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Al-Shajarah is a refereed international journal that publishes original scholarly articles in the area of Islamic thought, Islamic civilization, Islamic science, and Malay world issues. The journal is especially interested in studies that elaborate scientific and epistemological problems encountered by Muslims in the present age, scholarly works that provide fresh and insightful Islamic responses to the intellectual and cultural challenges of the modern world. *Al-Shajarah* will also consider articles written on various religions, schools of thought, ideologies and subjects that can contribute towards the formulation of an Islamic philosophy of science. Critical studies of translation of major works of major writers of the past and present. Original works on the subjects of Islamic architecture and art are welcomed. Book reviews and notes are also accepted.

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translated into Malay language (with more affordable price) so that a greater segment of the Malay society can benefit from it.

Santhiram R. Raman, *From Decolonization to Ethno-nationalism: A study of Malaysia's School History Syllabuses and Textbooks 1905 - 2020*. Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD): Petaling Jaya, 2021, 111 pp. I still don't have it from the reviewers; please go ahead without it.

Reviewers: Dr. Wan Ali Wan Mamat is Senior Academic Fellow (ISTAC-IIUM); Email: wanaliwm@iium.edu.my; and Abdul Rahman Ali, Malaysia Historical Society, Email: abdulrahman41@gmail.com

The history syllabus and textbooks in the Malaya/Malaysia education system became a matter of interest only within the few years before the country's independence in 1957 to eventually become a controversy among concerned educationists and academicians. During the British colonial period, the syllabus and textbooks, despite being European-centric/English oriented and far from being Malayan in form and content, were generally accepted without much dispute, perhaps because during this period the number of local historians and educated elites were still small. Education in the country was then under the colonial dominance. Furthermore, history teachers, having been educated under the British colonial system, even after some years of independence were more familiar and at ease with the old colonial curriculum. However, after Malaya (later Malaysia) gained Independence from the British in 1957 and Malaysia in 1963, the controversy about the right approach in the teaching of Malayan history came to the fore. The main contentious issue about the history curriculum was Malayanization and Malaysia-centric versus Euro-centric syllabus.

Later with changes in the curriculum and textbooks a new kind of controversy arose over the predominance of Malay and Islamic

elements in Malaysian history. Non-Malays academia appealed for a more inclusive history education to give more attention to the involvement of the Chinese and Indians in the history of national development. They argued that in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society, the role and contribution of all its citizens in the development of the country should be given equitable recognition. Even among the Malays, there was controversy between the leftists and the pro-West rightists over the issue of who better deserved a place in history books as the heroes of Independence.

The book written by Santhiram R. Raman entitled *From Decolonization to Ethno-Nationalism: a Study of Malaysia's School History Syllabuses and Textbooks 1905-2020* gives excellent overview of the development of Malaysia's school history syllabuses and textbooks for 1905-2020. This book is based on the author's Master's thesis on the development of history teaching in English medium schools in Malaysia through the syllabuses and textbooks used. According to him, history teaching in the English medium schools during the colonial period and thereafter was singled out for examination because it was only in these schools that we see a microcosm of Malayan plural society. He noted, however, that the British were not concerned with promoting national consciousness in the colonies. The Chinese and Tamil schools that existed during the period were quite free to develop their own mode of teaching. Chinese schools looked mainly to mainland China and the Tamil schools to India sub-continent for inspiration.

The book contains 5 chapters, plus an epilogue and conclusion. Chapter One looks at the purpose of history teaching in schools, whether it is for the sake of knowledge or playing a supportive role in achieving national objectives. Also in question was the kind of history to be taught particularly for an emerging independent nation. There was clearly a need for the Malayanization of the syllabus and textbooks used to serve the purpose of nation building and national unity particularly for Malaysia with its plural society. The common content syllabus as envisaged by the Razak Report (1956) was therefore significant towards meeting this objective.

Chapter Two is divided into two sections. The first section gives a brief outline of the policy on education between 1906 to 1957

while the second section touches on the policy changes in the post-independence era. Prior to the Second World War the British developed a *laissez-faire* attitude towards education. English schools were left to the private and missionary initiatives and the government only came into the picture when it felt that English education was necessary to serve the needs of the government interest. Mass immigration from China and India led to the establishment of Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools which were left very much to their own initiatives. Although the colonial government gave some attention to the development of Malay schools, it was mostly to serve the very basic needs of the Malays. This led to the development of a plural school system, thereby promoting divisiveness in society. Unfortunately, little was done to confront the issue of pluralism. It was only after the end of the War following serious political upheavals attempts were made to bring about some semblance of unity for the school system through the introduction of the Education Ordinance 1952. The second section mainly deals with the formulation and development of a national education policy following the Razak Report. It proposed a common language and common content curriculum for all schools, regardless of the medium of instruction with the introduction of the 1957 Education Ordinance.

