

Udjang Tholib\*

## Raffles' Views On Islam In Indonesia And Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir's Observation On The British Colonialists

### Introduction

In the colonial history of the Southeast Asia Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826) was famous because he was the founder of Singapore and the lieutenant governor of the British administration in Malacca and Indonesia. In addition, his work, *The History of Java*, made his name well-known in Europe and at the same time introduced Java to the western world. As many other colonial authorities, he had particular attitudes and views on Islam especially in the area under his control. His views on Indonesian Muslims are not very different from those of other Europeans, who, from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries were negative towards Islam and Muslims. In this paper I will present his opinions on Islam in Indonesia in the early nineteenth century, particularly the Muslims of Java, the pilgrimage, and the *Padris*. In addition, I will also discuss Abdullah b. Abdul Kadir's opinion on the British colonialists with whom he was familiar.

### Raffles' background

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was born on board his father's merchantman, off Port Morant, Jamaica on July 7, 1781. Stamford's father, Benjamin Raffles was a captain employed in the West Indies Trade out of London. According to the custom of the day, Captain Raffles was accompanied by his wife, who consequently gave birth to this Raffles junior on board the ship

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Ann.<sup>2</sup> The place of his birth seems to anticipate his later career, which was to be associated with the expansion of British trade in the tropical countries. And born on board under a far-ranging flag, he was to achieve his life's work within a more or less narrow radius of his birth place, but among seas and islands on the opposite side of the globe, not in the West Indies, but in the East Indies.<sup>3</sup> Very little was known of Raffles' early life. It seems that he left school before he was 15 years of age to plunge himself into public life. It is why throughout his life, Raffles never ceased to lament the loss of regular intellectual training.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, after graduating from the Mansion Boarding School at Jammersmith, London, he entered the service of the East Indian Company in 1795 and was appointed as clerk in 1800.<sup>5</sup> Five years later he was appointed to the position of agent of the company at Pulau Penang (Malacca). When the British exercised full control over the East Indies, Raffles was the highest ranking British administrator from 1811-1816.<sup>6</sup>

Raffles was in all respects a self-educated man.<sup>7</sup> He was devoted to favourite studies and to make himself master of French and to prosecute inquiries into some of the various departments of literature and science.<sup>8</sup> He was also interested in the study of the history of other countries and their ancient customs,

and was fond of asking questions about unusual things.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, he was greatly influenced by the late eighteenth century humanitarian movement "which had found its inspiration in the writings of Rousseau on the myth of "the noble savage"<sup>10</sup> Rousseau's teaching emphasized the perfectibility of human nature and the brotherhood of man.<sup>11</sup>

### Islam in Java

As colonial administrator of Java, Raffles employed a few Javanese rulers as personal advisors in regard to cultural affairs, namely Kyai Adipati Surodimenggala, the regent of Semarang and Natakusuma, the regent of Sumenep. The latter was an expert on Javanese and Arabic languages. On the basis of these authorities Raffles wrote his famous book, *The History of Java*, (published in 1817), which contains considerably more historical and cultural information than colonial history. In addition, the work indicates that Raffles was selective in his materials.<sup>12</sup>

His biased and negative attitude towards Islam and the Muslims of Java is obvious in the *History of Java*. Most parts of the book deal with the pre-Islamic history and culture, namely the Hindu and Buddhist heritage of Java. In discussing Javanese literature, which covers more than seventy pages, he quoted Islamic poetry only once and

very briefly, and described Islam as the new religion of the Javanese all within four pages, but devoted forty seven pages to summarizing the Javanese version of Mahabharata epic.<sup>13</sup>

Raffles seems to have not been acquainted with Islamic sources before he was appointed lieutenant governor in Malacca and then in Java. His knowledge of Islam in Java was based primarily on his observation and from the information given by his agents. In addition, according to *Hikayat Abduliah*, Raffles was greatly concerned with ancient and natural history. Moreover, he was influenced by negative Western images of Islam.

