

**MOHAMAD ZAIN Musa**  
Institute of Malay World and Civilisation  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

## HISTORY OF EDUCATION AMONG THE CAMBODIAN MUSLIMS

*The members of the Cambodian Muslims consists of two main groups, the Chams and the Malays. Nevertheless there are some of Arab, Indian, Pakistanis and Afghan origins. After Cambodia independence they are officially known as Khmer Islam (Muslim Khmer). Since their arrivals, the Chams and the Malays were well accepted by the Khmer communities at all levels. The Khmer Islam can freely choose any village to reside, any job to do for their living or they may work as a government officer or civil servants or else they may join the armed forces. Among them there are some who had been appointed to the highest position in the royal government's administration hierarchy such as governors and ministers. Islam as their religion can freely be practiced together with their traditional Islamic education system for their children. To date this freedom can still be widely seen. This paper discusses the long and winding history of the Cambodian Muslim education; how they keep up with changes and development brought about in the country where the majority of its population is Buddhist. This paper tries to trace the history of how Islam is taught to the members of the community. How the dynamism of Imam Musa's ideals and visions together with the Muslim brothers from the Malay archipelago have established a strong system which in their view has helped to maintain the balance in their daily life to be a good citizen and to preserve their own identity as Muslim.*

**Keywords:** Cham, Champa, Islam, Education

### Introduction

The Muslims of Cambodia comprise mainly of two ethnic groups: the Cham, an ethnic from the now extinct Kingdom of Champa (192-1835) and the Malays, known as *Jva* (in Cham) or *Chvea* (in Khmer), who were from the Malay Archipelago, Kelantan and Pattani in particular. Their exact number is not known but estimated at less than one million among the 14 millions of Cambodian population. They form a homogenous community, which nowadays is known as "Khmer Islam"<sup>1</sup> that is the Khmers who profess Islam. Their number is said to be between 450,000 and 500,000 people<sup>2</sup> spread out in some 454 villages.<sup>3</sup> There are also a very small

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<sup>1</sup>This appellation was given by the Sihanouk government by the *kram* 913-NS of 30 November 1954. Since then they are not known as an ethnic group but as the Khmer with the connotation *Islam* which denotes their religion. (J. Povvatchy 1975, p. 10; Po Dharma 1981 p. 161 n. 1.)

<sup>2</sup>Short of reliable statistics, various numbers of the Cham-Malay community in Cambodia since independence has been forwarded by various writers. Po Dharma 1981 estimated at between 150,000 and 200,000 people; Mak Phœun 1988, estimated at 300,000 people. Abdulcoyaume 1999 estimated at 500,000 (of a total of 700,000 which was 10% of the total Cambodian population) Cham and Malay people killed in Pol Pot's Killing Fields. See also Ben Kiernan 1996 p. 254-255; Ysa Osman 2002 p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Oknha Mufti, Tuon Haji Kamaruddin Yusof, interviewed on 29.11.2010. According to our previous interview on 22.11.2008, there were 428 Muslim villages in the country with about 350,000 to 400,000 peoples, compared to 317 villages and about 200,000 people in 1999 (T.Y. Abdulkoyaume 1999).

number of Arab, Indian, Pakistanis and Afghans origins. The descendents of the Arabs are found in the Eastern part of Cambodia, in the province of Kompong Cham. These Arab descendents only know that their ancestors were Arabs; they do neither speak nor understand Arabic language.

The Indian Muslims played a prominent role in the capital Phnom Penh, especially in import and export business and in clothes retailing business; they held two nationalities before the Pol Pot era; but now they could not be traced anywhere in the country. As for those of Pakistanis and Afghan origins, they can still be found especially in the areas around Phnom Penh, though their number is very small, and are still using a few words of their origin mixed with the daily language of either Khmer or Cham. Many of the Pakistani and Afghan had mixed marriages with the local, especially the Cham and the *Chvea*. The off-springs of those married Cham women speak Cham besides the Khmer, Cambodian national language. I will present briefly below how the Cham and the Malay have settled in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

### **The Presence of the Cham In Cambodia**

The Cham were one of the many ethnics which formed the population of the once famous Kingdom of Champa. There were many reasons for them to leave their beloved country to find safe places to live outside their country. One of the main reasons was the Vietnamese expansion to the South, famously known as *Nam-tien*. Most of them landed in Cambodia, the kingdom bordering Champa.

Map of the Kingdom of Champa (192-1835)



The Cham have lived in the Khmer kingdom since at least the eleventh century. Relations between Champa and the Khmer kingdom were described in Khmer inscriptions, including the fact that a prince from Champa married a Khmer princess. Their presence had also been recorded in the bas-reliefs of Banteay Chmar (of Angkor), dating back to the thirteenth century. In this bas-relief, Cham troops fought alongside the Khmer army.<sup>4</sup> Cham musicians, ‘mercenaries’, as well as ‘ballista instructors’, were among the settlers.<sup>5</sup> But the majority of the Cham refugees arrived after the fall of Vijaya, the capital of Champa, in 1471. The Vietnamese *Nam-tien*, which started as earlier as in 980 right after the official creation of the Viet state in AD 939, forced the people of Champa to flee their homeland until the identity of Champa was wiped out in 1835 by the Vietnamese Emperor Minh Menh.

<sup>4</sup>For a description of the thirteenth-century Champa army, see Jacq-Herlgoualc’h 1991.

<sup>5</sup>According to Jacq-Herlgoualc’h (1979, p. 135–6, 165–70), these people were ‘mercenaries’ or ‘allies’.

