

The Malayo-Muslim World of Singapore at the Close of the Nineteenth Century

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MUCH attention has been devoted, by scholars and others, to the dramatic growth of Singapore in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as a great commercial entrepôt, as a flourishing city of tens of thousands of Chinese migrants, and as the maritime focus of two economic empires, the British and the Dutch. The direction and the intensity of this interest are, of course, understandable, but it has done much to obscure the role of Singapore as a focus also for the cultural and economic energies of the Malaysian¹ world which existed alongside but in many ways separate from the world created by the West. While the comparison cannot be pressed too far, Singapore in the nineteenth century may be likened to Malacca in the fifteenth, in its role as metropolis for an area that embraced the whole Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, from Kedah and Aceh to the Celebes. Island trade in Malaysian or Arab hands, Indonesian migration to the Peninsula, the pilgrimage to Mecca and its subsidiary activities in the fields of Islamic teaching and publication, brought together in Singapore a great variety of Malaysian and Muslim peoples from differing social and economic background but sharing a lingua franca and important elements of a common culture, and often freed from the more hampering restraints of traditional social systems. Urban life has in all places and times been an important breeding ground for new ideas and new ways, and to this general pattern Singapore at the close of the nineteenth century conforms.

In 1819, when the Temenggong of Johore, in his own name and that of Sultan Husain, signed the Singapore Agreement with Sir Stamford Raffles,² the island was inhabited by only a handful of the Temenggong's followers and Malay and Chinese fishermen. Eighty-two years later, in 1901, it was the home, temporary or permanent, of 23,060 Peninsular Malays,³ 12,335 "Other Natives of the Archipelago,"⁴ almost a thousand Arabs,⁵ and about 600 *Jawi Peranakan*.⁶ The total population of all races was 228,555, of whom 72 per cent were Chinese.⁷ Of the

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¹ The term is used here, without present-day political connotations, to refer to the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago as a whole and its related peoples.

² See, e.g., R. O. Winstedt, "A History of Johore," *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society* [hereinafter *JMBRAS*], X, 3 (1932), 81-82.

³ Census of the Straits Settlements, 1901, p. 28, Tab. III. The census category "Malays" included, without distinguishing, Malay-speaking Sumatrans. The term "Peninsular Malays," when used here, refers to Malays born in the Peninsular States or the Straits Settlements.

⁴ *Ibid.* The larger proportion of these were Javanese (8,519) and Boyanese (2,712), with in addition Bugis, Dyaks, Filipinos and Acheneese. The complexities of regional and ethnic groupings presented British census takers at this time with considerable difficulties of classification.

⁵ *Ibid.* See p. 81 for a discussion of the term "Arab" in this context.

⁶ *Ibid.* "*Jawi Peranakan*" ("local-born Muslims") were the offspring of South Indian Muslim and Malay unions (see p. 86 and n.66).

⁷ *Ibid.*

36,080 Malaysians in Singapore, more than 26,000 lived within the limits of the Municipality, including the greater proportion of the Javanese and other immigrants from the Archipelago.⁸ The main Malaysian residential area in the city was Kampong Glam, an aggregation of Malay-style wooden houses and shops fronting the river and surrounding the Jamiah Mosque and the rather dilapidated *istana* (palace) occupied by descendants of Sultan Husain. On the fringe of Kampong Glam were similar areas occupied predominantly by Bugis, Boyanese, Javanese, and other immigrants, together with most of the Arabs and *Jawi Peranakan*. In the west of the city was a Malay area, Telok Belanga, settled in the first instance by connections of the Temenggong of Johore, whose original *istana* was there, and in the north Kampong Malacca, inhabited initially for the most part, as the name suggests, by Malays from that Settlement.

Little is known in detail of the provenance of the Peninsular Malay element of the population at the turn of the century. Most were probably Colony Malays, either locally born or from Penang or Malacca, but many certainly came from Riau and Johore, from the Federated States on the west coast of the peninsula, and to a lesser extent from the east-coast states of Pahang, Trengganu, and Kelantan. Throughout the last quarter of the century, Singapore, as the seat of the Straits Settlements Colony government, had been a centre of activity for Malay rivalries, intrigues, and negotiations attending the assumption by Britain of protectorate rights over the Western States and Pahang. Malay chiefs and their followers came frequently to Singapore to ask for aid, to confer with their legal advisers or with government officials, to make business deals, or to borrow money. Many found there a convenient refuge from rulers or rival chiefs, and others an enforced place of exile for long or short periods. Ex-Sultan Abdullah of Perak lived in Singapore from the time of his return from the Seychelles in 1894 until his death in 1922, and the Mentri of Larut, the Dato' Bandar of Sungei Ujong, and Rajas Mahdi and Mahmud of Selangor, were among those who found a place of retirement in Singapore after turbulent careers in the Peninsular States. Sultan Ibrahim of Johore, who had been born in Kampong Glam, kept an establishment at Telok Belanga and mixed regularly in polite European society. The conclusion of the negotiations with Pahang in 1888, in which Ibrahim's father Abu Bakar had materially assisted, was extensively reported in the vernacular press of the time, together with the movements in and out of Singapore of the Malay leaders involved.⁹ And Sir Hugh Clifford was probably not drawing wholly on imagination when he portrayed, in one of his novels, the Malay Raja Tuakal plotting with his English friend in Kampong Glam to assist the Achehnese in their war against the Dutch.¹⁰

In addition to those Malays who first came to Singapore as part of the retinue of a chief or other notable, many came to seek employment, or simply out of curiosity and adventure. They found a city overwhelmingly Chinese, to an extent unknown in even the larger towns of the Native States, in which, below the level

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29, Tab. III.

⁹ See, e.g., the Malay newspaper *Jawi Peranakan*, 1 and 15 August 1887, which gives a long account of Governor Weld's visit to Pahang in July, and the circumstances attending it. Details of all Malay periodicals cited in the present article may be found in William R. Roff, *Guide to Malay Periodicals, 1876-1941* (Singapore, 1961).