Although Islam had been established in Java for about two centuries, the natives, according to Raffles, were still greatly attached to their ancient institutions and still preserved the laws, usages and traditions which prevailed before the coming of Islam. The Javanese Muslims in general believed in one supreme God and His Messenger, Mu'ammad, yet they were less acquainted with Islamic doctrines and less fanatic. Few of the Muslim leaders eschewed the wine, and if the common people ceased to drink liquors it was not prompted by any religious motives.<sup>14</sup> He maintained that Islam as it existed in Java seemed to have penetrated only the surface, but was little rooted in the

hearts of the Javanese people. The best proof of their superficiality and imperfectness in their religion was their tolerance of Europeans as infidels and the conduct of the reigning princes in the conspiracy among the Sepoys serving on Java in 1815.<sup>15</sup>

The above explanation is not entirely true. Raffles seems to have applied particular cases to the people of the whole island of Java. We do not reject his opinion that most Muslims were still influenced by the old traditions in the hinterland or in the areas where Hinduism and Buddhism had been established. However, the Muslims who lived in urban areas or in the sultanates of Mataram, Demak, Banten and in other areas where Muslim leaders or *ulama* established *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), and where the *sufis* and the *da'is* (preachers) were active in implementing and spreading Islamic teachings, their religious knowledge and practice were much better than that of those who were far from this environment.

Raffles's conclusion of the imperfectness and superficiality of the Muslims' faith which was indicated by their tolerance of the infidels and by the involvement of some princes in the conspiracy, is very misleading. In fact, the true teaching of Islam is that the Muslims should be tolerant towards non-Muslims, especially *Ahl al-*



*Kitab* (People of the Book), i.e. Christians and Jews. If they were hostile towards the infidels, it was due to the latter's unjust and cruel treatment of them. Likewise, the princes' cooperation with the colonialists in the conspiracy could not be interpreted as representing all the Muslims in Java. Another negative statement by Raffles is that the Qur'ān contains many more intolerable and deteriorating tenets. In this respect Raffles seems to have shared the thought of the Dutch theologian, Antonius Walaeus who saw the Qur'ān negatively and maintained that it is a distorted scripture, full of contradictory ideas within itself.<sup>16</sup>

### The pilgrimage to Mecca

According to Raffles, the Dutch checked strictly the practice of pilgrimage to Mecca not because they wanted to hinder the progress of Islam in Java or wished to cut off communication with Mecca, but their main aim was to protect the safety of their own rule and the peacefulness of the country. Every *hājjīs* (one who had performed the pilgrimage rituals in Mecca) who returned from Mecca "assumed the character of saint," and gained the credence of the common people so that they even believed that such a person possessed supernatural power. With such a high position and great influence, the *hājjīs* was easily able to arouse people in an

uprising.<sup>17</sup> Mark R. Woodward maintains that there was an established tradition in which the *hājjīs* was accorded a great mystical significance. *sūfi* followers among the *santris* (students of the Islamic boarding school) claimed to have attained union with God while praying at the Ka'ba. As a result, they became the most dangerous enemies of the Dutch interests. The Muslim leaders, including the *hājjīs*, had often been found most active in every revolt.<sup>18</sup> The Dutch feared of the *hājjīs* is understandable since the latter, while in Mecca were often influenced by Arabic politics and religious thought of anti-colonialism.

