
THE ROLE OF TOK KU PALOH IN MANAGING AND UNITING THE PAHANG FIGHTERS IN THE PAHANG REBELLION 1891-1895

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ABSTRACT

The revolt of Pahang at the end of 19th century succeeded in featuring two series of struggle between the British colonisers and the Pahang fighters. One of the series shows that there is a role of religion which displays the major role of a Malay Muslim scholar. He is Tok Ku Paloh who can be seen managing and uniting all the fighters while evoking the spirit of Jihad at the second series of the fight. This writing, therefore, will examine the actual role played by this well-known figure. It will use the methods of literature review and content analysis. Through these methods, it was found that Tok Ku Paloh employed the methods of teachings and writings as one of the forms of Jihad in injecting and instilling as well as strengthening the religious belief amongst the Pahang fighters. Once the religious belief had been strengthened and appreciated, he then shouted the slogan of Jihad Sabil at the second series of the struggle. This managed to unite the fighters in fighting against their enemies as well as driving out the British colonisers from continuing to colonise Pahang.

Key words: Tok Ku Paloh, Malaya, Pahang History, British, Jihad.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pahang was faced with the arrival of the British colonisers at the end of 19th century. Various issues seemed to arise which showed the moral waning of the local leaders in Pahang at that time [1]. The main issue which caused them to revolt is the desire for their power to be retained. Besides, allowances (pence) given to these Malay leaders was also one of the issues. However, on several occasions many writings explained that the resistance against the British colonisers was caused by the introduction of new systems to replace the traditional systems which had existed for a long time. The resistance then took the form of an unexpected revolt against the British and had caused a terrible financial crisis [2][3]. The revolt is known in the history as the Pahang Rebellion which took place from 1891 until 1895. The two series of event mentioned earlier have their own stories of joy and sorrow and the struggle in defending our homeland. The first series is on the traditional rule and second, on the religion [4][5].

The second series of the fighters' struggle in fighting against the British is seen as having the religious sentiment. Engku Sayid Paloh or better known as Tok Ku Paloh is portrayed in the writing as someone who initiated Jihad in the cause of Allah to fight against a group of people known as *Kuffar* [6][7]. Tok Ku Paloh is said to have called out all fighters to fight and go against the enemies. Besides that, he was responsible for providing supply of weapons and prayers as well as additional troops of about 200 people to the fighters of Pahang [8][9]. These had roused their spirit to continue their fight to show feelings of hatred towards the colonisers as well as driving them out of Pahang. His contributions and involvement produce fruitful result. Even though the victory was not ever lasting, the spirit of Islam and *Jihad* in the cause of Allah were successfully developed in the state of Pahang. Therefore, this short paperwork will examine the discussions that revolved around Tok Ku Paloh's character as a Muslim scholar and the nation's fighter who succeeded in uniting the Pahang fighters in the memorable event, the Pahang rebellion [10].

2. TOK KU PALOH

Tok Ku Paloh's full name is Saiyid Abdur Rahman bin Saiyid Muhammad bin Saiyid Muhammad bin Sayid Zainal Abidin al-Aidrus. Saiyid Abdur Rahman al-Aidrus had a few nicknames but the most popular one is Tok Ku Paloh. Amongst the titles given to him are Engku Sayid Paloh, Engku Cik, Tuan Cik and Syaikh al-Islam Terengganu. He was born in the same year with Syeikh Wan Muhammad Zain al-Fathani (born in 1233/1817M). He is Haji Wan Ismail al-Fathani's grandfather. Tok Ku Paloh's spirit in fighting for Islam and the Malay race undeniably has its own impact on Sheikh Ahmad al-Fathani [11][12][13]. The issues of benefits of Islam and the Malay race in facing various problems regarding the colonisers can be seen in the context of relationship between Sheikh Ahmad al-Fathani, Tok Ku Paloh and Sultan Zainal Abidin III Terengganu. He was a Muslim scholar and member of the State Meeting Council during the reign of Sultan Zainal Abidin III. His other siblings are Tuan Embung Abu Bakar or better known as Tuan Embung Solok, Tok Ku Tuan Kecik and Tuan Nik (Senik). A few of them held important posts in the state of Terengganu but the prominent one is Tok Ku Paloh [14][15].