¹⁰ Hugh Clifford, *A Freelance of Today* (London, 1903), pp. 1-8.

of Government and the big trading houses, all departments of life were dominated by Chinese. The popular stereotype of the time was of the immigrant who arrived from Hongkong or the South China Coast with nothing but a sleeping mat, a pair of shorts, and a singlet, and who within a few years, as the result of incomparable industry, became a landowner and millionaire.¹¹ The typical Malay situation was rather the reverse, one writer complaining that as land values had risen, Malays had been forced to move from the centre of the city to the poorer areas. "Where is it all to end?" he asked. "Soon we shall be in Papua, where everyone is stark naked."¹² And indeed, the contrast between Malay and Chinese fortunes was all too apparent, and was little improved by what vernacular education was provided. Most Malays found employment only in menial roles, as policemen, watchmen, officeboys, drivers, and house-servants. Some made a living from petty trading as street hawkers or as small shopkeepers in the Malay areas of the city, and a few became religious teachers or mosque officials. Malay schools, run by the missions or supported by Government, had been spasmodically in existence for half a century and more,¹³ but it was said in 1894 that not one graduate from the vernacular schools could be found employed as a clerk, interpreter, or translator.¹⁴

But if in many ways Singapore at the close of the century represented for Malays an alien world increasingly controlled by an alien and highly competitive people, there was to set against this the richly variegated and socially more familiar life of Kampong Glam and the other Malayo-Muslim areas of the city. Free movement between the Indonesian Archipelago and the Peninsula was of very long standing. Malacca, home of one of the most diverse communities in the East, had been the trading centre for the whole Malaysian world; Negri Sembilan and the hinterland of Malacca were substantially populated by people from Minangkabau in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries; Bugis adventurers had achieved a dominant position in what is now Johore and in Selangor; even the Javanese had formed settlements in the southern and western parts of the Peninsula. In the nineteenth century, however, the nature of this rather random movement, related chiefly to trade, piracy, and war, changed and acquired two new defining characteristics. Traders and adventurers there still were, though perhaps in fewer numbers; but for the first time, and increasingly in the last quarter of the century, large numbers of Indonesians, especially Javanese, came to Malaya to work as indentured or free labour or as peasant settlers, and others came as sojourners for a purpose often bound up with the first, the pilgrimage to Mecca. For many of these people, Singapore was to be at the very least a stopping place, and often a permanent home.

One of the biggest lacunae in the social and economic history of nineteenth-century Malaya is that concerning the trading life of the indigenous peoples. Casual references abound to Malaysian traders in the Straits Settlements of the mid-century, but there is little detailed information about trade organisation or conduct, and we are left with only a shadowy reflection of what must have been the

¹¹ See, e.g., article "Menuntut Ketinggian akan Anak2 Negeri" ["In Pursuit of Greatness for Our People"], *Al-Imam*, II, 1 (July 1907).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ D. D. Chelliah, *A Short History of the Educational Policy of the Straits Settlements, 1800-1925* (Kuala Lumpur, 1947).

¹⁴ *Bintang Timor*, 30 October 1894.

substance.¹⁵ One observer, writing of Singapore in 1838, refers to thousands of Malay *prahus* lying off the town, with traders "from every port of the Archipelago" holding a constant floating fair for the disposal of their cargoes.¹⁶ No fewer than four thousand of these vessels were said to have arrived during the previous monsoon, and "but for the Dutch interference and jealousy, many more would visit Singapore yearly."¹⁷ Thirty years later, John Cameron described Singapore harbour as notable less for its fine foreign merchantmen than for "the extraordinary variety of nondescript native craft that swarm in its shoaler waters," with Malay *prahus* second in number and size only to the South China Sea junks.¹⁸ Every year, from May to October, fleets of boats arrived from Sambas, Pontianak, and Brunei, followed in October and November by the Bugis traders from Bali and the Celebes, with at all times a concourse of Arab vessels from Java, sailing under the Dutch flag.¹⁹ The Bugis, the Phoenicians of Malaysia, were particularly notable as traders, and the family business of Haji Embok Suloh, a leading figure in the Singapore Malay community in later years, was probably typical of its kind. Originally from the Celebes, Haji Embok's father and uncles owned pepper and gambier plantations in Borneo and Sumatra in the late nineteenth century and conducted a regular trade in their own ships between Singapore and the archipelago. Haji Embok himself, as a young man at the turn of the century, was made to divide his time between the plantations and the big family house in Bugis Street from which the business was carried on.²⁰ The Minangkabau, from West Sumatra, also had a special reputation as astute and able businessmen. In Kuala Lumpur in the 1890's, the greater part of the Malaysian merchant community was said to hail from Minangkabau,²¹ and it is likely that they formed an important section also of the shopkeepers and small traders in Singapore.

Large-scale Indonesian migration to the Straits Settlements and the Peninsula, independent of trade, seems certainly to date from after the opening up of the western states in the 1870's²² and the encouragement of settlement by way of land grants and sometimes loans to immigrants, though both Selangor and Perak had "foreign Malay" settler communities prior to this date. The early movement was predominantly Sumatran (Minangkabau, Rawa, Mandiling, Korinchi), partly for reasons of accessibility, partly because most Sumatran peoples had a closer cultural affinity with the Malays than others had (and often family ties in the peninsula states), and probably took place mainly by way of Penang, Malacca, and other west-coast landing points.²³ Already, however, by the 1890's, the flow of Javanese had begun,

¹⁵ The recent publication, long delayed and out of sequence, of Wong Lin Ken's "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69," *JMBRAS*, XXXIII, (December 1960), has done much to repair this situation. See, especially, Chapter IV, on "Singapore and the Malaysian Traders."

¹⁶ [Captain] Sherard Osborn, *Quedah; or Stray Leaves from a Journal in Malayan Waters* (London, 1857), p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865) pp. 39ff.

¹⁹ G. W. Davidson, *Trade and Travel in the Far East* (London, 1846), pp. 53-65.

²⁰ Conversation with Haji Embok Suloh, Singapore, 1961. A. B. Ramsay, "Indonesians in Malaya," *JMBRAS*, XXIX (May 1956), 120, refers to Haji Embok as "at one time a considerable owner of house property in Singapore."

²¹ W. H. Treacher, *Notes of Visits to Districts in Selangor, 1894* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, n.d.)

²² Cf. J. M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya*, (London, 1958), p. 26.

²³ There are no statistics relating to immigrant Indonesians. As an indication of Sumatran predomi-

initially as a labour force rather than as settlers. In the five years between 1886 and 1890, some 21,000 Javanese labourers signed contracts with the Singapore Chinese Protectorate, and though most of these were for service in Borneo and elsewhere outside Malaya, Singapore acted as a staging house, and the Government indicated its desire to encourage the importation of Javanese labour to Malaya.²⁴ Even before this, Indonesian "*shaykhs*," engaged in inter-island trading, were bringing to Singapore many *orang tebusan*, or "mortgage men," from Java, who then redeemed their passage money by working for an employer specified by the *shaykh*.²⁵ The sudden and rapid growth of the rubber plantation industry on the mainland in the first decade of the century greatly stimulated the demand for labour of all kinds, and Singapore became the main exchange point for the Javanese indenture system.²⁶ In addition, it provided a pool of free labour, drawn either from new immigrants prompted by overcrowded conditions in Java, or from time-expired contract men prepared to undertake any task from clearing forest to domestic service. It is impossible to say what proportion of Singapore's fourteen thousand urban "Malays of the Archipelago" in 1901 were labourers in transit, and what proportion were employed locally, and either temporarily or permanently resident. What is certain is that Singapore at this time represented a complete cross-section of the Malaysian world.