### The Padri movement

The Padris, according to Raffles, resembled the Wahabis of the Arabian desert. They proved themselves most fanatic and ruthless, but strove to establish reform and rule over all of Sumatra. The term Padri cannot be separated from the three famous *hājjīs* who returned to Minangkabau from Mecca at a date late in 1803 or in 1804, which could have enabled them to witness the capture of the Holy City by the Wahabis.<sup>19</sup>

During the civil war between the aristocratic *adot* party and the Padris, Raffles sided with the former. He called these Islamic leaders "Padris," the term used in India for Catholic priests and

Islamic leaders. However, according to R. Woodward, the term originally was applied to men of Pedir (or Pidie) after the port in Aceh, through which so many pilgrims passed. They later called themselves *orang putih* (white people, meaning good/pious people) and their opponents *orang hitam* (black people, meaning evil doers).<sup>20</sup>

The leader of the Padris observed that less than one-tenth of the population prayed. On the contrary, they were totally addicted to cock fighting and drinking. He was, therefore, resolved to root out gambling and to prohibit the use of all intoxicating liquors. He formulated four principle doctrines of Islam: faith, circumcision, seclusion and the knowledge of God, and taught that prayer was the proof of religion. The tokens of unity among themselves (the Padris) were heard for the male (another source mention that man had to dress completely in white) and a veil for the female; both should not bath naked and the use of tobacco for smoking and chewing was forbidden,<sup>21</sup> and whoever transgressed these precepts would be severely punished, even by death and his property declared forfeit.<sup>22</sup>

Raffles' statement on the fourth principle doctrine of the Padris is questionable since the knowledge of God can be included in the faith (first principle). In addition, according to Christine Dobbin, the

fourth principle is prayer five times a day.<sup>23</sup> This is closer to the Tradition (*Hadīth*) that prayer is the foundation of religion: whoever neglects it destroys the religion (his faith). Likewise, there is no prohibition in Islam from bathing naked as long as nobody can see him/her, but the two sexes should not bathe together in the same place.<sup>24</sup>

In the other part of his *Memoirs*, Raffles described that the Padris had ravaged, pillaged and burnt the capital of the Malay empire (Minangkabau). Their success in overrunning nearly the whole of the rich and populous countries of the interior led him to ask the British government to send Christian missionaries to confront the desolating influence of the "false prophet of Mecca" and to oppose them with a purer faith. According to Raffles, the Padris spread their tenets among other pagan people of Sumatra, including Batak (Batak) with the Qur'ān in one hand and the sword in the other. To counter the advance of the Padri missionaries, Raffles asked the British government to send him three hundred Christian missionaries with the purpose to convert three thousand native people, because there were yet hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions in Sumatra, who at that time possessed no religion at all. Among those, were included the Batak.<sup>25</sup>



From the above description, Raffles presented us much more bad impressions and showed his negative attitude and hostility towards the Padris. Here the Padris are portrayed as threat to the British authorities. In many respects, Raffles shared J.P. Coon's ideas of "natural hostility" and the danger of the fanatic Muslims.<sup>26</sup>

### Abdullah b. Abdul Kadir's Observation on the British Colonialists

Abdullah b. Abdul Kadir, the author of *Hikayat Abdullah* (1797-1854) was employed as copyist by Raffles when he came to Malacca in 1810. He became Raffles' secretary and his trustee until he returned to England in 1823. During his career in the service of Raffles he became acquainted with several English men, among others were Colonel Farquhar, Lord Minto, the missionaries Mr. Milne and Mr. Thomsen. In general, Abdullah's description of all these personalities were positive. He characterized the British as having fine characters, being able to win the affection of men; they made no distinction between the rich and poor, never hurt the people's feelings and showed the trait of humanism. The first British Resident of Malacca was Mr. Farquhar. Abdullah described how everyone in Singapore was sad when he returned home in 1823 for he was a good

Resident. From the beginning of his residency in Malacca, right up to the time of the founding of Singapore, he had never hurt people's feelings nor done the smallest harm to anyone of any race. All people liked and respected him for the fairness of his rulings.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding Raffles, Abdullah described him as very good at paying due respect to the people in a friendly manner. He treated everyone with proper respect, cared for the feelings of others and was open-handed with the people.<sup>28</sup> And when Lord Minto came to Malacca for the first time in 1811, Abdullah said that the people welcomed him cheerfully because they recognized a fine character, a person who knew how to gain the affection of men. He released the prisoners and debtors whom the Dutch had imprisoned. He ordered all instruments for torture which had been found in the Dark Dungeon to be taken out.<sup>29</sup>