In the long process of the Vietnamese *Nam-tien*, every military victory of the Viet over Champa was followed by efforts to colonize Champa territory by the Viet, also known as Kinh. Thus, the Cham people were forced to flee their homeland in search of a place which could provide them with peace and security. It was Cambodia that provided both of these needs and made them feel welcome. Meanwhile, some took refuge further away in the Malay Peninsula (Kelantan, Johor and Melaka) and in the islands of the Malay Archipelago (Sumatra and Borneo). The first Cham arrival en masse in Cambodia was after the 1471 Vietnamese destruction of Vijaya and recorded in Khmer chronicles.<sup>6</sup> The next big group of Cham arrived in Cambodia in 1692–3 after the Vietnamese annexed the region of Phanrang.<sup>7</sup>

Another large group of new Cham arrival happened when Panduranga (the last state of the Kingdom of Champa) was the battle field of Vietnamese civil war between the Tay-son and the Nguyen (1771-1802).<sup>8</sup> Other runaways after the annexation of Panduranga in 1835 were high ranking officers, civil or military with their followers, who were accused by the Emperor Minh Menh of revolting against the Hue court.<sup>9</sup> All these happenings to the Cham people has made Cabaton to conclude that the Vietnamese ‘could exist at the expense of the Cham people’ (A. Cabaton 1907 : 131). At that time, the Vietnamese wanted too to apply their hegemony over the whole of Southeast Asia (P-R. Ferray 1984: 118).

### **The Presence of the Malay In Cambodia**

The presence of the Malay in Cambodia dated back several centuries as the Malay and Khmer gradually established various forms of contact. According to Khmer sources, in the seventh century the ‘Chvea’ subjugated a large part of the Khmer territory. Vat Samran’s inscription (G. Cœdès 1964 : 133) mentions that Jayavarman II (AD 802–50), the founder of the Angkor Empire, organized a ceremony when Cambodia was liberated from the Jawa empire. Prior to Jayavarman II coming to power, he took refuge in the Malay kingdom as a result of an internal trouble in his kingdom. He was later given assistance by the Malays to regain his rightful position.

In the tenth century, Jayaviravarman, a Khmer prince from Tambralinga (Nakhon Si Thammarat), seized Lopburi and Angkor with the help of some Malay soldiers (G. Cœdès 1942: 72; D.K. Wyatt 1984 : 28). In the twelfth century, Jayavarman VII extended his territory to Jawa, Pagan in the West and Champa in the East (G. Cœdès 1942 : 267–8). Moreover, sailors and merchants from throughout the

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<sup>6</sup>Mak Phœun 1988 p. 83; Mak Phœun, 1995, p. 397–98; Mohamad Zain Musa 1991. For their arrivals before 1471, see Jacq-Hergoualc’h, 1991 p. 27–46. The Vietnamese conquest and the diaspora of the people of Champa which followed were also mentioned in *Hikayat Hasanuddin* and the *Sejarah Melayu*. Chapter 21 of the latter mentions the flight of two Cham princes: Pau Liang, who took refuge in Aceh, and Indra Berma, who took refuge in Melaka at Sultan Mansur’s (1458–77) court.

<sup>7</sup>For this episode of Champa history, see J. Boisselier 1963, p. 358–9, and Po Dharma, 1989, p. 128–35.

<sup>8</sup>About the fight between the Nguyens and the Tay-son brothers, see Lê Thanh Khôi 1955, p. 296–313. The Cham manuscript CAM27 relates that the odyssey of the king Po Cei Brei and his followers took place thirteen years before they settled down, with the permission of the Khmer king, in the region of Tay Ninh, then part of Cambodian territory but de facto controlled by Vietnamese. (See Mohamad Zain Musa 1990 and Po Dharma 1983). Generally, a Cham manuscript does not bear the author’s name or the date of its production. Neither does it give the title; but usually, in the first sentence, it tells the readers what is going to be described, and at the end of the text it normally gives the name of the copyist and the date when it was copied. See P.-B. Lafont, Po Dharma, and Nara Vija, 1977.

<sup>9</sup>For the annexation of Panduranga, the last state of the Kingdom of Champa, see Po Dharma, *Le Panduranga (Campa) 1802–1835: Ses rapports avec le Viêtnam*, 2 vols., Paris: PEFEQ, 1987.

Malay World frequented Khmer territory. Even though we do not know the exact date when the first Malay settled in the country, the good relationship that had always existed between the Malay and the Khmer points to a very early date for the establishment of their settlements in the Khmer kingdom.

During the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, the number of economic and religious contacts between the Malay World and Cambodia increased. Many merchants and missionaries arrived in Cambodia, though there were again no mentions of their settling permanently in the country. According to some *Chvea* (Malay), those who lived there came from Borneo, Sumatra, Singapore, Terengganu and from the kingdom of Pattani in the fourteenth century (Mak Phœun 1988 : 50). Portuguese and Spanish accounts also reveal that Malay merchant ships frequently visited Khmer ports in the sixteenth century. The Khmer chronicles also mention the services of Malay as guards to the Khmer monarchs in the sixteenth century. It is very obvious thus, they must have been living in Cambodia for quite some times before the Khmer kings put a trust in them and recruited them to their highnesses' service.

Information about the Cham-Malay community in the seventeenth century has been more precisely documented. A. Cabaton noted that 'the capital of Cambodia was inhabited by various communities such as Japanese, Portuguese, Malay and others who were doing business. Some of them lived there permanently, others stayed there just to do business and to move their goods' (A. Cabaton 1914 :157–8). It was also mentioned in the Dutch East India Company (VOC) reports of ships from Johor at the ports of Kompong Som and Kampot. These activities continued up until the eighteenth century when ships sailed between Terengganu and the Cambodian ports (P.-B. Lafont 1990: 5). The Malay from the Malay Peninsula continued to arrive through the French protectorate period (1863–1953) and even after independence. They were mostly teachers of the Islamic faith. After the Pol Pot era (1975-1979), in the 1990s through the present day, the Malay, mostly involved in business or missionary activities, continues to arrive and some chose to settle in Cambodia.

In Cambodia, both the Cham and Malay formed a 'peculiar' community because of their Islamic religion. Since they are generally known to the Khmer as *Cham-Chvea* (Cham-Malay). They have lived in harmony with their hosts, the Buddhist Khmer.

