

# MAPPING OF MALAY ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN GOMBAK DISTRICT, SELANGOR

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## ABSTRACT

Gombak District in the Klang valley contributes considerable importance to the history of Malay settlement which traces back hundreds of years that led to the existence of Malay architectural heritage in the Gombak district. Hence, this research seeks to inventory the current condition of Malay architectural heritage in Gombak. The research methodology involved a literature review, onsite inventory, and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Thirty-two (32) Malay traditional houses and masjids from 21 villages in Gombak have been inventoried. Most of them were built for over 80 years, while a few were 140 years old. The research also revealed that ten (10) heritage buildings are still in good condition and reasonably preserved. Proactive preservation initiatives and conservation efforts must be carried out continuously to conserve the traditional Malay houses and masjids to be appreciated by future generations.

**Keywords:** Inventory, Malay Architectural Heritage, Tangible, Traditional, Gombak

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Malay architectural style existed way back hundred years ago within the Malay peninsula. The architectural style is commonly found in the form of traditional houses, mosques, forts and royal palaces. One of the reputable elements of Malay's tangible heritage is the Malay traditional house. Abdul Halim and Wan Hashim (1997) described the house as one of the Malay architectural heritage, a primary identity for the Malay community. The Malay houses' style and form are related to the surroundings, topography, local climate, builder's capability, religious influence, economic status, and lifetime value. Since then, it has undergone a series of transformations, and building the house has been passed down from generation.

In Peninsular Malaysia, there are various distinct regional variations of the form of the Malay traditional house. According to Mohamad Tajuddin (2005), the regional styles of Malay traditional houses can be grouped into four main design styles: Perak style, Melaka style, Kedah style and East coast style. Each style can be differentiated through its roof shape, form, layout plan and structure. The traditional Malay architecture has also been subjected to the influence of its outer regions and neighbours: Indonesian, Bugis, Riau and Java from the south; Siamese, British, Arab and Indian from the north; Portuguese, Dutch, Aceh and Minangkabau from the west; and Southern Chinese from the east (Tajuddin, 2005). However, sad to say that many Malay traditional houses were neglected and abandoned not only in Gombak but also around the country. Among the common reasons are:

- i. young generations are not interested in staying in the traditional timber house
- ii. the traditional house required high maintenance
- iii. unresolved family inheritance issues

In order to preserve the Malay traditional houses, several government agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs), and institutions have taken many initiatives. Several traditional houses were repaired and relocated to a few local institutions for educational purposes, such as Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Politeknik Port Dickson. In addition, most architecture schools in Malaysia, such as KALAM UTM and Heritage Lab IIUM, have documented many Malaysian heritage buildings, including the Malay traditional houses and masjids, for archive and research purposes.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Malay Architectural Heritage in Selangor

Selangor does not have its own distinctive traditional Malay house design. Abdul Halim and Wan Hashim (2011) mentioned that the design of *Rumah Bumbung Panjang Tua* which still exists in Selangor, where the architecture features were derived from *Rumah Bumbung Panjang* Melaka as well as *Rumah Bumbung Panjang* Negeri Sembilan. *Rumah Bumbung Panjang Tua* houses can be found in Kuala Langat and Kuala Selangor. Most of the Malay population in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur were originally from various ethnicities from Sumatera island back in the 1800s. These were the Bugis, Jawa, Minang, Mendailing and Rawa (Nelawami and Nordin, 2011). One prominent figure as an example is Khatib Koyan bin Abdullah, the first chief of Setapak. He was a successful Minang migrant in Kuala Lumpur. Back in the day, he owned most of the land in Gombak from Batu 2 to Batu 9 and managed a tin mining business along the Gombak river. He also opened the old Masjid Jamiul Ehsan in Setapak, renovated and inaugurated in 1933. Another prominent figure of Minang migrants is Sutan Puasa, who migrated to Ampang during Raja Abdullah's time while exploring Kuala Lumpur. Due to the diversity of ethnic origins, Gombak offers an infinite history of heritage value in natural and cultural forms. Thus, efforts must be made to preserve these existing traditional houses to inform our present and future generations of their heritage.