Probably the greatest single stimulant to Indonesian migration, apart from the general lure of economic advantage in the Peninsula, was the desire to undertake the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. In the mid-nineteenth century, some two thousand pilgrims travelled annually to Mecca from Indonesia; by the end of the century, the number had risen to more than seven thousand.²⁷ The great majority took passage from and returned to Singapore. There were several reasons for this. Throughout the century, the Netherlands East Indies Government was distrustful of what was thought to be the subversive social and political influence exercised by returned *hajjis*, and attempts were made to discourage the pilgrimage by imposing restrictive regulations requiring, amongst other things, a means test before departure and an examination upon return.²⁸ The easiest way to avoid these regulations was to travel

nance on the west coast before 1900, see W. H. Treacher, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 14–15 and *passim*. In 1886, Selangor was estimated to have a migrant Indonesian population of 12,000, out of a total Malaysian population of 18,000 (Emily Sadka, "The Residential System in the Protected Malay States, 1874–95," Australian National University Doctoral Thesis, Canberra, 1960, p.7, n.8, citing Selangor Annual Report for 1886). The migrant Indonesian element in Perak was much smaller, in 1879 only 9,724 out of 56,632 (*Ibid*, citing Perak Annual Report for 1881), but was also predominantly Sumatran (see, e.g., Kinta Monthly Report for April 1894, in *Perak Government Gazette*, 25 May, 1894).

²⁴ R. N. Jackson, *Immigrant Labour and the Development of Malaya, 1786–1920*, (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, 1961), p. 127.

²⁵ I am indebted for this information to an M.A. thesis in preparation in 1961 for the Department of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, by Sayyid Hussin b. Ali.

²⁶ For details of Javanese indentured labour in Malaya, which persisted until 1932, see chapter XI, "Javanese Labour," in Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 127–131; also J. Norman Parmer, *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration: A History of Labor in the Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c.1910–1941*, (New York, 1960), pp. 108–113.

²⁷ J. Vredendregt, "The Haddj," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 118, (1962), 93, and Appendix II, 148–149, where the Indonesian statistics annually from 1878 are given.

²⁸ For details of the regulations, see Vredendregt, *op. cit.*, pp. 98–100. For an account of the Netherlands East Indies Government attitude towards *hajjis*, see Harry J. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun* (The Hague/Bandung, 1958), pp. 19–20.

by way of Singapore, where British requirements were less stringent.²⁹ On top of this, in spite of the considerable numbers of Indonesians living in or passing through the Hejaz, Holland did not establish a consulate in Jeddah until 1872, and Dutch shipping companies played no part in the carriage of pilgrims until late in the century.³⁰ Although the official attitude began to change after 1889 with the advent of C. Snouck Hurgronje as Adviser on Arabic and Native Affairs, it was not until 1902 that the restrictive policy was finally abandoned, and the first decade of the twentieth century continued to see Indonesian pilgrims still for the most part travelling by way of Singapore.³¹ Nor was this simply a matter of spending a few days or weeks in the city en route to or from Jeddah. Would-be pilgrims frequently lived for several years in Singapore or the Peninsula earning sufficient money to take them to the Middle East, and others either settled in Malaya on their return or worked there for a time to pay off passage debts incurred in Jeddah.³² Some failed, for reasons of irresolution or incapacity, to carry out their original intention, remaining permanently in Singapore, and the ironic title "*Haji Singapura*" is still understood in Indonesia today to refer to someone who falls short of his own expressed ideals.

The pilgrimage industry in Singapore and other activities associated with it were largely in the hands of the Arab community. Recruitment of intending *hajs* was carried out by pilgrim *shaykhs* or brokers who, working independently or on behalf of Meccan *shaykhs*, arranged passages for a premium from the shipping agents, escorted the pilgrims to Mecca, and there passed them over to the highest-bidding Meccan *shaykh* or to the *shaykh* on whose behalf they had been acting.³³ Itinerant recruiters operated also from Singapore throughout the peninsula and archipelago. Though undoubtedly there were rogues among the pilgrim *shaykhs*, the business was on the whole a respectable and necessary one, particularly well adapted to those Malaysian Arabs who had local knowledge of and contacts in the Hejaz.

The Dutch scholar L. W. C. Van den Berg described Singapore in 1886 as "the most flourishing, though not the largest, Arab colony in all the Indian Archipelago," and said that its numbers were increasing year by year, "as the point by which all Arabs pass who go to seek their fortunes in the Far East."³⁴ The Arab connection with the Malay world was of long standing, going back at least to the ninth century.³⁵ The earliest permanent settlements, at Siak in Sumatra and Pontianak in Borneo, date from the late seventeenth century, and wandering

²⁹ Before 1895, a small fee was levied on pilgrim passports in British Malaya, after that date none at all. Passports were required to show only the nationality, native country, place of domicile, profession, age, and appearance of the pilgrim, together with the name and birthplace of his father. (*Perak Government Gazette*, 22 November, 1895).

³⁰ Vredembregt, op. cit., p. 130.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117, n.86.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 137. For an instance of the kind of arrangement whereby an Arab firm in Singapore acquired labour for estate development by advancing money to Indonesians in the Hejaz, see *ibid.*, pp. 127-128, and *Jawi Peranakan*, 2 July 1894.

³³ For details of the *shaykh* system in Mecca, as it applied to pilgrims from Malaysia, see C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, (London, 1931), pp. 222-224.

³⁴ L. W. C. Van den Berg, *Le Hadhramout et les colonies Arabes dans l'Archipel Indien* (Batavia: Government Printer, 1886), p. 122.

³⁵ See, e.g., G. R. Tibbetts, "Early Muslim Traders in South-East Asia," *JMBRAS*, XXX, 1 (1957), *passim*.

Arab traders, adventurers, and religious scholars had been a feature of Malay life for many hundreds of years. In the nineteenth century, however, with the arrival of more stable and economically advantageous conditions in the Peninsula and on its periphery, and better sea communications with the Middle East, the Arab element in the population began to increase. By far the larger part of the movement was from a single area, the Hadhramaut, of whose people one authority has said "there are few countries in the world where a larger proportion . . . lives abroad."⁸⁶ By 1934, between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of all Hadhrami Arabs were estimated to live in the East Indies, East Africa, and the Red Sea countries,⁸⁷ and the majority of these in the Indies. The connection with the Straits Settlements and with Sumatra and Java was of such great importance, both for these areas and for the Hadhramaut itself, that some account is necessary of its main features at the close of the nineteenth century.