### **Locations of the Cham-Malay Settlements**

Upon settling in Cambodia, the Cham and Malay formed a unique community as both groups practised the same religion – Islam. There was a great deal of intermarriage between the two groups. The new arrivals on Cambodian soil full of hospitality were from various social backgrounds. They were well received by all the Khmer, from the ordinary people to the aristocracy and the monarchs. For example, in 1692, as soon they arrived they were given immediate protection by King Jayajettha III (1677–1709), who allowed them to settle in various parts of *Srok Khmer* (Cambodia), such as in the region of Oudong, then the kingdom's capital, in the provinces of Thbaung Khmum and Stung Trâng, and in various villages around the country (Mak Phœun 1995 : 397–8).

In the nineteenth century, the first French who arrived in Cambodia were surprised by this symbiosis and observed that ‘a Muslim population and a Buddhist people [were] living together in almost brotherly relations’.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of this continuous policy, nowadays the Malay and Cham can be found scattered throughout the kingdom. Their biggest concentrations, however, are on the banks of Tonle Thom (the Mekong), from Kratie to Phnom Penh, on the banks of Tonle Sap (from Phnom Penh to Kompong Chhnang, especially in Chrang Chamres, Khleang Sbek and Kompong Luong), in the region of the Beng Tonle Sap (the Great Lake) (provinces of Pursat, Battambang, Siemreap and Kompong Thom), as well as in the provinces of Kompong Cham (Thbaung Khmum), and in the region of Kampot. They are also to be found in the suburbs of the capital Phnom Penh, such as in Chroy Changvar<sup>11</sup> and Prêk Pra. The largest concentrations of Malay are in the provinces of Kompot, Battambang and the villages of Kompong Luong. They are also found in Prey Pus, Chouk Sâr and Srê Prey in the province of Kompong Chhnang. These new settlements were the result of a group of Cham-Malay rebellion in 1858 described in detail in a Cham manuscript (Mohamad Zain Musa 2009).

Once they were settled, they enjoyed the same rights as the Khmer. Their first preoccupation in each village, or settlement, was to build a mosque or *massala*, which served as places of worship as well as centres of religious and other community activities, including Islamic classes. They displayed unquestioned loyalty to the kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

The Cham-Malay has been actively involved in various daily activities. They are farmers, fishermen, cattle breeders<sup>13</sup> and traders. Others served as government servants, administrators of various capacities and levels, from the lowest village level, known as *chumtup*, *mékhum*, *mésrok* and *chauvay srok*, to the highest as governors of provinces. Others have held military or political positions such as ministers (Mak Phœun 1990). The Cham-Malay women have long been famous for their hand-woven cloth, particularly their *kain songket*, which is of considerable demand because of its beauty and quality (Po dharma 1981 & 1982).

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<sup>10</sup>Auguste Pavie 1901, p. 28–9, mentions the Cham people, but it is understood that those Muslims were, in fact, both Cham and Malay; likewise, in other writings, the term Malay in some cases refers to both Malay and Cham.

<sup>11</sup> Chroy Changvar is no longer a Cham-Malay village. As a result of development where land could fetch high price, the poor Cham and Khmer have sold the precious heritage to the high bidders. Thus in a few years time, Chroy Changvar, which is right in from the royal palace, will become a fully developed part of a great Cambodian capital.

<sup>12</sup> In the 19th century especially in the field of military, in many occasions, they have been tasked to form military companies to defend the kingdom, the palace and the royal families (Mohamad Zain Musa 2009). The latest of this happening was when they were asked to form a special brigade, known as 5BIS, in the fight against the Khmer Rouge (1970-1975) (Mohamad Zain Musa 2006.)

<sup>13</sup>ANSOM, Indo., Amiraux 12705, A. Spooner, ‘Rapport sur le Cambodge’, 30 December 1862.



and enjoys the confidence of all. At the village level, the Islamic spiritual leaders are known as *hakim*; he is also a well versed person in Islamic laws and was at the top of the village spiritual hierarchy. The *Khmer Islam* had to wait until the period of the Khmer Republic, under the leadership of President Lon Nol, before they could form two associations: the *Association des Khmer Islam* (AKI) and the *Association de la Jeunesse Islamique Khmer* (AJIK).

After a period of four years under the Pol Pot regime and a few years of its after-effect, the community, together with the Khmer people, began to reconstruct their lives. As the government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Samdach Hun Sen and the Kings, gives equal attention to the welfare of all Cambodians, the Cham-Chvea themselves are once again enjoying the past glory of their community and the trust of the Cambodian leadership. This is seen in their appointment to high-ranking positions in the new Kingdom of Cambodia as ministers, members of parliament, and officers in the civilian and military services.

The present Muslim community spiritual leader is now known as President or *Mufti*. The term *Mufti* is being accepted at the request of the Muslim Community. Besides putting all their efforts into rebuilding their country, the Muslims have started to rebuild their community by repairing Islamic and Koranic schools (*masjid*, *musalla*, *madrash* and *pondok*). They believe that the Islamic knowledge is the core and strength of their community.

### Islamic Teachings

As it is believed that Islam has reached Champa by the 11th century, the Cham who were found in Cambodia has already embraced the religion. (Mohamad Zain Musa 1994; Marrison 1985). Though there are two theories regarding the coming of Islam to Indochina: one through the Arabs and the Persians during the great expansion of Islam (10-12th centuries) and the second theory is through the Malay during the 14-16th centuries). Whatever it is, the Malay who were found in Cambodia, they too have embraced the religion.

Cham historical sources too (Po Dharma 1978) have shown that the first Champa king bore the name of *Po Uvalvah* or *Po Ovlah* (King Allah) reigned at *Sri Banay* for 37 years (1000-1036) (Po Dharma 1978). With the reign name of their first king of *King Allah* the Champa people have tried to raise the status of their kings, as done earlier in the Hindu's belief, when the king was given posthumously a name in relation with their god. However as Champa was busy fighting with its northern neighbour from the 10-15th centuries, it was the Malays, who began to arrive in Champa in the 14th century, were very piously spreading the teachings of Islam to the Cham.<sup>15</sup>

In Cambodia the Cham who kept a very close relationship with the Malay in the Archipelago, especially those in Kelantan, sent their young children to learn Islam in the 16-19th centuries (M. Ner 1941: 152). According to local historical sources (Collectif 1984), there was then a big number of Malays in Indochina, who were known as *Jva* (in Cham) or *Chvea* (in Khmer)<sup>16</sup>, the term is being used till the present day.