Chapters Three, Four and Five are devoted to the study of the development of history curriculum proper in the decolonization of history courses for Malaysian schools from the colonial period to until relatively recent times. Chapter Three is about history teaching in the English medium schools prior to the Independence (1905-1957). During this long period up to 1939, not surprisingly, it was mainly English political history that was taught and much of it through the study of biographies and personalities. At the highest level of secondary schooling the curriculum was just a replica of the English model on the history of the British Empire.

It was of interest that the Director of Education of the FMS in 1939 envisaged a change in the history syllabus to contain mainly "the best elements of indigenous civilization". Unfortunately, there was hardly any significant change following the proposal. The study of Malayan history proper was absent and, if there is any at all, it was in the context of foreign involvement in the country. The content was

basically about world historical events and figures especially in Europe with a few from Asia like Confucius, Buddha, Alexander the Great, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Marco Polo, and Magellan. There was neither any study of local personalities nor the history before the coming of the Europeans which the author attributed to the lack of resource materials. Eurocentric approach to history was later to become the focus of concern for Malaysian historians.

Chapter Four is about history teaching in the post-Independence period 1957-1978. The author provides a rather detailed account of the new history syllabus introduced in 1959 and 1966. Undoubtedly, the new syllabus was a radical departure from the pre-Independence version and was in line with the objectives of the Razak Report which had advocated the “Malayanization” of the education system. Although there was an increase in the allotted time given to Malayan history at both primary and secondary levels, the author opined that the syllabus and textbooks continued to have a Eurocentric vision of history. Another matter of concern was the little attention given to the socio-cultural and economic life of the local population.

Chapter Five discusses significant changes in the syllabus and consequently textbooks brought about by the new demands from local historians for reforms in the teaching of history. This came about in 1978. He referred to these changes as a new landmark in the history of education in Malaysia. The 1978 syllabus was meant to replace a Euro-centric with a “Malaysian-centric” history while acknowledging the need for students to also be aware of the history of the world. The core of the curriculum then was about prominent historical events related to Malaysia, the institution of government especially the role of the Malay rulers, the struggle for Independence, and the nation building efforts. At the end of the chapter the author expressed concern that insufficient attention is being given to certain aspects of Malaysian history such as about the population of Sabah and Sarawak and the immigrant communities particularly the Chinese and Indians.

In the book’s epilogue titled “Emergence of Ethno-Nationalistic History Teaching (1978-2020)” the author draws readers’ attention to changes made to the primary and secondary

curriculum with the introduction of the KBSR and KBSM; and in 1989 the making of history as a compulsory subject for all students (and more recently a compulsory pass in the final secondary school examination (SPM) was made mandatory). A thematic and chronological approach in the syllabus was introduced in 1989 and a further restructuring was made under the Standard Secondary School Curriculum. The author raised his concern about the rise of Malay ethno-nationalist ideas that sought to promote a Malay and Islam-centric framework in Malaysian history. He observed a growing emphasis on the ‘Malayness’ of the curriculum and textbook contents and on Islam whereas the pre-Islamic Indian cultural influence did not receive due coverage. In response to this development, he said, non-Malay educationists began campaigning for a more “inclusive and truthful history” based upon a Malaysia-centric framework. They are critical of the textbooks, which to them gave the impression that the nation has reached its present status of development “all through the contribution of the genius of the Malays”. In other words, the author was arguing in particular that syllabuses and the textbooks did not adequately include the contributions of the non-Malays and to some extent that of the “Bumiputras” of Sarawak and Sabah to nation building when in fact they have contributed significantly in the economic fields of the nation, the fight against the Japanese occupation and the return of the British after the war.

These issues notwithstanding, this book offers an informative and critical overview of the development of the history syllabus in Malaya/Malaysia from 1905-2020. The author makes interesting observations about the development and assessment of the syllabus and textbooks used in primary and secondary schools. In the final analysis it really boils down to what constitutes a balanced and fair account. Interestingly, the author comments in the conclusion “to be sure there is nothing wrong in highlighting the contributions of the Malays. But we should not omit or ignore the other ethnic groups.” Perhaps therein lies the answer – but how much and to what extent?

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	‘	‘	‘	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ř	ل	l	l	l
پ	—	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n
ٹ	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h ¹
ث	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ş	و	w	v/u	v
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḍ	ḍ	ž	ی	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	-a ²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	¹ – when not final ² – at in construct state ³ – (article) al - or l-			
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğ				
ڈ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f				
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k				
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	k			

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
		uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au	ev
	ی	ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	u	u	u or ū
	ی	i	o or ö
	ی	i	ī

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. چھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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