Rumah Penghulu Haji Abbas or famously known as Rumah Pak Ali in Kampung Kerdas, was among the prominent traditional houses in Gombak (Figure 1). It is reported that the house was built and designed in 1875 by the owner, Penghulu Haji Abbas bin Haji Abu Bakar. The house was designed in a unique blend of Perak and Sumatran architecture, using *Chengal* timber as the primary building material. Tragically, Rumah Pak Ali was destroyed in a fire on 20 October 2003 (Figure 2).

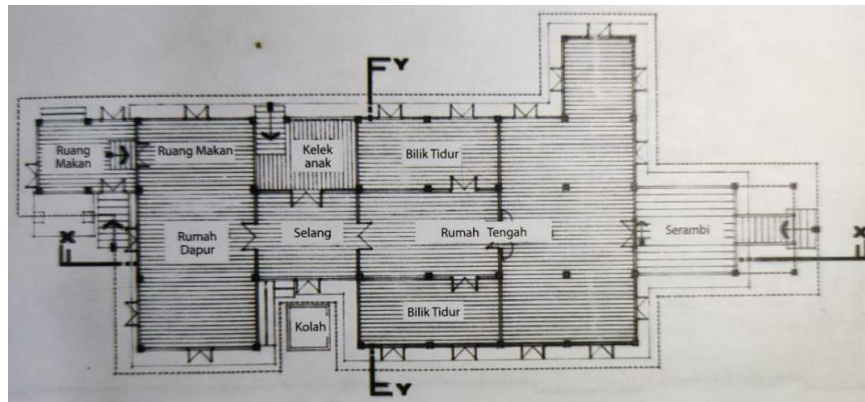


**Fig. 1:** Rumah Penghulu Haji Abbas or Rumah Pak Ali in Kampung Kerdas, Gombak



**Fig. 2:** Rumah Pak Ali was destroyed in a fire on 20 October 2003  
(Source: <http://fireheritage.blogspot.com/>)

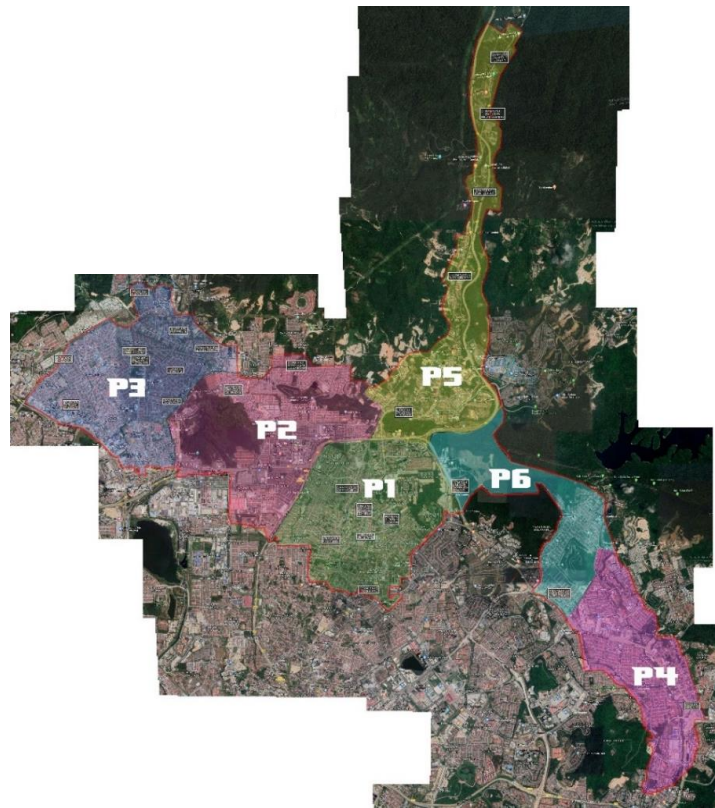
Similar to the common layout of a traditional Malay house, Rumah Pak Ali was divided into a few main spaces which are *serambi*, *rumah tengah*, *selang*, *kelek anak* and *rumah dapur* (kitchen) as shown Figure 3. Each space has its unique function; they are carefully designed according to position for various social and household activities. Most of the timber used to construct the house was retrieved from the nearby forest.