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<sup>15</sup> For detailed description of the presence of the Malay in Cambodia, see Mohamad Zain Musa 1991.

<sup>16</sup> *Jawa* was a kingdom and not the island of Jawa which was then known as *Yava* or *Yavadvipa* (Finot L. 1903, p. 641; Peliot P. 1904, p. 287-289). The word *Chvea*, as recorded in Khmer documents refers to the Malays from the Malay Peninsula. (M. Ner 1941, p. 152; Mak Phoeun 1988, p. 85).



In the 17th century, a Champa prince, who later became king Po Rome (1627-1651), had come to study Islam in Kelantan. He later married a Kelantanese princess whose descendents are now the ruling Sultan (Abdullah Mohamed 1981 & Po Dharma 1989). Later in the 19th century one famous Cham by the name of Katip Sumat<sup>17</sup> born in Cambodia, came to Kelantan to pursue his Islamic studies (Po Dharma 1987(I): 142; Po Dharma 1989: 80) He later became the leader of an Islamic movement (1833-34) fighting the Vietnamese emperor. Early in 1832, he had incorporated Panduranga (Champa) into his territories, Vietnam. Besides these two famous personalities, there were many young Cham-Malay continuously coming over to Kelantan to learn Islamic education.

After World War I, most of the Cham teachers who taught Islam in Cambodia and Chaudoc (Vietnam) were graduated from Kelantan or Mecca (M. Ner 1941: 189). Young Cham aged between 10 and 20 years old were sent to Kota Bharu, Kelantan, to be educated in Islam. The length of time of their studies depended on their parents' capability to support them. This continued until 1975, when it stopped for a moment, and resumed in 1993.

Among the young men who come to Kelantan were Mr. Idris bin Mahmud, better known as Pak Yeh. He was only 12 years old at the time he comes to Kelantan in 1936. He was from Phum Pœuh, district of Krauch Chmar, province of Kompong Cham. Two other of his village mates were Son Ahmad and Aly Musa<sup>18</sup> who joint him later and became well known as Imam Ahmad India and Imam Musa respectively. The two have changed the course of understanding of Islam among the Cham by bringing a significant new challenges in the Cambodian Muslim way of life.

Malay scholars of Kelantan, on the other hand, did not only see these young Cham came to their villages to learn Islam and then returned to Cambodia to perpetuate the teachings of Islam, but they too took appropriate measures by going and carried out missionary works there. Some of known personalities were Laksamana Abdul Hamid, Laksamana Hj Omar, who went there in late 17th century; Tuk Guru Syeikh Ismail bin Syeikh Hussin, Tuk Guru Hj Wan Salleh bin Hj Omar, Tok Guru Hj Wan Ngah bin Wan Mat Yunus, Tok Guru Hj Syeikh Ismail bin Muhammad Zain, by mid 19th century; Tuk Guru Hj Said bin Hj Isa, Tuk Guru Hj Ahmad bin Hj Abdul Manaf, Tuk Guru Hj Wan Hassan bin Wan Muhammad Zain and Tuk Guru Nik Daud bin Nik Mat by mid 20th century. Kelantanese women too were not left behind. They too participated in this noble endeavour. They were Che Zainab, Che Kalthum, Hajah Hafsa binti Muhammad and Che Fatimah binti Abdullah. There were among them those who settled permanently in Cambodia and some returned to their native Kelantan after some period of time (Abdullah Mohamed 1989: 27-40).

By the end of 19th century, there were two distinct branches of Islam practiced by the Cambodian Muslim. One of them is known as *Islam Bani* and *Islam Murni*.<sup>19</sup> Nowadays the *Bani* can still be found in Ninh Thuận and Binh Thuận provinces of Vietnam, and a small number of them, which is still dwindling, is found in district of O Russey (Cambodia). This group practicing *Islam Bani* is also known as *Cam Jahid*

<sup>17</sup>Concerning the struggle of Katip Sumat see Po Dharma 1987 vol. I p. 139-150; Po Dharma 1989; Mohamad Zain Musa 1992; Mohamad Zain Musa 1993.

<sup>18</sup>About the life of Imam Musa see Mohamad Zain Musa 2007 and Mohamad Zain Musa 2008. Imam Musa spent most of his time studying in Pattani.

<sup>19</sup>About the *Bani* Muslim and other Muslim of Indochina and their Islamic practices, see Mohamad Zain Musa 1994. Their number by the end of the 19th century was about 10,000 in Vietnam and 60,000 in Cambodia (E. Aymonier 1890, p. 145).

and now also known as *Cham Tujuh*.<sup>20</sup> The *Murni* Muslims, as the name suggests, practises orthodoxy Islam. They are more open to changes and progresses compared with the *Bani*. It is the people of the *Murni* group who sent their children to pursue Islamic studies in foreign and distant lands such as countries in West Asia. As for the *Bani*, both *Bani* of Vietnam and Cambodia, they are a community who has been destroyed and do not know how to change their nature ( E. Aymonier 1890: 146).



Two Muslim Bani and Me  
(Photo: Mohamad Zain Musa)

There were not much information of how the early Islamic classes were conducted among the Muslim in Indochina, except the teachings were spread through *masjid* and *surau*, and at the *tuon*'s house all over the country as compared to the teaching of Buddhism through pagodas.

Another famous Cham who had brought changes in the approaches in the teaching of Islam among the Cambodian Muslim was Imam Musa. These approaches have brought about changes in their way of life, which can be summed up as progressive and dynamic. Imam Musa<sup>21</sup> returned to Cambodia in 1948. He was

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<sup>20</sup>The practices of Cha Bani were described in Mohamad Zain Musa 2004.

<sup>21</sup>Imam Musa was born Ly Mousa or Musa Bin Ali, in the year of the Snake (1916 c.e.). He was born in Phum (the village of) Ampil, Khum (sub-district of) Pœuh, Srok (district of) Krauch Chmar, Khet (province of) Kompong Cham, Cambodia to a farmer family. He was the eldest of seven siblings of three boys and four girls. Further details of his life see Mohamad Zain Musa 2008.

followed a few years later by Imam Ahmad, who had a Masters degree from the Darul Uloom Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, India.<sup>22</sup> He was the one who was responsible for bringing the new *Kaum Muda* thoughts to the Cambodian Muslim society.