There were 1,508 Arabs in the Straits Settlements in 1901, 919 of them in Singapore.⁸⁸ Of the latter, rather less than half the 380 adult men and only a handful of the 183 adult women were born in the Hadhramaut, the remainder having been born in Singapore of part Malaysian (or in a few cases Chinese) parentage. These proportions reflect one of the most marked demographic characteristics of the Arab community—the ethnically mixed population consequent upon local inter-marriage as a result of a strict embargo on female emigration from the Hadhramaut. It is impossible from the available figures to say how many of the locally born "Malay-Arabs" were themselves descendants of mixed parents, but there is no doubt that a fair proportion of Malaya's "Arab" community had only a nominal claim to that title.⁸⁹ Possession of an Arabic honorific (usually *Sayyid* or *Shaykh*) did not necessarily mean more than a rather tenuous Arab descent nor any personal acquaintance with Peninsular Arabia. It did, however, denote membership of the "Arab" community, with all the advantages of respect, prestige, favour, and influence that this status conferred.

The Malays had for centuries tended to look upon all Arabs, whatever their origins, as the direct inheritors of the wisdom of Islam, and on *Sayyids* in particular (descendants of the Prophet) as possessed of unexampled piety and religious merit. Many of the Hadhramis who came to the East in the nineteenth century were, in fact, cultivated and scholarly men in an ancient tradition, with their roots in a literary and religio-legal society which has been likened, in its institutions and manners, to those prevailing in the centres of medieval Islam.⁴⁰ In the East Indies, as in their own land, the *Sayyids* and *Shaykhs* of the Hadhramaut and

⁸⁶ W. H. Ingrams, *A Report on the Social, Economic and Political Condition of the Hadhramaut* (Colonial Paper No. 123, London, 1936), p. 141.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Census of the Straits Settlements, 1901, p. 15, Tab. II, and p. 28, Tab. II. Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 110, n.1, refers to a Straits Settlements Government census of 1884, which gives a figure of 1,637 for the Settlements as a whole, and 835 for Singapore. He considers the Singapore figure for adult males, 445, "much too high," and says that there are "at the most 200 adult [male] Arabs actually settled at Singapore." He attributes the alleged excess to Arabs in transit to the Netherlands Indies. His own figure of 580 male and female Arabs in Singapore includes children only if more than ten years old.

⁸⁹ The proportion of "Malay-Arabs" was highest in Malacca, where a well-established Arab colony had existed for many years, and probably rather higher in Penang than in Singapore, which was where most of the newcomers settled.

⁴⁰ R. B. Serjeant, "Historians and Historiography of Hadramawt," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXV, (1962), 238.

those descended from them formed a respected, influential, and often wealthy class, somewhat set apart from their fellows. They wore, as a rule, the loose flowing robe (*jubbah*) and turban of the Arab world, men kissed their hands in greeting, took their opinion in matters of Muslim law and tradition, and received religious instruction from them. Best known as traders and merchants, they formed the élite of the Islamic community in Malaya and Indonesia. Up to the beginning of the twentieth century much of the inter-island sailing ship trade was in their hands,⁴¹ especially in *batik* and other cloth products, but also in a wide range of other goods, from the spices and tobacco of the archipelago to the brassware and haberdashery of Birmingham and India and the honey, dates, and religious literature of Arabia. Some Arabs owned tea, pepper, and gambier estates, others ran merchandising or shipping concerns in the towns, and a few of the wealthiest owned very substantial house and land property in the Straits Settlements and elsewhere.⁴² In Singapore, the leading members of the community were active in charitable and social welfare work among Muslims, helped endow hospitals, built mosques, gifted land for a burial ground, and sponsored large public gatherings on the main Islamic feast days which were attended by several thousands of their co-religionists.⁴³

If the marked improvement of communications with the Middle East resulting from the increasing predominance of the steamship and the opening in 1869 of the Suez Canal had done much to stimulate Hadhrami emigration to the Indies,⁴⁴ it also enabled the connection to be maintained. Though the Arabs in Malaysia formed close and lasting relationships with their countries of domicile, they seldom broke their bonds with the homeland. For most, economic necessity alone had driven them overseas,⁴⁵ and they both preserved emotional and spiritual ties with Arabia (manifested in dress, language, and intensity of religious life), and periodically returned there to visit families, to make the pilgrimage, and often ultimately to die. Through remittances they contributed very largely to the internal economy of the Hadhramaut,⁴⁶ and the wealthier among them sent sons born in Malaya back to the *Wadi* to be educated. Those who could not afford this gave their children private religious instruction, or put them to "Arab schools," or *madrassah* in the Straits Settlements and the Peninsula.

Singapore's reputation as a centre of Islamic life and learning in the late nineteenth century was widespread, though it rested less on possession of a school of religious thought (or even on particular teachers) than on its position in relation

⁴¹ Report on "Hadhramis in the East Indies," by L. de Vries, Deputy Adviser for Native Affairs in the Netherlands East Indies, in Ingrams, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁴² Ingrams, *op. cit.*, p. 150, says that the Arab community is, for its size, the wealthiest in Singapore, "owing to its large holdings in house, land and estate property." Cf. also G. Lee-Warner, "Notes on the Hadhramaut," *Geographical Journal* LXXVII, (1931), 220, who says that "whole streets in Singapore and Penang are owned by wealthy Hadhramis."

⁴³ Buckley, *op. cit.*, II, 563-565, where brief life histories are given for several leading Singapore Arabs; cf. also A. Wright, ed., *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (London, 1908), pp. 705-707 and 710-712.

⁴⁴ Cf. R. B. Serjeant, *Prose and Poetry from Hadramaut*, (London, 1951), p. 4, n.8.

⁴⁵ Ingrams, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142. Cf. also Richard H. Sanger, *The Arabian Peninsula* (New York, 1954), p. 225.

⁴⁶ There are no figures for the earlier period. By 1934, remittances amounted to £630,000 annually from all overseas sources, and to about £40,000 a month from Java alone. Ingrams, *op. cit.*, pp. 142 and 70.

to the pilgrimage and Arab migration, and not least on its role as a publication and distribution centre for religious writings. Students from all over the archipelago, wishing to further their studies in doctrine or law, went either to Mecca or to the Straits Settlements,⁴⁷ where they met and sat at the feet of itinerant scholars from the Hadhramaut, and from Patani, Aceh, Palembang, and Java—most of whom had themselves studied in Mecca. The city thus stood at the heart of a communications network which fed a constant stream of revived “orthodox” Muslim thought from the Hejaz into the peninsula and archipelago, embodying in its comparative rigour implicit criticism of the syncretism and eclecticism of indigenous religious life. It formed the nucleus of an urban, mercantile society, with a way of life and thought significantly different, in its insistence upon fundamental Islamic values untainted by innovation or the impurities of customary belief and superstition, to that of either peasant or aristocratic Malaya. The efforts of the religious to live and to promulgate an Islam of this kind, to further the ideal of the Dar-al-Islam, were greatly helped by the publishing facilities which now sprang up in Singapore, and ultimately by the gradual spread of literacy.

