

## History of the Settlement of Arabs In Indonesia

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**Abstract:** In Indonesia, both in the cities and in the villages, there are many people whose faces look like Arabs. Actually, they are indeed descendants of Arabs, but they were born in Indonesia. These Arab descendants have lived for a long time in Indonesia in a downward manner, forming a community and sporadically occupying certain regions of Indonesia. They don't only work as traders, but also as educators and hold important positions in the government. It has been debated where they came from due to there are so many Arab countries. This article will explain the arrival of the first Arabs who came to Indonesia using several different theories.

**Keywords:** Arab, Indonesia, Hadhramaut, social, culture

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The area known as Hadhramaut is located in the southwest corner of Arabia. It is currently one of the provinces of the Republic of Yemen. Hadhramaut is divided into two regions, where one is a coastal area in which there are two major cities, Mukalla and Shihr, the gateway to the Indian Ocean and the rural areas with mountains and rocky highlands. In that area there are a number of deep valleys, one of which is named Hadhramaut Valley. The Hadhramaut Valley is very fertile and densely populated. Inside there are big cities, such as Shibam, Say'un, and Tarim, which are traditionally considered as the places for Hadhramaut culture. Besides Hadhramaut, the other valleys are the al-'Ain, Daw'an, and 'Amd Valley which stretch in the South and Southwest. These valleys are very useful for the survival of their economy, because these valleys are the access to the Indian Ocean which is an important route in trade. In both the coastal and rural areas, the weather is very extreme. In the afternoon, it is very hot especially in the highlands, and during the night it is very cold. Rain rarely falls, and if there is any, it is just drizzle. If there are two heavy rains in a year, it shows that the year is a good year. (Kesheh, 1999: 18)

Formerly, to the south of the Hadhramaut Valley, there was someone who was most feared by families and tribes throughout Arabia. This person was named Amir bin Qahtan. He was feared for his courage, foresight and strength. Every time he joined the war, then the place would turn into a valley of death. For this reason, Arab tribes at that time named their place of residence as Hadhramaut. *Hadra* means "present" and *maut* means "death", where Amir bin Qahtan was, and there too, death was present with him. The people of Hadhramaut are called Hadramis. They live in a city full of buildings centred on irrigation along the river. In the period after the Prophet Muhammad, most of them became traders and adventurers who connected the eastern part of the African Continent, such as Sudan and Somalia, with the southern part of the Asian continent, such as India and Indonesia. Most of them traded by following the direction of the West and East winds. This forced them to wait several months before returning to their hometown. During this waiting period, interactions between them and the indigenous people occurred. Some of the traders preached and also married native women. Most of them settled there. (Suyanto, 2008: 125).

Fishing was an important livelihood in the east of Hadhramaut and along the coast. Their economic activity focused on the sea. They used small traditional Arab boats. Many of those who tried their luck at sea travelled abroad for several years. After that, they returned to his family to build a house made of wood carvings that reminded us of the model of houses in East India. (Penn, 2001).

Traditionally, the Hadhramaut society is divided into several levels. The highest level is the *Sayyid*, which is a group of religious and social leaders who are considered descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his grandson Husayn. This group considers Ahmad ibn Isa al-Muhajir as the descendant of the eighth generation of the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, Fatimah. Originally from Basrah, Iraqi people then entered Hadhramaut in 952 AD. Based on this descent, in Hadhramaut, the Sayyid group was highly respected and made a religious teacher or mediator in tribal disputes. In fact, some of them are considered as people who

have supernatural powers and the graves of the guardians of the Sayyid are used as places for pilgrimage and popular ritual activities. These people who belong to the sayyid group are called *Sayyid* (which literally means "King") or *Habib* (loved ones). When people meet with sayyids, they have to kiss their hands and the daughters of the Sayyid must not marry people who are lower than their status.

The second level of the system of stratification is occupied by *masya'ikh* (educated people) and *qaba'il* (tribal leaders). These people become religious leaders in Hadhramaut, with support from the Sayyid. This *masya'ikh* family usually comes from a family of guardians whose tombs are taken care of. Meanwhile, even though *qaba'il* is the same as *masha'ikh*, the social role is very different. They are tribes who live in the rural, like to carry weapons, are considered unbelievers, and compete with each other. Respect for them is seen from their ability to carry weapons and defend themselves. The al-Kathiri and Quayti tribes fall into this level category.