Imam Musa Bin Ali (1916 – 1975)<sup>23</sup>



Zainab Binti Mustafa (1929 - )  
Imam Musa's wife

The birth of *Kaum Muda* threatened the religious leadership of the old folks, who were practicing the Islamic teachings mixed with other believes such as ancestral customs which include animism. Imam Musa, the activist and his followers believed that due to the old practices of Islamic unorthodoxy, the Muslim communities were underdeveloped.<sup>24</sup>

As time passed, more and more people followed the Imam Musa teachings, which appealed to the Muslim community to follow the true path of Islamic teaching based on the Quran and *Hadith*. He urged the Muslim community to accept the modern knowledge, including sciences subjects, history and geography, which is considered beneficial. He also urged the community to allow women to have freedom in education and be involved in the community activities. The *Kaum Muda*'s

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<sup>22</sup>His Malaysians contemporaries are the late Ustaz Zahari from Melor and Ustaz Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the present PAS leadership and *Mentri Besar* (Chief Minister) of Kelantan.

<sup>23</sup>The three photographs published in this article are the Courtesy of Khusyatillah, Imam Musa's daughter.

<sup>24</sup>Among the forerunners of the *Kaum Muda* in SEA were famous personalities such as Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin and Muhammad Yunus. See Mohamad Zain Musa 2008.

struggle,<sup>25</sup> led by Imam Musa, were not going on smoothly. Those who espoused the *Kaum Muda* idea were strongly opposed by a group called *Kaum Tua*, headed by Tuon Kachik of Chumnik, Tuon Hj Aly of Speu and Tuon Hj Ali of Moat Chrouk (Chaudoc, Vietnam).

Imam Musa started to teach the translation and interpretation of the holy Koran to the his wife's village folks, old and young, men and women. Classes of Koran translation and *hadith* were conducted almost every evening between *Maghrib* and *Isha* prayers. During day time, he trained those pursued their full time Islamic studies. The number of his students was growing as time passed. And only when they were qualified, Imam Musa appointed them to be teachers and sent them to other Cham villages along the Mekong river. Through his diligence, up to 1970 when the Cambodian civil war broke out, he managed to train only a handful of them. Some had obtained scholarship to pursue their religious education abroad. This method of teaching where a more knowledgeable student is allowed to teach the younger ones is still in practiced today.



A young girl teaching some younger ones  
in Norea, Battambang  
(Photo: Mohamad Zain Musa 2008)

Prior to the coming of Imam Musa it was believed that the Koran cannot be translated and if ever it is to be translated, it can only be done by 'special people'. Imam Musa new method of teaching and the interpretation of Koran, were well accepted by many, from normal village folks to the educated and socially high-ranking personalities, including the Khmers. It was an opening eye to the new world.

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<sup>25</sup>To spread out their thoughts and teachings, the *Kaum Muda* had their own news paper; the first one was *al-Imam*, a Malay news paper published in Singapore in 1906. There were others news papers such as *Neracha*, *Utusan Melayu* and *Lembaga Melayu* which were also published in Singapore. The *Kaum Muda* also had a magazine called *al-Ikhwan* published in 1925 and in Pulau Penang under the leadership of Syed Sheikh al-Hadi. To respond to the many articles published by the *Kaum Muda*, the *Kaum Tua* also had their own voices heard through *Lidah Benar*, which was published in Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Besides, Imam Musa exposed them to the economics and politics concepts. I can still remember vividly that he taught old folks and children to read maps too.

Despite of all harassments by his foes, the poor infrastructure of the areas along the Mekong river and most of all the shortage of fund, he managed to set up *pondok*, one after the other, in various villages where there were his followers. These schools were nothing more than a few tables and long wooden benches set up under some houses, especially the imam's house. In some villages, classes were conducted in *surau* or *masjid* as the *Kaum Muda* followers are majority. Beside those so-called *pondok*, the first religious school was built in Phum Khbop, Khum Svay Khléang in 1968. The building of this school could not be completed as the Cambodian civil war, a spill over of the second Vietnam War, has started in 1970.



A class room under a house in Dang Kambit, Kompong Cham  
(Photo: Mohamad Zain Musa 2002)



A class room under a house in Svay Khleang  
(Photo: Mohamad Zain Musa 2009)

Some of the *pondok* teachers were those who were teachers before; but some others were given the task by Imam Musa after having attained a certain level of education with him. As for the religious books, they were brought in from Malaysia: Penang or Kelantan. And as there were not enough copies, the lessons were hand copied and distributed to various villages.

### **National Education During Imam Musa's Time**

Many men, women and children of all ages attended religious classes organised by Imam Musa. As he was convinced that education can bring change to his community<sup>26</sup>, modern education has to be brought to Cham villages and be given to children of both sexes. First Imam Musa and his followers formed a well organised community which they aptly gave the name of *Sangkum Ly Mousa (Ly Mousa Solidarity)* in 1953.<sup>27</sup>

The *Sangkum Ly Mousa* built in 1955 the first primary school for the national education system, which was secular in nature, in the middle of Phum Prek Krout (Svay Khléang, in Khmer), where majority of its population are Muslims. The wooden school building, a block of three class-rooms was built with brute energy of the Muslim community, starting from cutting woods in the forest to make it into planks, sand and pebbles collected in the Mekong river, just opposite their houses, and of course donations from the well-to-do individuals. The second block of another three class-rooms was built later. The Krauch Chmar district education officer, Mr. Om Kek have given the approval to the application to build the school. Mr. Om Kek

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<sup>26</sup> His vision of bringing his family out of poverty had encouraged him to leave his home village at very tender age to pursue education outside his home village. (Mohamad Zain Musa 2007 & 2008)

<sup>27</sup> This organisation of *Sangkum Ly Mousa* was created ahead of the formation of a national political movement known as *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* by Norodom Sihanouk in 1955. *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* is «usually translated as People's Socialist Community» (D. P. Chandler 1996, *A History of Cambodia*, p. 188).

later became a well-loved headmaster and a teacher at the *Sangkum Ly Mousa Primary School*. He was one of my beloved teachers.<sup>28</sup>

### After Pol Pot Era

The 1975-1979 Pol Pot administration of Cambodia has destroyed all the fabrics of a civilised nation. As the Cambodian Muslims believed it is their religion that is the impetus and unifying factor in their desire to retain their identity, they tried to rebuild their society by renovating mosques and *surau*, and looked for those who can teach religion to them, especially to the young ones.