For centuries Malay had been not only the lingua franca of the port kingdoms of maritime Malaysia, but the vehicle in particular for a religious and philosophical as well as an historical and romantic literature. The great Sumatran mystics of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Hamzah Pansuri, Shamsu'l-Din of Pasai, and 'Abd al-Ra'uf of Singkel wrote in Malay (for the benefit, said Hamzah, “of those without knowledge of Arabic and Persian”),⁴⁸ as did numbers of other scholars and missionaries not native born. The Gujerati Shaykh Nur al-Din ibn 'Ali al-Raniri, for example, was one of the latter, a man of part Hadhrami descent, whose *Bustan as-Salatin* (“Garden of Kings”), written in Aceh towards the middle of the seventeenth century, is possibly the best known of Malay religio-historical compendia, achieving wide circulation in the following two hundred years. Winstedt has pointed out that the appearance by the early sixteenth century of a Malay translation of the *Book of the Thousand Questions* (*Kitab Masa'alah Sa-Ribu*), the first Arabic account of Islam to become known in Europe, is a reminder that Malay has for long been one of the important languages of Muslim culture.⁴⁹ First Malacca, then Aceh in the heyday of that state's dominion, with Palembang and later Riau as subsidiary centres, acted as foci for the intellectual and religious life of a small and pious Malay-educated class, from whom, together with the ubiquitous itinerants from overseas, came an intermittent stream of manuscript translations of authoritative Arabic works on doctrine, law, exegesis, and commentary, Sufi mysticism, prayer, and catechism, and “a rich popular-religious literature, independent of the Arabic.”⁵⁰ In the nineteenth century, the role of literary and publication centre for the Malayo-Muslim world came increasingly to be assumed by Singapore, with the added stimulus of more frequent and intensive communication with the Middle East, and the growing use first of the lithograph and then of the printing press.

⁴⁷ Cf. C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, II, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Quoted in R. O. Winstedt, “A History of Malay Literature,” *JMBRAS*, XVII, 3 (1939), 93.

⁴⁹ Winstedt, *op. cit.*, p. 101. A Latin translation of the *Book of the Thousand Questions* was made at Toledo in 1143 A.D.

⁵⁰ Hurgronje, *Mekka*, p. 264. He is referring here to both Javanese and Malay.

A number of hand-lithograph presses were established in Singapore in the latter part of the century,⁵¹ owned mainly by *Jawi Peranakan* and publishing a growing body of both religious and secular writings in Malay, together with some in Arabic and regional languages. The setting up of a Government press in Mecca in 1884, with a Malay section under the supervision of Ahmad b. Muhammed Zein from Patani (described by Hurgronje as "a savant of merit"), together with publications in Malay from Cairo and elsewhere in the Middle East,⁵² undoubtedly helped to encourage this activity. On the purely religious side, publications included editions of familiar texts like the *Kitab Masa'alah Sa-Ribu*, Marzuki's *Abdau* (a Malay version of a rhymed catechism widely used in religious teaching),⁵³ and Baidawi's commentary on the Kuran, along with Sufi tracts such as the *Sabil al-Muhtadin* ("Way of the Guided") by Mohd. Arshad b. Abdullah of Banjar, translations of parts of Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum ad-Din* ("Renovation of the Religious Sciences") by Abdul Samad al-Djawi al-Palembangi under the titles *Sayr us-Salikin* and *Hidayat us-Salikin*, and numerous hortatory and homiletic works for use by teachers. Mention may also be made of the revivalist tracts known as *Wasiat al-Nabi* ("Testamentary Admonitions of the Prophet"), which, circulated in many parts of the Muslim world during the past two hundred years, had always been accompanied, according to Hurgronje, by episodes of local fundamentalist revival and religious intolerance.⁵⁴ In the early 1890's, one *Wasiat* at least appeared in profusion throughout Malaysia, printed and reprinted in Malay at Singapore and Palembang.⁵⁵ And finally, in Arabic, there were collections of *khutbah* (addresses) for delivery in mosques during the Friday prayers, excerpts from *hadith*,⁵⁶ with explication in Malay, and stories from the life of the Prophet and his Companions, to be recited at length during *maulud*⁵⁷ ceremonies.

In addition to these manifestly religious publications, Singapore's lithographers produced an increasing spate of other material in Malay, ranging from old and new translations of classical romances and legends of Arabic or Persian origin and Islamic flavour, traditional folk tales, and poetry, to the modern autobiographical chronicles of Abdullah b. Abdul Kadir Munshi's *Hikayat Abdullah* and its successors,⁵⁸ and reams of topical *shaer* on recent and current events. The importance of Abdullah's work for modern Malay literature has been the subject of frequent comment, which is familiar enough to need no repetition here.⁵⁹ The

⁵¹ Details of these are still deficient. References to some of them may be found in E. W. Birch, "The Vernacular Press in the Straits," *JSBRAS*, IV (December 1879), 4; Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, II, 185-186; Zainal Abidin b. Ahmad, "Modern Developments," in Winstedt, "A History of Malay Literature," p. 145; and in the Malay press of the time.

⁵² See Hurgronje, *Mekka*, pp. 165 and 286-287.

⁵³ Ahmad Marzuki, *Ak'idat ul-Aw'wam*, translated into Malay as *Naadzam Abdau*, or *Naadzam Che Marzuki*.

⁵⁴ Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, II, pp. 182-183.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ The collections most widely used in Malaya were taken from the *Sahih al-Bukhari*.

⁵⁷ One of the most popular collections of *maulud* readings was that published in Cairo by Hasan at-Tochi. Cf. Hurgronje, *op. cit.*, I, 212.

⁵⁸ The *Hikayat Abdullah* ("Abdullah's Story") was first published in Singapore in 1849, and the same author's *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah* ("The Voyage of Abdullah") a few years later. One of his sons published a *Kesah Pelayaran Mohd. Ibrahim Munshi* ("The Voyage of Mohd. Ibrahim Munshi") in 1872.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Winstedt, "A History of Malay Literature," pp. 117-118, or Mohd. Taib b. Osman, *An Introduction to the Development of Modern Malay Language and Literature* (Singapore, 1961), pp. 1-4.

directness and spontaneity of his observation and the independence of his comments on people and events contrast with the stylised characterisation common to more traditional forms of writing and provided a lively model for later Malay literary reflections on the contemporary world. Apart from this new genre in reportage, however, which is echoed also in the topical verse of the time, another kind of literary activity, now pursued for the first time, the study of Malay linguistics, is of particular interest in the late-nineteenth-century context of Singapore.