Since the British occupied Malacca they ordered the plantations and rice-fields to be opened and cultivated and the jungle to be cleared away so that the people might have easy means of growing food and earning their living.<sup>30</sup> At that time Malacca was at peace and prosperity; merchandise went in and out from all countries. Poor people could earn their living and the rich enjoyed a much better living. Many people from other countries came to Malacca to live, marrying and

bringing up their families, where the customs and laws were good.<sup>31</sup>

Abdullah explained that when the Dutch had taken over Malacca from the British the majority of people had felt glad because they thought that the Dutch were much better than the English. But their expectation faded away because they had soon felt the "iron hand of the Dutch", and longed for the return of English rule. Every day the Dutch made changes in the method of administration, the system of government and the laws of the British. In doing so, they caused great hardships for the poor, since every day people were obliged to pay money. Taxes were increased and imposed on things which had not been taxed by the British.<sup>32</sup>

This description of the British by Abdullah seems to be exaggerated and generalized. We know from the experience of colonialism in our country, whether by the British or the Dutch that their attitudes towards the natives was not very different. They would be very kind towards the natives as long as they did not stand against their goals, did not oppose their policy and cooperated with them in reaching the goals, otherwise, they should be eliminated. In addition, with only few British representatives, Abdullah made a general impression that the British were of fine people. However, to some extent, the British attitude towards the subjects

under their colonial rule was generally accepted to be much better than that of the Dutch.

Abdullah's description of the British colonialists also seems to have appeared very subjective. Perhaps, during the Dutch colonial era of Malacca, he had no position in the government or in the service of the Dutch, so he did not gain any benefit from them. However, if we look at the humanitarian movement which influenced Raffles and perhaps other British administrators, Abdullah's observation might be true to some extent. In addition, Raffles' fine character was also acknowledged by other writers, for example, H. E. Egerton says that Raffles was the kindest of masters, the most delightful of companions. He stood out as great morally and intellectually as it was politically.<sup>33</sup> And R. Coupland mentions, Raffles was free and friendly in his relations with the natives as with the European community. As at Penang and Malacca; so in Java, he made the most of every opportunity of personal intercourse with the people of the country. They were frequently in his house. He talked to them by the roadsides and in their villages. When he resided for some months at Semarang, the native chiefs were constant guests at his table.<sup>34</sup>

What is lacking in *Hikayat Abdullah* is information on the British opinion of Islam and



Muslims in Malacca. Probably Abdullah did not find any British authorities who had made a research on the Malayan Muslims as Raffles did on the Indonesian Muslims.

### Conclusion

Raffles' opinion of Islam and the Muslims in Java is not very different from that of the Dutch who came to Indonesia from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. His attitude and impression of Islam are negative and biased. His interest in the pre-Islamic history of Java is much greater than his concern with the Islamic history and culture of the region. From this we can infer that he appreciated Hinduism and Buddhism more than Islam. In addition, since Islam is the religion of the majority of people in the East Indies and since he saw how the fanatic Padris ravaged the country, it is understandable that he shared the policy of "natural hostility" of J.P. Coen. He might also have been influenced by the Dutch theologians who saw Islam as heretical religion when he said that the Padris were influenced by the "false prophet" and that the Quran contains the "deteriorating tenets." Raffles' attitude towards the Muslims and his opinion of Islam indicate that the pattern of "natural hostility" continued well into the twentieth century and he perpetuated the Western medieval image of Islam.