The first Islamic school established after the Pol Pot era was the Madrasah Hafiz Al-Quran, built in Trea district (in Kompong Cham province). It was followed by the Dubai school in Km9 (built by the Jam'iyyah Ihyaturath Al Islami, Kuwait), the Darul Aitam in Pochentong, the Ummul Kura in Chrouy Metrei funded by a Saudi,<sup>29</sup> the Madrasah Hajjah Rohimah Tambichik in Angkor Ban, and the Maahad Al Muhammadi in Beng Pruol.

During the Pol Pot era, any form of religious identity was completely destroyed. Most *Tuons* and *Hakims*<sup>30</sup> were killed or died of disease or starvation; religious books and most mosques and *surau* were destroyed or turned into pigsties. Longing to practice their religion, fearing that the youngs would become non-Muslims and most of all knowing that Islam is the community's strength, the Muslims started to gather all their energies with utmost urgency to cleanse religiously their houses of worship, mosques and *suraus*.

As the first phase was completed, they started looking for *tuon*. It was found that every parts of Cambodia, only a very few of those who had knowledge of Islam was found to be alive. In Prèk Krout (Svay Khleang, Krauch Chmar, Kompong Cham province) where there was a high concentration of *Kaum Muda* followers and *tuon*, only Zakaryya Adam was survived. New villagers too were coming to Prek Kout, some from as far as Andong Sâr and Angkor Ban, all in the province of Kompong Cham. The new government opened classes for national schools, and allowed the Muslims to reorganize their Islamic classes by themselves. But there were very few students attending either school, because primarily there were no teachers, and secondly the parents of those children were very poor to let their children going to school. They would rather keep their young to help them to earn a living.

Tuon Zakaryya, fondly known as Tuon Ya, was working very hard to convince the villagers to send their children to both schools, national and Islamic. As

<sup>28</sup> The first *Sangkum Ly Mousa Primary School* teachers were Cham picked by Imam Musa himself. Only after a short time later, qualified teachers were sent to the school by the government, all of them native of the district of Krauch Chmar. Their salaries were paid by the government; and the school was administered under the education system of Cambodia. Following that success, a few more primary schools were built by the *Sangkum Ly Mousa*, one each in the Khum Kompong Ro, Prek Sandai (Chœutéal Phloueh, in Khmer) in Srok Chhlong, Khet Kratié. Many young Cham children benefited from the schools as they were sent there without any more fear by the parents. Prior to this, it was believed that sending Cham children (meaning Muslim) to national schools, the children would become Khmer (meaning becoming non-Muslim of *Kufar*). In the 1970s many have reached the university level and left the country for overseas for further education. Some were appointed at various departments, public (civil and military) and private institutions. See Mohamad Zain Musa 2007 & 2008.

<sup>29</sup> This school was closed by the end of May 2003 and its foreign teachers were arrested. Now the school is opened and have become the Cambodian Islamic Center whose president is the Oknha Mufti.

<sup>30</sup> In Cambodia and Vietnam and within the Muslim community *Tuon* refers to the Islamic teachers, and *Hakim* refers to a well-versed person in Islamic laws. A *Tuon* or *Hakim* commands a very highly respectable position in the Muslim community. In most cases, only one person holding simultaneously the *Tuon* and *Hakim* position.

the government policy requires the children to go to national school only in the morning, he got them to attend Islamic school in the afternoon. He himself taught in both schools, morning and afternoon in Khpob (village adjacent to Prek Krout) and Prèk Krout.

Currently, Tuon Zakaryya is a member of Parliament. He has been appointed as education officer, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs; and within the Muslim community he was Deputy *Mufti* until 2000. Muslims all over the country organized Islamic classes where ever there was a *Tuon* who survived the Pol Pot regime. But unfortunately only very few survived. In some villages, a few of those who could only read Koran and has very shallow knowledge of Islam survived and became *Tuon*.<sup>31</sup>

Students who attended the Svay Khleang Islamic school at that time came from as far as Kompong Ro, Choumnik, in the North, and Andong Sor and Angkor Ban in the west. There were shortages of everything: *kitab* (religious books) and stationeries. Tuon Ya with the help of some villagers was searching in vain *kitab*s in houses which may have been overlook by the Khmer Rouge. Very unfortunately no *kitab*s were found. After that he made several trips to Phnom Penh's markets to find out if ever there were some left over. He found some and they were exchanged with rice, which he brought from his home. The barter was done because at that time there was no money in circulation in the country. He also found out that some *kitab*s which are sold there were brought in from Cham villages in Vietnam, like Saigon and Chaudoc. The *kitab*s sold there in Phnom Penh were snatched up like hot cakes as Muslims from other parts of the country were hunting for any *kitab*.

Not long after that, Zakaryya started to look for *kitab*s from somewhere else. He got in touch with *Rabitah* (Saudi Arabia) who sent him 10 *kitab*s; it was a personal gift from someone whom he did not know. These presents were delivered by mail. This was the beginning of so many things to happen in the field of Islamic education in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge.

Meanwhile, the government realizes the importance of the Muslim community in the process of national building. Every year in the month of December, the Heng Samrin government organized a *Moha Sanibat* (national conference) of the *Tuon* and *Hakim*. The *Moha Sanibat* was aimed at formulating a policy for the development of the Cambodian nation where the Muslim have been playing a very important role. The government knows the very important role played by the *Tuon* and *Hakim*, who are highly respected by the Muslim community. Through the *Tuon* and *Hakim*, the government's messages can be conveyed very easily to the people even in very remote villages. After the conference in the month of December 1987, 200 cartons of Koran weighing some 22 tons given by a person by the name of Isa Bin Nasir from Dubai, United Arab Emirates were distributed throughout the country through the *Tuons* and *Hakims* who were present at the conference. Prayer mats were also distributed.