Language has a peculiarly intimate relationship with cultural identity, both as the most expressive vehicle for a society's beliefs, values, and sentiments—for its innermost spirit—and as a means of self-recognition. It is not surprising that in Malaya, as elsewhere, one of the first signs of a conscious ethnicism ignoring local political boundaries was a concern for the nurture of the language as symbol and expression of the group. Munshi Abdullah, upbraiding the Malays in 1849, said that while they have “so far forgotten their own language as to have no place at all where that language is taught, . . . other races of this world have become civilized and powerful because of their ability to read, write and understand their own language, which they value highly.”⁶⁰ The first known lexicographical work by a Malay, Raja Ali Haji's *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa* (“Book of Linguistic Knowledge”), though not published until seventy years later, was in fact compiled in 1858. A kind of Johnsonian dictionary, in which definition is made the occasion for comment, *Pengetahuan Bahasa* illustrates clearly the importance attached to the language as an integral part of Malay culture, the fate of one mirroring that of the other. Taking as texts, as it were, the words he defined, Raja Ali commented critically upon the ways in which Malay life was changing: traditional articles of clothing influenced by Chinese and European fashions, customs decaying, language becoming debased with the increasing prevalence of bazaar usage—all themes which were to recur repeatedly in the ensuing years. The *Pengetahuan Bahasa* was followed in 1878 by the first published Malay word-book, the *Kitab Pemimpin Johor* (“Guide for Johore”) by Munshi Abdullah's son Mohd. Ibrahim Munshi, and in 1894 by Sayyid Mahmud b. Abdul Kadir's *Kamus Mahmudiyyah* (“Mahmud's Dictionary”), perhaps the most ambitious of the early Malay vocabularies. The concern for the growth and development of the language was also reflected in other ways. Confronted on a basis of everyday familiarity with a host of new and alien institutions and ideas originating in Western Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, users of Malay, particularly in the towns, were forced to seek new expressions with which to refer to, use, and describe these innovations. In 1888, the first of what was to be a long succession of Malay cultural-welfare associations was formed by leading Johore and Singapore Malays, in Johore Bahru. Called the *Pakatan Belajar Mengajar Pengetahuan Bahasa* (“Society for the Learning and Teaching of Linguistic Knowledge”), it devoted itself mainly, in the course of its brief life, to determining Malay equivalents for English terms in the field of government and administration.⁶¹ At all times, of course, many expressions were taken into the language

For the view that Abdullah's marked pro-Western bias constitutes a serious criticism of his work, see Kassim Ahmad, ed., *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* (Kuala Lumpur, 1960), pp. 1–14.

⁶⁰ R. A. Datoek Besar & R. Roolvink, eds., *Hikajat Abdullah* (Djakarta/Amsterdam, 1953), pp. 426–427.

⁶¹ Za'ba [Zainal Abidin b. Ahmad], “Modern Developments,” in Winstedt, op. cit., p. 144, gives as examples “*setia-usaha*” for “secretary,” “*pejabat*” for “department,” and “*kerja raya*” for “public works,” all of which came into general use. A major reason for the direction taken by the PBMPB's interest was the autonomy in government and administration retained by Johore, compared with the other states.

direct from English, but often not without dispute over the propriety of this procedure, which seemed to many to detract from the autonomy and dignity of Malay language and culture. A heated controversy was carried on in the correspondence columns of the Malay weekly newspaper *Jawi Peranakan* in 1894 over whether the clubs and associations newly being formed should use the word "Club" or "*Persekutuan*" in their titles.⁶² Less antipathy was felt by the self-conscious Malay to the adoption of Arabic terms, which became, indeed, a feature especially of newspaper journalism,⁶³ itself a wholly new phenomenon. For the urban intelligentsia, whether Malay, Indonesian, Arab, or *Jawi Peranakan*, Arabic was the language of the true civilisation and of that wider Islamic world of which they felt themselves increasingly to be a part.

Malay journalism, like book publication in Malay, owes its origins very largely to local-born Indian Muslims in Singapore,⁶⁴ or, to be more exact, to the community known as *Jawi Peranakan*. There has already been frequent occasion to refer to this community, and in view of its contribution to Malay intellectual life, especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it is unfortunate that it has been so little described.⁶⁵ Comprising in the main the locally-born offspring of unions between Malay women and South Indian (chiefly Malabari) Muslim traders, merchants, and settlers migrant to Malaya in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,⁶⁶ the *Jawi Peranakan* lived for the most part in Penang, though the growth of Singapore attracted many to the south. While retaining some South Indian customs and modes of life, the community seems rapidly to have assimilated itself to Malay society, to have spoken Malay as its first language, and to have identified itself with Malay concerns. With a reputation for intelligence and language ability, *Jawi Peranakan* were frequently employed by the British as clerks, translators, and interpreters, a role in which they were found also at the courts of the Native States. Many acted as *munshi*, or Malay teachers, to the European community, particularly in Government, and others were among the first school-teachers in the Straits Settlements. As merchants and shopkeepers in Penang and Singapore, some of the *Jawi Peranakan* possessed considerable wealth, and they ranked next to the Arabs in leadership and authority within the Malayo-Muslim community.

In 1876, a group of *Jawi Peranakan* formed an association in Singapore in

⁶² *Jawi Peranakan*, 4 June, 18 June and 2 July 1894. The controversy related mainly to the Muslim Recreation Club in Penang (so named), but the principle involved was discussed at length.

⁶³ Mohd. Taib b. Osman, "The Language of the Editorials in Malay Vernacular Newspapers up to 1941," (B. A. Honours Exercise, Department of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, 1958), pp. 11–20, gives a list of Arabic words occurring in the Malay press, most of them dating from about this time. Cf. also R. J. Wilkinson, *Papers on Malay Subjects*, Series I, Part 1, *Literature*, (Kuala Lumpur, 1907), p. 20.

⁶⁴ The only existing historical study of the Malay press is Nik Ahmad b. Nik Hassan, "The Malay Vernacular Press" (B. A. Honours Exercise, Department of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, 1958). I have in preparation a *History of Malay Newspapers*, based in part on a series of five talks prepared in 1961 for Radio Malaya, and reproduced by them in mimeograph. Cf. also my *Guide to Malay Periodicals, 1876–1941*, (Singapore, 1961), an annotated search-list, and Mohd. b. Dato' Muda, *Tarikh Surat Khabar [History of Newspapers]*, (Bukit Mertajam, 1940), pp. 90–204.

⁶⁵ Not at all described, if we except a few scattered references in contemporary literature.