Saiyid Abdul Rahman al-Aidrus or Tok Ku Paloh is a descendant of Sayyid. Hence, it is the tradition of that family to pay special attention to the efforts of seeking knowledge from those closest to them. His father, Saiyid Muhammad al-Aidrus or Tok Ku Tuan Besar was a renowned scholar who held high position in religious matters in Terengganu. For that reason, Saiyid Abdul Rahman al-Aidrus had learned various fields of knowledge from his father himself [16][17][18]. Almost all scholars in Terengganu at that time studied with the scholars who came from Patani. Besides studying with his father, Tok Ku Paloh also studied with

Sheikh Wan Abdullah bin Muhammad Amin al-Fathani who was known as Tok Sheikh Duyong. Saiyid Muhammad al-Aidrus or Tok Ku Tuan Besar and Tok Sheikh Duyong were close friend and learned together from Sheikh Abdul Qadir bin Abdur Rahim al-Fathani in Bukit Bayas, Terengganu. They also learned together from Sheikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fathani in Makkah. When he returned from Makkah, Saiyid Abdul Rahman al-Aidrus centralised his activities in Kampung Paloh Terengganu. According to Muhammad Abu Bakar, Kampung Paloh was visited by people from various areas, not only from Kuala Terengganu itself but also from Kelantan, Pahang and Patani. It is reported that one of his students at that time was Sultan Zainal Abidin III. According to another report, Abdul Rahman Limbong and Tok Janggut were among his students who later on became fighters of anti-colonialism [19][20].

Tok Ku Paloh is prominent for the teachings of his Tasawwuf knowledge. His two most popular books are Kitab Hikam Melayu and Ma'arij al-Lahfan which become the reference books in the study of Tasawwuf. The approach and the content of Ma'arij al-Lahfan are really interesting and give a great impact in the fight against the colonisers as well as the fighters of Pahang. Kitab Ma'arij al-Lahfan was composed at the end of Tok Ku Paloh's lifetime, that is why it could not be finished [21][22][23]. The content of this book shows a much deeper and higher level of the Tasawwuf study, compared to the previous books on Tasawwuf composed by his father, which are more general and aimed at common people and distributed widely amongst the public. On the contrary, Tok Ku Paloh's book talks about questions of philosophies and metaphysics which were difficult to be comprehended by his students unless with guidance from him. In addition, his students required basic preparation in the field of Tasawwuf prior to the acceptance of its content [24][25].

Tok Ku Paloh is a man of great character compared to other Muslim scholars before him. The arrival of the British colonisers finally led to the intervention of the British in Terengganu after the Treaty of Terengganu in 1919 was sealed [26][27]. It showed the religious element as the earliest element which triggered dissatisfaction amongst the people of Terengganu especially amongst those scholars who always recited Qur'anic verses which were against Yahudi and Nasrani people and forbid Muslims from appointing them as their leaders. It is evident as shown in al-Quran, Chapter al-Ma'idah: Verse 54 (5:54) and Chapter al-Nisa': Verse 143 (4:143). Moreover, as a prominent figure in Terengganu, he stressed on the opposition against the non-Muslims to become the leader as it is one of the Articles in the Terengganu State Legal Text. It is as follows (Article 14 Prohibition upon the Ruler): 'It is not permitted and unlawful for the Ruler to come into agreement or contrive to forgo or surrender the State and the government or any part thereof to any foreign government or any European powers or others.' In addition, Hugh Clifford; one of the British officers who was assigned to go in pursuit of the fighters from Pahang to Terengganu had described Tok Ku Paloh or mentioned by him as Ungku Saiyid Paloh as: "...a man who enjoys a great reputation for sanctity and for the possession of supernatural attributes throughout the length and breadth of the East West of the peninsula... makes one's offering to be made to him of their desires are accomplished and health Islam restored and trouble averted." Clifford stated further in his report about Ungku Saiyid Paloh as: "the saint lives secluded in the retirement of a shady steeped village... preaches the Friday congregational prayers to throngs of devotees." [28][29][30].

3. TOK KU PALOH AND THE UNIFICATION OF THE PAHANG FIGHTERS

The key issue in this paper is the type of role played by the Muslim scholars at the end of 19th century, particularly Tok Ku Paloh, in injecting the spirit of Jihad amongst the fighters of

Pahang while successfully uniting them. The writers read the discussion of the late Ustaz Wan Mohd Saghir Abdullah in his writing entitled 'Kehebatan Ulama Melayu Ahli Sunah wa al-Jemaah' that the Muslim scholars associated the term Jihad with the Sabil war, war in the cause of Allah, and the war of Muslims against the Kuffar. In his opinion, Jihad seems to happen in a war only [31][32] [33]. The writers believe that his opinion is based on the writing and Fatwa on Jihad announced by Sheikh Daud al-Fatani and Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Palembangi who were directly involved in a war against the Siamese. In the writers' point of view, Jihad can be divided into several categories; in the form of teachings, in the form of writings, and in the form of physical involvement either directly or indirectly in a war. These forms of Jihad were carried out at its level best by specific Muslim scholars particularly in Pahang as the research topic. In addition, the approach taken by Muslim scholars in order to get close to the society is through the use of teachings and writing, which the writers believe is also a form of Jihad. This takes place before the use of Jihad either physically or directly in a war. The writers' opinion is similar to an article written by the late Ustaz Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah entitled 'Ulama Nusantara: Peranan Ulama Dalam Silat' which stated that: "The role of a scholar in Silat can only be reflected in the thinking of Sheikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fathani and Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Palembangi in Jihad in the cause of Allah. These two prominent scholars are believed to use the 'weapon' of writings in teaching the Malay race and sword in fighting for the cause of Allah in order to safeguard the sanctity of Islam and the locals from the colonisers..." [34][35].