### Bibliography

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### Endnoters

- <sup>1</sup> John Sturgus Bastin, "Raffles," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 18, ed. Warren E. Preece (Chicago: William Benton, 1970): 1102.
- <sup>2</sup> Hugh Edward Egerton, *Sir Stamford Raffles: England in the Far East* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), 1.
- <sup>3</sup> R. Coupland, *Raffles 1786-1826* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 6.
- <sup>4</sup> H. E. Egerton, *Sir Stamford Raffles*, 3.
- <sup>5</sup> J. S. Bastin, "Raffles," 1120.
- <sup>6</sup> Bernard H. M. Vlekke, *Nusantara. A History of the East Indian Archipelago* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1943), 240.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>9</sup> Abdullah b. Abdul Kadir, *Hikayat Abdullah*, trans. A. H. Hill (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), 76, 78.
- <sup>10</sup> John S. Bastin, *The Native Policies of Sir Stamford Raffles in Java and Sumatra: An Economic Interpretation* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), xii.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Karel Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam: Contacts and Conflicts 1596-1950*, trans. Jan Steenbrink and Henry Jansen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), 73.
- <sup>13</sup> Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The History of Java*, vol. 2 (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, n.d.) 2.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>16</sup> Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism*, 47.
- <sup>17</sup> Mark R. Wood, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 194.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Christine Dobbin, "Islamic Revivalism in Minangkabau at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century." *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 3, (1974): 330.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Raffles, *The History of Java*, 86.
- <sup>22</sup> C. Dobbin "Islamic Revivalism," 336.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> Demetrius Charles Bougler, *The Life of Sir Stamford Raffles* (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1897), 288-289.
- <sup>26</sup> J.P. Coen (1587-1629) maintains that good and evil are never compatible. The hostility that nature produces in different animal species, oil and water, can be applied to people who differ from one another in religion. Therefore, Muslims [he refers here to Ternatane Muslims] and Christians are enemies by nature. They (Muslims) are deceitful, treacherous, uncommitted to their oaths or promises to Christians. They are proud, presumptuous, cruel and murderous. Although they are few in number, they dared to terrorized the various nations nearby for they are completely preoccupied by war (see Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism*, 60).
- <sup>27</sup> Abdullah b. Abdul Kadir, *Hikayat Abdullah*, 196-198.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> H. E. Egerton, *Sir Stamford Raffles*, 268.
- <sup>34</sup> R. Coupland, *Raffles*, 62.



## من استعماراته صلى الله عليه وسلم

والمؤمن مرآة أخيه<sup>(١)</sup>

«من كنوز البر: كتمان الصدقة والمرض والمصيبة»<sup>(٢)</sup>.

«داووا مرضاكم بالصدقة»<sup>(٣)</sup>

«حصنوا أموالكم بالزكاة»<sup>(٤)</sup>.

«صدقة السر تطفىء غضب الرب»<sup>(٥)</sup>

«جدع الحلال أنف الضيرة»<sup>(٦)</sup>.

«الحمي رائد الموت وسجن الله في الأرض»<sup>(٧)</sup>

«الدنيا سجن المؤمن وجنة الكافر»<sup>(٨)</sup>.

«اتقوا فراسة المؤمن. فإنه ينظر بنور الله»<sup>(٩)</sup>

«أكثرُوا ذكر هادم اللذات»<sup>(١٠)</sup> أى الموت.

ومن روائع بيانه: تمثيله النساء بالقوارير.

«رفقاً بالقوارير»<sup>(١١)</sup>.

وقوله عن جبل أحد:

(هذا أحد يجينا ونحبه)<sup>(١٢)</sup>

(١) رواه البخاري في الأدب.

(٢) رواه أبو نعيم في الحلية.

(٣) رواه أبو الشيخ في التواب، وسكت عنه السيوطي والذوي.

(٤) حديث ضعيف.

(٥) رواه الطبراني في الصغير، ورواه السيوطي بالصححة.

(٦) مجمع الأمثال للسيدي.

(٧) حديث حسن.

(٨) رواه الترمذي، وقال: حديث حسن.

(٩) رواه الطبراني.

(١٠) حديث حسن؛ رواه الترمذي والنسائي وابن ماجه وابن حبان والحاكم وصححه.

(١١) رواه مسلم.

(١٢) رواه البخاري.