**Fig. 3:** The floor plan of Rumah Pak Ali  
(Source: Warisan Seni Bina Selangor)

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

Gombak was founded on 1 February 1974, concurrently establishing the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Covering 65,008 hectares, Gombak is the third smallest district in Selangor, with hilly terrains in the east, north and west, while the central region is mainly lowlands. The main rivers flowing through are Sungai Gombak, Sungai Klang, and Sungai Batu. Gombak is divided into five sub-districts and villages; the largest is Rawang Sub-District I, followed by Rawang Sub-District II and the sub-districts of Batu, Setapak and Hulu Klang (Gombak District and Land Office, 2021). According to the Gombak District and Land Office, there are 44 villages in the Gombak district. However, this research only involves 25 villages from three subdivisions: Setapak, Hulu Kelang, and Batu (Figure 4), as these subdivisions were the early Malay settlements of the original Gombak district (Table 1).



**Fig. 4:** Zones of the research area.

**Table 1** List of the inventoried villages in the research

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Name of Villages</b>
<b>P1</b>	1) Kampung Changkat 2) Kampung Kerdas 3) Kampung Simpang Tiga 4) Kampung Tengah 5) Kampung Tengah Lembah
<b>P2</b>	1) Kampung Melayu Seri Gombak 2) Kampung Melayu Wira Damai
<b>P3</b>	1) Kampung Nakhoda 2) Kampung Selayang Indah 3) Kampung Laksamana 4) Kampung Sungai Tua 5) Kampung Sungai Tua Bahru 6) Kampung Sungai Kertas 7) Kampung Bendahara
<b>P4</b>	1) Kampung Pasir
<b>P5</b>	1) Kampung Sungai Chinchin 2) Kampung Sungai Salak Batu 10 3) Kampung Batu Sebelas 4) Kampung Batu Dua Belas Gombak
<b>P6</b>	1) Kampung Tengah Tambahan MRR2 2) Kampung Kelang Gates Baharu

The main aim of the research is to identify the Malay architectural heritage in Gombak, which still retains the design structure of Malay traditional features. The traditional Malay buildings in Gombak are identified and later recorded in an inventory form. The research involved a literature review, onsite inventory, and face-to-face semi-structured interview methods. It is important to note that Pertubuhan Pewaris Anak-anak Melayu Gombak (PEWARGA) and Hj. Ishak Surin, *Ketua Kampung* (Chief Village) Banda Dalam have assisted in giving brief information on the traditional Malay houses in Gombak. However, due to the movement control order of COVID 19, onsite inventory and interviews were postponed and rescheduled many times. During the onsite inventories, photographs of the identified houses also were recorded using a smartphone to record the current condition and structure of the houses. There are five (5) benchmarking building categories, category 'A' being the best and category 'E' being the lowest condition, which is unsafe to inhabit (Table 2). Face-to-face interview with the local experts of Gombak was conducted through a telephone appointment. Walk-in-interview with the user of the identified houses was conducted during the onsite inventory.

**Table 2** Building category according to condition and structure

Category	Integrated Analysis	
	Condition	Structure
A	Good	Structurally sound
B	Fair	Structurally sound
C	Poor	Structurally sound
D	Fair	Moderate
E	Very Poor	Unsafe

#### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research discovered thirty-two (32) traditional Malay buildings that include houses and masjids from the data collection conducted from October 2020 until April 2021 (Table 3). Most traditional buildings are located within the southern zone of Setapak (P1), with 19 (59.4%) buildings, which is believed to be the initial opening of the original Gombak district. While at the P5, the northern zone comprises seven (21.9%) buildings. However, there were five (15.6%) buildings on the P3, the western zone of Batu and no building on P2, the eastern zone of Batu. Only one (3.1%) building in P4, the western zone of Hulu Kelang and no buildings in P6, the southern zone of Hulu Kelang.

