



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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ISSN: 2222-6990

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i7/4524>

DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i7/4524

Received: 19 May 2018, **Revised:** 22 June 2018, **Accepted:** 26 June 2018

Published Online: 17 July 2018

In-Text Citation: (Omar, Yusoff, Ismail, & Mohamad, 2018)

To Cite this Article: Omar, N., Yusoff, Z. @ M. Y. bin M., Ismail, F. Z., & Mohamad, M. Z. (2018). The Biography of Haji Mat Lintar: An Al-Quran Scholar from Terengganu. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(7), 979–985.

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Vol. 8, No. 7, July 2018, Pg. 979 - 985

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The Biography of Haji Mat Lintar: An Al-Quran Scholar from Terengganu

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Abstract

Haji Mat Lintar was a scholar who had immensely contributed to the field of al-Quran studies in Terengganu. He also became an icon for the ulama in Terengganu by teaming up with the Sultan and propagating knowledge related to reciting the al-Quran. However, studies concerning Haji Mat Lintar have been lacking and rarely cited in academic literature. Therefore, this article intended to focus on Haji Mat Lintar by examining his background and contributions to the field of al-Quran recitation. This study was qualitative in nature and applied the interview and document reference methods. The findings showed that Haji Mat Lintar played a significant role in expanding al-Quran studies in Terengganu, especially in the field of tarannum. This study also found that Haji Mat Lintar was an outstanding al-Quran scholar and should be a source of inspiration to the younger generation.

Keywords: Haji Mat Lintar, al-Quran scholar, al-Quran studies, Terengganu

Introduction

Al-Quran is the ultimate source of reference for Muslims. All fields of knowledge in Islamic studies are not exempt from the al-Quran, including the field of reciting the al-Quran (Khan, 2002; Muhamadul, 2011; Muhammad, 2013). The long history of Islam has given us scholars in this field right from the beginning of Islam until today. Besides scholars of the al-Quran from the Arab world, the Malay world, especially Malaysia, has also created scholars of the al-Quran that are of calibre, such as Hj. Mat Lintar, a well-respected scholar of the al-Quran from Terengganu.

Family

In Terengganu, if someone says that he or she is a student of Haji Mat Lintar, they would be considered to be outstanding and well-respected by the people of Terengganu. Haji Mat Lintar was outstanding because of his skills in reciting the al-Quran from various aspects related to tajwid and tarannum.

Haji Mat Lintar was born on 21 March 1900 (A. Azhar, 2014). His actual name was Haji Mohamad bin Haji Awang Kechik. According to an interview with his daughter, Puan Hajjah Hasnah, regarding the origins of Haji Mat Lintar, she mentioned that he came from Kg. Kemomin in Pengkalan Chepa, Kelantan (Hasnah, March 1, 2015). He was a Hafiz, which refers to someone who has memorised all the 30 juzuk of the al-Quran. Besides the hafazan (memorising), he had immense knowledge about tajwid too.

It is said that Haji Mat Lintar had more than 18 wives, with some of them being separated while some having demised. Some of the wives are living in Kelantan and Terengganu. Hence, there is a strong possibility that Haji Mat Lintar has left a legacy of offspring living all over Terengganu, Kelantan and some even in Kuala Lumpur. One of his wives is Hajjah Aminah Ali and the eldest child by Haji Mat Lintar, called Ramlah, is the mother of Ustaz M. Lokman, who happened to be one of the main informants in this study. The husband of Hajjah Ramlah, Ustaz Haji Awang Ismail, was the former Imam of Masjid Putih or Masjid Sultan Zainal Abidin in Kuala Terengganu. Ustaz Haji Awang Ismail was also a former student of Haji Mat Lintar. He was frequently invited to be a judge during the Terengganu state level Tilawah al-Quran. Ustaz Haji Awang Ismail passed away in 2004 (Lokman, February 23, 2015). The third child of Haji Mat Lintar, Hajjah Hasnah, lives in the district of Dungun. She was born after Haji Mat Lintar returned from Mecca and she later married Ustaz Omar Daud, a religious teacher who taught in Sultan Zainal Abidin Secondary Religious School. Whereas, Haji Mat Lintar's youngest child was Abdul Hadi (Lokman, February 23, 2015).