In some villages, the copies of Koran are sold to individuals. The money collected was meant for building *surau* or mosques. When the *surau* or mosques were completed, the Koran bought earlier were now presented to the people by having them kept in these sacred places. Once again everyone enjoys the reading and learning of Koran.

During the early period after the liberation from the Khmer Rouge, under the Heng Samrin regime, Tuon Ya went from one village to another, to give Islamic talks

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Zakariyya Adam on 18 April 1988.



on various topics of the teachings of Islam, especially on *Fardhu Ain* (religious obligation of the individual Muslim). The Muslim community also organized talk-shows during weddings. On these occasions, villagers hired a PA (personal address) system. *Tuon* are invited to give lectures. These occasions are called “jamu puk” (*village feast*, in Cham) or “pataum tuon” (*gathering of teachers*, in Cham). It consists of lectures on prayers, fasting, *zakat*, the hajj, or any other topics which are related to the teachings of Islam. There were also Koran reading sessions, where children were showing off their skills. There were also lectures on *tafsir* (interpretations of the Koran) and *Hadiths* (the traditions of Prophet Muhammad) sessions.

Besides the teaching of Islam by local people, there were also preachers who came from outside Cambodia to carry out da'wah works. Since 1990, a few groups of *Da'wah Tabligh*, consisting of some overseas Cham and Malay, and the *al-Arqam* group went to Cambodia and Vietnam. Since 1991, the Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of South East Asia & Pacific (RISEAP), Malaysia, under the leadership of the late Dato' Ahmad Nordin Mohd Zain, sent regularly some Cham graduates, to organize Islamic classes in Cambodia, and Vietnam, and also to train the old and new *Hakim*. Under this programme, a school has been built in Phnom Penh and a few schools have been repaired.<sup>32</sup> The teaching of Islam has once again started and is welcomed by all Muslims in Indochina.

### Present Day Islamic Education

The teaching of Islam as described above continued until 1993, where the first election was held and the new Cambodia was headed by two Prime Ministers, namely the First and the Second Prime Ministers. The First Prime Minister, Prince Norodom Ranarith, was married to Princess Marie, who was *métis* of a Khmer and a Cham of Chrouy Changvar. The rate of intermarriage between Buddhist Khmer, both male and female, and Muslim Cham-Chvea is increasing (Ysa Osman 2010).

Now we have quite big number of *muallaf* (*tameu bani*, in Cham) living all over the country. But the main concern among the Muslims is always how to keep their youngsters within the grip of Islam. They are having this thought, especially those who are living in the big cities and the capital, because the development experienced by Cambodia now has brought along many elements which are against the teachings of Islam. Coupled with poverty, some young girls were lured into prostitution or were sent overseas as labourers, and many were exploited.<sup>33</sup>

The building of schools in various parts of the country is no longer a big problem, though mosques and *suraus* or even the *Tuon's* house as classrooms. During the course of our research in villages along Tonle Sap River and around the lake Tonle Sap, in the provinces of Kompong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, Siemreap and Kompong Thom, in 2008 and 2009, we have found out that in every village there was at least a school. Funds were collected to purchase tables, chairs and blackboards or whiteboards. Many *Tuon* lived on his students donations. Since 1990's the funding

<sup>32</sup>Discussions with Ustaz Yakob bin Ahmad (23 Dec 1993), a graduate from Libya. He was also involved in the da'wah project but was based in Malaysia.

<sup>33</sup>H.R.H Samdech Reach Botrei Preah Anoch Norodom Arunrasmy, the Royal Cambodian Ambassador in Malaysia, in an article published in The Star (a Malaysian daily) (16.01.2011) was quoted as saying do not expect “too much “that her nationals to feel the vacuum left behind by the freeze by other foreign maids, as it was found out by herself that many do not want to come back after their contract expired because of being abused by employers. She is as sympathetic to their plights as she has hosted a luncheon for some of the abused maids at her embassy.

came from overseas Cham, such as those living in Malaysia, France and the United States, and some philanthropist Malay. The overseas Cham usually sent their money to build or repair schools, *suraus* or mosques in their own village. There are also those who opened up schools in villages other than theirs. One of these people is Hj Ali Bin Taib, 57 years of age, together with his 42 years old brother Hj Zainal Abidin Bin Abd Majid. Both are from Khleang Sbek, Srok Ponhea Lu, Khet Kandal. They have built three *madrasah*:

- 1 Madrasah Nurul Hidayah  
Khum Kbal Romeas, Srok Tuk Thla, Khet Kompot  
Built in 2005  
Students: 70 male and 100 female
- 2 Madrasah Mahajirin  
Phum O Chrav, Khet Kompong Som  
Built in 2001  
Students: 120 male and female
- 3 Madrasah Nurul Hidayah Islamiah  
Phum Trea, Srok Krauch Chmar, Khet Kompong Cham  
Built in 1993  
Students: 180 male and 120 female.<sup>34</sup>

Many more schools were built one after the other since 1993. One of them is the famous *Ummul Kura*, which was built in 1998 and officially opened in 1999. There were some 40 teachers who were all foreigners; none of them was a Cham-Malay. There were then some 600 students prior to its closure on the 27 May 2003. It was closed because some of the teachers were accused as having connection with *Jumma Islamiah*. Those who were arrested were later freed and left for their home countries. By the 16 April 2004, an approval was made by the Cambodian cabinet allowing the Ummul Kura School and other religious schools in the country to reopen and be placed under the supervision of the *Mufti's* office.<sup>35</sup> The Ummul Kura centre was later officially reopened on 21 April 2004 and served as the *Islamic Center of Cambodian* placed under the *Cambodian Islamic Council (CIC)*.