**Table 3** Number of Malay traditional buildings by zone

Zone	Total	Percentage (%)
P1 - Setapak (South)	19	59.4
P2 - Batu (East)	0	0.0
P3 - Batu (West)	5	15.6
P4 - Hulu Kelang (South)	1	3.1
P5 - Setapak (North)	7	21.9
P6 - Hulu Kelang (North)	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.0</b>



**Fig. 4:** Traditional Malay houses



**Fig. 5:** Traditional Malay masjids

Most of the buildings surveyed were believed to be more than 80 years. From the survey, ten houses and one masjid were more than 100 years old (28.2%). Also, houses and masjids were built during the 1930s and 1940s, which were more than 80 years old (51.3%). The rest were built after the 1950s, and a few houses were believed to be 30 to 40 years old (20.5%).

From the onsite inventory, the research identified that 10.3% of the surveyed houses were abandoned for unknown reasons (Table 4). Due to the Gombak district's geographic location, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, most houses are still inhabited even though the house residents are tenants and not the owner. It is interesting to note that some of the houses are still inhabited by the heir of the original owner. Whereby most of the other houses are not the original heir of the first owner. Therefore, very minimal information can be obtained about the houses. The traditional Malay house and masjid symbolise the lifestyle of the Malays.

**Table 4** Finding on status of the buildings

Status of buildings	Total	Percentage (%)
Inhabited/Still in use	28	87.5
Uninhabited/Abandoned	4	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.0</b>



**Fig. 6:** Sample of inhabited houses



**Fig. 7:** Abandoned/uninhabited houses

Based on the data, many houses and masjids were reasonably preserved and still inhabited (Figure 6). Seven (7) houses and three (3) masjids (31.3%) were categorised as 'A' because they were preserved well even though they underwent many renovations. From the field survey, most houses had gone through many renovations to meet the current needs, such as adding or enlarging rooms and kitchens. Thus moving away from the original layout of the traditional houses and were partially preserved. From the material perspective, many occupants of the houses preferred to use modern materials such as corrugated zinc for the roof and composite brick & concrete for the houses' structure because it is relatively cheaper than the original material of the houses, which is timber. Whereby fourteen (14) houses and one (1) masjids were put under 'B' category (46.9%). The buildings are still in fair condition after going through minor renovations. The masjid is carefully taken care of because it is the focal point of the community. The next category is 'C' with three (3) houses (9.4%). Although they were not well preserved, they were still in firm physical condition. The 'D' category with three (3) houses (9.4%) seemed poorly preserved but still fair to be inhabited. The final condition is 'E' with one (1) house (3.0%); the house has been abandoned, badly damaged by termites, full of bushes, and almost destroyed (Figure 7). The traditional Malay house is a valuable gem of architecture to be preserved for future generations and has many unique features that current modern houses do not have.

**Table 5** Condition category of the surveyed buildings

Category	Integrated Analysis			
	Condition	Structure	Number of Buildings	Percentage (%)
<b>A</b>	Good	Structurally Sound	10	31.3
<b>B</b>	Fair	Structurally Sound	15	46.9
<b>C</b>	Poor	Structurally Sound	3	9.4
<b>D</b>	Fair	Moderate	3	9.4
<b>E</b>	Very Poor	Unsafe	1	3.0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

The research has inventoried 32 Malay traditional houses and masjids throughout Gombak. Most of the houses and masjids found have been around for more than 80 years; some were more than 100 years old and up to 140 years old. It was discovered that 10 (31.3%) of the surveyed buildings were still in good condition and moderately preserved. However, the buildings underwent many renovations to meet the current needs. Preservation and conservation efforts need to be done immediately to the traditional Malay buildings, which can be maintained so that future generations can appreciate this cultural heritage. Indeed, the Rumah Pak Ali tragedy should not be repeated in other heritage buildings. Heritage buildings are priceless and irreplaceable but very vulnerable. Efforts from the local authorities, especially Selayang Municipal Council and organisations related to heritage tourism, can take appropriate action and measures to preserve and promote this cultural heritage. Furthermore, the areas in which the traditional houses and masjids are in Gombak, especially in the Setapak sub-district, famous for its historical remains, can be promoted as a tourist heritage trail.

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