During the last days of his life, Haji Mat Lintar had frequently visited Mecca al-Mukarramah. Hajjah Rogayah, a Terengganu Qariah, had visited him in Mecca and he still remembered Hajjah Rogayah although at that time he was feeble and of poor eyesight. Haji Mat Lintar died in 1963 in Kg. Ladang and was buried at the Kg. Ladang Tok Pelam cemetery in Kuala Terengganu (Lokman, February 23, 2015).

Academic Background

Haji Mat Lintar obtained his education in Mecca and Medina. While in Mecca, one fellow student who studied together with Haji Mat Lintar was Syeikh Mahmud Khalil (H. M. Yasin, September 20, 2015). According to the degree certificate read by Hajjah Rogayah in Jawi, one the teachers who taught Haji Mat Lintar was Syeikh Husain Ibrahim al-Suyuti. The complete genealogy of the teacher is as follows:

"...Syeikh Husain bin Ibrahim al-Suyuti al-syahir bi al-Sya'ir al-Muqri al-Muqri was from Madinah, and his teacher was Sheikh Husain bin Muhammad Bayoumi, whose teacher was Sheikh Muhammad Sabiq Bisakandari, whose teacher was al-Sheikh al-Halil al-Matubi whose teacher was al-Sheikh 'Ali al-Abyari bi al-Jami' al-Azhari, whose teacher was al-Sheikh 'Ali al-Halawi bi Makkah al-Mukarramah whose teacher was al-Sheikh Ahmad Abu Ma'munah, whose teacher was Sidi Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Jazari, whose teacher was Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman al-Qastantani, whose teacher was Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman al-Azmiri, whose teacher was Sultan al-Zahi, whose teachers were Sayyid Ahmad al-Masiri and Sayyid Abi Jaafar al-syahir bi Auliya' Afandi"

Besides the teachers mentioned above, one of Haji Mat Lintar's teacher who was of Arab descent was Syeikh Ibrahim al-Sair (Rogayah, January 8, 2015). Haji Mat Lintar had studied together with Haji Ahmad Som Pergau while in Mecca. He also studied Qiraat from several famous ulama while in Mecca. The culture of the people in Mecca at that time was to read the al-Quran according to the Hijazi style, which was a form of reading based on a 'dry or dessert' like background theme. In the beginning, Haji Mat Lintar was more influenced by this form of reciting.

Nevertheless, after World War 2 in the 1940s, Haji Mat Lintar was more inclined to the Misri (Egypt) style of tarannum when reciting the al-Quran. According to the views of Datuk Paduka Haji Nik Jaafar, the tarannum style of the Egyptians was different to that of the Hijazi as it was politer and 'softer' and known as *qira'ah layyinah*. Hence, the change in tarannum from the Hijazi style to the Misri style followed the run of time and the acceptance of the qurra' as well as its similarity or resemblance to the characteristics found in the decrees of the al-Quran and hadith. According to Datuk Paduka Haji Nik Jaafar, the two methods of reciting the al-Quran correctly are the *tahsin al-sawt* and *qira'ah layyinah* (Jaafar, March 22, 2015).

Haji Mat Lintar was appointed by the government as the imam of Masjid Abidin from 26 October 1927 to 1 November 1953. Masjid Abidin was a historical mosque and its construction began during the reign of Sultan Zainal Abidin II. Then, it was re-constructed using stone during the reign of Sultan Umar (Salleh, 1992).

Haji Mat Lintar had also taught the al-Quran at Sekolah Menengah Agama Arab Sultan Zainal Abidin Ladang in Kuala Terengganu. Students who had the potential in the field of tarannum were invited by Haji Mat Lintar to learn tarannum with Haji Ahmad Mat Som Pergau, who was living in Kampung Kemumin, Pengkalan Chepa in Kelantan. One of the students who had the potential was Ustaz Haji Muda Ismail (Muda, March 2, 2015). Haji Muda Ismail stated that:

"While studying in secondary school, I got to know Ustaz Haji Mat Lintar because he was teaching al-Quran and Tajwid in class. When seeing my skills in reciting the al-Quran and having the potential to read the al-Quran with a melody, Haji Mat Lintar invited me to Kelantan to learn the field of tarannum al-Quran with some like-minded friends of Haji Mat Lintar, such as Haji Mat Som Pergau and Haji Yusof Kedondong. From there, I became familiar with the fundamentals of tarannum and travelled to and from Terengganu and Kelantan every month from 1952 to 1957."