Once the permission is given, the Cambodian Islamic Council (the *Mufti's* office) has also transformed the centre into a study centre for young Muslim students. The first batch of 304 students has been admitted to the center on October 04, 2004. Uknha Sos Kamry and H.E. Zakariyya Adam, under secretary of state, ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs headed the committee which oversee the running of the Center. The children of 13 to 15 years of age studying at the centre must go through double program which covered both the national school and religious programmes. The centre provides both Islamic and general education of secondary school level. Students and teachers are all Cham. It is a boarding school. In 2004, the students have to pay 40,000 Riels (US\$10.00) per month to the centre for their food and accommodation. This amount was hardly enough. According to Uknha Sos Kamry, the centre had to fork out another USD15.00 per student per month to cover the expenses.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Hj Ali bin Taib on 10 Jan 2011.

<sup>35</sup> The approval letter addressed to the Mufti, Oknha Sos Kamry (Ust. Kamaruddin bin Yusof) was signed by the Home Minister, H.E. Sok An (Ref. no. 408 s.j.n dated 16 April 2004).



A mosque in a village of the district of Krauch Chmar, Kompong Cham.  
(Photo: Agnès De Féo, 2007)



A floating Surau in Choeung Khnéas village, Siemreap  
(Photo: Higuchi Hideo 1994)

### **Some problems**

In view of the backgrounds of schools funded by various people or organizations, and employing graduates from various Muslim countries, there were those who for some reasons, accused those attending or supporting schools funded by the Kuwaiti or Saudi Arabia as belonging to Al Wahabi (Imam Mohamad bin Abdul Wahab) movement. This is in fact a small problem, as so far there is no case being brought before the courts of law, but it is disturbing as it could break the unity among the Muslims. Though it should be noted that, since 1993, there was only one incident, which happened in Phum Pœuh, in the district of Krauch Chmar, Kompong Cham province, where one Imam, accused of being supporter of Wahabi School, was stabbed to death in mid-2000. Consequently, some parents carefully chose the school to which they would send their children, the school they believe would teach them the

*true teachings* of Islam. The province of Kompong Cham is far advanced compared to the other provinces in terms of number of well-organized Islamic schools. Next come the area around the capital, Phnom Penh, and in the provinces of Battambang and Kompot.

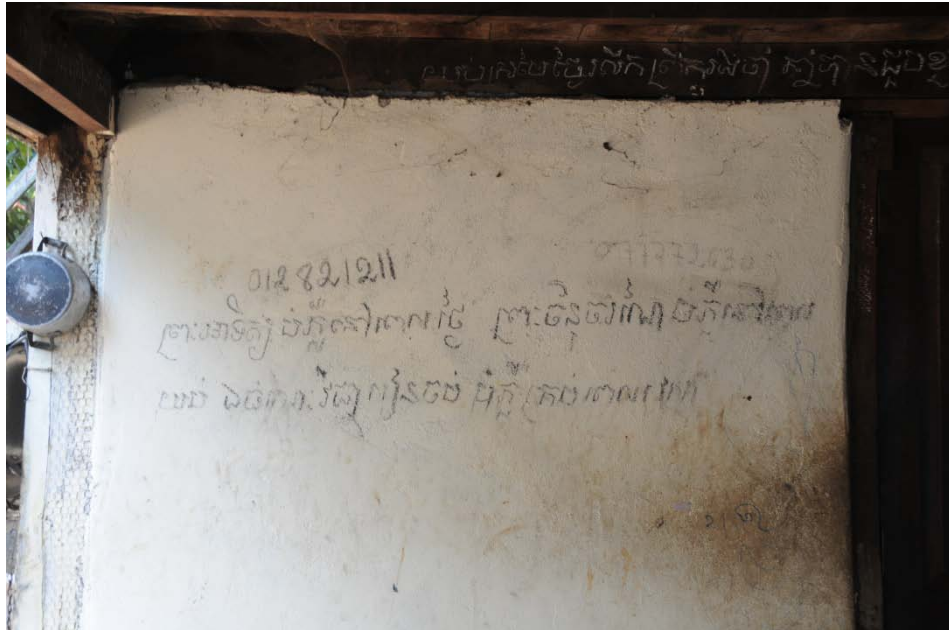
### **Conclusion**

Since their arrival in the Kingdom of Cambodia, the *Khmer Islam* always consider Cambodia as their home. Together with the Khmers they have been working very hard to defend and building up the Cambodian nation. As they practice Islam, they have been considered by the Khmers as a peculiar group of people, because being Muslims, they could never let themselves be assimilated by the Khmer ethnic whose religion is Buddhism. However their integration in the national community is total.

As they understand that Islam is not only the believe that they have to hold on but most importantly the only factor that can keep their identity alive, they have to strengthen the Islamic education, in addition to the national education, especially after the Pol Pot era, during which any form of religiosity was completely destroyed. Besides, the very long history of their presence in Cambodia, the royal governments have given them full liberty to exercise their freedom of choice and full support in their noble endeavour.

The Muslim Cambodian community have expressed their heartfelt thanks to many, individuals, governmental institutions and many NGOs, local and foreign, for their supports. The education system of *pondok*, *madrasah* and institutions of higher learning are in need to develop further. Until now the traditional system of Islamic education has helped them to maintain balance in their lives and relations with the outside world. They are moving in the right direction. And with both forms of education, religious and national education, they can become progressive citizens. With their intellectual and economic situation in par with other communities, only then the Muslim community continues to live in peace and harmony with other communities in the kingdom.

They were even praised by the Prime Minster Hun Sen himself who had said at one Meeting the People session in 1998 that "The Cham are trust worthy and always very grateful ..." These words are true to his spirit as times and again he has been defending them again all accusations, from the inside or outside the country. The peaceful nature of both the Khmer and the Cam-Chvea, has allowed them to live side by side, as it has been observed by the first French who arrived in Cambodia during the French protectorate that "a Muslim population and a Buddhist people living together in almost brotherly relations" (A. Pavie 1901: 28-29) was very true, and we pray that this bond will never be broken.



Advice found on the wall of a Cham house in Prek Pra village which reads:  
 The sun shines during day time  
 The beautiful moon brightens night time  
 Knowledge Lights all the time.  
 (Photo: Mohamad Zain Musa 10.01.2011)

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