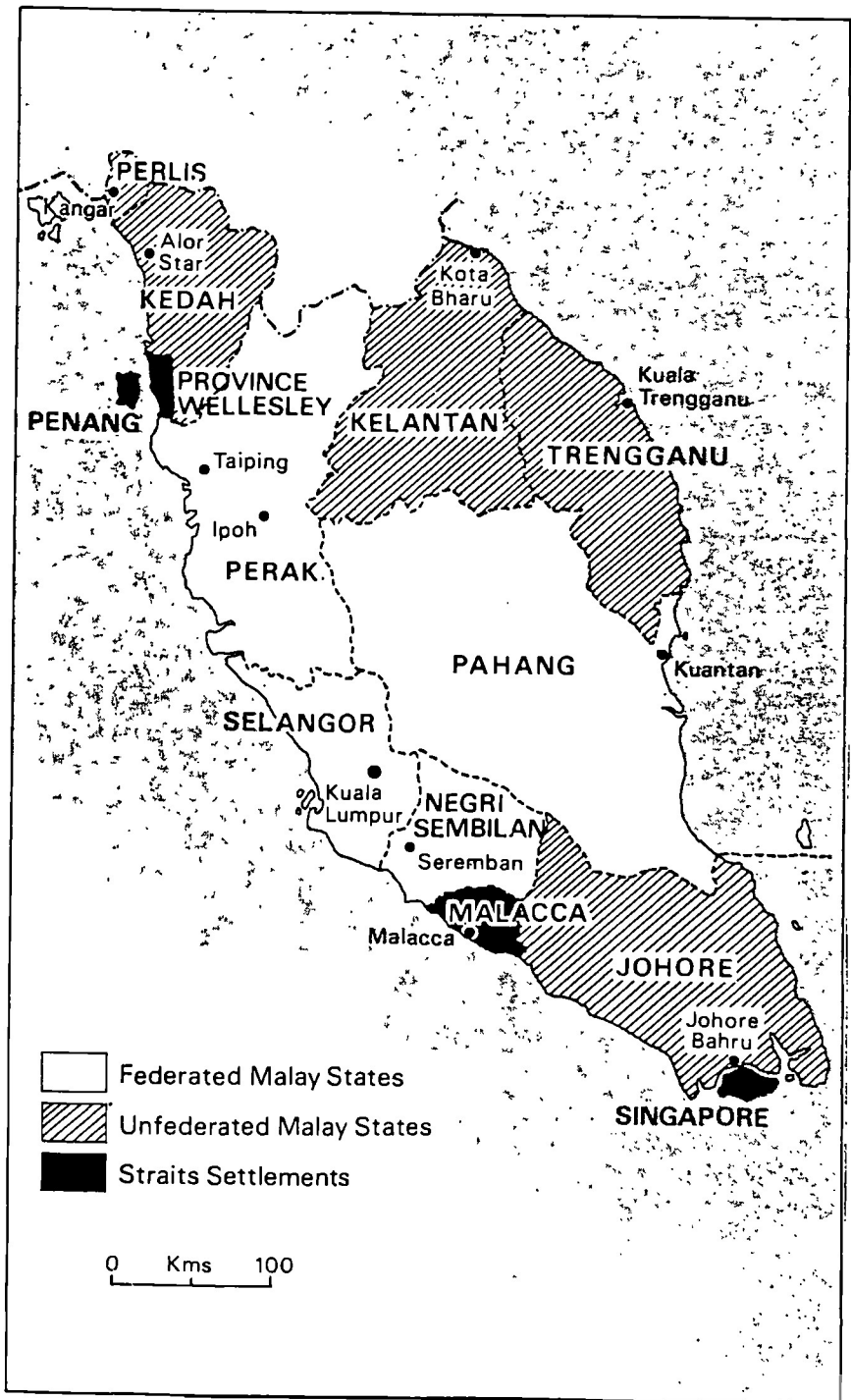




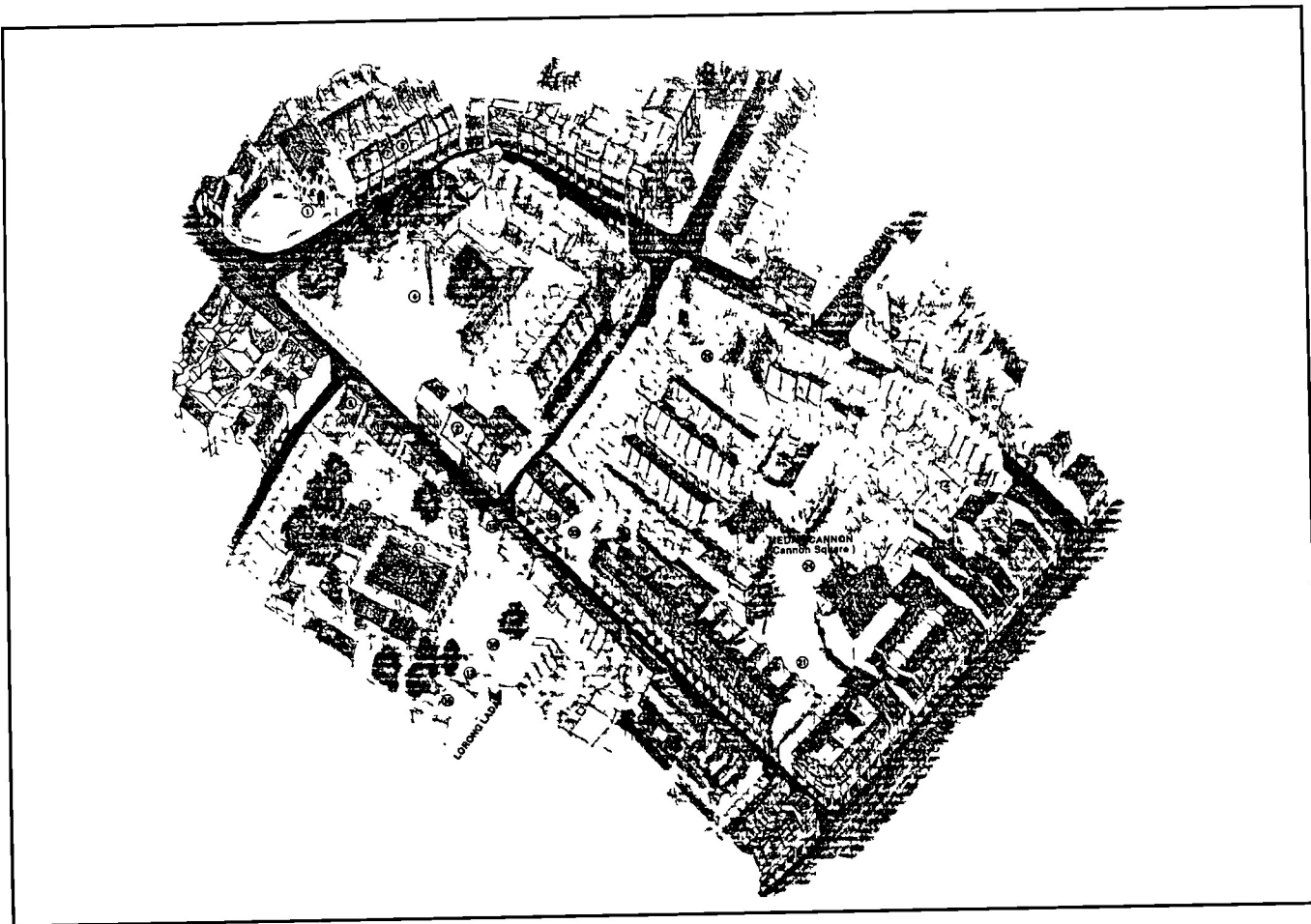
Map 1: Early Contacts in the Malay World
(adapted from Andaya and Andaya 1982)



Map 2: 15th Century Malacca - A Centre of the Eastern Trade



Map 3: The Malay Peninsula in 1920



Map 6: George Town Muslim Malay Settlement
(adapted from Lebuh Aceh & Lebuh Armenian : Wadah Tumpuan Warisan Budaya 1992)

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Malays of Southeast Asia are a conglomerate mix of ethnic groups as a result of intermarriage between the Malay peoples who are indigenous to the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia, Brunei, Sabah, and Sarawak and the migrant populations that arrived and settled in the region. When the first wave of Indian and Chinese migrants arrived as early as the 3rd century, the local inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula comprised the aboriginal peoples (*Orang asli*) and the native Malays who practised a mainly agrarian existence, with some seasonal maritime activities. Commercially, they participated in an intricate network of supply and distribution, tapping the richness of the Peninsula's mineral and jungle resources in the hinterland and its sea products in the coastal regions. Traders and merchants who regularly plied the trade route between India and China came in search of camphor, lakawood, incense and gold exchanging them with the cloth, copper and ironware, beads, pottery and glass which they brought.

The ports of the region became major centres of trade and thriving entrepôts during the periods of glory in the region's history-

the Srivijaya empire from the 7th to 13th centuries, the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th and 16th centuries, and the rise of Singapore and Penang in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Palembang, Surabaya, Bantam, Patani, Kedah, Melaka, Aceh, Singapore and Penang became the meeting points of merchants and traders from China, Persia, Siam, Indonesia, India, Arabia and Europe. The new arrivals set up pockets of settlement, some of which became permanent while others were opened seasonally as and when commercial needs brought them to the region. The colonies that were more permanent often developed as the centres of distinctive foreign populations or enclaves. As with the old European mercantile colonies of Marseilles, Venice, Naples and Alexandria, many of the trading communities of maritime Southeast Asia generally displayed a scattering of such enclaves which housed the major ethnic quarters.