Among the well-known students of Haji Mat Lintar were Dato' Hajjah Rogayah Sulong, and Haji Megat Othman Megat Chik as well as Qari Mohamad Nor Mohamad, who was the cousin of Dato' Hajjah Rogayah Sulong (Rogayah, March 5, 2015). Besides that, some of his other students were Hajjah Wook Hassan (Wook, March 6, 2015) and Haji Salleh Awang (Rashid, March 12, 2015).

A like-minded friend of Haji Mat Lintar was Haji Yusof Kedondong. He was the Royal Qari of Kelantan since he was 8 years old (Jaafar, Mac 22, 2015). According to Datuk Paduka Haji Nik Jaafar, Haji Yusof Kedondong and Haji Mat Lintar had learned tarannum from Haji Nik Wan Tengku Mahmud when they were in Kelantan. Haji Yusof Kedondong was the grandfather of Datuk Paduka Haji Nik Jaafar, from his mother's side. When altercations between the rulers in Kelantan erupted, Haji Nik

Wan fled to Pattani. While in Pattani, Haji Nik Wan learned religious knowledge, including tarannum, from the ulama in Pattani, who had obtained their religious knowledge in Mecca.

After returning to Malaysia in the 1800s, Haji Nik Wan taught the al-Quran and tarannum to the people there. Haji Nik Wan taught in Kampung Kerasak, which was located in the District of Bunut in Pasir Mas, Kelantan. Among some of his students were Haji Mat Lintar and Haji Yusuf Kedondong.

Haji Yusuf Kedondong also learned tarannum from Syeikh Musa, an Arab who lived in Kg. Apa-apa, Pasir Mas, Kelantan. The grave of Sheikh Musa is known as Sheikh Tok Panjang's grave. Sheikh Musa had a grandchild named Haji Abdul Majid, who had extensive command of tarannum and had become an international champion. Haji Yusuf Kedondong had contributed immensely to the community around him by teaching tarannum, with a combination of Hijazi and Misri styles.

Contributions

Haji Mat Lintar had a commanding and crisp thunderous voice that could be heard by the last *saf* (line of prayers) at the back row when he was the imam during prayers at the Masjid Abidin. Haji Mat Lintar also became the Royal Imam for Sultan Ismail during Friday prayers. According to Haji Mat Lintar's daughter, Hajjah Hasnah, *"each Friday the palace authorities would come and fetch Haji Mat Lintar with the palace vehicle so that he could become the imam at whichever mosque Sultan Ismail performed his Friday prayers"* (Hasnah, March 1, 2015). He was also the palace qari, just as Haji Yusof Kedondong (Ali, 1997).

It could be said that Haji Mat Lintar was just as good as Haji Yusof Kedondong in Kelantan. Thus, if Kelantan was famous with Yusof Kedondong, then Terengganu was famous with Haji Mat Lintar among the people there. Haji Mat Lintar was friends with Haji Yusof Kedondong, Haji Mat Sering, Haji Ahmad Mat Som Pergau and Hajjah Che Yam Pasir Mas (who was the mother of Hajjah Faridah Mat Saman and Yusof Slow Machang). During each month of Ramadhan, the expert "music makers" mentioned above, would come to Haji Mat Lintar's house in Kg. Tanjung Kapur because they were invited by Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah, who was the grandfather of Sultan Mizan, to recite the holy verses of the al-Quran at the Terengganu Palace (Hasnah, March 1, 2015).

One of the religious teachers who was active in propagating the teachings of the al-Quran, tajwid, fasahah and tarannum in Terengganu during the 1930s was Haji Mat Lintar. Haji Mat Lintar also helped form the Terengganu Qurra' Association or *Persatuan Qurra' Terengganu* (M. Lokman, February 23, 2015). Its members consisted of students who had finished reciting the al-Quran under his tutelage.