⁶⁶ The term "*Jawi Peranakan*," or "local-born Muslim," was in practice used to signify only the offspring of South Indian Muslims and Malay women, and their descendants. Those Indian Muslims who did not marry Malay women remained a separate community, unassimilated to the Malays, as is the case today. The term *Jawi Peranakan* later went out of use, to be replaced by *Jawi Pekan*, or "town Muslim," especially in Penang, where the bulk of the community lives.

order to open a printing office and publish a weekly newspaper in Malay, under that name, which would provide the latest foreign and local news, foster vernacular education, and help to give some regularity to the changing Malay language.⁶⁷ During the next thirty years, no fewer than sixteen Malay-language journals were established, seven in Singapore, five in Penang, and four in Perak.⁶⁸ With few exceptions, they were edited and printed, first in manuscript lithograph and later in moveable type, by members of the *Jawi Peranakan* community,⁶⁹ writing as Malays and identifying themselves with Malay interests. Most of the journals were weeklies, and though, apart from *Jawi Peranakan* itself, which was published without interruption for the remarkable period of nearly twenty years, few had a very long or secure existence, they represent the first attempts of a section of the Malayo-Muslim community to report and comment on the circumstances of their lives in a manner not wholly dictated by either the traditional past or the alien-dominated present, though inevitably partaking of both. The journals were modelled in the first instance on the English-language press in the Straits Settlements (upon which, indeed, most of them relied for much of their material), but came increasingly to use the Egyptian and Arabic press as sources of news and articles of general interest and as determinants of journalistic style. Towards Government they were seldom critical and never hostile, and their frequently self-deprecatory tone indicates a fairly general acceptance, at least for public consumption, of an estimate of the Asian, and particularly the Malayo-Muslim, peoples based on categories and standards derived from the West.⁷⁰ For all that, there was much that was positive and stimulating in their emphasis on the potentialities of education and an acquaintance with the wider world as a means of individual and communal self-improvement, and on the importance of their own role in this process. When, in 1906, *Al-Imam* listed twenty-six different virtues of newspapers, among them that they were “the light of the mind, the talisman of the thoughts, the mirror of events, the servant of the wise, the prompter of the forgetful, a guide to those who stray, a prop to the weak, the guardian of the community, and the forum for all discussion,”⁷¹ it was doing no more than summarise, if somewhat grandiloquently, the ideals which its predecessors from *Jawi Peranakan* to *Khizanah al-Ilmu* (“Treasury of Knowledge”) had set before themselves for the past three decades. *Taman Pengetahuan*, the “Garden of Knowledge,” in a “sample issue” published in 1900, promised to cultivate for the benefit of its readers “flower beds full of per-

⁶⁷ E. W. Birch, “The Vernacular Press in the Straits,” *JSBRAS*, IV, (1879), 51–52. This is the only extant contemporary record of the origins of the first Malay newspaper. Present holdings of *Jawi Peranakan* date only from 1887.

⁶⁸ Only two Penang papers (*Jawi Standard* and *Tanjong Penegeri*) were started before 1900, as compared to six in Singapore (*Jawi Peranakan*, *Nujumu’l-Fajar*, *Shamsu’l-Kamar*, *Se’kola Melayu*, *Bintang Timor*, and *Warta Malaya*), and two in Perak (*Sri Perak* and *Jajahan Melayu*).

⁶⁹ The most notable exception was the Singapore *Bintang Timor* which, sponsored by the Straits Chinese Association and edited by Song Ong Siang, ran for twelve months in 1894–95. *Bintang Timor* has the added distinction of being the first Malay-language daily (for the first nine months of its life). Other periodicals were weekly, with one fortnightly and two monthlies.

⁷⁰ It has been suggested to me by Malays that the absence of any marked criticism of Government, or of colonial rule in general, was due to fear of reprisals. I doubt if this was the case to any significant extent. It is true that many of the *Jawi Peranakan* held minor official posts of one kind or another, but in a much more profound sense than simple fear of losing their jobs or incurring official displeasure, they were impressed by the material and educational superiority of the West with which they were familiar, and by a corresponding sense of their own shortcomings.

⁷¹ *Al-Imam*, I, 5, (November 1906).

fumed, fragrant blooms such as may entice the bee to sip,"⁷² and both the sentiment and the rhetoric are entirely characteristic of the time.

At least three-quarters of the Malaysian population of Singapore, if not more, were unable to read or write their own language.⁷³ The literacy figures for Penang and Malacca were probably similar, and those for the Native States certainly much lower. It follows that the early vernacular newspapers in no sense constituted a popular press. Their readers were drawn, in the main, from the small élite-group of literate *Jawi Peranakan*, Arabs, and Malays in the towns, with in addition some of the Malay-speaking Straits Chinese. There was, however, one important exception to this. In the almost complete absence of suitable readers or textbooks, newspapers were widely used as a teaching medium in the Malay vernacular schools.⁷⁴ One, *Seġola Melayu* [sic] ("The Malay School"), was started expressly for this purpose, and both government and non-government schools subscribed to others. Referring to this practice, R. J. Wilkinson, at the time Inspector of Schools and one of the more sensitive and intelligent of contemporary observers, said that the vernacular press, together with education in general, was likely to prove decisive in the intellectual and material improvement of the Malay people. It must certainly be supposed that exposure to newspapers at school both helped to create a wider reading public for them later, and, more specifically, served to introduce several generations of vernacular school pupils to the wider issues affecting Malay life.

The extent to which the press reflected the totality of the Malaysian scene was, however, limited.⁷⁵ The mercantile interests of the majority of its readership ensured the regular publication of commercial information about shipping movements, commodity prices, and currency exchange rates, but local news of a general kind, particularly that relating to public life, was rather haphazardly dealt with and only rarely accorded analytical comment.⁷⁶ With few exceptions, political matters were entirely avoided, and until the advent of *Al-Imam* in 1906 there was a marked absence of serious discussion of religious and related social and economic questions. Where the late-nineteenth-century press did most, perhaps, to foster a knowledge of the Malaysian world and a sense of community was in the often lengthy and detailed reports from other places, and in its flourishing correspondence columns. *Jawi Peranakan*, the paper best equipped in this respect, listed representatives (*wakġil*) in most parts of the Peninsular States, in Medan, Deli, Padang, and Singkel in Sumatra, and in Riau and Sarawak,⁷⁷ and published long reports descriptive of conditions and events in most of these areas.⁷⁸ Some of the reports constitute the only extant indigenous accounts of life in the places they describe and may still be read with interest by his-

⁷² Quoted in Mohd. b. Dato' Muda, *Tariġh Surat Khabar*, p. 123.

⁷³ A. C. Hill, Inspector of Schools in the Straits Settlements, in a prize-giving address delivered at Kampong Glam Malay School, Singapore, reported in *Jawi Peranakan*, 30 July 1894.