With regard to the struggle in Pahang, the writers take into account the view of Shafie Abu Bakar in his article entitled 'Peranan Ulama dan Kesannya Terhadap Sikap Anti Penjajahan' with reference to the teachings of Tasawwuf by Sayid Abdul Rahman bin Muhammad (Tok Ku Paloh) which was based on his writing Ma'arij al-Lahfan. This article can be found in a book entitled 'Masyarakat Melayu Abad ke-19' which is published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. In his article, he wrote about the fight against the colonisation in Terengganu. One of Shafie's interesting points which attracts the writers' attention is his opinion that one of the features which is essential in the fight against the colonisation is the Islamic factor. This factor arouses the feelings of anti-colonisation against the infidels. He also stated that the rise of a figure or a hero in the context of realisation or fight against the infidels is not the rise of an individual only but also the rise of the whole society that shows him as the head of the actions or spokesperson of his society [36][37][38]. With reference to this matter, he wrote about the French philosopher named Montesquieu (1689-1755) who said once that: "Greater men and important event are the signs and result of greater and lengthier processes." Similarly, Hegel (1770-1831) stated that: "Great men do not give birth to history but act as midwives..." [39][40].

Shafie Abu Bakar subsequently wrote about the struggle in Pahang which saw the resistance took place due to the process of religious orientation. This has been going on too long. It can be said that in reality the anti-colonisation attitude happens due to a clash of contrast between the values of civilisation and cultures founded by Islam and the systems of value and method brought about by the British colonisers. These systems, which originate from a party considered as enemies, contradict what were being followed and practised. Shafie Abu Bakar also wrote about the role played by the scholars in instilling the spirit of Islam and spreading it through the informal and formal Islamic educational institutions. The increased awareness of Islam in Terengganu has reached a relatively high level though not on par with the level achieved by Aceh [41][42]. Nonetheless, numerous Islamic Malay literary works were produced by local Islamic scholars successively throughout its history of Islam. The civilisation achieved was in line with the progress made by other states in the traditional period. The proofs can be found in the art and handcrafts made by its people, for examples, in

the construction of large boats, handwoven of Songket, and production of copper utensils. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Islamic knowledge, which was sown since the acceptance of Islam, was also expanding and shaping the spirit of Islam. This is a strong fortress to defend the value and dignity of the society from invasion [43].

According to Shafie Abu Bakar, the rebellion in Terengganu has involved Muslim scholars who worked earnestly to instil the spirit of anti-infidelity. Abdul Rahman has spread the ideas of anti-colonialism, as shown in his writings, which criticised the hypocrites. He considered them as more dangerous than the infidels and in his opinion both of them are the enemies of Allah and Muslims. According to him, this situation has shown the role of Islam in triggering the revolt against the European colonisers. It is a general phenomenon in the history of local resistance in the Muslim countries in South East Asia. Similar event occurred in Aceh when its people fought against the Dutch colonisers. The composition of Muslim scholars such as Kitab Nasihat al-Mu'minin which was written by Sheikh Abdul Samad Palembangi became their guidance in the opposition against colonialism. Some literature works roused the spirit of resistance such as Syair Perang Sabil (1881) which was written by Tengku Muhammad Haji Pantekulu in response to a request from an Aceh warrior named Tengku Cit Ditiro [44][45].

The writings of the late Wan Saghir Abdullah and Shafie Abu Bakar have sparked the authors' point of views to investigate the development in Pahang from the religious and scholarly perspectives, prior to the struggle against the British. To answer the question, the authors noticed that Pahang also had religious development and outstanding Muslim scholars before the occurrence of resistance to the British colonisers in the late 19th century. Before the call of Jihad was propagated by Tok Ku Paloh on the second series of the fighters' struggle, they had already possessed a pretty good knowledge of the religion which formed a strong spirit of Islam and their identity as the people of Pahang. The roles were played by the scholars as good as possible before and during the rebellion against the British colonisers. These arguments reinforce the authors' opinion to divide the role of scholars in Jihad into three types; scholars in Jihad through teaching, scholars of Jihad through writing, and scholars in Jihad either physically or directly in a war [46][47].