Of this geographically fluid and demographically mobile trading population in the region, the Indian Muslim migrants from South India comprised one of the biggest and most regular commercial groups. They entered the Peninsula in three major waves of migration to three locations, namely Kedah during the Srivijaya period, Melaka during the Melaka Sultanate, and Penang when the island was opened as a British settlement. Thus, throughout the greater part of the history of the Malay Peninsula, the Indian Muslims played an influential role in its economic life and contributed greatly to its development. Their role as *Saudagar Raja* or intermediaries between the foreign merchants and the Malay rulers gave them an early start in *istana* and court politics and provided the background for their later foray into local and national politics. They were pioneers in the administration of

the British, and in the development of education and the professions. Their contributions, therefore, deserve a more comprehensive description in the annals of modern Malaysia.

Indian Muslim merchants who settled in the trading ports of peninsular Malaya were one of several minority groups of migrants among whom were Arabs, Chinese, Hindu Indians, Siamese and the Malay groups consisting of Minangkabau, Javanese, Bugis, Boyanese and Acehnese. As with the other visiting populations, these migrant minorities came into contact with the host community or core society of local Malays (*Melayu asli*) who were dominant in terms of numbers, power and political influence.

The meeting of peoples of different ethnic compositions and cultural orientations is an age-old phenomenon that occurs as a result of colonial conquest, military occupation, trade and missionary activity, displacement of people by domestic unrest and civil war, and in modern times, voluntary immigration. It is perhaps tautologous to say that the human instinct for survival, which makes man gregarious and mobile as he moves to new pastures to seek a better livelihood, is universal. The impact and effects of migration and cultural contact, however, are more distinctive and are determined to a large extent by the intrinsic characteristics of the human groups that come into contact with one another, their demographic characteristics, the nature of the contact and by extraneous factors in the socio-cultural environment of contact. The socio-cultural adaptation, in particular acculturation and assimilation of different groups to the same environment may have quite different results as can be seen with the different migrant groups that settled in Malaya.

The assimilatory powers of a common religion, Islam, played a great part in easing the socio-cultural adaptation of the Indian Muslims to the core Malay society. Intermarriage between the Indian Muslim men and the local Malay women, which was facilitated by their common belief in Islam, produced offspring who were brought up in the language and domestic customs of their Malay mothers and the activity and diligence of their commercially-inclined Indian Muslim fathers. Through a recurring pattern of intermarriage from generation to generation the *Jawi Peranakan* or *Jawi Pekan* as they were classified in the British census categories, underwent a process of acculturation or cultural assimilation as they adopted the more overt Malay cultural patterns in language, dress and food as well as the less tangible elements of culture like beliefs, customs and traditions. Acculturation being a reciprocal process also resulted in the borrowing of Indian Muslim cultural elements by the native Malays, for example in the dietary and language patterns.

Where intermarriage occurred on a considerable scale as in Penang, and where the urban socio-cultural environment encouraged continuous contact and interaction between the *Jawi Peranakan* and the local Malays, they underwent a greater degree of assimilation into the core society at the structural and identificational levels. What this means is that the cultural differences between the two ethnic groups disappeared as the *Jawi Peranakan* gained acceptance into the societal networks and institutions, that is the societal structure of the Malay community. With this developed the sense of peoplehood or ethnicity based on the wider Malay society. This process of cultural assimilation followed by structural, marital and identificational

assimilation was reinforced through several generations until the *Jawi Peranakan* community became absorbed into the Malay community.

Independence and the Federation of Malaya's rapid socio-economic and political development saw great efforts to integrate the country's various ethnic groups into one nation of people. Government policies consolidated the status and position of the Malays by bringing together the different Malay sub-groups under the Federal Constitution's definition of Malay ethnicity, thus ensuring their total assimilation into the greater Malay society. Today, Malays of different ancestries and ethnic compositions including the *Jawi Peranakan* have formally adopted a single Malay ethnic identity, partaking of the rights and privileges that accrue to the group as defined in the Malaysian Constitution. At the formal structural and identificational levels it can be surmised that their assimilation has been total.

However, at the less formal level of family organisation and kinship structure some of the original *Jawi Peranakan* norms are still maintained. The more intrinsic aspects of culture such as the belief system and value system inherited from their Indian Muslim forefathers are still perpetuated among the older generation and in families where endogamous marriages among members of the extended family or within the community are encouraged. In the socio-cultural adaptation process some traits of the original culture are maintained, some are adapted and undergo change while others disappear altogether. The extent to which these cultural norms and characteristics are maintained, adapted or forgone depends on a host of variables that prevail in the environment of contact, including the socio-cultural, economic and political factors.

THE WRITERS



Zainab Abdul Majid

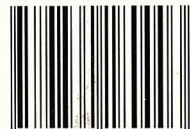
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