The third level of this stratification system is occupied by *masakin* (poor people) and *dhu'afa* (weak people), namely people who cannot trace their descendants to their ancestors. There are a lot of people who fall into this category. According to Serjeant, in general, this can be divided into two parts. Included in the category of *masakin* are traders, carpenters, masons, artists who have technical expertise and those included in the category *dhu'afa* are construction workers, gardeners. *Masakin* and *dhu'afa* occupy the majority of the population in villages and cities in Hadhramaut. As unarmed city dwellers, they need political protection from a higher class. The lowest level of this stratification system is the slaves who came from Africa who were not only Arabs (Kesheh, 1999: 18)

## II. THE PEOPLE OF HADHRAMAUTIN INDONESIA

Regular trade routes between South Arabia and countries in Southeast Asia appeared to have existed in the early 7th century. Tourists from Europe and Arabia who had been to Southeast Asia reported that since the 13th century, there had been several Arab merchant settlements in the central regions trading. However, it cannot be ascertained that these people came from Hadhramaut. The first major wave of migration of Hadhramaut people to Southeast Asia took place in the latter half of the 18th century. This happened, because many of the men from Hadhramaut were interested in stories about treasure found in Southeast Asia, then they travelled to the region. The Hadhramaut people first docked in Aceh. From there, they then travelled to Palembang in South Sumatra and Pontianak in Kalimantan. Since 1820, the settlements of the Hadhramaut people had appeared in various trade centres along the North coast of Java. Meanwhile, the settlement of Hadhramaut people in Eastern Indonesia appeared since 1870.

The earliest census data in 1859 showed that Hadhramaut people living on Java and Madura amounted to 4992, consisting of men, women and children. Plus 2776 people who live outside the island, so that the number becomes 7768, except Aceh which was not included in Dutch supervision. Although the census data referred to Arabs in general, the greatest number came from Hadhramaut. The 1870 census recorded 12412 Arabs, 7495 living in Java and Madura, 4917 living outside the island under Dutch supervision. With the opening of the Suez canal in 1869 and the introduction of steam power vessels between Arabia and the Indies, the average number of migratory Hadhramaut people increased. This increase was seen from the 1885 census data which showed that there were 20,501 Arabs, 10,888 in Java Madura and 9613 outside the island, which showed an increase of approximately 45% and 96% in the 15 years since 1870. This growth continued to increase. In 1900 the number became 27,399 and in 1920 the number became 44,902 and in 1930. According to the latest census data before World War II, the number was 71,335. It was estimated that there would be around 80,000 Arabs until the Japanese occupation in 1942.

The majority of these migrants are from the Kathiri region, especially from the Hadhramaut Valley, between the Cities of Shibam and Tarim. Upon arrival in the Indies, they usually occupied areas that were previously occupied by relatives or other migrants from the same village. In addition to creating a sense of kinship, close relationships were the reasonable means of finding work. Almost all Hadhramaut people made a living by trading. Van den Berg illustrated that the Hadhramaut people who had just arrived in the late 19th century worked as helpers in a shop or as small traders belonging to their relatives who had come first in the village. After sufficient income, they would work as independent traders, such as becoming brokers, which is buying imported goods from large European companies and reselling them to other traders or consumers from Indonesia. Almost all of the merchandise they sold was textiles, especially cotton. Other items they sold were manufactured goods from Europe, such as watches and products made of iron or steel, as well as products from the Middle East, such as dates and prayer beads, and the 20th century they added the list with books.

If they lived in certain areas outside Java and Madura, they also sold special local merchandise, such as forest products and horses. When they already had the sufficient capital, even though the Quran prohibits usury, they began to lend their capital to others with high interests. If some of them were lucky enough, after several years of hard work, they would increase their business by investing their funds into property in one of the major cities in Indonesia and received the title as landlords. Between 1912-1919, even though there was World War I,

there were 1121 people who requested permission to enter Indonesia. About 75% were traders, who when they arrived in Indonesia, had cash between 100-1500 rupiah, merchandise worth 100-1200 rupiah, mainly in the form of the famous Daw'an honey. Approximately 18% of traders had their capital guaranteed by their families who had lived there first and only 7% came without capital. This picture shows that most migrants had money or relatives in the Indies.

The business of Hadhramaut people in the property sector also flourished. In early 1860, the as-Saqaf family owned 20 houses in Surabaya, 3 houses and land that had not yet been built in Batavia. In 1914, ShaykhSalih bin Ubayd bin Abdat owned a luxury hotel "Des Galeries", the second largest hotel in Batavia. At the end of 1930, al-Kaf had a construction company called "N.V. BouwMaatschappij Al-Kaff ". At the same time, a well-known investor, Baswedan, from Shibam in Hadhramaut, had hundreds of houses in Singapore and Batavia. The Palembang Arabs also invested in property. In the 1930s, the sector was hit by an economic recession, but then rose again at the end of the decade. Likewise, when World War II broke out, this property field had a problem. However, in the late 1960s, the situation began to improve. The involvement of Arabs in property, construction and hotels began to rise again.