⁷⁴ Birch, *op. cit.*, p. 52, said in 1880 that *Jawi Peranakan* "appears to fulfill the useful function of a 'highest reader' in all the vernacular schools." There are numerous evidences of this in the newspapers themselves. See, e.g., *Seġola Melayu*, 1 August 1888, and *Bintang Timor*, 26 November 1894.

⁷⁵ The remarks which follow refer mainly to *Jawi Peranakan*, which in addition to being the best organised and longest-lived Malay newspaper of the period, is also one of the few of which there are extant holdings.

⁷⁶ *Bintang Timor* (20 October 1894) said scathingly of its contemporary *Tanjong Penegeri* (of which no copies are known to exist today), that it might as well be published in Java as in Penang, for all the local news it contained.

⁷⁷ Also in Paris.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., in 1887, reports in *Jawi Peranakan* from Sandakan and Patani (30 January and 7 Febru-

torians today.⁷⁹ At the time, they must have assisted in the development of a general consciousness of the unity as well as the diversity of the contemporary Malaysian world.

The correspondence columns were among the most popular features of the newspapers, so popular in fact that editors pressed for space often had to make special pleas for brevity. The repository of a wide range of letters, usually written in traditional epistolary style, they represented a means of public expression and exchange of opinion not previously available and of considerable value in discussing issues of the day. It is noteworthy, for example, that when in 1894 the Government proposed to discontinue adult education evening classes and close many Malay schools in the Straits Settlements as a measure of financial retrenchment, the matter was discussed at some length both editorially and in the correspondence columns.⁸⁰ Many letters were published on less controversial topics which were nevertheless of much current interest to the Malays, from the pronunciation of Arabic words and correct Malay spelling to the need for the destruction of predatory wild pigs in Perak and Selangor, and reference has already been made to the dispute over the terminology to be applied to the newly formed study and recreation clubs.⁸¹ In quite another connection, the press, and in particular letters to the editor, formed a useful adjunct to one of the principal activities of the clubs by suggesting topics for formal debate. In 1894, for instance, a Malay reader wrote to *Bintang Timor* expressing concern that young girls should be employed to sell sweetmeats on the city streets late at night, and proposing that some of the clubs debate the propriety of this.⁸² In the same year, newspaper correspondence led to a full-scale debate in the *Persekutuan Dar-ul-Adab* on whether or not it would be proper for the parents of bride and groom to send written wedding invitations to both male and female guests, a practice completely at variance with Malay custom and social usage. The question created wide interest, and a summary of the debate, which was well attended and recorded by three shorthand reporters, was later published in the press.⁸³

ary), Selangor (4 and 18 April), Kelantan, (22 August), Pahang (1 and 15 August), Kedah (26 September), and Perak (14 November).

⁷⁹ Of particular interest in 1887 were the reports (cited above, n.78) from Patani, describing the system of government and the condition of the inhabitants; from Kelantan, describing the famine of that year; and from Kedah, describing the immigration into that State consequent upon the East Coast famine.

⁸⁰ *Jawi Peranakan*, 10 October and 30 December; *Bintang Timor*, 26 July, 25 October, 26 October, 30 October, 17 November, and 26 November.

⁸¹ See above, p. 86. In its editorial for 8 August, 1894, *Bintang Timor* says that this year the Malays in Singapore "have delighted in starting clubs like the Europeans and Chinese." The first study and recreation club ("*tempat pelajaran dan bersukaz*") appears to have been the *Persekutuan Dar-ul-Adab*, formed in the early 1890's (*Bintang Timor*, 10 August 1894, gives the membership of the Committee for that year). At about the same time, an association called *Harbab Ashkedan* (or *Hasbab Ashkedan*) came into being. A third club, the *Persekutuan Dar-ul-Taadzim* was formed in August 1894 (*Jawi Peranakan*, 13 August 1894), and a fourth, the *Persekutuan Jawa Almasakin*, in October 1901 (Sayyid Hussin Ali, "Pertumbuhan Bahasa dan Sastera Melayu Di Singapura Selepas Perang Dunia II" ["The Growth of Malay Language and Literature after the Second World War"], *Bahasa*, II, 2, (Singapore, March 1960), p. 8, n.5). Penang at this time had the Muslim Recreation Club, and at least one other association, with the name *Jamshid*. It is of interest to note that the first Malay industrial combination was organised in 1894, the *Club Kapitan dan Injiniriz Melayu* (Malay Captains' and Engineers' Club), by ships' crews. A report in *Jawi Peranakan* (10 October 1894) says that a meeting had been held to discuss the formation of such a club, "because everyone else is doing it" and to make it easier for members to confer about raising their wages ("*supaya senang ia bermeshuarat darihal menaikki gaji mereka-itu kelak*").

⁸² *Bintang Timor*, 21 August 1894.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21 August; 1 September; and 5 October, 1894.

But if, under the leadership of the Arab community and the *Jawi Peranakan*, the Malays had started out on the road to social change and economic adjustment, there was still most of the way to go. In October 1894, the Straits Chinese *Bintang Timor* published, over the pseudonym "Senex," a series of eleven articles entitled "*Mengapa Melayu Layu?*," or "Why are the Malays Withering Away?"⁸⁴ Written ostensibly in a spirit of friendly criticism, "for the good of the Malays," the articles offered a scathing analysis of the alleged reasons for Malay economic and educational backwardness: their slavish adherence to outmoded custom, the dissoluteness of their traditional leaders (interested only in opium, women, and gambling), their lack of industry and ambition, their hostility towards anyone who showed exceptional talents, and their inability to practise mutual self-help. As was no doubt expected, the articles were very ill received by *Bintang Timor's* contemporary and rival *Jawi Peranakan*, which, however, found little to say in reply except to hurl abuse at the Straits Chinese.⁸⁵ The whole affair degenerated on both sides to a rather unedifying exchange of sneers and taunts before finally fizzling out.

But however objectionable the tone of the articles, and however little understanding they showed of the problems facing traditional peasant societies confronted with the vigour and aggressiveness of the West, they came for many Malays uncomfortably near the truth. It could hardly be denied that in the Colony the Malaysians, with few exceptions, formed an economically depressed and educationally inferior class, and that there appeared to be no prospect of rapid improvement. Urban Singapore and Penang, with their thriving and highly competitive Chinese majorities, threw this situation into particularly sharp relief. The attempt to understand it and to remedy it was to become the principal preoccupation of many thinking Malays for decades ahead.

⁸⁴ *Bintang Timor*, Nos. 81–5, 87, 89–92, 5–17 October 1894.

⁸⁵ See, especially, editorial in *Jawi Peranakan*, 15 October 1894.