The Terengganu Qurra' Association also played an important role in culturizing the al-Quran and tarannum among the people in the state of Terengganu. Among the activities carried out by the Terengganu Qurra' Association was teaching the al-Quran and tajwid to the masses and the association was still active when this study was being carried out. The members comprised approximately 1000 individuals who had studied the al-Quran and tajwid under the tutelage of Haji Mat Lintar or his former students. Hence, it could be said that learning the al-Quran and tajwid in a continuous form and giving certifications in a continuous form since the time of Haji Mat Lintar until the time of Ustaz Haji Awang Ismail (Lokman, February 23, 2015).

Today, the Terengganu Qurra' Association is located at the Surau Haji Mat Lintar in Kg. Tanjung Kapur, Ladang, beside the house of Hj. Mat Lintar (Muda, 2 March 2015). The President of the Terengganu Qurra' Association (at the time when this study was carried out) was Cikgu Rahim, a former Federal Inspectorate living in Kuala Terengganu. Whereas, the association's secretary was Haji Ku Tuan Razak, who was living in Kg. Losong and the former principle of Sekolah Sheikh Abdul Malek in Kuala Terengganu (Lokman, March 3, 2015).

Among the leading qari who became members of the Terengganu Qurra' Association were Haji Muda@Jusoh Ismail (March 2, 2015), Haji Ismail Embong (August 20, 2015), Haji Yusop bin Embong in the 1980s (August 17, 2015), Haji Mohamad Yasin Embong, Ayah Long Awang Nobat Sungai Derhaka (Yasin, September 20, 2015) and Hajjah Rogayah Sulong.

Haji Muda@Jusoh Ismail was the uncle of Ustaz M. Lokman and lived in Kg. Bukit Payung in the district of Marang, Terengganu. He was once the Tilawah al-Quran champion at the Terengganu state level in 1961 and 1967 (Lokman, February 23, 2015). Due to the diligent tutelage of Haji Mat Lintar, Haji Muda emerged as an expert in tarannum. Commenting on his involvement in the field of tarannum, Haji Muda said:

"When I was young, I was actively involved in training the qari and qariah in Terengganu under the sponsorship of the Religious Affairs department of Terengganu. I first became a trainer in 1990 and was then invited to be a facilitator every year after that. I also became a judge during the Tilawah competition from 1987 to 2007. When I became a judge at the national level, I was entrusted with the responsibility of judging the vocal and tarannum sections. To be a vocal judge was difficult and needed careful deliberation on aspects such the eloquent flow of the voice, mahattah and everything associated with the voice"

Surau Hj Awang Abbas in Kg. Tanjung Kapur, Kuala Terengganu is the surau (place of prayer) where Haji Mat Lintar taught the al-Quran and tarannum. During the early days, this surau was called Surau Hj Awang Abbas, in accordance with the name of the property's landlord where the surau was built. Nevertheless, as time went by, the local community came to know the surau as Surau Haji Mat Lintar. This surau had also produced many famous figures in the field of al-Quran and tarannum. Among them was Haji Yasin Embong, a qari who had won the Tilawah al-Quran competition at the Terengganu state level and represented the state at the national level competitions in 1975 and 1977. He also mentioned about the tutelage he received from Haji Mat Lintar when he said, *"among the teachers who taught me tarannum was Haji Mat Lintar from Kg Tanjung Kapur in 1958"*.

Until today, Surau Hj. Mat Lintar is still active in disseminating knowledge as well as teaching the al-Quran and tajwid through former students of Haji Mat Lintar every Wednesday after Asar prayers (Lokman, February 23, 2015). Near the surau is a house, which is actually the house of Haji Mat Lintar and is occupied by the grandchild of Haji Mat Lintar, namely Ustaz M. Lokman bin Awang (Lokman, 2015) or the third generation of Haji Mat Lintar.

Conclusion

Haji Mat Lintar was a well-respected and famous scholar of the al-Quran at one time. He had contributed tremendously to the people of Terengganu by producing many scholars and experts in the al-Quran. Among his biggest contributions was the formation of the Terengganu Qurra' Association (Persatuan Qurra' Negeri Terengganu), which still exists until today and plays the role of enhancing the standard of al-Quran recitals among the society besides producing a generation of al-Quran reciters who possess a high standard in this field.

Acknowledgement

Special thanks go to the Research Management, Innovation and Commercialization Centre (RMIC), Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin for the funding.

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