Another successful business was Batik. In 1840, Arabs in Pekalongan had imported cotton and wax for use by Javanese women making batik. Around 1860, the Arabs financed the holding of individual workspaces to make hand-made batik or printed batik which were cheaper using steel stamp (Abushouk, 2009: 145). On the north coast of Java, batik developed as a local product which was cheaper than Indian products. The patterns of batik, some of which were taken from Indian patterns, were then reproduced to be used by Javanese and sold in various parts of Southeast Asia. Among the people trading on the North Coast of Java were Arabs from the Arab Islamic descent community (Kauman), descended from Indian and Arab Islamic clothing merchants living in Southeast Asia and marrying indigenous women. These Arabs adopted local customs and languages. This can be seen by the term *pakian*, which is called "Sarong Cloth" (Maxwell, 2003: 325).

In addition, some Hadhramaut people in Indonesia also had an important role in the field of journalism. They supported the spread of ideas and knowledge through their publications. Printers from Arabia existed in Indonesia in the early 1850s. The greatest expansion in the field of printing occurred in 1910-1920 with the growth of various journals in Arabic, Malay and a mixture of the two languages. In addition to the efforts made by the Hadhramaut people in the field of printing, especially the newspapers, the hard work of the Hadhramaut people in establishing modern educational institutions was specially treated as the most important part of the rise of Hadhramaut people in the first four decades in twentieth century.

This development in journalism formed a strong relationship with the emergence of modernisation of Islam in Indonesia. The growing vision of a new education motivated by the perceptions of Islamic modernists and opposing the outdated traditional education system was considered as important in the rise of Hadhramaut people. As part of a new view in the field of education and teaching, students were encouraged to read the original newspapers published by their community. Many reading rooms were opened. This Arab-Muslim publication of the Hadhramaut people attracted a larger Islamic world, especially in urban centres, such as Cairo, Istanbul and Mecca. In the same way, the publication was used as a program to spread Islamic issues and the idea of Islamism. In the publication, they also expressed their sympathy for the Ottoman Dynasty which at that time was experiencing a setback and destruction with the abolition of the Caliphate system in 1924 (Eliraz, 2004: 53).

Many Hadhramaut people who came to Indonesia came from cities in Hadhramaut and people who were already familiar in the trade sector. With their expertise in the art of trading, they could quickly keep up with trade developments, especially as intermediaries in cross-border economic transactions or traders. Its economic strength was as good as its capacity in religious expertise. The native people considered them to have pious and orthodox lifestyles. This attitude was shown by the natives, especially towards the Sayyid group, who were and still are considered descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, to have the highest position among Arabs as the elite in the Arab community in Indonesia, and those who are not sayyid, but still in obedience and have expertise in Islam. The people of Hadhramaut in Indonesia have been mostly religious and more careful in carrying out daily worship than Muslims in Indonesia in general, so that their position is highly respected. Besides, Arabs were adherents in the origin of Islam, so their status is considered higher than that of the followers afterward.

Likewise, the people of Hadhramaut themselves felt comfortable living in Indonesia, because they were not considered foreigners by the indigenous people, especially after they formed a community that mingled with the local community. Some of these Arabs married women from the indigenous population and had children from the wombs of Indonesian women. This happened because at that time there was a strict prohibition on Hadhramaut women to be able to migrate to Indonesia. Due to be this, there is an opinion that this was why Indonesian people cannot expel Arab communities from Indonesia.

Therefore, it is no surprise that there are Arabs in Indonesia who work as teachers or religious leaders. The religious level, social status and their descendants from the Middle East naturally put them in the forefront of

religious interactions between the Middle East and Indonesia. The role of the Hadhramaut people as cultural intermediaries between the two regions is also supported by the strong relations and ties that they cultivate with the Middle East, due to their genuine involvement in trade between regions. They also often send their children back to their father's country to study or to participate in events that occur in Arab countries. They subscribe to journals and publications published in the Middle East and learn Arabic due to the fact that the Arabic language can maintain their history as a cultural intermediary between the two regions. Through their economic, religious, vitality and efforts to meet modern needs, the people of Hadhramaut have managed to give their influence not only in religious matters, but also in economic, political and social developments in Indonesia. (Eliraz, 2004: 53)