Tok Ku Paloh is an eminent scholar who was directly involved in the battle field. Although his name was listed out in the two types of Jihad, which is Jihad through teaching and Jihad through writing, it does not mean that he was not involved directly in the battle field. This shows that there is overlapping of roles and involvement at one time in Jihad and the struggle in Pahang. His prowess at these three roles of teaching, writing and the involvement in the battlefield has successfully united the Pahang fighters in the Pahang Rebellion, especially in the second series of the struggle. His reputation as a prominent scholar and good writer cannot be disputed. His book Ma'arij al-Lahfan had absolutely inspired not only the people of Terengganu but also the Pahang fighters and caused them to have high spirit of anti-colonialism. No wonder when facing with the defeat at the hands of the British colonisers on the first series, Dato' Bahaman immediately contacted Tok Ku Paloh to ask for help and protection. It seems like they had known each other for quite sometimes as Dato' Bahaman knew where his team and he should be heading if they were defeated [48].

Tok Bahaman and his followers' requests were welcomed by Tok Ku Paloh. He immediately offered protection before the second battle took place. Even after Dato Bahaman's team was said to be defeated and they were chased by the British army, he had unequivocally provided protection to the Pahang fighters. This close relationship seemed like it would prolong and it was full of love. It might be on the basis of the struggle against the anti-colonialism, Muslim brotherhood, and love. Indeed, Tok Ku Paloh was a scholar who was not afraid of the risk faced in the struggle to defend Islam and the Malay race. He

protected the Muslim fighters and the Malays who were the enemies of the British colonisers at that time. The spirit of Jihad inside him was appealing and refreshing as stated by Muhammad Abu Bakar in his book Ulama Terengganu (The Scholars of Terengganu). He wrote "...in the Pahang War, the opponents of British led by Datuk Bahaman, Tok Gajah and Mat Kilau almost surrendered after being pressured by the government. In Mei 1894, they contacted Tok Ku Paloh and gain sympathy from him. This did not only give impetus but they were also given protection in Paloh and were taught knowledge to fight their enemies in Pahang." Hugh Clifford, in his observation, said that Tok Ku Paloh had called upon the warriors to launch a holy war. Due to the new spirit obtained from Tok Ku Paloh and an increase in strength, the team of warriors became larger in number and was more organised [49].

The full support obtained from Tok Ku Paloh gave hope to Mat Kilau and Dato' Bahaman to launch another attack on Pahang. This movement had attracted 200 followers who were ready to fight with Bahaman and Mat Kilau. They came from Hulu Terengganu, Besut and the district of Lebir in Kelantan. Tok Ku Paloh had launched Jihad (Sabil War) against the infidels and it can be seen that religious influence had successfully united the locals against the British. The main goal of the rebellion was to eliminate foreign rule and Islam was the general link to convince those who were involved in the resistance movement. The rebels realised that the strength of Islam would make possible for their goals to be achieved. They were also given Pelias (a charm to make one invulnerable) and Parang (a long and heavy knife) with the Quranic verses engraved on it by Tok Ku Paloh. Consequently, the second series of the rebellion started under the banner of Islam. It then led the Bahaman's team to advance and they managed to win the battle in Jeram Ampai. Tok Ku Paloh's role in generating the spirit of Islam was very crucial and acted as a catharsis for the Bahaman team's defeat in the previous first series of the rebellion [50].

The other external factor which is related to the religious factor brought about by Tok Ku Paloh previously is the call against the infidels, said to be influenced by the idea of Pan-Islamism. This idea was spreading rapidly in other parts of the Islamic World and the effect was felt in Malaya, led by Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. It acted as a trigger and played an important role in raising awareness of the universality of Islam in facing the Western aggression. Based on the above statement, the writers see Tok Ku Paloh's direct involvement in the struggle against the British colonisers as really happened. It was probably true that he did not participate in the battlefield but the call for Jihad performed by him showed that he was the person responsible for what was happening in Pahang at the end of the 19th century. The outcomes of his teachings and understanding of Islam and jihad to the Pahang fighters were reflected in the battle which took place at Jeram Ampai. The call for Takbir was cried out loud to mobilise Jihad Sabil in order to fight against the British colonisers in Pahang [51].

4. CONCLUSION

Obviously, Tok Ku Paloh plays a role in uniting the Pahang fighters in the Pahang rebellion, especially in the second series of the struggle. His character as a great and renowned scholar gives an impact which is beyond the reach of mind because his role, his point of view as well as his support are extremely needed by the society in Terengganu and the surrounding states. Teaching and writing had helped strengthen the content of the Islamic knowledge amongst the residents and the Muslim society at that time. The Pahang fighters were no exception due to the teachings carried out by him and his writings which centralised around the issues of anti-colonialism. As a result, they were united and had no fear in facing the enemies. The writers believe that these two aspects; teachings and writings were the first two aspects successfully

achieved by Tok Ku Paloh before uniting them with the call of Jihad Sabil in the second series of the struggle.

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