### III. CONCLUSION

One reason that the Arab community in Southeast Asia mostly come from Hadhramaut is because of the successful and international trade links and families of Hadhramaut people. They live in various cities in the Southeast Asian region (Feener: 2009: 115). In Indonesia, it seems that the Hadhramaut people easily blend with the native population. Van den Berg said that most Hadhramaut people have blended in fully with native people within three to four generations. There are several factors that make it easy for the adaptation process. The first is that Hadhramaut people who came to Indonesia were mostly adult men. In Hadhramaut, there is a cultural taboo which prohibits Hadhramaut women from traveling to the coastline. This led to a high rate of marriage between migrants from Hadhramaut and native Indonesian women, thus providing access for husbands to mingle with the local community. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Hadhramaut people were able to form an alliance with powerful families in parts of the Indonesian archipelago. Peter Carey discovered the marriage of certain Hadhramaut people with women from important royal families in Java at the beginning of the 19th century. In Pontianak and Sumba marriage was used as a stepping stone by adventurers from Hadhramaut to establish the sultanate. Hadhramaut people refer children as a result of their marriage with indigenous women as *muwallad* (mixed blood), to distinguish them from *aqhah* or *wulayati* (pure Arabic blood). In a short time, the *muwallad* then formed a community of Hadhramaut people.

The second factor that caused Hadhramaut people to be more easily mingled with indigenous people, compared to other nations such as China, was a religious factor. Migrants from Hadhramaut had the same religion as indigenous people, namely Islam. In port cities in Indonesia, there were Muslim communities who engaged in large international trade. They joined Indians, Javanese, Minangkabau and others and formed a community bound by mutual trust and mutual benefit. Therefore, Hadhramaut people were no longer considered as 'foreigners', but as members of a broad and widespread Muslim community throughout the world (Kesheh, 1999: 18)

The history of the Hadhramaut people in Indonesia has had a successful history, both in the fields of trade, politics, education and religion. Especially after the absence of pressure and interference from the Netherlands, many Hadhramaut people in Indonesia were successful in their trade. Some of them had established companies. Even though they were entangled in a wider international business network, they remain focused on businesses whose management is held by their closest family and relatives. Likewise, in international trade relations, they often involved relatives. The trading business that characterised them was furniture or clothing stores on the roadside for the lower class, or in certain places for the upper class. The people who worked in the shop were mostly family and relatives. Sometimes husband and wife from one family traded separately, even though it was still in one location. Some of these still appear now, such as the one in Klungkung, Bali, where there is a shop that has two adjacent rooms and each has its own entrance. In one room, the wife sells clothes for women and the other room, the husband sells household furniture. (Jacobsen, 2009: 3)

The people of Hadhramaut in Indonesia come from all levels. The farmers and traders, they are part of the Hadhramaut people from the honourable group, like *sayyid*, *sharif* and *masha'ikh*. In Indonesia, in fact, both Hadhramaut people from the upper class or lower classes all work as traders. Although there are some authors who claim that the social structure of Hadhramaut people has been grafted in Indonesia as a whole and in its entirety in the 20th century, the system collapsed in the late 19th century. Van den Berg, in 1886, conducted a research and said that the relations of Hadhramaut people were constantly changing. Being a *sayyid* is not a guarantee of a high level. There were some sayyids who complained to him that there were Hadhramaut people from his group who had forgotten their duties as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Dutch government often appointed Arabs who were not from the *sayyid* group to become leaders in an Arab community. Likewise, as the population of Arabs in a city grew and required people to organise, the Dutch government appointed one of those who had a reputation to be the leader. The first appointment of Arabs to become leaders took place in 1819 in Semarang, then followed by others throughout the 19th century. Arabs who were appointed chiefs were called Hoofd der Arabieren (Leaders of the Arabs) and given rank in the military as Lieutenant or Captain. Their job was to be an intermediary between his community and the Dutch government, to provide statistical information, input to the government regarding matters relating to Arabs, to spread regulations or decrees from the government, and to comply with laws and regulations.

More than half of the Arab leaders appointed by the Dutch colonial government were Arabs who were not from the *sayyid* group. With more non-*sayyid* Arabs being appointed in government positions than the *sayyid* Arabs, it showed that the assumptions of traditional Hadhramaut people about the social stratification system had collapsed. With the collapse of this system of social stratification, at the end of the 19th century, a new group emerged whose recruitment of members was based on welfare and education rather than descent. Its members consisted of fortunate traders and property entrepreneurs in the century. This group is led by Abdullah Al-Atas and Umar Manqush. (Kesheh, 1999: 18)

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